A CHURCHLESS FAITH

FAITH OUTSIDE THE EVANGELICAL PENTECOSTAL / CHARISMATIC CHURCH OF NEW
ZEALAND

_________________________________________

A Thesis
Submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology
in the
University of Canterbury
by
Alan Kevin Jamieson

_________________________________________

University of Canterbury
1998
To
John and Kay

Whose courage and conviction in their journey of authentic faith inspired and ensured the completion of this thesis.
Abstract

This research contributes to the growing literature on religious disaffiliation by considering the leaving process in one stream of the church which has not been the focus of previous qualitative studies - evangelical Pentecostal and charismatic churches in New Zealand. Contrary to expectation the findings show that long term, middle aged, key leadership people who were previously very committed to their churches are leaving such churches but not their faith. The research shows that such people leave due to fundamental transitions in the nature of their faith rather than because of a repudiation of that faith. Given the complex relationship that exists between individuals, their church and the wider society, it is suggested that it is the divergent changes within the wider society and the church that are encouraging increasing numbers of previously committed church participants and leaders to re-evaluate their faith. James Fowler’s faith development model is used as a ‘scaffold for insight’ to explore these issues.

Leavers are categorised into four groups displaying significantly different faith contents, understandings and operations. These groupings are not isolated faith positions but form way-points in discernible trajectories of faith. The formation of groups of church leavers are considered and an ongoing dialogue between them and the leaders of evangelical Pentecostal and charismatic churches proposed. Such a conversation is postulated as one way forward for the institutional churches and the isolated post-church groups in an increasingly postmodern society.

The research is based on interviews with ninety eight church leavers, ten marginal church attenders, fifty four church leaders and the participant observations of the researcher. Interviewees were located through a snowballing technique, a methodology that both shapes and limits the nature of the findings.
Acknowledgements

The first acknowledgement I want to make is to my primary supervisor, Dr Bob Hall, without whose patient support, good humour and insightful guidance I could not have produced this thesis. Such thanks also need to be extended to Professor David Thorns, who with Bob, read and re-read the thesis as I wrote. Their numerous critical reflections on its development were greatly appreciated.

In acknowledging the work of key people I am greatly indebted to Sandra who not only accepted all the extra pressure of being married to a thesis student but also discussed the research with me long into the nights, proof read each word that I wrote and commented on most. Thanks also to our kids, Chris and Emma, who missed out on time with Dad, holidays and the benefits of a regular income for three years.

The third group of people to whom grateful thanks must be extended is the interviewees who allowed me the privilege of standing on ‘holy ground’ as they unfolded the stories of their own journeys of faith. To these must be added the numerous ministers, theologians and counsellors who gave up precious time for my interviews.

In practical ways the thesis was aided by the financial assistance of the ‘Dove Trust’, and the ‘Christian Trust’. I was extremely grateful for this.

I also want to thank a small group of specific people who have helped with this work: Helen Bayldon and Robyn Adams who typed many of the interview scripts; Mike Riddell, Peter Bramley and Brett and Helen Mann who read the thesis as it neared completion and made many helpful comments; and to Darcy Haliday and Peter Bramley who were both friends and confidants throughout the difficulties and excitements of the research’s development.

Finally I want to thank the people at the Ilam Baptist Church, my own Turangawaewae, whose loving support and personal friendship on my journey of faith have been immeasurable. Special thanks are due to Fay Tucker who encouraged me and endorsed the continuation of this study.

Thanks to you all.

Alan Jamieson

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We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know it for the first time.

T.S. Eliot (1945:43)
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Chapter One

Introduction

The Sociological Imagination . . . is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self and to see the relations between the two.\(^1\)
C. Wright Mills

When Stuart and Michelle left the church they had helped to found and lead for a number of years they began a journey that is being undertaken by growing numbers of previously highly committed church participants. As such they left a church which had previously been a place that provided great enjoyment and fulfillment for them, a place in which they felt they belonged, a place where they provided a significant contribution in leadership and a place that in turn provided them meaning, hope and nurtured their faith. This church that they once loved now irritates them. The meaning and truth it provided seems simplistic and narrow, while the hope and faith it nurtured seems increasingly irrelevant to their life, work and present faith. It is to these people, those who have left Christian churches for a “churchless faith” that this research relates. Cyprian a leading theologian from a previous age once wrote, “he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the church for his Mother.”\(^2\) In reference to this quote Michelle said “I have nothing against God, it’s his wife I can’t stomach.” This captures the essence of what is being referred to as a “churchless faith.” But how do we understand such a move away from the church? Is this nothing but the demise of the church and Christian faith through secularism or is there some other dynamic at work here? It is to these questions that this research will address itself. In line with the C. Wright Mills quote this research will seek to show that in the inter-relationship of individual faith trajectories, church theology and practice and the influence of the wider society milieu can be found relations that make sense both of why particular people leave particular churches at particular times and what influences them to do so. The research will also seek to provide a framework from which to understand the leaver’s post-church faith journeys. I begin by considering the declining influence of the Christian church in Western society.

1.1 Christian Church in Decline

Since the advent of the modernist period in the late Seventeenth Century and the consequent erosion of Christendom the influence and significance of the Christian church has been in decline in Western societies. This erosion of influence of the Christian church in modern society is generally explained through reference to secularisation - the marginalisation, demystification and privatising of Christian beliefs and practice. This loss of significance has resulted in dramatic reductions in the numbers of people attending church services and in reduced participation in the activities of the church. The number of people attending church in England, for example, has steadily dropped over the last one hundred and thirty years from a time when half the English population was at church each week, to the point where 10% attended church in 1989 (see Table 1.1). During the period from 1979-1989 the attendance figures for Great Britain decreased from 11% of the population at church each Sunday to 10% of the population. In real numbers this is the equivalent of a thousand people a week, every week over this ten year period.\(^3\) David Barrett (1982) estimates that in Europe

---

\(^1\) C. Wright Mills 1959:7

\(^2\) The full quote states - “Anyone who separates himself from the Church and unites with an adulteress (schism), shuts himself off from the promises of the Church, and anyone who leaves the Church of Christ, will not deserve Christ’s rewards. He is an outcast, unholy, an enemy. God is not his Father, if the church is not his mother. If anyone outside Noah’s ark had been able to escape, then so might a man outside the Church.” (Cyprian, De unitate Ecclesiae 6; CSEL 3/1, 214. Also quoted by Augustine; e.g. Sermo ad Caesariensis ecclesiae plebem 6; CSEL 53, 174; and Jerome, Ep. 15; CSEL 54, 63. - Here quoted from Kung 1967:314).

\(^3\) These figures would include those regular church members who died during these ten years as well as those who decided to cease attending services. Figures drawn from Fanstone (1993:28).
and North America an average of 53,000 people are leaving the Christian church every week and that they are not coming back.\(^4\)

### Table 1.1 Percentage of the English Population Attending Church\(^5\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage Attending Church</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hendricks (1993:252) equates the comparable losses in the United States to the casualties in the Vietnam war saying the United States lost about 57,500 people in the Vietnam war while the church is losing nearly this number every week. The Australian church situations have reflected similar attendance losses.\(^6\) In New Zealand the census figures which record the adherence of New Zealanders to particular church denominations indicate similar losses. As shown in Table 1.2 during the ten year period from 1986 to 1996 the New Zealand Anglican denomination adherence figures dropped by 20\%, the Catholics by 4.6\%, the Presbyterians by 22\%, the Methodists by 20\% and the Baptists by 21\%.\(^7\) Except for the Catholic church, for whom census figure adherence has remained strong, these figures represent significant declines in religious adherence over the period of one decade.\(^8\)

People hold to religious adherences for a variety of reasons, because of tradition, family habits, or for the sake of a ‘label’. While these people may call themselves ‘Anglican’, ‘Methodist’ or by another religious label they may not be involved in any church or attend church services. There is, therefore a marked difference between affiliation and active church involvement.\(^9\) The real effect on the churches of such a declining interest is further amplified when actual attendance figures are considered.

---

\(^4\) This figure is drawn from a 12 year research project overseen by British demographer David Barrett for the Oxford University Press. The Editorial in the ‘India Church Growth Quarterly’ (97:2) introduces Barrett saying “Dr. Barrett is considered the top Christian researcher in the world. His editorial masterpiece, World Christian Encyclopedia, is the best and most comprehensive study of the status of Christianity ever produced.” Hendricks (1993:255) speaking of Barrett’s (1982) research states “I have to admit, Barrett’s numbers are so staggering as to sound suspect.” Hendricks goes on to quote the research study itself which indicates that “all statistics resulting (from the research) have been checked and counter-checked, sources investigated, and documents verified.” This included computerizing the data in order to run “a large number of checks... for consistency, plausibility, probability, and so on”(xiv). Hendricks also lists the consultants and editors who were part of the project who together form an impressive list of Christian researchers.

\(^5\) Source Fanstone 1993:28


\(^7\) Because the wording of census religious adherence questions has changed on occasions the results are therefore difficult to compare. See Wilson (1993:73) and Hill and Zwaga (1989).

\(^8\) During the same period some churches have increased attendances, for example the Mormon and Jehovah’s witness churches.

\(^9\) The Government Statistician in his introductory remarks to the Census volume on Religious Professions stated “It is recognised that many of the people who record their adherence to a particular religious profession are not engaged in the regular practice of their religion” (NZ Census of Population and Dwellings 1971, vol. 3 ‘Religious Professions’ p5.)
Table 1.2 Religious Adherence in New Zealand (Census figures\textsuperscript{10})

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<td>Anglican</td>
<td>791,901</td>
<td>732,045</td>
<td>-7.5%</td>
<td>631,764</td>
<td>-14%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>496,389</td>
<td>498,612</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>473,079</td>
<td>-5%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>587,673</td>
<td>540,675</td>
<td>-8%</td>
<td>458,289</td>
<td>-15%</td>
<td>-22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>153,249</td>
<td>138,705</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>121,650</td>
<td>-12%</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>68,016</td>
<td>70,155</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>53,524</td>
<td>-24%</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>37,143</td>
<td>48,009</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>41,445</td>
<td>-13%</td>
<td>+11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witness</td>
<td>16,377</td>
<td>19,179</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19,527</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>+19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brethren</td>
<td>19,758</td>
<td>20,337</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19,950</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salvation Army</td>
<td>16,818</td>
<td>19,992</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14,625</td>
<td>-27%</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seventh Day</td>
<td>12,048</td>
<td>12,765</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12,042</td>
<td>-6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian (no further description)</td>
<td>45,354</td>
<td>78,195</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>186,894</td>
<td>+140%</td>
<td>+312%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example the Anglican church attendance figures recorded a drop from 47,523 in 1986 to below 39,000 in 1994 (Taylor 1997:48). This represents a reduction of 9,000 people (18%) over seven years.\textsuperscript{12} The average weekly attendances of the Presbyterian church of New Zealand have halved in three decades (see Table 1.3). This trend is also true of the Catholic church in New Zealand which recorded the lowest change in religious adherence as measured by the Census results of the mainline churches, but has nevertheless suffered significant losses of attenders at mass. The number of Roman Catholics attending mass has declined over the ten years (1986-1996) from 139,104 to 104,900. This is a net loss of 24% of its 1986 attendances (Taylor 1997:53). An extreme example of this decline is shown in the Wellington Diocese of the Roman Catholic church. Records of mass attendance show that average weekly mass attendance decreased from 61,631 people in 1974 to 20,392 in 1994. This is a loss of 67% of its 1974 attenders in twenty years.\textsuperscript{13}

Table 1.3 - Average Presbyterian Attendances in New Zealand From 1960-1990.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Average Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>119 041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>93 931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>84 360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>52 780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But while there is a continuing decline in the mainline church adherence and attendance figures close to home, on the broader stage there have also been significant world wide trends that show increased church growth. Barrett’s statistics (1997) show that Pentecostals and charismatics make up 27.5% of the total number of ‘affiliated church members’\textsuperscript{14} (Barrett 1997:25). The Pentecostal and charismatic streams of the

\textsuperscript{10} The fastest growing religious adherence groups were ‘No religion’ which moved from 533,790 in 1986 to 867,264 in 1996 and ‘not specified’ which grew from 58,686 in 1986 to 187,878 in 1996 (Barclay 1997:A8). Wilson (1993:63) indicates that these categories may for many provide a ‘catch all’ position.

\textsuperscript{11} The number of people choosing to label themselves as Christian with no other denominational tag is growing, as shown in this Table. However such growth does not in any way offset the extent of the losses incurred in the specific denominational religious adherence categories.

\textsuperscript{12} However it needs to be noted that recent figures record a significant period of growth within the last two years. The attendance figures moving from 39,000 in 1994 to 43,500 in 1995 (Taylor 1997:48).

\textsuperscript{13} The Palmerston North figures record a similar reduction from 23,160 in 1980 to 13,915 in 1994. This is a loss of nearly 10,000 attenders in ten years (figures returned to this researcher from Bishop P. Cullinan Diocese of Palmerston North 9.8.95). Wellington Mass Attendance figures taken from the Archdiocese of Wellington statistics provided by Cardinal T.S. Williams (Archbishop of Wellington) 27.6.95

\textsuperscript{14} Barrett defines ‘affiliated church members’ as ‘the total Christian community affiliated to (on the rolls of) denominations, churches or groups, including baptised members, their children and infants, catechumens,
church are growing phenomenally. Barrett estimates that by the year 2000 the Pentecostals and charismatics will make up 29% of the ‘affiliated church members’ and this growth is projected to continue reaching 44% by the year 2025. Between 1995 and 2000 it is expected that the number of Christians throughout the world will grow at a rate of 51,000 new Christians per day (Christian Research Association 1997), with this enormous growth being generally attributed to the growth of the Pentecostal/charismatic movement. Observers of this growth describe it:

In all human history, no other non-political, non-militaristic, voluntary human movement has grown as rapidly as the Pentecostal/charismatic movement in the last twenty five years (Wagner in Synan 1992:ii).

Because of its brief history and incredible growth rates, the appearance of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement may well be the single most important fact of twentieth century Christianity (Synan 1992:1).

Despite the enormity of this growth and Barrett’s projected future growth it is, both in daily increases and as a percentage of the world population, in decline compared with the rapid growth rates of the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Table 1.4).

### Table 1.4 - World Wide Christian Growth\(^\text{15}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Daily Increase of Christians</th>
<th>Daily Increase Global of Population</th>
<th>Christian Growth as % of Population Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960-1965</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>175,000</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1970</td>
<td>45,000</td>
<td>199,000</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1975</td>
<td>47,000</td>
<td>208,000</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1980</td>
<td>59,000</td>
<td>201,000</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1985</td>
<td>68,000</td>
<td>219,000</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1990</td>
<td>62,000</td>
<td>231,000</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1995</td>
<td>56,000</td>
<td>245,000</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995-2000</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>238,000</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the vast majority of such growth is occurring in the ‘two-thirds world’ countries of Asia, Africa and South America there has also been considerable growth of these churches within the Western world including New Zealand.\(^\text{16}\) The census records for example show an adherence increase for the Pentecostal churches of New Zealand of 116% over the ten year period from 1986 to 1996 (Table 1.2). These increases in religious adherence figures are also being reflected in the Pentecostal church attendance figures. The Assemblies of God, for instance, increased by over 10,000 people (71%) in the ten year period from 1986 to 1996. The Elim churches grew from 3,500 to 6,500 attenders in the same period.\(^\text{17}\) However, the most dramatic growth has been seen in the Apostolic churches where attendances have more than doubled from 5,000 in 1986 to 11,140 in 1996 (an increase of 122%) (Taylor 1997:51). Of course we need to remember that it is because of the relatively small size of these churches that the percentage increases are so favourable. In real terms the increased number of people who labeled themselves Pentecostal between 1986 and 1996 inquirers, attenders, but excluding interested non-Christian attenders, casual attenders, visitors, et alia” (Barrett 1988:126).


\(^{16}\) Although there has been large growth in the Pentecostal/charismatic stream of the church it does not compensate for the decline from the mainline churches.

\(^{17}\) Approximate figures taken from a graph presented by Taylor (1997:52). Bentley et al. (1992:38) indicate similar growth in Australia stating - “According to Australian Census statistics, the number of persons identifying with (Pentecostal churches) increased from 38,393 in 1976 to 72,148 in 1981 and 107,007 in 1986. This represents a growth of over 48% in the 1981 to 86 period when the population grew by only 7%. However, in real numbers the movement is still quite small and overall only 0.7% of the population.”
was only 18,270. This number of people represents only 11% of the loss to the Anglican church alone. While the relative size of the Pentecostal gains needs to be remembered, their increases in adherence and attendance against the trend of the mainline churches is nevertheless significant.

The other sector of growth in the Christian churches is that of charismatic churches within the mainline denominations. These figures cannot be easily differentiated from the overall denominational and census figures. However as a recent article on church decline in New Zealand pointed out the Nelson diocese of the Anglican church, perhaps the diocese most influenced by a charismatic style, has grown by 44% in attendance figures from 1990 to 1996.19

Alongside this background of Pentecostal and charismatic church growth there are indications of a drop-out rate from these churches that is also high. This is the issue that Wilson (1993:71) raises about the Assemblies of God church in New Zealand, when he suggests further work is needed “to determine if the increase in affiliation of young people is the whole pattern or whether there is some disaffiliation with age as well.” David Barrett in his 1988 study indicated that the Pentecostal-charismatic movement has a significant number of people who had formerly been involved within it withdrawing. He did, however see at least some of these people becoming involved in other Christian churches and para-church groups.20 In his study he defined two new categories of Pentecostals and Charismatics; which he called Post-Pentecostals and Post-charismatics. He defined these as follows:

Post-Pentecostals: former members of Pentecostal denominations who have left to join non-Pentecostal denominations (due to marriage, family moves, job transfers, upward mobility, new interest in liturgy and theology, et alia.), but who have not renounced their Pentecostal experience, and who still identify themselves as Pentecostal (Barrett 1988:127).

Post-charismatics: self-identified charismatics within mainline non-Pentecostal denominations who are no longer regularly active in the Charismatic Movement but have moved into other spheres of witness and service in their churches (Barrett 1988:128).

Barrett has highlighted the enormous turnover among charismatics and Pentecostals both Protestant and Catholic. He estimates that there were nearly twenty four million ‘active Protestant charismatics’ in America in 1990 and over thirty one million ‘post-charismatic Protestants’.22 In the Australian context Bentley et al. (1992:41) state that “the 1989 NSSS (National Social Science Survey) showed, for the first time, a large number of people who called themselves Pentecostal yet who said that they never attended church services. Indeed, 41% of this sample of 134 Pentecostals said they never attended, and another 25% of them attended only occasionally. If further studies support these results, it will show that the Pentecostal churches do lose many of those who join them.” Synan illustrates this by describing a Pentecostal church with which he is associated, in the United States, in the following way: “according to my estimates, the former members of the church are three times the number of their current membership. . . three-fourths of the people leave by the back door.” (Synan 1992:50) Much of this movement is not movement out of the wider Christian church, but movement to other denominations. Synan is quick to add that “this is not altogether bad, as we have already seen. Many - perhaps most - of the former Pentecostals are active elsewhere in the Christian community” (Synan 1992:50).

19 Such substantial growth may be a significant factor in explaining the more recent gains of the Anglican church attendance figures over the last few years.
20 Para-church group refers to Christian organisations set up to perform specific functions beyond the scope of the local church. In the New Zealand setting ‘Youth With A Mission’, (YWAM) and ‘Youth For Christ’ (YFC) are prominent examples.
21 Barrett continues with the following example “post Pentecostals formerly members of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church are nowadays estimated at 450,000 in the U.S.A. which is three times IPHC’s present membership of 150,000” (1988:127).
22 The exact figures quoted were 23,722,050 and 31,600,000 respectively. Quoted in Synan (1992:53)
Bolitho (1997) found similar losses within the Baptist Denomination in New Zealand. This is a denomination which has been heavily influenced by the charismatic renewal. Bolitho looked at membership figures for the Baptist churches which are lower than Baptist church attendance figures as they only record people who through baptism or transfer from another church have chosen to formally become members of the church. She found that between 1989 and 1996 the church had a small overall membership decline (from 23,601 members to 23,031). However during this period over eleven thousand new members were added to Baptist churches. Taking into account those who died and the fact that the Baptist churches had transferred more people in than out she found that 10,118 members were ‘lost’ without record. For these seven years the net result was a loss of 570 people a percentage loss of 108% of new members. This means that for every one hundred new members to the Baptist churches of New Zealand one hundred and eight left. These leavers could not be accounted for as moving to another church or dying. This is a substantial increase in back door leavers from the period 1948 to 1988 which Bolitho provides comparative figures for (see Table 1.5).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage lost</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>108%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within New Zealand there have also been large numbers of leavers from Pentecostal churches. For example the Apostolic church which has seen the most dramatic recent growth has also had a steady back door loss rate of over 10% per annum. Table 1.6 outlines the growth and back door losses of the Apostolic churches.

Taylor says of the Apostolic church that its growth in new attenders has masked the ‘back door’ losses.

These statistics indicate that people are leaving the Pentecostal-charismatic churches, but do not explain what happens to them after they leave. Do they continue to hold a Christian faith or are they simply giving away their Christian faith? This research seeks to understand these ‘back door’ leavers, not those who move on to other churches but those who leave the church altogether.

Table 1.6 Apostolic Church of New Zealand’s Attendance Figures and Back Door Losses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Regular Attendance</th>
<th>Back Door Losses</th>
<th>Net Transfer growth in to the church %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>3,496</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>5,831</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>7,102</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>8,380</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>9,730</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>11,040</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>10,824</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>11,140</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>12,028</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23 This Table is produced from Bolitho (1993:230-231) and Bolitho (1997a).

24 Note this is a seven year period. The other columns each represent ten year periods.

25 This is the percentage of members lost compared to those added to the church during the respective periods. Therefore between 1948 and 1958 for every 100 new members 52 left unaccounted for by church transfer or death records.

26 Taylor says “few of these losses were caused by death, for the young Apostolic age profile is reflected in a low death rate.” This she estimates as a ‘crude’ death rate of 4.5 per thousand (Taylor 1997:69 & 74).

27 Source Taylor 1997:69
This present research begins from the premise that significant numbers of leavers from Pentecostal/charismatic churches are leaving not to join another church or religious group but are leaving the church completely. It seeks to understand what motivates their leaving and considers how their faith is changed, lost or strengthened outside of the church. This is an area in which to date there has been very little substantive research. Let us now turn to consider the previous research in the area of religious disaffiliation.

1.2 The Research Base From Which to Understand These Leavers

Brinkerhoff and Burke (1980:41) point to the lack of research in the area of religious disaffiliation. In doing so they also point out that what research had been done has concentrated on quantitative demographic studies. In the research that has been done in the field they list the demographic studies (Greeley 1972; Mueller and Johnson 1975), studies which report the amount and type of education of apostates (Zelan 1968: Caplovitz and Sherraw 1977), studies which discussed defectors from highly specific groups such as the Hutterites, (Mackie 1975), and studies which described “individual” case studies (Richardson 1975; Jehenson 1969). Such studies have not focused on what they call “the process by which the individual disaffiliates.” By 1988 Bromley et al. indicate that there continued to be little research focusing on those who leave churches. Hoge (in Bromley et al. 1988:81) says “the study of religious disaffiliation is still at an elementary level today, and even the basic concepts are clouded in confusion.” The few research studies we have are diverse, sometimes unconnected, and often limited to particular religious groups.” Bromley comments on what research has been done:

Much of the research on established religious groups has been based on survey data, while open-ended, face to face interview and/or participation observation methods typically have been employed in studies of disaffiliation from new religious groups (Bromley 1988:23).

Where Bromley speaks of ‘new religious groups’ he is primarily talking of cults and other religious sects.

Within the New Zealand context the significant body of research on religious practice is drawn from census figures and a limited number of church attendance and membership studies. In preparing this present research it was perceived that a double gap existed in the research available to date. Firstly the growing number of leavers from the Pentecostal/charismatic stream of the church have not been previously researched as distinct from the overall disaffiliation research within Christian churches in New Zealand. Secondly the majority of disaffiliation research from any religious group has been drawn from census and survey data. There is little evidence of qualitative research focused on the methods of face-to-face interviews and participant observation. This research therefore set out to open up the understandings of the leavers from this growing stream of the Christian church - the evangelical Pentecostal and charismatic churches by the use of qualitative research.

The focus of this study is not on the Christian church in all its varieties and forms but on one stream within the wider Christian church the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic stream (abbreviated in this study to ‘EPC’). As already indicated, this stream is growing both in New Zealand and across the world. However while it is responsible for much church growth it is a stream of the church that also has experienced considerable leave-taking from within its midst. It is this leave-taking which is the focus of this study.

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28 Cited in Brinkerhoff & Burke 1980.
29 Cited in Brinkerhoff & Burke 1980.
30 Cited in Brinkerhoff & Burke 1980.
31 Cited in Brinkerhoff & Burke 1980.
32 The tangle of interconnected terms that are used in such research further complicates discussion in the field. Here it is sufficient to indicate that a number of related terms are used in the research and no typology and connection of these terms has been produced to date. The terms used include: leave-taking, disengagement, disaffiliation, deconversion, drop-outs, apostasy, exiting and defecting.
33 Hill (1983:271) states “sociological accounts of religion in New Zealand are normally based at some point on an analysis of census statistics, and these show that for all the major churches and denominations there has been a numerical decline in stated adherence as a percentage of the total population.”
The research comes at a time when, as Bromley (1988:9) states, “there is a recent growth of scholarly concern with the disaffiliation process.” This lack of knowledge but increasing interest is found not only in the scholarly community but also in the concerns of church leaders within the Pentecostal/charismatic churches. Taylor identifies the interest amongst Apostolic churches leaders in “identifying ‘glue’ to hold the back door shut.” There has been little attention given to those leaving by the back door. Who are they? And why did they head in this direction? The significance of such research pertains not just to understanding the process of disengagement but also in formulating adequate understandings of the joining process.

One might take the view point that disengagement or deconversion gives a more comprehensive understanding of the joining process itself. To the extent that social reality is dynamic and subject to change throughout the life cycle, how commitment is gained may be closely tied to how commitment is lost. In the same way that sociologists have recognised the role of commitment-building processes (Kanter 1973) in conversion or adherence to religious movements, there is a similar logic to processes of dismantling (Berger and Luckmann 1966). In many ways this conceptualisation of disaffiliation merely turns the conversion process on its head (Wright 1988:144).

1.3 Who Is Leaving The Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches and Where Are They Going?
Because there is little specific research pertaining to ‘EPC’ (evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic) churches, the answers that are typically given to such questions are drawn by inference from other religious disaffiliation research. Such research tends to indicate that those on the fringe, the young and those involved in religious groups for shorter periods of time are most likely to disengage and drop out. Here we will briefly look at the research in each of these areas:

1.3.1 Is It Those on The Fringe Who Are More Likely to Leave?
Albrecht et al. (1988) in their study of disengagement and disaffiliation among Mormons found that those who left, typically were marginally involved. “Many reported that they had never really strongly identified with Mormonism.” He quotes two interviewees who reported:

I think I never was a Mormon. I think it was in the experimental stage . . . I had never heard LDS (Latter Day Saints) before in my life until I lived in Utah. And it’s like taking a math class, you start learning basics. Then when you get to a point where you learn enough, you make a decision, gonna stay with math or stay out of math. I think I learned enough from them that to me it wasn’t realistic. There wasn’t a need for it.

This concern is focused on religious disaffiliation but Wright (1988:145) notes that “as researchers have sought comparative studies of disengagement from other types of social groups or movements, they have found a surprising paucity of data. . . . the available pool of comparative studies is astoundingly scant. . . . offers a dearth of resource material from which to conduct comparative analyses. . . . it also provides a rare opportunity to make a vital contribution to the larger sociological enterprise. The study of cult disaffiliation and for that matter, religious disaffiliation in general has important implications and offerings for more generalised studies of organisational disengagement, role exiting and identity transformation and desocialisation.”

Taylor, (1997:70) cites recent articles in the Apostolic News as evidence of this.

Fanstone says “The public today does not perceive that British churches have anything relevant to offer. If long -established church-goers are ceasing to attend because they find it irrelevant and boring, others who have never been will get the message clearly too.” (Fanstone 1993:221). Lloyd Geering states - “The churches could profit greatly from engaging in frank dialogue with the group of disenchanted church-goers who find themselves in a kind of spiritual wilderness and still look, a little forlornly, to the churches they found it necessary to abandon. Their existence seems to issue a warning.” (Geering 1987:87).
Like I say, this wasn’t an overnight, all of a sudden, I disassociated myself with any organisation. I never thought or felt captivated by Mormonism and so I never thought of myself ever as totally LDS. And because of my life style I haven’t felt the need to attend any church in particular (Albrecht et al. 1988:73)

Of those interviewed by Albrecht et al., most indicated that they didn’t know very much about their religion and had not got in deep enough to confront doctrinal difficulties. Likewise Arn & Arn (1984) indicate that those most likely to leave evangelical churches in the United States are those who responded to one off, manipulative joining processes and who never either made close friends or made strong commitments to the faith.

1.3.2 Is It The Young Who Are More Likely To Leave?

In commenting on disengagement research Albrecht et al., (1988) indicate that “consistent with the data on disengagement, the majority had stopped participating during their teens or in the first year after high school graduation.” In this and other similar research (Caplovitz & Sherrow 1977 Hoge & Roozen 1979; Hadaway 1989; Hoge et al. 1993) the largest group of leavers were those who left in their teens and early adult years. Fanstone (1993:178) said of his British study that 87% of the loss to churches occurred among those under 30 years. The significant aspect of such studies is that this leave taking is often seen as one chapter in the religious lives of adults. This is because many young leavers are seen as returning to church later in life, typically with the onset of their own families. For example Hoge (1988:96) concluded that disidentification and dropping out usually were not permanent. Roozen (1980) showed from the 1978 Gallup survey on church involvement that 37.5% of American Christian adults drop out at some stage and that the most common pattern was for people to drop out in their teens or early adult years and then return 5-10 years later.\(^{37}\) In explaining such dropping out among Catholics he writes:

A common pattern in middle-class America is for youth to drop out during their teens or early twenties and for a majority of them to return at some time later. A researcher must begin from the view that religious change is often temporary and usually it occurs in the process of other changes in the total life economy (op.cit.:96).

Hoge et al. (1993) were to find a similar pattern among Presbyterians brought up within the church.\(^{38}\)

1.3.3 Is It Those Who Are Linked To The Church For Shorter Periods Of Time Who Are More Likely To Leave?

Not surprisingly research indicates that those involved in religious groups for relatively short periods of time are more likely to leave than those who have become long term attenders and participants. Barrett (1988:119) for example says of charismatics that they “on average are involved for two or three years. After this period of active weekly attendance at prayer meetings, they become irregular or non-attending, justifying our term post-charismatics.”

While this present research accepts that ‘EPC’ churches also lose people who are young, on the fringe or involved in the church for brief periods of time, it found that the vast majority of those interviewed were not representative of any of these groups. As will be discussed in greater detail later in Chapter Two, these leavers were typically middle aged, involved with the church for an average of fifteen years, and had been highly committed to the churches they belonged to prior to leaving. The second interesting factor is that these leavers are not looking to return to the church again. Most would not return to a church like the ‘EPC’ church

\(^{37}\) Quoted in Hoge 1988:15

\(^{38}\) In this research Hoge et al. interviewed five hundred 33-42 year olds who had been brought up in Presbyterian churches. Of this sample 75% had dropped out. They found that “the main ages for dropping out were 18 through 22, specifically 7% dropped out prior to 17, 33% dropped out when 17 or 18, 21% when 19 or 20, 15% when 21 or 22, and 24% after 22. Dropping out often coincided with moving out of the parental household” (1993:245). They also indicated that many of those (49%) who did drop out later returned.
they left and those who have or are open to returning in the future see themselves as being on the edge of different kinds of church groups.

1.4 Methodological Considerations

“A Churchless Faith” is a sociological research project, and as such seeks to link larger societal shifts with the intimate features of individual people’s lives. In so doing it follows the advice of C. Wright Mills who identifies the crucial aspect of the sociological imagination as “the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self - and to see the relations between the two” (Mills 1959:7). The research sets out to answer the question as to why people leave the Christian church and what happens to their faith outside the church. The answers to these questions draw on three different but interrelated factors. These are first, the personal faith transitions of the leavers, second, the theology and structure of the churches they choose to leave and third, the wider societal shifts that are occurring from a predominantly modernist societal milieu to an increasingly postmodern period. It is the intention of this study to better understand the relations between society, church and individual in which these decisions are made.

Because this research is opening up a new area of study and, at least within the New Zealand context, is doing so by employing a previously unused qualitative approach it was considered appropriate to utilise a grounded theoretical methodology. Thus the theoretical base of Glasser and Strauss’ (1967) ‘grounded theory’ provided a backdrop from which to postulate why people might consider leaving ‘EPC’ churches and what might happen to their Christian faith in the process of and subsequent to leaving.

I began the research in 1993 by interviewing a small sample of ‘informed insiders’. This group was drawn from ministers, theological lecturers and counsellors who met with church leavers. The result of these initial interviews was the production of four theoretical propositions that held the possibility of providing understandings to the research problem. The theoretical propositions that were considered were:

- A Changing macro-social context particularly as described in secularisation theory.

- Organisational change - changes in church leadership, vision, goals or direction.

- Personal changes - Changes in the personal life of the individual including changes of employment, marital status, starting a family, introduction to new ideologies, further study or personal crises including divorce, illness, financial difficulties etc.

- Changes in the content and practice of their faith. - Here a rejection of Christian faith and changes to people’s Christian faith were considered.

The interviews with the initial group of informed insiders indicated that these theoretical propositions either individually or in combination might lead to greater understanding of those who leave ‘EPC’ churches. I then developed an interview schedule designed to question and probe the relevance of each of these theoretical propositions (see Appendix 10).

The second stage of the research was to interview a small number of church leavers in order to consider the priority and validity of the propositional understandings being considered. During 1995 and 1996 the research moved to interview a larger sample of both informed insiders and leavers. Throughout the course of the study 108 church leavers were interviewed and 54 ‘informed insiders’. These were drawn from Christchurch, Nelson, Dunedin and Auckland. The informed insiders included a number of pastors (both senior and associate pastors of ‘EPC’ churches), counsellors who had worked with a number of church leavers in their professional practice and had some understanding of church dynamics, and lecturers from theological colleges and universities.
The decision to focus on ‘EPC’ church leavers was determined by the snowball sampling technique employed. This snowballing sampling method consistently led to leavers from within this stream of the church, despite initial intentions that the interviews would include people from other streams of the church. The focus of this study has therefore been on the ‘EPC’ churches rather than mainline Protestant churches not affected by evangelical theology and the Pentecostal/charismatic movements or leavers from the Roman Catholic church.

Alongside this I was able to observe ‘EPC’ practices as an ‘insider’.

Throughout the first three years of the research project I was employed as a minister within a large evangelical charismatic church, and was therefore able to gain access to many church leaders to interview. I was also able to raise questions in the course of seminars, services, meetings, and informal gatherings. In this study the information gained through formal interviewing is held alongside that gained through informal conversation and participant observation situations. My position as a minister also afforded me numerous opportunities within which to observe the leadership, governance patterns, goals and practices of ‘EPC’ churches, para-church groups and their leaderships. As an accepted insider I was able to both observe and question in areas which would normally be difficult for outsiders to gain access to.

The final stage of the research phase (1996) involved a period of interviewing and observation in Melbourne (Australia) to provide a broader perspective beyond the confines of the New Zealand situation. In the next chapter those interviewed will be introduced.

1.5 Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 will introduce the leavers. This is done by looking at the demographic, educational, employment and religious histories of the interviewees. The journey of the leavers into the church as well as their involvement in the church prior to their leaving is also considered in this section. This material is then compared to the research of Hendricks (1993) and Fanstone (1993) on why people leave churches in the United States and England respectively. Chapter 3 looks at the Churches the leavers have left. It considers the functions of the Christian church through history seeking to articulate the essence of what it means to be ‘church’. It then considers the major movements that have shaped the ‘EPC’ churches of New Zealand. Chapter 4 introduces the faith development model of James Fowler. This chapter provides a significant section of the theoretical faith understandings that underpin the argument of the thesis. In Chapter 5 we consider the leaving process undertaken by the interviewees. In so doing we focus on the accounts given by the leavers and draw connections between these and the “role exit” theory of Helen Ebaugh. Chapters 6 through 9 consider the faith trajectories of the interviewees categorising them into four specific faith groups. These chapters provide the heart of the research findings presented through the accounts of some of the leavers.

In Chapter 10 we consider the groups of leavers that have emerged and the role of groups in the leaver’s decision to leave their church and nurture their faith outside the church. This chapter introduces the themes of marginality and liminality, considering the extent to which these groups of leavers provide indications of ways forward for the Christian church. Chapter 11 focuses on the influence of an increasingly postmodern society as a milieu which encourages those influenced by it to reconsider their ongoing role as ‘EPC’ church attenders. This chapter brings together the complex relationship between society, church and individual. Chapter 12 then searches for a place for the leavers within the Christian community and offers a model for their ongoing relationship and dialogue with the centre and power structures of the ‘EPC’ churches. Chapter 13 seeks to draw the argument of the thesis together while pointing forward to the choices before both the established ‘EPC’ churches and the post-church groups in their respective ways of being church within an increasingly post modern world.

Having outlined the broad parameters of the thesis it is now time to consider the people who were interviewed during the course of the study.

39 The positive and negative aspects of this role within the research will be discussed in greater detail in the methodological appendix (Appendix 1).
On a cold winter’s evening in August 1993 I knocked nervously on the front door of the home of the first church leavers I would formally interview. Stuart, a tall slim man in his mid-thirties, met me and welcomed me in. As we walked through to the lounge he mentioned that he and his wife, Michelle, were interested in the research I was undertaking. Offering to make a cup of coffee he explained that Michelle was finishing off reading a story to their two young children before bed and would be out to join us soon. Stuart, a medical doctor, then began to explain that since leaving their Pentecostal church four years previously they had been involved in a group of 12 to 14 other people who had also left similar churches.

The evening with Stuart and Michelle introduced me to the complex web of involvements they had with the church, their reasons for leaving and the ongoing nature of their faith over the five year period outside the church.

Michelle who had been brought up in an Anglican church was, as she said, “well churched.” As Stuart remembered, this experience of church was not to prepare her for her own conversion experience through a high school Christian group in the early 1970s. She describes it in the following way:

So when I made a personal response at high school it was an extraordinary and challenging and all encompassing thing for me. It was a very emotional time. I received the Holy Spirit, none of which I knew anything about. A total culture shock but the reality of it was very much embedded in me and I could just see that this was very real (4.1).

For Michelle this began what would be a fourteen year involvement in both para-church groups and a Pentecostal church. During this time she and Stuart met and were married. She was involved in leadership roles as a worship leader, children’s work leader, youth group leader and supporting her husband as an elder in the church. Stuart was to be an elder for a number of years before co-founding a suburban branch of this church nearer to where they lived. Here he was involved as an elder, regular preacher and leader of homegroups right up to the time they left. Stuart, like Michelle, had also had a ‘mainline’ church background being sent by his mother to a Presbyterian church at least once a fortnight for four years. Stuart remembers this involvement as “boring and irrelevant”, something which was quite different to his own experience of God in his late teenage years in the Pentecostal church he joined. He remembers being very impressed by a popular Christian book that was doing the rounds in the seventies. This book ‘The Cross and the Switch

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40 Quoted from the New International Version.
41 By the term ‘well churched’ Michelle was referring to her childhood and early teenage background within the church which she considered as being very thorough.
42 The reference (4.1) indicates that this quote is taken from interview number 4, paragraph 1. Each quote from interviewees is referenced in this manner. As some interviews were with married couples the same interview number may apply to two different people.
43 Although Stuart’s parents chose to send the children to church they did not attend themselves. Stuart remembers being sent to church from the age of ten to fourteen.
44 Stuart became involved in the church at the age of seventeen.
Blade’ (1963), describes the life of David Wilkerson a young American minister, who went to the ghettos of New York to try and help young men caught in gangs, crime and drugs. The book details the miraculous conversion of Nicky Cruz and other gang members. Stuart says that this book “made an enormous effect” on him. For the first time he seemed to be reading about the “real thing,” a “God who actually does something.”

Although they were well connected within the church, heavily involved for over a decade, and very well respected by the Christian community within their city and their church Michelle and Stuart decided to leave the church they had helped establish and lead. However Stuart and Michelle were not to simply move to another church but were to leave church altogether. Their decision to leave was not over leadership struggles within the church, although leadership issues were a factor. Nor was it a rejection of their Christian faith, although there were doubts and questions regarding certain aspects of “faith” that were presented in their church. It was not because of personal difficulties with people in the church nor was it a result of a desire to pursue new leisure or work opportunities that conflicted with church time. In fact Stuart and Michelle became part of a group of church leavers who met in a home for three hours every second Sunday morning for a period of four and a half years after they had left the church. It was, however, through a long period of dissatisfaction and questioning of their church and faith that they decided to leave. Unravelling the reasons for their decision revealed the multiple interconnected factors and influences involved. When I asked Michelle her reasons for leaving she replied:

(Michelle) - Some of the things that come to mind for me would be power issues, women's issues and some of my own stuff which comes from my own pathology, my own need to please, my own need to perform highly, function highly, perfectly. A lot of which was dealt with in therapy. But it started the ball rolling in my mind and I found that I was living with a tension which became increasingly unbearable and I tried very hard to smooth it over and plaster over and wallpaper over it. I tried ways of getting round it by being more honest from the pulpit and going against the system and using language which was everyday language rather than religious language and trying to model what I thought was really real and honest for me and once again I found that I really had no peers, no one who said ‘Hey I really feel like that too’. People would say it to me privately but I didn't have a friend or a close soul mate who I felt was going the same place as me (4.6).

(Interviewer) - You mentioned three things, power structures, women's issues and the more personal issues which you were going through. How would you rate these? Was it more personal issues that were the driving force or the structural things or is that an unfair question?

(Michelle) - No, it's not an unfair question, but I don't know I can do justice in answering it because I found that seasons come and go in terms of how I perceive things. Women's issues might be very strong at a particular time when certain things are happening in the church. The power thing came in many disguises, touched women's issues and touched my personal issues so the power structure, the decision-making structure the whole way we communicate and share decision-making that was pretty critical to me, more so when I became involved in

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45 Published by Pyramid Books, New York. The Book went through over twenty reprints selling many million copies world wide. 'The Cross and the Switch Blade' and ‘Run Baby Run’ (Nicky Cruz's own story) became two of the most popularly read books of the emerging Pentecostal/charismatic churches of the late 1960's and early 1970's. Knowles (1994:112) speaking of the charismatic movement in New Zealand states: “Another important catalyst in the expansion of the charismatic movement was that of publications from overseas. David Wilkerson’s book 'The Cross and The Switch Blade': published in 1963, was by far the most influential of these, and was widely read in New Zealand.”

46 (4.55-56).

47 A number of those interviewed spoke of psychotherapy as an important aspect in their reflective process regarding their faith and their continued church involvement.
leadership and I found that even then I was fairly important and still fairly unlistened to, listened to but not heard (4.13-14).

The personal issues that Michelle was to describe were a combination of her own depression and the grief and struggle of living with the severe health problems of their children. For Stuart the issues took on a more intellectual and structural focus, concerns about the lack of connection between the church-world and the work-a-day-life of people, what he called the “sacred-secular split.” He also perceived a lack of space within the church for the kinds of questions that educated or intellectual people might bring. Over a period of time Stuart began to feel that he no longer fitted.

(Stuart) - Eventually for me I was kind of valued as someone who was coming from a different perspective and had provoking challenging things to say. When we started up XXX (the suburban branch of their church) myself and a couple of the others were mainly responsible for the preaching which was some sort of useful outlet for doing something to change the system but I increasingly came to see that people were where they were at and I was where I was at and it wasn’t necessary for them to follow the same path that I was following, ask the questions I was asking. But I was never going to be satisfied within that sort of framework, not that I was really actually looking for satisfaction but it just came to a point where it was pointless really to continue on with it (4.21).

And so Stuart and Michelle began to feel that their involvement in the church was no longer satisfying. These factors on their own would probably not have led Stuart and Michelle to leave the church. They had seen too many others do that, many of whom were close friends, and didn’t want to leave as these friends had. Coupled with this was their own loyalty to the church. As Michelle said “we both had a tremendously loyal streak.” There were two separate factors that helped these loyal, long term leaders of the church to come to their decision to finally leave. The first was the fact that the church they had helped to pioneer was going well, had a new pastor and they were no longer needed to the same degree as they had been previously. Secondly they met up with two other married couples of similar age who had also been very involved in long term Christian leadership and had the same feelings of dissatisfaction. These couples did not go to the same church as Stuart and Michelle but had been very heavily involved in a para-church group that functioned from a similar ethos and theology as the Pentecostal church. Both couples had been full time workers for this para-church group for a number of years. Alongside their para-church work they were also involved in churches, one couple in another Pentecostal church and the other in a charismatic Baptist church. For about a year the three couples met together and talked about their dissatisfactions with church and desires to find a group of Christians with whom they could meet and discuss things in new ways. It was the existence of this small group with similar journeys and concerns that finally provided the impetus for Stuart and Michelle to leave.

Stuart and Michelle left the church but not their Christian faith, although their faith is different to the faith they held to five years previously. They continued to acknowledge the reality of their previous experience of God in the church. Since leaving they have continued to meet with this group of dissatisfied church leavers fortnightly. As Stuart said:

I had experiences in the past, transcendent experiences where I have absolutely no doubt whatsoever that God has been involved in my life and done certain things. And he’s actually sort of moved in and broken into the here and now, time and space as something from outside my life. There is no doubt. I shouldn’t say there is no doubt, but there is no real

48 They had seen their friends leaving amidst tension and conflict and did not want to leave the same way.
49 I was able to interview one of these couples and the man from the second couple independently.
50 In this particular case the pastor of one of the couples was also involved in their meetings. He acted as a facilitator and guide to their discussions and encouraged them to set up a group outside of the church. The involvement of this pastor in the discussions of such a group was however unique.
doubt that God exists and that he is real and cares and is concerned about me and everyone else (4.126-127).

Hence while they had left the church, and saw no reason to consider returning, they were nevertheless holding onto and nurturing their Christian faith. In many respects Stuart and Michelle were typical of the leavers I was to meet over the next three years in Christchurch, Auckland, Dunedin, Nelson and Melbourne.

Before looking further at the leaving process and post-church faith of Stuart, Michelle and others like them it is important to consider the other leavers who were interviewed. In this chapter we will consider who the leavers were and the demographic make up of the sample of leavers interviewed; how they were involved in the church and some previous studies that have provided some directions for our understanding. Those interviewed in this study, like Stuart and Michelle, had all left either evangelical Pentecostal or charismatic churches, the same stream of churches that are growing both within New Zealand and across the world. As we will see these leavers were predominantly core church leaders between 35-45 years of age who had been heavily involved in their ‘EPC’ church for a considerable period of time. It is to their background that we now turn.

2.1 The Interviewees

One hundred and eight people were interviewed in the course of this study. Ninety of these were people who had left evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic (‘EPC’) churches and were at the time of the interview not involved in or participating in any way within a church. Eight of the interviewees had left ‘EPC’ churches and been outside of them for a minimum of six months and had subsequently returned to a church involvement. The final ten interviewees were considering leaving their ‘EPC’ church at the time of the interview. The break down of these interviewees is shown in Table 2.1.

2.1.1 Demographic Background of Those Interviewed

Like Stuart and Michelle who were in their mid-thirties when I initially interviewed them, the interviewees who make up this study were predominately in their middle adult years (35-45). Although the age range included some interviewees under 30 years (n=4) through to some who were over fifty five (n=4) the vast majority were between thirty five and forty five years of age (n=76), (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.1 - Interviewee’s Church Involvement at the Time of Interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewee’s Church Involvement at the Time of Interview</th>
<th>Number (n )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Churchless Faith:- Had left the ‘EPC’ church they were previously involved in and had no present involvement in a church.</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to Church:- Had left the ‘EPC’ church they were previously involved in, been uninvolved in any church for a minimum of six months and have since subsequently re-joined a church.</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal:- Considering leaving their ‘EPC’ church at the time of the interview.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The time interviewees had been out of their respective churches varied from 6 months to 14 years with an average out-of-church time of 3.5 years.

For most of the eight interviewees who had returned to church participation there was a definite decision to join a church outside of the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic stream of churches. This will be developed further later.
This study indicates that there are a considerable number of leavers from ‘EPC’ churches who make the decision to leave in their middle years. This does not mean that this is the only age group leaving such churches, of course. There are another group of leavers who have grown up within ‘EPC’ churches who chose to leave the church in their late teens and early twenties. These leavers, unlike those interviewed as part of this study, are making an adult decision to leave the church and coupled with this they tend to be setting aside the Christian faith with which they have grown up. Research and my own exposure to some of these younger leavers\textsuperscript{53} indicates that many of them, again unlike the leavers interviewed in this study, are likely to return to Christian faith and the church later in life (Hoge et al. 1993). It needs to be emphasised, though, that the focus of this study was on those who had made adult decisions to be involved in ‘EPC’ churches and who then subsequently chose to leave. This group of predominately middle aged (35 to 45 years of age) leavers typically draw a distinction between the church they leave and the faith they retain. It is this distinction which provides an important focus of this research.

\textsuperscript{53} During the course of the study the very small number of under thirty year olds being located by use of the snow balling method became obvious. I was from then on very conscious of the issues raised in conversations with younger church leavers. Over the 18 months that I informally collected data on younger leavers I came to see that for these younger leavers there was not the same distinction being made between their leaving the church and leaving the Christian faith that I observed among the older leavers.
The interviewees were relatively evenly spread between males (n = 50) and females (n = 58). The majority (79%: n = 85) were married, the remaining twenty one percent of the interviewees were made up of twelve (11%) who had been previously married and eleven (10%) who were single at the time of the interview. Table 2.3 summarises the marital status of those interviewed.

Eighty percent of the interviewees had children, which provides another interesting dynamic in the decision to leave. It is generally held in research on church leavers that children are regarded as a reason to join a church or remain actively involved in one. Here the majority of interviewees chose to cease participation in a church despite the fact that a decision to leave meant taking the children away from the socialising influence of the church and the Christian faith. Although some interviewees continued to encourage their children to attend Sunday school or youth group the children’s attendance was generally short lived.
2.1.2 The Educational and Employment Backgrounds of the Interviewees

Seventy nine of the interviewees were involved full-time in paid employment (73%), and fourteen in part-time paid employment (13%). The remaining fifteen (14%) were not working at the time of the interview. Three of those not working had left work to study full time, and the majority of those remaining were involved in the care of young children. A significant number (84% n = 49) of the women interviewed both married and single were in paid part-time (24%, n= 14) or full-time (60%, n=35) employment. Table 2.4 summarises those employed in full-time and part-time roles.
Table 2.4 Interviewees in Paid Part-time or Full-time Employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paid Employment</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid employment</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewees were generally well qualified with 68% (n=73) holding a tertiary qualification (72% of men and 64% of women). A breakdown of the interviewees highest academic qualification is given in Table 2.5 overleaf.

2.1.3 Joining the ‘EPC’ Church

Twenty eight percent of the interviewees like Michelle had come from a strong church background. These people grew up attending church, children’s and youth church groups and were supported in doing so by their parents who also attended church regularly. Forty percent, like Stuart came from nominal church background, where they as children had some exposure to the church although it was not a major influence on their parents and family lives.

Table 2.5 Highest Academic Qualification of Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

57 The interviewees listed here were ‘well’ qualified for those in New Zealand from the same age grouping. In 1991 between 47-55% of male Baby Boomers (those aged between 25 and 44 years of age) and 37-43% of females (in the same age group) had tertiary qualifications. At the same time one third of those then enrolled in university and polytech were Baby Boomers including over half the part-time students and two-thirds of external students (Statistics New Zealand 1995:31).

58 The relationship between education and church attendance is inconclusive. Acquaviva (1979:168) stated that “It is an objective and uncontroversial fact that rising educational and cultural levels, together with better economic conditions favour religion, at least in Western society and at least until the beginning of the 1960’s.” Since this statement was made research claims have been less definitive (Bentley et al. 1992, Hoge et al. 1993). Hoge et al (1993:253) state from their research that “Education weakened core beliefs and was associated with having fewer children, both of which variables in turn decreased church attendance. Yet apart from them, education also had a direct effect on increasing church attendance. These effects cancelled each other out, and the net impact of higher education on church attendance was near zero.”

59 A strong church background is generally seen as correlating to strong beliefs and practices among the young (Hunsberger and Brown 1984). But there appears to be less correlation as people get older (Hoge et al. 1993). Hoge et al’s study of five hundred Presbyterian adults between 33 and 42 years of age concluded that “the influence of positive parent-child bonds was very weak. The effect of early social learning was weaker in our data than in most past research and the reason is probably that our sample consisted of adults at least 33 years old, whereas earlier research looked at persons of high school age or college age. The effects of childhood social learning during childhood and youth apparently wear down under the pressure of later influences” (p253). This was supported by Willits and Crider (1989) who found spouses became more important than childhood religious backgrounds. This research, at least in terms of continued church attendance, stands in contradiction to the folk wisdom which suggests that ‘as the twig is bent, the trees inclined’ and the often quoted biblical proverb - “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6)”.

60 The word ‘nominal’ is here used in broad sense to mean those children raised in families that encouraged or supported their children’s attendance in church activities but where the parents were not involved themselves in more than a nominal sense (i.e. attended less than monthly). This use of the term is taken from Bentley et al. (1992:1) who define ‘nominal’ as “those who label themselves as belonging to one or other of the Christian denominations in the census or other surveys, but who attend church services of worship less than once a month.”
The remaining thirty percent came from non-churched backgrounds. These included people who grew up within other faiths (Non Christian), agnostic or atheistic family backgrounds, or families that held some belief but no affiliation or attendance in church.

2.1.4 Involvement of Interviewees in the ‘EPC’ Churches

The interviewees had been involved as adults\(^{61}\) in their respective ‘EPC’ churches for an average of 15.8 years (over 18 years of age). A number were involved in mainline churches, Sunday schools or church-based youth groups prior to this but these involvements are not recorded as part of their adult involvement. The interviewees ranged from three years of active adult involvement through to 30 years. Table 2.6 shows a breakdown of the time periods the interviewees were involved in their respective churches\(^{62}\) prior to leaving.

\(^{61}\) Here adulthood has been taken as being 18 years or older. The decision to use this age is drawn from the work of Sharon Parks (1986:4) who states - “developmental theorists do not agree about when ‘adolescence’ ends and ‘adulthood’ begins. There is general agreement that adolescence begins with puberty, but there is little agreement about where adolescence ends. Douglas Kimmel, cataloguing some of the discrepancies among biological, chronological, social and perceived age, notes that “there is a growing emphasis on the age of eighteen as a socially defined turning point in the life cycle that, in many ways, marks the beginning of adulthood in a social and legal sense” (Kimmel 1974:12). In agreement with Kimmel and Parks adult commitment to church is here taken as beginning at age eighteen. This is in accordance with the legal age of voting, joining the military or marrying (without specific parental consent) under New Zealand law.

\(^{62}\) For some interviewees this period of time includes involvement in more than one church.
Table 2.6 Time Involved in Church as Adults Prior to Leaving.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Involved</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The vast majority of interviewees had been involved in at least one, if not a number of key leadership positions within their church or para-church groups. Table 2.7 (overleaf) gives a breakdown of the leadership positions within churches held by the interviewees. Beyond this church involvement many were also involved in para-church activities and leadership.

A number of individuals were involved in more than one leadership role, some in numerous roles over the length of time they were attending the church. Six of those interviewed were not involved in any of the leadership positions identified in Table 2.7. This means ninety four percent of the interviewees held at least one significant leadership position within their church.

Table 2.7 Leadership Positions Held by Interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvements</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership of church</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading home group</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading youth work</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading children’s work</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading worship</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading prayer groups</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading evangelistic programmes</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The degree of involvement of the interviewees is further emphasised by an analysis of the number who were involved in either full-time work within an ‘EPC’ church or para-church group or studied theology full-time. Forty percent (n=43) of those interviewed were involved either in full-time study or full-time Christian work (see Table 2.8).

There was also a relatively large group of people who were involved in full-time Christian study for less than a year.

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63 Four of those who didn’t hold such positions were nevertheless married to spouses who did and saw themselves as supporting their spouse in this position.
64 Those involved for twelve months or more as overseas missionaries are also included in this grouping.
65 To satisfy the full-time criteria the person needed to be either working or studying full-time for at least one year.
66 As some were involved in both full-time study and full-time Christian work the total is less than indicated in Table 2.8.
Typically these people were involved in full-time courses for three to six months (n=10). Added to these are a further group who were involved in part time theological study (n=7). Taken together thirty three percent (n=36) of those interviewed had at some point been involved in full-time or part-time theological study.
Table 2.8 Those Involved in Full Time Christian work and/or Full time Theological Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Work</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Theological Study</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Even when those who had been involved in full-time capacities (either work or study) are removed from the table of involvement in church leadership positions the degree of participation in key roles remains very high. Sixty percent (n=65) of those interviewed had not been involved in full-time study or work roles. Table 2.9 shows the involvement in leadership positions by those who had not been involved in full-time roles.

The average time interviewees had been outside of the church was 3.5 years. When this figure is taken alongside the mean age of those interviewed we see that those leaving the church who were interviewed in this research left (on average) in their early thirties through to their early forties. This indicates that there are a considerable number of people in these middle years of life who are leaving the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches.

Table 2.9 Voluntary Involvement in Key Leadership Positions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvements</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership of church</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading home groups</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading youth work</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading children’s work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading worship</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading prayer groups</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading evangelistic</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>programmes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2. What Can We Say about the Interviewees?

From an initial introduction to the interviewees in this research four comments can be made which hold this group to some degree in tension with the results of previous studies of those who disaffiliate from churches.

1. The interviewees are not leaving ‘mainline’ churches but have left Pentecostal and charismatic churches. These churches are amongst the growing stream of the Christian church.

2. The leavers are not leaving in the process of entering adulthood but are predominantly between thirty and forty five years of age.

3. The leavers were not on the fringe of the church, but formed the very core of the church, the vast majority holding key leadership positions (94%) and a large percentage (40%) being involved in either full time Christian study or work.

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67 This includes three women who were included on this list in their role as a pastor’s wife. In each case the women were not involved in other paid employment but were engaged in performing the role of a “pastors wife” for a number of years. All three had also been married to their husbands while they studied full-time at a theological college. What is indicated here is the degree of involvement with the church that these women had.

68 This table relates to interviewees who were not involved in full-time Christian work or study.
4. The leavers had not been involved in the church for only a short period of time. The sample of interviewees involved in this research had been adult participants in ‘EPC’ churches for an average of 15.8 years.

It is the focus of this research to analyse the faith of these leavers and here the second distinction with the research literature is drawn. As will become clearer in the subsequent chapters the majority of these leavers are not moving to a position of apostasy, (i.e. no longer holding to a Christian faith) but like Stuart and Michelle are retaining their faith while leaving the church. They are also, like Stuart and Michelle, unlikely to return to an evangelical or Pentecostal/charismatic church again. This raises an interesting question - what characterises the post-church faith of these leavers? This is a question upon which the research focuses much of its attention and to which we need to give some initial consideration here.

2.3 Leaving the Church But Not the Faith

These interviewees do not easily fit the common understandings of church disengagement and disaffiliation. Specifically this is seen in the way the majority of interviewees recorded in this study have moved outside the church but as will be seen nevertheless claim to have continued in their Christian faith. In this way this research stands in opposition to the general thesis of secularisation - where secularisation is taken to mean the decreased significance and relevance of religious faith to people’s lives.69

It is important to note that ‘religiosity’ is multi-dimensional. As Cornwall et al. (1986) identify there are three major components involved. There is a behavioural component to religiosity involving participation, an affective component involving organisational identification and commitment and a cognitive element involving belief. Each of these dimensions can be severed with differing results. Cornwall et al. describes the severing of these by the use of three different terms:

Disengagement is the process by which individuals cease or discontinue their active participation in a religious group.

Disaffiliation is the process by which individuals change their commitment to a religious group either by joining another church or by no longer affiliating with any religious group.

Apostasy is the process by which individuals cease to believe in the teachings of a particular religious group.70

In this study it will be argued the interviewees are typically both disengaging and disaffiliating but predominantly are not moving to a position of apostasy. That is the vast majority of people leaving ‘EPC’ churches, (if the following research is indicative of a wider group of leavers), are not rejecting or moving out of Christian faith. Although their understanding of, and commitment to their faith and faith practices may be changing, these leavers are typically adamant that they are not leaving the Christian faith.

As Bibby’s research (1987) indicates “most people have not necessarily given up on the faith; however, they do appear to be giving up on the institutional church” (Bibby 1987:51).

2.4 A Way Forward

In the process of preparing for this study I read two books in particular: ‘Exit Interviews: Revealing Stories of Why People are Leaving the Church’ by William Hendricks (1993) and ‘The Sheep that Got Away: Why Do People Leave the Church?’ by Michael Fanstone (1993). Both these writers sought to bring

69 The relevance of the secularisation theory as a means of understanding these church leavers is discussed fully in Chapter 5.
70 Quoted in Albrecht et al. 1988:79-80.
understanding to the reasons people leave ‘EPC’ churches. We will now turn to a brief overview of the reasons cited in these works.

2.4.1 ‘Exit Interviews’

Hendricks begins his book by saying

While countless “unchurched” people are flocking in the front door of the church, a steady stream of the “churched” is flowing quietly out the back. . . This is the ‘dark side of church growth’ . . . despite glowing reports of surging church attendance, more and more Christians in North America are feeling disillusioned with the church and other formal, institutional expressions of Christianity. . . not to say these “back-door believers” have given up on the faith . . . some have remarkably vibrant spiritual lives and touchingly close friendships with a kindred spirit or two. . . but they tend to nurture their relationship with God apart from the traditional means of the church and para-church (Hendricks 1993:17).

Hendricks reports a number of accounts, including large quotes, from the ‘couple of dozen’ people interviewed in the process of writing the book and then proceeds in the last two chapters to summarise the reasons given by the interviewees for their decision to leave, see Table 2.10. He says that the people left “despite an initial trust in churches and ministries and a longing for community” (op.cit:260).

In producing his list Hendricks (1993:259-260) states that “perhaps the most important thing to hear is this: There is no one, overriding reason why people are leaving the church today. . . there is no one reason; there are many reasons - perhaps as many reasons as there are people leaving the church.” He goes on to suggest that “If I had interviewed two dozen people, I feel certain I would have heard two dozen different stories.”

2.4.2 - ‘The Sheep That Got Away’

Fanstone (1993:52) surveyed 509 people within England who had left a Christian church. Fanstone’s study included a wider range of church backgrounds than that considered by Hendricks’ or the more focused stream of the church considered in this research. Hence Fanstone interviewed a number of leavers who had left mainline, liberal or Catholic churches as well as those who had left evangelical or Pentecostal churches.

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71 Hendricks continues saying - “this dark side of church growth is not something that has been either widely reported or carefully studied. But it’s there. In fact, I believe its growing” (Hendricks 1993:17).

72 In introducing the reasons given by the people he interviewed Hendricks states four things the leavers were not saying. These were: (1) They were not saying they wanted to leave the faith. (2) They were not saying they wanted to leave the church. (3) They were not saying the church is full of hypocrites and (4) they were not saying that all clergy are dishonest.
Table 2.10 Common Themes from Hendrick’s Interviews with Church Leavers.

1. Boredom with church services.
2. A craving for ‘truth’ and ‘reality’.
3. The importance of psychology as a resource.
5. Extreme antipathy to formulae and ‘packaged’ Christianity coupled with a realisation that there is no easy path to spirituality.
6. A dislike of false advertising, where more was promised than delivered.
7. A feeling that the busyness in church programmes did not equate with spirituality.
8. A desire for an opportunity to express their spiritual gifts.
9. A wholesale rejection of the prosperity teaching.
10. A sense of being hurt by the church and ‘family’ of God.
11. Mixed attitudes about being brought up in Christian homes.
12. From those in full-time Christian work a feeling that they suffer the hardest falls.
13. The theology they received made a difference.
14. The sense that spirituality is a process, and more involved than a focus on conversion.
15. A gap between the ideals taught by churches and the reality people face in the day-to-day.
17. A sense that most evangelical churches preach grace and live works.
18. A correlation between people coming alive to their emotions and their exit from the church.
19. Disillusionment is a process - it doesn’t happen over night.

Despite the wider focus of Fanstone’s study he too identified a similar list of reasons for British church leavers as Hendricks did for American church leavers. The reasons for leaving the church recorded through Fanstone’s survey are provided below in Table 2.11. Fanstone then looked in greater detail at each reason categorising the list of reasons under four headings: Personal Issues, Leadership Issues, Relevance Issues and God Issues. In seeking to find why the churches rated so badly in these particular areas he points them back to the example of Jesus as a model for church life.

The results of Fanstone’s work in England and Hendrick’s in the United States of America showed similar reasons being proposed by the leavers for their decision to leave. As will be seen later these reasons are consistent with those interviewed in this research of leavers from within New Zealand and Australia. Where this research differs from that of Fanstone and Hendricks is the way in which the unconnected reasons listed by Hendricks and Fanstone are considered not only as isolated expelling factors but are connected through the use of a processual model of faith development in relationship to a changing societal milieu.

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73 The reasons given in this table are not presented in an order of priority (source - op.cit:260-268).
74 The prosperity teaching suggests that obedience to God and a strong faith lead to personal prosperity measured in terms of wealth, health and happiness. Hendricks (1993:262) states “my interviewees took a dim view of the teaching that God will bless people - with health, wealth, or even spiritual rewards - in exchange for certain behaviours. Not only had they not experienced the faith that way, they were skeptical that the “prosperity gospel” is a biblical doctrine.”
Table 2.11- Fanstone’s Survey Results: Reasons Why People Don’t go to Church Any Longer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Yes %</th>
<th>Maybe %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I found it irrelevant to my everyday life</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I found it boring</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt I didn’t belong</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t like the direction the church was going.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was put off by the sermons</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I didn’t get on with the leader or leadership</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People didn’t seem to care about me as a person</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I had domestic conflicts or tensions because I attended church</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I felt God let me down in some way</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My questions and/or observations weren’t taken seriously</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sickness or old age</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words this research seeks to integrate these seemingly diverse rationales for leaving evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches. To do this the thesis will present three distinct but inter-related factors which individually, but more significantly in combination, provide an understanding of leavers from evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches. These three factors are:

1. The changing societal culture that contemporary Western dwellers find themselves in; specifically this changing cultural milieu is perceived as the time of transition between the erosion of influence of modernity and the increasing influence of postmodernity.

2. The structure, faith contents and faith practices of evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches shaped through the combined influences of evangelical theology, charismatic worship and leadership patterns and church growth techniques.

3. The faith development of individuals located within evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches and significantly influenced by the societal changes brought in the transition to an increasingly postmodernist society.

It is in the dynamic inter-relationship of these three factors that our understanding of why people leave evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches and what happens to their faith after leaving will be made sense of. The thesis will then proceed to outline trends that can be discerned regarding leavers from evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches and look at ways of learning from these leavers.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introduction to the ‘EPC’ church leavers. Stuart and Michelle are typical of the leavers we will meet in this study. They left the ‘EPC’ church they had been highly committed to for over ten years without quarrel or incident and moved to a non-church based faith. Their reasons for doing this involved a number of factors - personal, church structural, faith and wider societal influences. When Michelle and Stuart left the church they became involved in a group of similarly dissatisfied people who would meet fortnightly to talk, have breakfast together and sometimes pray or consider the Bible together.

Fanstone also notes ‘other reasons given for not going to church’ which were less significant among those he surveyed. These were: ‘I’m too busy -5%’, ‘I moved home and didn’t find another church in my new area to go to - 4%’, ‘I can’t cope with the hypocrisy and falseness that I see in churchgoers - 4%’, ‘I’ve lost my faith and don’t believe now -3%’, ‘I opt to spend time with my family on Sundays - 3%’, ‘I was made to go to church when I was younger and it put me off - 3%’, ‘I have just got out of the habit -2%’, ‘I have a serious problem with the leadership - 2%’, ‘I can’t cope with the current style of worship in the church -2%’ (op.cit:63).
This was a group to which they and many other members of the group were highly committed and one which would continue for four and a half years.

Michelle and Stuart are also typical of those interviewed in this study as they are both well educated\textsuperscript{76}, creative people who were leaders in their church. They have a family which they are concerned for and for whom they want a positive Christian influence, and yet they remain outside of any church involvement. Michelle and Stuart therefore present a human face to the back-door losses of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches discussed in Chapter 1. In Chapter 3 we will consider the stream of the Christian church that the interviewees have come from which I have called the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches or ‘EPC’ churches. What has shaped this stream of churches? In what ways are they different to other churches in New Zealand or Australian society and how can we begin to understand the people who are leaving them?

\textsuperscript{76} Michelle has a tertiary diploma and Stuart is a medical doctor.
Chapter Three

The Church

The Sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and purpose. . . . No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey.\textsuperscript{77} C. Wright Mills.

3.1 Introduction

In the early 1970’s Gabrielle moved from the small mainline traditional church her family attended to go to a large Pentecostal church which was then at the forefront of Pentecostal church growth within her city. The attraction of this new church was the “liberty and freedom” (her words) that it offered; there was more “life” and “vitality.” Gabrielle stayed there a few months and then moved to join a separate house church that was just beginning. She said of the house church, “it seemed to be pertinent to young people and relevant. It seemed very loose at the time, certainly there was no structure” (22.13). This house group had about 50 people at its core and 400 to 500 around the fringes.

It was in this group that she met her husband Craig who with many others had joined the house group after being “caught up in the whole Jesus movement of the 1970’s.” Prior to this Craig had no church background, except a brief period in a Sunday school as a child, and had left home as a teenager to go surfing.

(Craig) - I had rejected all those (his parents values) and left home at a very early age. I just went surfing. So I just dropped out for a few years and then got caught up in the whole Jesus movement of the 70s, when it first hit here in New Zealand. Through that I became a Christian in a very real way. I mean it totally transformed my life. I’m still quite happy to acknowledge that to anybody. I have no qualms about that at all (22.4).

Initially the gatherings of the house group were pretty relaxed. Their meetings “started out with singing, there would be long sessions of singing and informal praying . . . and witnessing - telling their stories.”\textsuperscript{78} At this stage the group was loosely advised by a couple of older men who gained the respect of the younger group participants and could identify with the group. Craig remembers a key incident that typified one of these men.

(Craig) - So the way he got the ear of the people in the group was illustrated by the story where he met a couple of the kids in town and recognised them as some of the ones who had drifted into the church occasionally just to look at what was going on, and had heard that they had been newly converted. He said “Hey neat to see you again.” These guys were wandering through town with their long hair and hippie gear on in bare feet and Mr Brown said “how sensible, why do I get around in shoes like this.” And in the middle of town took his shoes and socks off and said “this feels great.” He was another humble person, very gentle, but a listening person (22.20).

But not long after this the leadership of a larger Pentecostal church who had been keeping a watchful eye on the development of this house group suggested that they needed more of a structure.

(Craig) - That was when we started getting into the whole structure of the church thing. The experts saw that now was the time to step in and organise these people properly. They

\textsuperscript{77} C. Wright Mills 1959:6
\textsuperscript{78} (22.32).
basically started forming us into a church structure with formalised leadership and that sort of thing. Initially it was voluntary people in leadership positions and senior people from the church in town that came out on a volunteer basis (22.32).

The move toward structure in the group mirrored a move for more structure and conformity within the lives of many of those who had joined the Jesus movement out of what he describes as the alternative culture of the period. Craig says of his friends:

(Craig) - The things that I used to notice was dress code. You know. Here’s a bunch of hippies from the sixties. We were really in the fringe element, into the drug scene and really weird and wacky, and those sort of guys and the next minute they were in suits and ties. These were my friends (22.47).

The changes brought about by Craig’s conversion were not as severe for him as they had been for his friends, at least as far as he saw it. Craig carried on surfing and didn’t make any outward changes to his appearance. He did however move back to his parent’s home and begin training towards a future job. This was a result of a desire to marry Gabrielle who wanted him to “get an education.” Although Craig came out of the alternative culture Gabrielle, who was an accepted member of the surfing scene, was less involved in the more radical elements of the alternative culture. Craig and Gabrielle reflected the membership of the house group - many from the alternative cultural scene of the time and others who had moved from traditional church backgrounds into the perceived life, freedom and vitality of the Pentecostal churches.

The next move for the house group was a further step along the road to formal church structures. This occurred when the leaders of the house group decided they needed a pastor, though initially this was to be on a part-time basis. The man they got was a young pastor who had worked with another Pentecostal pastor in a growing church. Gabrielle describes him as

(Gabrielle) - a very goal oriented person. He had a business . . . sort of go ahead business background. He had a real zeal for wanting to establish a big church, having been part of a church that had really grown in leaps and bounds. So he very much wanted the same thing for the church here . . . he was a very charismatic leader . . . so it grew and became one of the happening churches . . . with lots of people coming along (22.61 & 67).

Gabrielle and Craig remained significantly involved in this church for 10 years before moving on to another church in the early 1980s when this pastor and his direction for the church began to part company with what they saw as being important. Up until then they were house group leaders, part of the church leadership and Gabrielle was very involved in counselling, praying for people and advising the pastor on people and church concerns.

In order to understand the church environment that Gabrielle and Craig had joined and would subsequently leave, we need to understand something of what “church” is and what has shaped the stream of the church in which they were involved.

3.2 What is “The Church”?
To study a ‘churchless faith’ it is necessary to understand the boundaries and functions of the church as well as faith.79 As will become clear as the discussion develops, defining the boundaries of what is church and what isn’t provides particular challenges. We must therefore address the question ‘How are we to define Church?’ Sociologically the understanding of the nature of church originates in the work of Max Weber (1963) who distinguished between ‘sects’ and ‘churches’. This work was further developed by Weber’s student Ernst Troeltsch (1931) who saw the two terms as characterising two different social manifestations of Christianity. Crotty summarises Weber’s work saying:

79 Chapter 4 will focus on the changing dynamics of faith.
As an ideal type of religious organisation Weber’s ‘sect’ was exclusive, requiring personal commitment from its members, his ‘church’ was inclusive, embracing all who were born into it, whatever their level of commitment. Troeltsch expanded these criteria. The ‘sect’ was not only exclusive, it was also small numerically, austere in practice and dismissive of the dominant culture and society. It lacked any complex form of organisation, was generally a close-knit fellowship and derived most of its members from lower social classes. The ‘church’ was the exact opposite: inclusive, large, impersonal, bureaucratic, adjusted to the reigning social order and appealing to the upper classes of society (1996:39).

Troeltsch also presented a third type of Christian thought ‘mysticism’, as emerging beside the church and sect.

Mysticism depends neither upon the institution, as does the church, nor upon literal interpretation of the Law of God in the Bible, as does the sect. It is an individualism freely combining Christian ideas with other elements. . . . In mysticism ideas which had hardened into formal worship and doctrine are replaced by purely personal experiences. Its groups have no permanent organisation. Voluntary association with like-minded people replaces both church and sect and is equally remote from both (Moberg 1962:75).

Mysticism is omitted from most subsequent analyses of religion as it is only rarely found in institutional form (op.cit.:75). Since Weber and Troeltsch’s original “church-sect” typology Yinger80 (1957:147-155), Becker81 (1950:624-642), Wach82 (1951:190-196), and others83 have developed typologies building off this work. Troelstch’s typology and its derivatives have however been subjected to significant criticism.84 The distinction drawn by Weber, Troeltsch and others will be utilised in greater detail in the following chapter, however for now it is sufficient to say that such sociological distinctions do not take us far in providing a definition of the Christian church outside of the definitional tension inherent in the “church-sect” typologies. As Giles states:

The Sociological form of the church has changed and changed, dramatically over the centuries, moving in different directions at different times and in different places, but the constituent elements remain the same. The continuity to be seen lies at the theological level, not the sociological (1995:45).

Attempts to define the church functionally are also limiting. The church could be defined as an organisational and legal entity, with hierarchical leadership structures, pooled financial resources and corporate times of meeting for religious activity centered around the Christian message. However in defining ‘church’ it is necessary to see beyond organisational structures, (buildings, Priests/ministers, financial

80 Yinger produced a sixfold typology: The universal church, ecclesia, class church or denomination, established sect, sect and the cult.
81 Becker defined churches into four sub categories: - ecclesia, denomination, sect and cult.
82 Wach suggested three major forms of Christian communities: - Ecclesiastical bodies, independent bodies (denominations) and sectarian bodies.
83 Crotty (1996:45-46) builds on the work of Weber and Troeltsch and Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions developing a new typology between church and sect. And, for example Niebuhr (1951) provides a typology built on the relationship between church and culture. He identifies five relationships between the two: Christ against culture, Christ of culture, Christ above culture, Christ and culture in paradox, and Christ as the transformer of culture (see Niebuhr 1951).
84 Moberg (1962:89-90) states the following criticisms: - Religious organisations do not always change from sects to churches, the term ‘sect’ is problematic theologically for example “certain groups called sects in the typology qualify as churches according to the biblical definition of church(89).” The purity of the concepts defies the realities of religious communities. The typologies typically overlook the role of ‘mysticism’, the typology is difficult to verify and its existence may have prohibited “further innovative ideas about the nature of religious organization” (90).
systems and constitutions) and functional accounts of the church’s activities, (worship, prayer, preaching etc.) to find the essence of what is ‘church’. To understand the Christian church in this way we must take account of how those within the church understand it. This means to consider the historical development of the church. As Kung states:

The “essential nature” of the Church is not to be found in some unchanging Platonic heaven of ideas, but only in the history of the Church. The real Church not only has a history, it exists having a history. There is no “doctrine” of the Church in the sense of an unalterable metaphysical and ontological system, but only one which is historically conditioned, within the framework of the history of the Church, its dogma and its theology (1967:13).

The Christian church began with the accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and while it is clear that Jesus did not establish the church, his life and teaching were foundational to its development. 85 Although the New Testament uses a number of terms to describe the new community that emerged after Jesus’ death the term that came to be generally used is ‘ekklesia’. 86 Originally ‘ekklesia’ was used in a political and cultural context to describe ‘the assembly of Greek citizens who were called out of their homes to the market place by a herald’. As a result the early Christians thought of themselves as an assembly of those called out in a special sense, for they were the assembly of those called out by the proclamation of the gospel for the purpose of coming together to belong to God. They also saw themselves as called to promote this gospel to others. This was seen as the ‘mission’ of the church. 87

Ecclesiologically the essence of the church lies in two key elements that are intimately linked. The ‘laos theou’ (the people of God) engaged in the ‘missio Dei’ (the mission of God). The church is therefore at one and the same time the people of God and the community focused on and involved in the mission of God. 88 Thus the defining characteristics of the Christian church that will be used in this study are an assembly of people who meet to draw near to God (typically in the forms of prayer, worship and teaching) and who as an assembly place priority on and give energy and resources to supporting the ‘mission of God’ in the world.

The church as an institution carries out these twin functions through organisational and legal structures, with hierarchical leadership structures, pooled financial resources and corporate times of meeting where the members engage in religious activity centered around the Christian message. Thus when in this study we speak of those who have left “the church” we speak of those who no longer participate in “the institutional

85 Although Jesus understood himself within a Judaic framework and gave no indication of a desire to start a new religion, his life and teaching was to be the impetus behind the inauguration of the church. Jesus did speak often of the ‘realm (kingdom) of God ’ and its ‘nearness. The ‘basileia tou theou’ (kingdom of God) gave the image of a new way of being human in the world. Giles (1995:45) says - “Jesus did not establish what Troeltsch and later sociologists define as ‘church’, but Jesus did call into being the Christian community, the church theologically defined.”

86 This was the Greek translation of the Hebrew word ‘qahalin’, which means ‘assembly’

87 Bosch (1993:372) states “Mission is not a fringe activity of a strongly established church, a pious cause that (may) be attended to when the home fires (are) brightly burning . . . Missionary activity is not so much the work of the church as simply the church at work . . . It has become impossible to talk about the church without at the same time talking about mission. One can no longer talk about church and mission, only about the mission of the church . . . The inverse of the thesis ‘the church is essentially missionary’ is ‘mission is essentially ecclesial’. Because church and mission belong together from the beginning, a church without mission or a mission without the church are both contradictions. Such things do not exist, but only as pseudostructures”.

88 Crum summarises this position by stating: “ One may therefore perceive the church as an ellipse with two foci in and around the first ( the laos Theou) it acknowledges and enjoys the source of its life; this is where worship and prayer are emphasised. From and through the second focus (the missio Dei) the church engages and challenges the world. This is a forth-going and self-spending focus, where service, mission and evangelism are stressed. Neither focus should ever be at the expense of the other; rather, they stand in each other’s service (Crum 1973:288). Put more simply ‘the church gathers to praise God, to enjoy fellowship and receive spiritual sustenance, and disperses to serve God wherever its members are (Snyder, 1983:29).
church”, (characterised by organisational/legal structures, hierarchical leadership, pooled financial resources who meet together to engage in religious activity) who previously were actively involved in such a church.

The focus of this study is not on the Christian church in all its varieties and forms but one stream of the Christian church that is prevalent and growing both in New Zealand and across the world. This stream of the church is the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic stream (’EPC’). In this study the leavers had all left ‘EPC’ churches. The focus of this study has therefore been on the stream of the church that is growing rather than on the mainline Protestant denominations (not affected by evangelical theology and the Pentecostal/charismatic movement) or on the catholic church. In understanding the churches the interviewees in this study have left it is necessary to understand the key influences that have shaped this stream of the church. To do this we will discuss five movements that have significantly shaped ‘EPC’ churches in New Zealand. These movements are the Evangelical movement, the Pentecostal movement, the Charismatic renewal, the Jesus movement and the Church Growth movement. We will consider each of these in turn.

3.3 The Evangelical Movement

In terms of numbers involved, the most significant single event in the history of the Christian faith in New Zealand was the 1959 Billy Graham crusade. Over the 12 days of the crusade 574,300 people attended and 17,493 came to the front at Billy Graham’s request to make decisions for Christ. Forty five percent of those who made decisions were young people. At this time Graham represented an emerging group within the Christian faith known as the ‘new evangelicals’. These ‘new evangelicals’ were trying to carve a middle ground between the Christian fundamentalist and the liberal divisions of what was the ‘old evangelicalism’.

Christian fundamentalism emerged as the ‘old evangelicalism’ began to split between the conservatives and the liberals in the late 1800’s as a result of the insights of historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation

89 The original intent in the study was to move beyond the ‘EPC’ churches to include mainline Protestant leavers as well. The snowballing method however did not lead in this direction. See Methodological Appendix for greater detail.

90 Mainline denominations functioning more as ‘churches’ than ‘sects’ in Troeltsch typology have less clearly defined boundaries, and therefore leaving is not as easily identifiable as was the case within the ‘EPC’ churches studied. The Catholic faith, for example, has a strong cultural (and often familial ingredient). This can often mean that individuals raised within Catholicism never see themselves as having left it regardless of what degree they participate in, align themselves with or hold to the church. A number of people told me during the research ‘Once a Catholic always a Catholic’. Other methodological issues for the focus of the study are discussed in the Methodological Appendix.

91 Graham himself, at the time, said he ‘had preached to more people in six days in New Zealand than in any other week of my ministry’. (Christchurch Star 9 April 1959). However since 1959 Graham has preached to significantly larger audiences.


93 Thirty seven percent of these decisions were ’re-affirmations of faith’. This means they were decisions made by people who had previously made similar commitments to Christian faith. Pratt (1989:52) suggests that mass evangelists have little effect on people who are not already within the churches orbit. . . . in fact the evangelists are moving ’in the company of the converted’ or at least of the sympathetic. That only 37 percent of those making decisions had previously made similar decisions indicates the degree to which this crusade encompassed members of the wider society.

94 Aged between 5 and 18 years of age (Knowles 1994:63)

95 “The word evangelicalism derives from the Greek euangellismos. The evangel is the good news or gospel, and throughout the New Testament it designates the message of salvation. . . . Despite the dominant usage of euangellismos in the New Testament, its derivative, evangelical, was not widely or controversially employed until the Reformation period (Gerstner 1975:22-23). For a full history of the use of the term see Gerstner 1975.

96 By introducing the term ‘old evangelicalism’ I am referring to evangelicalism prior to its split into the fundamentalist and liberal camps. The term ‘old evangelicalism’ is not here intended to imply a distinct theological position but chronologically to distinguish between evangelicalism prior to the split into the fundamentalist and liberal positions.
that questioned previously unquestioned understandings of the Bible\textsuperscript{97} and the result of Darwinian thought. The net result was the emergence within the conservative camp of a preparedness to articulate and defend a few fundamentals of faith.\textsuperscript{98} These fundamentalists\textsuperscript{99} simply saw themselves as holding to biblical orthodoxy in the wake of a growing secular and modernist culture.

Fundamentalists as a Weberian ‘ideal type’ could be seen to uphold the following beliefs:

- Biblical Inerrancy\textsuperscript{100}
- Jesus Christ as truly born of the virgin
- Christ’s substitutional atonement
- Christ raised from the dead in bodily form
- Accuracy of the accounts of miracles recorded in the Bible
- Christ’s return to earth in the immediate future.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{97}Marsden (1980:103) in, what McGrath (1994:43) calls arguably the most definitive study in this area, states: “The issues debated so often about the orthodoxy of some of the graduates of Union Theological Seminary, adopted a five point declaration of ‘essential’ doctrines. Summarised, these points were: (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his bodily resurrection, and (5) the authenticity of the miracles. These five points were not intended to be a creed or a definitive statement. Yet in the 1920’s they became the famous ‘five points’” (Marsden 1980:117).

\textsuperscript{98}There were three important moves in this direction:

1. “In 1910 in the United States of America the Presbyterian General Assembly, in response to some questions raised about the orthodoxy of some of the graduates of Union Theological Seminary, adopted a five point declaration of ‘essential’ doctrines. Summarised, these points were: (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the Virgin Birth of Christ, (3) his substitutionary atonement, (4) his bodily resurrection, and (5) the authenticity of the miracles. These five points were not intended to be a creed or a definitive statement. Yet in the 1920’s they became the famous ‘five points’” (Marsden 1980:117).

2. The publication of twelve paperbacks called ‘The Fundamentals’ from 1910 to 1915. These ‘testimonies to the truth’ of Christian faith were distributed free (due to the enormous financial backing of Lyman Stewart the chief promoter and financial backer) to “every pastor, missionary, theological professor, theological student, YMCA and YWCA secretary, college professor, Sunday school superintendent, and religious editor in the English-speaking world. Some three million individual volumes in all” (Marsden 1980:119).

3. The writings of Curtis Lee Laws editor of the Baptist Watchman-Examiner magazine who invented the word ‘fundamentalist’ to describe his Baptist party (Marsden 1980:107).

\textsuperscript{99}‘Fundamentalists were seen as holding to the great themes of the Christian faith. As Kirsopp Lake wrote (1926) “It is a mistake often made by educated men who happen to have but little knowledge of historical theology, to suppose that fundamentalism is a new and strange form of thought. It is nothing of the sort, it is the partial and uneducated survival of a theology which was once universally held by all Christians . . . The fundamentalist may be wrong; I think he is. But it is we who have departed from the tradition, not he, and I am sorry for the fate of anyone who tries to argue with the fundamentalist on the basis of authority. The Bible and the corpus theologicum of the church is on the fundamentalist side” (quoted in McGrath 1994:note19 page 43).

\textsuperscript{100}An example of what is implied by Biblical inerrancy is given in the Chicago Short statement on Biblical Inerrancy (1978) which states:

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scriptures in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God’s witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God’s own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches; it is to be believed, as God’s instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God’s command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God’s pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture’s divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our mind to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible’s own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the church.

\textsuperscript{101}These points are drawn from Colin Brown’s summary of Christian Fundamentalism delivered in a lecture entitled ‘Understanding Christian Fundamentalism’, College House Theological Consortium, 24 October 1995. Brown (1992:143) states - “It seems to me that an approach via the notion of ‘family resemblances’ is helpful
Particularly in the United States these beliefs were thought, by fundamentalists, to be under threat by liberal theology and by a rapidly changing scientific and secular world. The ‘fundamentalists’ saw themselves as the defenders of these beliefs in the wake of such change. As such they formed a counter cultural movement. By the 1940’s fundamentalism was becoming an increasingly closed, cautious, defensive and oppositional group within society linked in many people’s minds to anti-intellectual, separatist and militant approach to the Christian faith.  The emergence of evangelicalism as a distinctive option, avoiding the weaknesses of both fundamentalism and modernism, dates from the period immediately following the Second World War, and is especially associated with two leading figures: Billy Graham (b. 1918) and Carl F. H. Henry (b. 1913) (McGrath 1994:29).”  Graham and Henry reflected a growing dissatisfaction with what ‘fundamentalism’ was becoming from within the ‘fundamentalist’ camp itself.

Billy Graham was himself from a fundamentalist background, but in the 1950’s he was finding the rigidity of the movement limiting on his growing evangelistic work. He therefore began to work with Christian groups, many that the fundamentalists would have labelled as ‘liberals’ to enable a wider audience and appeal for his evangelistic crusades. This was to be a crucial factor in the success of his crusades including his 1959 visit to New Zealand.

The ‘new evangelicals’ focused their attention on the bringing back of a social gospel (concern for this world not just the next) and a desire to gain a hearing among educated people.  This was a move from fundamentalism’s social isolation to a renewed desire to engage with the thinking and issues of the day.  Tomlinson (1995:66) states that their “intention was to create a ‘new evangelical theology’, which could on the one hand stand apart from fundamentalism, while at the same time continue to maintain the same basic form of doctrine.”  Francis Schaeffer, another leading figure of this ‘new evangelicalism’ illustrates this position, in proposing new evangelicalism:

. . . with the connotation of being Bible-believing without shutting one’s self off from the full spectrum of life, and in trying to bring Christianity into effective contact with the current needs of society, government and culture. It had a connotation of leading people to Christ as Savior, but then trying to be salt and light in the culture (McGrath 1994:30).

and, where Fundamentalism is concerned, the following ‘resemblances’ seem the more important in marking out ‘Christian’ Fundamentalism as a sub-species of Conservative Evangelical Protestantism.

1. Adherence to Conservative Evangelical Protestant doctrines such as the Virgin Birth, substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Christ and, above all, biblical inerrancy - all held in a dogmatic and militant manner.
2. Belief in the Second Coming of Christ regarded as central to the Christian belief system and often construed in terms of Dispensational Premillennialism.
3. A strongly separatist stance towards other so-called Christians.

James Barr (1977:1) summarizes the most pronounced characteristics of Christian fundamentalism as:

(a) a very strong emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible, the absence from it of any sort of error;
(b) a strong hostility to modern theology and to the methods, results and implications of modern critical study of the Bible;
(c) an assurance that those who do not share their religious viewpoint are not really ‘true Christians’ at all.

Marsden (1982:1) identified fundamentalists as being “ Evangelicals who are angry about something.”

Dick France & Alistair McGrath point out the difference between fundamentalism and evangelicalism by saying: “ . . . Sociologically, fundamentalism is a reactionary counter-cultural movement, with tight criteria of membership and is often associated with a ‘blue collar’ constituency. Evangelicalism is a cultural movement with increasingly lose criteria of self-definition, which tends to be associated with a professional or ‘white collar’ constituency (France & McGrath 1993:7).”

Carl Henry (1947) in his manifesto of neo-evangelicalism called evangelicals to cultural engagement. (McGrath 1994:29-30)

Hence the new evangelicalism intended to provide a middle route between the fundamentalist and liberal wings of the church. As the ‘new evangelicalism’ gained acceptance it ceased to be ‘new’ and it came to be known simply as ‘evangelicalism’.

Within New Zealand the divisions between fundamentalists, evangelicals and liberals were less clearly marked than in the United States. Yet today Evangelicalism is the dominant and growing face of Christianity within New Zealand and across the globe. The old divisions between liberalism and fundamentalism have predominantly given way, with fundamentalism being subsumed as one subset of the larger conservative evangelical stream and liberalism’s gradual numerical demise. McGrath, an evangelical Anglican and Oxford Theology Professor, writes of the evangelical movement:

Evangelicalism, once regarded as marginal, has now become mainline. It can no more be dismissed as an insignificant sideshow, sectarian tendency, or irrelevance to the life of the churches. It has moved from the wings to centre stage, displacing others once regarded as mainline, and who consequently feel deeply threatened and alienated by this development. Its commitment to evangelism has resulted in numerical growth, where some other variants of Christianity are suffering from severe contraction (McGrath 1994:9).

While the new Evangelicalism brought with it a preparedness to engage with society and work in unity with Christian churches, groups and individuals outside of the fundamentalist camp the extent to which the ‘fundamentals’ themselves have changed is less evident. Billy Graham when asked if he was a fundamentalist replied:

. . . if by fundamentalist you mean ‘narrow’, ‘bigoted’, ‘prejudiced’, ‘extremist’, ‘emotional’, ‘snake-handler’, without social conscience, then I am definitely not a fundamentalist. However, if by fundamentalist you mean a person who accepts the authority of the scriptures, the Virgin birth of Christ, the atoning death of Christ, his bodily resurrection, His second coming and personal salvation by faith through grace, then I am a fundamentalist. However I much prefer being called a Christian (Pratt 1989:44).

What is clear from Graham’s statement is a desire to rid himself and the new evangelicalism that he was championing from the negative connotations107 and separatist stances of the fundamentalists without altering the core beliefs on which fundamentalism was founded. James Barr claims:

Though there may be, and are, many evangelicals . . . who are not fundamentalists, there is little sign that they have, or seek to have a strong and independent position about the Bible, to set against the fundamentalist one . . . under strain and pressure from critics they will try to display a more open position, but left to themselves, they will fall back on a fundamentalist position, modified as little as possible (1980:67).

Today the term evangelical has become a very popular self-designation. As Graham, Henry and others wished to distance themselves from ‘fundamentalism’ in the 1950’s, so there are few Christians today who

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107 Barr (1977:3) states: “The word fundamentalist does carry the suggestion of narrowness, bigotry, obscurantism and sectarianism. . . The dislike for the term ‘fundamentalist’ is itself a sign that people are sensitive to these suggestions, and when they prefer another term like ‘conservative evangelical’ they are making something of an effort to project a more favourable image”. Barr goes on to say (1977:3-4) “the image that comes through, however, is still very much the unwanted ‘fundamentalist’ image. The conservative evangelical argues that is unjust and unfair, and he may be right. We on the other hand are entitled to ask whether the ideas and practice of many conservative evangelicals are in fact so different from those suggested by the word ‘fundamentalism’. The question is not whether they disassociate themselves from the term but whether they in their religious practice and biblical interpretation show substantial difference from the characteristics suggested by it. The difference should be one of substance before a difference of terms can be considered useful”.
would choose to call themselves a ‘fundamentalist’. None of the senior pastors I spoke with described either themselves or their church as ‘fundamentalist’, each preferring to call themselves ‘evangelical’. Although evangelicalism is growing and has become a very popular self designation for Christians and Christian groups and churches it has also become an umbrella term for a vast host of theological and culturally distinct groups. As a Newsweek article (April 26 1982) says: “so many different kinds of Christians now call themselves evangelical that the label has lost any precise meaning.” Although a precise definition cannot be given David Bebbington (1989:2-3), in what Wright (1996:3) terms a classical definition states that “there are four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: conversionism, the belief that lives need to be changed; activism, the expression of the gospel in effort; biblicism, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called crucicentrism, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Together they form a quadrilateral of priorities that is the basis of Evangelicalism.” McGrath sees evangelicalism as being:

... based on a cluster of six controlling convictions, each of which is regarded as being true, of vital importance, and grounded in scripture.... These six fundamental convictions can be set out as follows:

1. The supreme authority of scripture as a source of knowledge of God, and a guide to Christian living.  
2. The majesty of Jesus Christ, both as incarnate God and Lord, and as the saviour of sinful humanity.  
4. The need for personal conversion.  
5. The priority of evangelism for both individual Christians and the church as a whole.  

McGrath states that all other matters, not listed in the six convictions above, have “tended to be regarded as ‘matters of indifference’, upon which a substantial degree of latitude may be accepted - but a latitude which is itself grounded in the New Testament, in that responsible evangelicalism has refused to legislate where Scripture is silent, or where it offers a variety of approaches” (McGrath 1994:51). McGrath’s introduction and subsequent elaboration of these six convictions as the fundamentals of Evangelicalism indicates an underlying link between the ‘new evangelicalism’ and the ‘old fundamentalism’. Knowles (1994,54-55) indicates the key difference between the two was one of mood and emphasis, rather than one of doctrine. The evangelicals, as Marsden states, differed little in their core convictions from the fundamentalists:

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109 Tomlinson (1995:54) says “on the doctrinal front you can tell when you are in evangelical territory when you hear the phrase ‘Bible-believing.” Knowles, (1994:64) said the most important legacy of the Billy Graham crusade (the 1959 crusade in NZ) was its emphasis on ‘ the Bible says’. This provided a source of authority, and hence, of reassurance, in an age tense with anxiety over the threat of nuclear holocaust, the advances of communism and the erosion of many of the old value-standards of family and community life.”  
111 Knowles (1994:54-55) writes “the key distinction between the Old Fundamentalism and the New Evangelicalism was one of mood and emphasis, rather than one of doctrine. Fundamentalism as a movement was characterised by an ‘anti-modernist’ temper, a combative approach to doctrinal questions, and a refusal to recognise any critical interpretative approach which would weaken their dogmatic position, especially in relation to the inerrancy of the scriptures.”
the ‘new evangelicals, while maintaining the essential core of Fundamentalist belief, were much more moderate in their application of principle. They continue to oppose liberalism in theology but dropped militancy as a primary aspect of their identity (1991:128-129).

Gilling, a New Zealand researcher, states “many Christians, calling themselves evangelicals, hold theological positions identical to fundamentalism’s, but would shudder at the thought of being tarred with the fundamentalist brush. Their problem may be with the attitude adopted by fundamentalists of strict separatism from all potentially tainting influences. Or it may have to do with difficulty in assenting to strict biblical inerrancy, although the Bible is still held in high regard as possessing ultimate authority in all matters of faith and practice. The line between Fundamentalism and such ‘Conservative Evangelicalism’ is a fine one” (1992:xi). Because of the prevalence, growth and projected future strength of the evangelicals within the Christian church worldwide this study began by considering leavers from this stream of the church. Although the original intent was to move beyond this stream of the church to consider non-evangelical church leavers as well the use of a snowballing method to identify potential interviewees did not lead to opportunities to interview such leavers. Therefore the theological base for all the interviewees was drawn from within the ‘evangelical’ church. However, as has been stated already, it is important to realise that evangelicalism is itself an umbrella term within which a variety of quite different church and para-church groups are located. Wright (1996:6-9) quotes Fache as outlining six distinct sub-communities within evangelicalism, while Croucher (1986:1) suggests that there may be up to sixteen different subgroups within evangelicalism. Two of these sub categories are the Pentecostal and charismatic sections of the church. We will now consider each of these in turn.

3.4 The Pentecostal Movement.

The evangelical and Pentecostal movements were closely linked in the New Zealand context. Knowles says ‘The 1959 Billy Graham Crusade had a lasting effect on the ‘constituency’ of New Zealand Evangelicalism. It raised its general public profile, and, in so far as Pentecostalism was concerned, helped to stimulate the expansion of that movement in the 1960’s” (1992:120).

David Barrett defines Pentecostals as “Christians who are members of explicitly Pentecostal denominations . . . whose major characteristic is a rediscovery of, and a new experience of, the supernatural with a powerful and energising ministry of the Holy Spirit in the realm of the miraculous that most other Christians have considered to be highly unusual” (Barrett 1988:124). This definition highlights the two key characteristics of this sub-group of the evangelical stream of the Christian church. Firstly Pentecostals are participants in Pentecostal churches which are outside of the mainstream denominations. Secondly Pentecostals hold to an experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in supernatural ways within their own lives. Such an experience is typically called ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ and is encouraged as something all Christians should seek. It is normally seen as being associated with one or more of the supernatural gifts known in the New Testament record of the early church.

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112 This is discussed fully in the Methodological Appendix and implications for the study considered.
113 Fache’s six sub-categories are: Fundamentalist evangelicals, Old evangelicals, new evangelicals, Justice and peace evangelicals, charismatic evangelicals and ecumenical evangelicals.
114 Brown defines Pentecostal churches, or classical Pentecostalism as a “movement outside the larger Christian denominations, to, e.g. the Assemblies of God as contrasted with the Anglican or Methodist churches. The use of “Pentecostal” in this context is based on the fact that such churches seek to reproduce the type of Christian experience described in Acts 2” (1980:100).
116 Barrett (1988:124) describes these gifts as “instantaneous sanctification, the ability to prophesy, to practice divine healing through prayer, to speak in tongues (glossolalia), or to interpret tongues; singing in tongues, singing in the Spirit; praying with upraised hands; dreams, visions, discernment of spirits, words of wisdom, words of knowledge, emphasis on miracles, power encounters, exorcisms (casting out demons), resuscitations, deliverances, signs and wonders... most Pentecostal denominations teach that tongues-speaking is mandatory for all members ...”
The Pentecostal movement began in the early years of this century in the United States of America. Historians of the movement trace its beginnings to around January 1st 1901\textsuperscript{117} when a student, Agnes Ozam was prayed for and subsequently, according to her own account, claimed that the Holy Spirit fell upon her, and she prayed successively in several tongues unknown to her. Similar incidents appeared in other parts of the United States culminating in the movement beginning to gain momentum after a number of such meetings in Los Angeles. From there it spread throughout the United States and on to other countries eventually including New Zealand.

The New Zealand history of the Pentecostal movement in the 1920’s draws more on Great Britain than the United States (Brown 1980:100). Since the legal incorporation of the ‘Pentecostal church’ (now called the Elim church) in New Zealand in 1925\textsuperscript{118} the number of Pentecostal churches has grown considerably. Today the Pentecostal grouping includes the Elim churches, The Assemblies of God, New Life, Apostolic, Christian City Churches and an array of independent churches.

The period of most rapid growth for the Pentecostal churches of New Zealand occurred during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. Ker (1984:80) states that “during the period 1966-1971 Pentecostal sects increased their membership by 50%.”\textsuperscript{119} Because Pentecostal churches tend to emphasise the personal relationship between the believer and Christ rather than church membership\textsuperscript{120} many people were able to join the movement relatively easily. Knowles writes of the ease with which people could join the New Life churches in the 1960’s. He says: “the comparative absence of formal membership qualifications and criteria made it attractive to those seeking a simpler, less institutional form of Christianity” (1994:73). He goes on to say that in Pentecostal churches, and New Life churches in particular, “their first loyalty was to Christ and consequently the movement has tended, until comparatively recently, to give less attention to matters of church polity than to those of the Lordship of Christ, the salvation of sinners and, especially the activity and power of the Holy Spirit” (op.cit:73). Such emphasis had a natural affinity with those from the counter cultural movement of the 1960’s\textsuperscript{121} and members of hierarchically and institutionally structured mainline churches who were becoming disillusioned with the theological and institutional dimensions of their respective churches. Hence Pentecostalism was a natural destination for both groups in the late 1960’s and 1970’s.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{117} The exact date is disputed, see Neil (1974:34).
\textsuperscript{118} On the 27th of December 1924 the first official gathering of the Pentecostal church was held. The first church was opened in January 1925 in Wellington and by the time of the second annual conference of the Pentecostal Church of New Zealand (Jan 3 1926) there were organised assemblies in Auckland, New Plymouth, Wellington, Blenheim, Christchurch and unorganised assemblies who nevertheless sent delegates to the meeting from Hawera, Eltham, Wanganui, Masterton, Picton, Motupika, Temuka, Geraldine, Pleasant Point and Dunedin (Worsfold 1974:171).
\textsuperscript{119} This is supported in Neil’s study (1974). He states “Since 1967, however, there has been a sharp increase in the number of Pentecostals. This growth has been caused by factors such as the presence of the ‘Jesus Movement’ in New Zealand; an increasingly mature, stable and balanced leadership in Pentecostal assemblies, the continuing movement of mainline Protestants into these assemblies; the strong witness of classical Pentecostal students on University campuses (especially at Massey, Auckland and Canterbury); the enthusiastic and aggressive evangelism by Pentecostals” (Neil 1974:82).
\textsuperscript{120} Knowles cites an unquoted saying within the early days of the Pentecostal churches of New Zealand - “you might as well have your name on a sausage roll (as a church roll) for all the good it will do you” (1994:15). This comment reflects the separatist tendency of the early Pentecostals who, with the fundamentalists, taught the need to ‘come out of’ the mainline denominations and set up new churches untainted by the liberalism and secularism of the mainline churches.
\textsuperscript{121} Correspondence with Dr Peter Lineham (Senior Lecturer, History Department Massey University) suggests that the counter culture had less effect on New Zealand society than American society (e.mail -19.11.97).
\textsuperscript{122} Taylor’s (1997) figures indicate that the Pentecostal churches have continued to grow. The Assemblies of God churches growing by 71% in the ten year period from 1985 to 1995, ending with an attendance of 24,000 in 1995. The Apostolic churches had more than doubled from 5,000 in 1986 to 11,400 in 1996. The Elim churches also grew sharply in the late 1980s, although their attendance figures have fluctuated between 6,000 and 6,500 from 1992 to 1996. The Vineyard churches have grown rapidly, although their total attendance figures are relatively smaller at 1,165 (1996) (Taylor 1997:51-53).
Yvonne Dasler (1982) described a New Zealand Pentecostal service in an article on the Elim church in Blenheim. She said:

There’s none of your four-hymns-and-a-sermon stuff at Elim. Each two-hour service opens with a full 60 minutes of singing. Grooving to a five-piece band, the congregation claps, sways and waves arms in the air as choruses are sung over and over again. Sometimes the music trails away to permit “singing in the spirit”- a jam session for singers in which surprisingly harmonic sounds come from hundreds of people simultaneously chanting or singing spontaneous praises.\(^{123}\)

Theologically Pentecostalism has many links with fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism. Barr (1977:207) identifies such a link between fundamentalism and Pentecostalism, although he acknowledges that this is not a universal link. He states that “the doctrine of most Pentecostal groups seems to be uncompromisingly fundamentally, and in this sense probably more extreme than the mainstream type of conservative evangelicalism . . . .”\(^{124}\)

3.5 The Charismatic Renewal
The roots of the charismatic\(^{125}\) movement stem from the Pentecostal movement described above and although there are some historical distinctions between the two there are also considerable points of connection and similarity. Therefore while the charismatic movement is here considered separately it, like the evangelical movement, is closely linked with Pentecostalism.\(^{126}\) The charismatic movement is dated from the 1950’s although the most rapid expansion of the movement occurred in the 1970s. Charismatics usually describe themselves as “having been renewed in the Spirit and experiencing the Spirit’s supernatural and miraculous and energising power.” . . .Charismatics unlike Pentecostals\(^{127}\). “remain within, and form organised renewal groups within, their older mainline nonpentecostal denominations” (Barrett 1988:125-126). These charismatics, although experiencing similar manifestations of the Holy Spirit as the Pentecostals, were unique in that they did not set up independent churches but remained participants in their respective mainline churches. In New Zealand the charismatic movement can be dated to the late 1960’s in the Anglican,\(^{128}\) Catholic,\(^{129}\) and Baptist\(^{130}\) churches and perhaps a little later within the Presbyterian,\(^{131}\) and Methodist\(^{132}\)

\(^{123}\) Reported in ‘Then They Came to Elim’ NZ Listener, April 24, 1982 18-21.

\(^{124}\) For example the Statement of faith of the Christchurch New Life Centre 1989 is listed as Appendix 2.

\(^{125}\) Brown states “the term ‘charismatic’ is derived from the Greek word ‘charisma’, signifying, in the New Testament, a ‘gift’ given by the grace of God; as used in this context it often highlights particular ‘gifts’, notably ‘glossolalia’ (popularly called ‘speaking in tongues’), and ‘spiritual healing’” (1980:100).

\(^{126}\) Knowles states “although there were no direct organisational connections between the Pentecostal and charismatic movements, a number of Pentecostal leaders had some influence on the early development of the renewal. However, this influence was two-way, as the charismatic movement also exercised a moderating effect on the sectarian ethos of many New Life churches” (1994:105). Brown (1980:100) links the Charismatic Renewal and Classical Pentecostalism under the common title ‘Pentecostalism. In so doing he points out that some within the movement could see the use of this umbrella term as derogatory. For this reason and because of the self-definitions given by church leaders in this particular study the two are linked yet individually acknowledged. Therefore the focus of the study is on the “Pentecostal/charismatic” churches. This designation is intended to convey both the links and similarities between the two movements and also ensure that both Pentecostals and Charismatics would “feel” included.

\(^{127}\) Italics not originally part of the Barrett definition but added here for clarity.

\(^{128}\) “In Anglicanism the beginnings are usually dated from 1965 when, at Palmerston North, both in All Saints’ parish and at Massey University, and associated especially with the Rev R.J. Muller, the movement surfaced and included instances of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) (Brown 1980:105)”. A powerful influence in the spread of the charismatic movement within the Anglican church was the ‘summer schools’ and the life in the Spirit seminars (Neil 1974:139).

\(^{129}\) The movement within the Roman Catholic church in New Zealand is dated to 1971 and beyond (Brown 1980:105).

\(^{130}\) Initial reactions within the Baptist churches were ‘cool’ towards the new Charismatics. In the NZ Baptist (5.1967:2) the then editor wrote “Baptists who accept Pentecostalist views should. . . sever their connections
denominations. In New Zealand the charismatic movement began with the knowledge of the movement’s revival already at work within the United States and Britain (Ker 1984:80). Today, in the New Zealand setting, the majority of Baptist churches would be charismatic in orientation as would a considerable percentage of the other mainline denomination’s member churches.

It is therefore clear that theologically and experientially the Pentecostal and charismatic movements are very similar. What differentiates them is whether they form independent churches as a result of the movement (as Pentecostals have done) or remain members and participants within the existing mainline churches (as charismatics have done). Because of the similarities of these two movements I have combined them together as Pentecostal/charismatics.

The church leavers studied as part of this research were all drawn from Evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic backgrounds. The churches they left are predominantly encompassed within the Pentecostal and charismatic wings of the Evangelical stream. Although many evangelicals would not include themselves as

with their church, and link up with like-minded people in one of the several Pentecostalist bodies in this country. . . love and honesty demand that they resign their membership, rather than remain as agents, no matter how unwitting, of Satan himself”. However such views were to soften by 1970 when the Baptist Union of New Zealand presented a report which indicated a cautious watchful gaze was being taken by the Union, although the conclusion was positive regarding continuing influence within Baptist churches of the charismatic movement. The report states “Past experiences in dealing with Neo-Pentecostalism (the term used of the Charismatic Movement) have emphasised the importance of adequate teaching concerning the Holy Spirit. It has also proved that this in itself is not enough. Knowledge must be translated into experience. We rejoice in the revival of interest in the ministry of the Holy Spirit and recognise that in many places the winds of God’s Spirit are blowing and bringing renewal to many believers. This is the great need of Christendom today, and we must be eager to share in whatever God has for His people. Without doubt all our churches must be, and must be seen to be, alive with the Holy Spirit (Report to the Baptist Union of New Zealand by the Special Committee set up to Investigate the Effects of Neo-Pentecostalism on New Zealand Baptist Churches 1970) (cited in Worsfold 1974:337-343)). Brown (1980,106) states “it has been claimed that by February 1975 25% of Baptist ministers had been ‘baptised in the Spirit’ (the figure would be about the same in 1978), that many Baptist theological students were products of the Renewal, and that congregations favourably disposed to it were growing faster than those critical of it.” Brown gives no reference for this source except to indicate that harder evidence is necessary and that others within the Baptist denomination would dispute the figures given above. This is supported by Bolitho (1993:37) who states “between 1968 and 1988, 54% of charismatic and 35% of non-charismatic (Baptist) churches grew at a rate greater than the collective body. Figures for churches in existence from 1968 to 1988 showed that those identifying as charismatic in 1989 added 6,700 members while the others added 700 members. It appeared that whatever all the churches did, the charismatics did it more!”.

Writing of the Presbyterian church in 1980 Brown says “By now the movement is fairly widespread in the Presbyterian church but, although it has affected perhaps 20% of the parishes, few are dominantly ‘charismatic’” (op.cit:106).

Of the Methodist churches Brown writes “In Methodism few churches were seriously affected in the earlier years of the movement . . . since then there has been significant wide-spread growth, notably in Christchurch” (op.cit:106).

Ker records that the denominations were initially hesitant about the charismatic movement. “Denominations reacted against what they termed ‘unsophisticated’ theology, an ‘imbalance’ between the greater emphasis on personal salvation as compared with the ‘social gospel,’ and the ‘bias’ of emotionalism. They criticised the ready acceptance of Pentecostal ‘practices and attitudes including an anti-intellectual stance’ and a ‘fundamental approach to the Bible’” (1984:80).

Bolitho (1993:37) records that “by 1989, 138 out of 200 New Zealand Baptist churches identified with charismatic theology, including 32 of the 36 most recently established churches”.

“By November 1974 between 40% and 50% of the clergy in the Auckland diocese were either participants in the renewal or were open to the possibility of a charismatic experience. . . . 30% of Anglican clergy in the diocese of Christchurch were, at about the same time, either participants in the renewal or sympathetically interested; in most, perhaps all parishes there were (and are) ‘charismatic Christians” (Brown 1980:105 - drawn from Church of England in New Zealand. Commission on the Charismatic Movement. Report In General Synod of the Church of the Province of New Zealand, 42nd, Christchurch, 1976. Proceedings, p33)
Pentecostal/charismatics there is a natural fit between an evangelical theological stance and the Pentecostal/charismatic movements. Barr states:

> Healing and speaking with tongues both commend themselves fairly naturally on the grounds that they represent a recovery of the original state of the New Testament church. If one is to be a true Christian of New Testament type, one ought to have personal experiences such as those described in the earliest church… Thus though the charismatic movement does attract people from all streams of Christianity, it is likely that fundamentalist background is there in a very high proportion of cases (Barr 1977:207)

Alongside the growth in the Pentecostal/charismatic churches came an increase in the number and influence of para-church groups like ‘Womens Aglow’ and the ‘Full Gospel Business Mens Association’ which served to link Christians of evangelical (and often Pentecostal/charismatic) persuasion from different churches. For the leavers interviewed in this study their primary church has been Pentecostal (58%), for a smaller number Baptist charismatic (34%) and for a minority of the interviewees other mainline Protestant charismatic (7%).

Alongside this ‘EPC’ church involvement many were also involved in para-church groups that encapsulated the same beliefs, values and expected behaviours. The historical roots of their faith have, therefore, all been located in the fertile soil of the ‘evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic churches and para-church groups.

Two further movements within these churches need to be considered in gaining an understanding of the recent influences that have shaped the ‘EPC’ churches the interviewees have left. These two movements are the Jesus Movement of the late 1960’s and early 1970’s which drew large numbers of young adults into the ‘EPC’ churches and the Church Growth Movement which has influenced the structure and orientation of ‘EPC’ churches and their leaders. We will now turn our attention to these two movements.

3.6 The Jesus Movement

The exact origins of the Jesus Movement are unclear. It was, however, intimately connected with the counter-culture movement of the 1960’s in the United States of America. The social environment of young hippie drop-outs, drugs, protest against the Vietnam war, free love and Woodstock provided the backdrop for the Jesus Movement. “Around 1967 a number of different Christian ministries in the USA began to develop in parallel ways. One of these was the coffee bar ministry in the heart of the hippie district of Haight-Ashbury, San Francisco. A group of people rented a storefront and used it simply to talk with street people about Jesus and the Bible. This outreach work was named the Living Room” (Enroth et al. 1972:14). Young people who felt lost and lacked meaning were turned around by their encounter with the Jesus movement with its focus on love and hope.

Wilson (1982:138) says “middle-class young people found in the Jesus Movement both a moderation and a legitimation of their countercultural lifestyles and values.” The Jesus Movement was based on a conservative evangelical faith “which offered a refuge for confused and bruised young people disillusioned with the hippie myth” (Ward 1996:82). As Knowles says - “the ‘Jesus People’ and the ‘Youth Counter-culture’ of which they formed a part helped to reinforce a movement towards the charismatic and Pentecostal churches, especially in America. To some extent, this was also the case in New Zealand” (1992:128).

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136 Pentecostal n= 63, Baptist n= 37 and mainline n= 8. The percentage total equals 99% due to rounding errors. As a number of those interviewed moved around two or more churches during their church involvement I have taken their primary (most influential church for them) into account here.

137 Enroth et al. (1972:12) who are the leading source on the movement state “It is difficult to trace the origins and history of the Jesus Movement, because it does not have a clear beginning in time with one person or group. Its self-consciousness as a movement emerged only gradually.”

138 “The Jesus Movement is primarily a religious movement. It is not just a psychological aberration or a social or political swerving. It has its source in the desire for ultimate transformation which is the ground of all religion. It asks religious questions and gives religious answers. Young people want something that is absolute, that they can believe in absolutely. They will respond to anyone who is able to convince them, by clues that may not convince everyone - that he really knows, is really committed and cares” (Ellwood 1973:133).
A significant number of the leavers from the church interviewed in the course of this research entered the church out of the counter-culture movement of the 1960’s during the Jesus Movement. The prominent feature of this movement in the New Zealand context was the Jesus Marches of 1972. The largest of these marches occurred on the 8th of October 1972 when a crowd estimated between 15,000 and 25,000 marched in Wellington. These marches were planned as both a protest against the moral decline within New Zealand society and a public declaration of evangelical faith (Knowles 1994:161). One of the significant effects of the Jesus Marches was as a spur to Christian unity that bridged denominational boundaries and helped increase links of like-minded ‘EPC’ Christians regardless of church affiliation (Knowles 1994:166).

The Jesus Movement brought into the churches not only a new group of young New Zealanders but with them its own cultural forms - psychedelic posters, badges and bumper stickers, reflecting the language of the movement - ‘Smile, God Loves You’, ‘Honk if you Love Jesus’, ‘Have a nice forever’, and ‘God’s speed doesn’t kill’ (Palms, 1971:31)” Despite the new language the Jesus Movement was not in its core convictions a move away from evangelicalism. Wilson (1982:140) says:

. . . the Jesus Movement, despite its hip presentation, was really just old-style revivalism. Within a very few years most Jesus people groups had either merged into mainline churches in the USA or had formed their own highly conservative house churches.

In fact the Jesus Movement was very closely linked to the Pentecostal and charismatic movements of the day. Ortega “concluded that of those he interviewed in California 85 to 89 per cent were associated in one way or another with Pentecostalism. Most had a firm belief in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and many had spoken in tongues” (Jasper 1984:96).

The spontaneity and spiritual gifts focus of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches made them a natural place for the Jesus Movement people to attach themselves. Knowles states that “the main body of the Jesus Movement was absorbed into the churches, and especially into those of Charismatic and Pentecostal persuasion. This reflected the general orientation of the Jesus People towards charismatic forms of Christianity” (1994:165). In Christchurch considerable numbers of young people joined Pentecostal churches out of this movement. What was to become the ‘New Life Centre’ (then meeting in rented premises at the Horticultural Hall), The Elim church, The Apostolic church and many others gained numerous young people through the Jesus movement. At this time there were few distinctly Charismatic churches in Christchurch. One that was entering into the charismatic movement - Spreydon Baptist Church - also grew through its appeal to young people involved or influenced by the Jesus Movement. Pam, like Craig was one of these.

(Pam) - It was back in the early 70’s when the Jesus movement was becoming quite pronounced. There were quite a lot of young people that I was mixing with who were starting to attend services at the XXX (Name of a Pentecostal church). and it was sort of like a revival, I suppose. I went along and it was something completely different to what I’d seen as far as Christianity is concerned especially from the Presbyterian church. So I went along a few times with some friends, mainly on a Sunday night. There were lots of young people along there then, many of them were surfies, not the sort you would expect to see in church. I was pretty interested, then after a period of weeks, two of my best friends decided they wanted to make some kind of commitment. I guess that kind of shocked me a bit as I didn’t quite feel ready for that sort of step. I sort of held out for a few more weeks (23:7).

Pam and Craig and many others like them began to become part of the ‘EPC’ church scene. Ronald Enroth (a Sociologist and authority in the United States on the Jesus Movement) says:

Many of the Jesus people seem to have faded into the crowd - the Christian crowd ... (for) the young people are now attending established churches where their influence has been felt

139 Dominion newspaper 9 Oct 1972
mainly in terms of more informal worship and a new emphasis on the Holy Spirit (Enroth 1973:14-15).

The Jesus People shared a disillusionment with institutional Christianity (Enroth 1973:136), an emphasis on the primacy of experience (Enroth 1973:164) and a fundamentalistic approach to the Bible. Because of these emphases the Jesus People connected well with the ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups of the time.¹⁴⁰

Knowles shows the convergence of the four movements discussed above in the following quote:

The Pentecostal churches continued to grow throughout the 1960’s because they emphasised the experience of the Spirit, and tended to both internalise and personalise the [Fundamentalist] authority of “the Bible says.” The stress on a personal experience of the Spirit, rather than on material, visible institutions of authority, aligned these churches with the ethos of the era, while the mainstream churches, because more institutional, were unable to respond in the same way. Crises in the mainstream churches, such as the Geering heresy trial,¹⁴¹ tended to reinforce an increasingly institutional dysfunctionality, and further accentuated the appeal of the Pentecostal and Charismatic groups. (1992:129)

3.7 The Church Growth Movement

If the four movements discussed to this point were interconnected, the “church growth movement” was equally “fused”¹⁴² to the ‘EPC’ churches. The ‘Church Growth’¹⁴³ movement’s origins stem from the heart of evangelicalism - a concern to evangelise the peoples of the world effectively.¹⁴⁴ The movement can be divided into three phases, the early phase of the movement that focused on church growth in the two thirds world, the second phase which focused on church growth in the United States and other western nations and the present phase which focuses on the growth of the meta-churches and mega-churches. The first of these phases began with the founder of the movement Donald McGavran (1897-1990). McGavran, a third generation missionary, worked in India where he observed that the growth rate of the majority of missionary church endeavours in the area was 11% per decade, but that a few of the churches were growing at a rate of between 100% -200% every decade. McGavran began asking why this was happening. Why did some churches reach people (in evangelism) and grow while others declined? “For twenty years, he studied growing and non-growing churches in India, Mexico, the Philippines, Thailand, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, West Africa, North America, and other lands” (Hunter 1992:158). The results of McGavran’s work was published in ‘The Bridges of God’ (1955).¹⁴⁵ McGavran’s writings outlined three principles on which the movement was to be founded. These were:

¹⁴⁰ Knowles reinforces these views within the NZ context. Knowles (1992:128) states that those drawn from the Jesus Movement had an orientation that was anti-materialistic and were resistant to collectively-imposed forms of authority. “This involved rejection of traditional ‘institutional’ standard conduct, with the location of authority being both personalised and internalised”.
¹⁴¹ For details on the heresy trial see Veitch J. (1980).
¹⁴² This is how Bolitho describes the relationship between the Church Growth Movement and the Charismatic renewal (Bolitho 1993:37)
¹⁴³ The term ‘Church Growth’ was coined by Donald McGavran to mean “all that is involved in bringing men and women who do not have a personal relationship to Jesus Christ into fellowship with Him and into responsible church membership” (Wagner 1976:12).
¹⁴⁴ Donald McGavran (1986) the movement’s founder records his own motivations at the time of the birth of the movement saying - “As my convictions about mission and church growth were being molded in the 1930s and ‘40s they ran headlong into the thrust that mission is doing many good things in addition to evangelism. It is feeding the hungry, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, teaching the illiterate to read, and on and on. The gospel was really news of a better way of life, a more nutritious diet, and a growing democracy around the world. I could not accept this way of thinking about missions. These good deeds must, of course, be done, and Christians will do them. I myself was doing many of them. But they must never replace the essential task of mission, discipling the peoples of the earth (1986:54).
¹⁴⁵ Initially rejected by a number of publishers ‘The Bridges to God’ became the most read missionary book of 1956.
1. The Eternal God commands Church growth. “The first essential of mission/church growth is to realise that God wants his lost children found and enfolded.”

2. Responsible research needs to be undertaken to gather data about why and which churches are growing. “Discovering the facts of church growth is the second essential of all mission/church thinking.”

3. “Planning all mission activities in the light of what is being achieved is the third essential (McGavran 1986:57-58).”

In 1958 McGavran left his mission society and set up the ‘Institute of Church Growth’ which was later to be called the ‘School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth.’ Thus the first phase of the Church Growth movement focused on the work of overseas missionaries and the effectiveness of traditional missionary methods in terms of evangelism.

The second phase of the movement began as the principles and teaching of the Church Growth Institute entered the North American church scene. Wagner dates this move to 1972 almost 18 years after McGavran wrote ‘The Bridges of God’. In the American, and on into the wider Western church environment, the same principles of church growth were beginning to be picked up. The focus of the movement was the local church. Behind this lay McGavran’s first principle that God’s kingdom on earth will grow through the growth of the local church. This served to place church’s attention on their own growth. Secondly church effectiveness in growth could be assessed using the research tools of the social sciences. This brought with it a new openness within the evangelical churches to the social sciences, and with it a new discourse within their own ranks. The terms ‘theoreticians’, ‘practitioners’, ‘scientific principles’ and ‘growth goals,’ became part of the discourse of pastors and church leaders. The following quote gives some feel for both the links with science and the optimism of the movement’s potential to bring about church growth:

Church growth as a science helps us maximise the use of energy and other resources for God’s greater glory. It enables us to detect errors and correct them before they do too much damage. It would be a mistake to claim too much, but some enthusiasts feel that with church growth insights we may even step as far ahead in God’s task of world evangelisation as medicine did when aseptic surgery was introduced.

146 Originally set up at the Northwest Christian College in Eugene, Oregon the Institute later moved to Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena California. Here he was joined on the faculty by Alan Tippett, Ralph Winter, Arthur Glasser, Charles Kraft, Peter Wagner and J. Edwin Orr (Wagner 1976:12-13). Each of these men (all previously overseas missionaries themselves) are now well known writers and leaders in either world missiology or the church growth movement in their own right.

147 Wade Coggins of the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association wrote in March 1967 that “Up to now, church growth research and training have been aimed toward the missionary front. What about pastors in the U.S.? Should they not be equally interested and equally in need of this philosophy and emphasis? . . . A way must be found to gather the facts on significant growth in this country and disseminate this information to stimulate the church into dynamic growth.” Wagner comments on this quote saying - “But apparently few in the turbulent sixties were able to hear what Wade Coggins was saying over the din of the civil rights controversies, the hippie movement and the Viet Nam War” (Wagner 1976:15-16).

148 Although both McGavran’s early books were available in America and one chapter of ‘How Churches Grow’ was reprinted as a booklet under the title ‘Do Churches Grow’, of which thousand of copies were sold among American leaders, the ideas failed to gain much attention (Wagner 1976:11).

149 Although many church growth proponents of the time wrote about the need for qualitative and quantitative growth in churches, the emphasis undoubtedly fell on quantitative growth.

150 One of the distinctive themes of the church growth movement as outlined by Hunter (1992:158) was that “the Christian movement can be advanced by employing the insights and research tools of the behavioural sciences, including the gathering and graphing of relevant statistical data for mission analysis, planning, control and critique”.
Lack of church growth is a serious disease, but in most cases it is a curable one. The cure, however, is usually not simple. More often it requires as careful a diagnosis and therapy as a tumor on the ovary or a coronary thrombosis. One of the central tasks of the church growth school is (1) to develop scientific techniques of diagnostic research for ailing churches and (2) to design instruments to be used in the kind of therapy which will restore normal church health. Just as in medicine, it will take specialised and professional training to use these new tools well (Wagner 1976:42).

Thus the management, marketing and quantitative social research techniques became part of the staple diet of the local church. Texts and seminars abounded, both in New Zealand and overseas identifying vital signs of churches that grow. The first of these, and one on which great emphasis has been placed is the role of the church pastor as a leader. For churches to grow the role of the pastor as a dynamic leader, possibility thinker, and catalyst for growth was considered essential.

The third phase of the movement involves the rising prominence of the mega-churches (churches with memberships of 2000 plus) in the United States. It is these mega-churches that have become the focus of many pastors and leaders in ‘EPC’ churches in New Zealand and around the contemporary Western world. Two leading examples are the Garden Grove Community Church in Southern California and Willow Creek Community Church in northwest suburban Chicago. In New Zealand there are no genuine mega-churches (memberships over 2000) but the influence of overseas models remains considerable. The Willow Creek Community Church is arguably the most influential model within New Zealand ‘EPC’ churches. The Willow Creek Church fits ‘neatly’ within the dominant movements discussed in this chapter. It is evangelical, influenced in worship and church governance by the charismatic movement and strongly connected to the church growth movement. There is a Willow Creek Association of New Zealand with its own director which disseminates tapes, videos, books and arranges seminars from the teaching staff at Willow Creek.

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151 Seven Vital Signs:

1. “A pastor who is a possibility thinker and whose dynamic leadership has been used to catalyze the entire church into action for growth” (p.31).
2. “A mobilized laity which has discovered, developed and is using all the spiritual gifts for growth” (p.38).
3. “A growing church needs to be big enough to provide a range of services that meets the needs and expectation of its members” (p.41).
4. “The local church should be able to provide its members with involvement in three different kinds of relationship based on the size and the purpose of the group gathered together. These are celebration (large Sunday service gathering), congregation (peer group in which each person knows the others by name up to about 120) and cell (group of 8-12)” (p.43).
5. “Membership of a healthy growing church is composed basically of one kind of people” (p.46).

What McGavran called the Homogeneous Unit Principle.

6. “The growing churches are using evangelistic techniques which are known to work” (p.48).
7. “Making sure that evangelism is given higher priority in church life than social involvement” (p.50).

(Beasley-Murray 1981:pages as listed)

152 Os Guiness writes of these mega-churches that “Mega-church has joined megabucks, megatrends, and the megamall as common American jargon. Megachurches, churches-for-the-unchurched with congregations over two thousand, are widely touted as “the inside track to fast growth” and a “leading trend of the coming millennium.” The United States is now said to have over three hundred such mega-churches - nearly fifty with over five thousand in attendance - and experts predict that five hundred will exist by A.D. 2000” (1993:12).

153 Gregory Pritchard is an American Sociologist who has written a Ph.D thesis on the Willow Creek Church which has since been condensed and published (1996). Pritchard (op.cit:30) states that “whenever Willow Creek staff were asked to clarify their beliefs, they would quickly associate themselves with the broader evangelical church and its theology. I asked Dr Gilbert Bilezikan, Hybel’s mentor and the church’s theologian, “What is Willow Creeks relationship to the broader evangelical world?” He responded, “if we were to join any kind of organisation, it would be the National Association of Evangelicals. That’s where our kinship is, and we feel at home among them.”

154 Pritchard (1996:51) writes that when in 1975 Bill Hybels (Senior Pastor Willow Creek) was only dreaming of starting a church he attended the Robert Schuller Institute for successful church leadership (Schuller is a
It would seem that the direction of the church growth movement is towards bigger and bigger churches, (in the American scene many churches are now focused on the meta-churches\textsuperscript{156} churches that provide an increasingly totalistic environment for their membership and churches that are focused around the professional leadership of their senior pastor.\textsuperscript{157} Typically the Mega-churches provide a range of services, Christian education, small groups, social activities, sporting activities, friendship networks and opportunities for service all within their own organisational orbit. There can be little doubt that McGavran’s essential principle that God commands church growth has been taken up by the proponents and followers of the church growth movement in a very serious manner.

The net effect of the five movements discussed above can be summarised in diagrammatical form as building an ethos made up of the designated expected behaviours, values and beliefs (Figure 3.1) which is prevalent in ‘EPC’ churches.\textsuperscript{158} This combination of expected behaviours, values and beliefs forms an ethos that I have labelled ‘meta-accounts’ which undergird the ‘EPC’ churches. These meta-accounts are taken-for-granted by the participants of such churches, at least until they become problematic, as part of the “package” of faith contents and operations of the ‘EPC’ churches.

![Diagram](image.png)

**Figure 3.1 The Meta-accounts Made up of Expected Behaviours, Values and Beliefs Prevalent Within ‘EPC’ churches**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expected Behaviours</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Beliefs</th>
<th>World Views</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accepted dress codes, values and customs within ‘EPC’ churches</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Personal ethics - in terms of drinking, smoking, swearing etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spiritual gifts, prophecy, healing, tongues</td>
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<td>The importance of church teaching, worship etc.</td>
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<td>Social ethics - non-acceptance of homosexuality, ‘living together’ etc.</td>
<td>Values</td>
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<td>Value of evangelism</td>
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<td>Necessity of personal conversion</td>
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<td>Jesus as Son of God</td>
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<td>Efficacy of prayer</td>
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<td>World Views</td>
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\textsuperscript{155} The aim of the Association is stated as “Our mission is to help local New Zealand churches reach unchurched people and assist them to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.” The Association’s president is Graeme Paris and operates from Auckland (Patrick 1997: 212-217).

\textsuperscript{156} Churches of 10,000 plus attenders.

\textsuperscript{157} Such churches have multiple pastors each fulfilling specific roles with a senior pastor who acts as the CEO of the church. The link between the senior pastor and the business concept of CEO is actively promoted within much of the church growth literature and discourse.

\textsuperscript{158} Here the term ‘EPC’ churches is intended to include the ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups.
3.8 The ‘EPC’ Churches

The contemporary ‘EPC’ churches prevalent in New Zealand have been shaped by the five movements discussed earlier. Their character, structures, programmes and focus are the derivatives of these movements. To understand the stories of those who have left these churches it has been important to understand the historical background that has shaped ‘EPC’ churches as social institutions. The ‘EPC’ churches are therefore those new or rejuvenated churches born of the combined influence of these five movements. We need to bear in mind that each local church has its own ethos and character which has been influenced to differing degrees by each of these movements as well as its own local context. Having said this we can now consider the effect of these movements on the structures of ‘EPC’ churches. As we do this we are portraying an ‘ideal type’ of the ‘EPC’ church.

‘EPC’ churches are conservative in their evangelical theology. That is, these churches lie close to the theological definitions of fundamentalism presented in this chapter. As Gilling (quoted above) states the “line between fundamentalism and conservative evangelicalism is a fine one” (Gilling 1992:xi). The ‘EPC’ churches teaching reflects more literalistic readings of scripture which allow little space for the insights of critical approaches to exegesis, although many within ‘EPC’ churches would want to distance themselves from the ‘biblical inerrancy’ of fundamentalism. There is nevertheless a clear dependence on an uncritical reading of the Bible as an external authority in matters of doctrine and ethics, to the extent that ‘EPC’ doctrines are hard to distinguish from those of fundamentalists,\(^{159}\) while their views on moral and ethical issues are normally clear, decisive and unquestioned. They can be labelled what I will later call ‘orthodox’ in regard to their ethical and moral views. From their evangelical heritage they have a strong focus on evangelism, seeing people come out of the ‘world’ and into the ‘church’. Such a focus on conversionism is based on the individual’s decision. This emphasis has reduced the priority for the issues of social justice, political concerns and the ongoing development of an individual’s faith beyond the point of conversion and the process of early discipleship.\(^{160}\)

From the Pentecostal and Charismatic movement have come changes to the worshipping style in comparison to the mainline Protestant church’s focus on liturgy. With the influence of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements has come church worship based on contemporary music styles and a greater range of musical instruments.\(^{161}\) While these are often the more dramatic changes from the perspective of the church visitor they are of less significance compared to the shift from a liturgical based service that incorporated an array of worshipping styles,\(^{162}\) hymns and prayers rich in the history and tradition of the Christian church. This is a liturgy that incorporated aspects of the journey dimension of Christian faith as well as human suffering, pain, death, and confusion. Coupled with this came a subtle change of focus in worship from the church of history and the God of eternity to the needs, wants and concerns of the individual. In many respects such changes reflected the mood of the society in what is often called the ‘me’ generation of the 1960s and 1970s. These movements brought with them a change, in which as Bolitho (1993:36) summarises, “experience of God came to be valued more highly than knowledge about God.”

\(^{159}\) The fundamentalist doctrines listed above were: biblical inerrancy, Jesus Christ being born of a virgin, Christ’s substitutional atonement, Christ being raised from the dead in bodily form, the accuracy of the teachings on miracles as recorded in the Bible and Christ’s expected return to earth in the immediate future. Conservative evangelicals may differ slightly from fundamentalists in two respects. First they may well react to the term biblical inerrancy and yet continue to use the Bible in a quite literalistic fashion. And secondly the immediacy of Christ’s return may be softened today more than it was in the same churches in the early 1980’s.

\(^{160}\) The initial period of Christian education after someone makes a decision to convert to Christianity.

\(^{161}\) Perhaps particularly the use of drums, electric guitars and keyboards.

\(^{162}\) Including confession, forgiveness, intercession, meditation and silence.
But if the Charismatic and Pentecostal movements were to change the forms and focus of worship they were equally to affect the patterns of leadership and decision making within churches. Leadership within these movements became focused more on ‘gifting’ than ‘training’. The previous emphasis on theological training and ministerial induction were replaced, however slowly in some cases, by an emphasis on charismatic leadership based on the ‘exceptional qualities’ or giftings of a person; the new church leaders being those who were good teachers, prophets or leaders. The linking of ‘special gifts and status’ on leaders within ‘EPC’ churches has tended to foster a dependent faith relationship on behalf of the ‘ordinary’ people of the church. This has been further emphasised through the teaching of some sections of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement. Gabrielle and Craig talked in their interview of how the pastor who came to lead their house group had a ‘shepherd/sheep thing’. By this they meant that the pastor taught the church and acted as if he was the shepherd and the people in the church were the sheep. It was the role of the shepherd to provide a covering authority and leadership to the sheep as well as spiritual food (teaching).

The church growth movement has also been a significant shaper of the ‘EPC’ churches. This movement brought the techniques of management, marketing and quantitative analysis into the centre of these churches. Unfortunately these techniques have often been used without due consideration to the theological and structural consequences. The net result has often been a strong focus on the growth of the church as measured by increased numbers of people attending church services and the uncritical use of business models as part of church governance and church priorities. The writings of George Barna are illustrative at this point. Barna points to the need to revamp the church and the role of its pastors along business lines. Wells (1994:74) states that the “key to Barna’s revamping of the church, however, is his understanding of need. He argues that the church must define its services in terms of contemporary needs just as any secular business must.” Within New Zealand, and more particularly within the United States of America, this has led to churches providing more services designed to meet the needs of their people as well as attracting new people to their churches. These services include the traditional church services offering worship, teaching, and counselling as well as sports facilities and groups, relational groups, children’s crèches, pre-schools, youth facilities, as well as recreational and entertainment facilities within the church.

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163 Weber defined ‘charisma’ as a “certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he (sic) is set apart from ordinary men and women and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These as such are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as leader (Weber 1947:358-359).” Ker (1994:6) identifies six characteristics of the charismatic leader from Weber’s analysis:

1. Charisma is manifested as an exceptional personal quality which indicates superiority over ‘the ordinary person’;
2. the perception of qualities as God-like or as qualities to be emulated;
3. the acknowledgment that the holder of such characteristics is leader;
4. the lack of availability of charisma for most people;
5. the interweaving of various forms of legitimate authority; and
6. the articulation of a message.

Ker applies these characteristics to Jesus Christ as the leader within charismatic churches and finds that five of the six criteria apply (Ker writes - “there is only one main departure from Weber’s definition: charisma in the form of charismatic gifts is seen to be shared by disciples and in this sense, “diffused” charisma is available to the ordinary person” (op.cit:22). Although accepting Ker’s analysis, it has been found to be helpful in this study to apply the same criteria and position to the leaders of ‘EPC’ churches. A significant number of the interviewees speak of their ‘EPC’ church leaders in the terms evident in the categories above.

164 (22:96-100)

165 Wells (1994:70-71) points out that although initial concern with the lack of a theological base and overt focus on numerical growth was quickly addressed by the church growth proponents this was often not the case in local churches. He states: - “once these theories moved outside scholarly circles - once it was seen that McGavran’s ideas could be used to ensure pastoral success - the seriousness of the discussion quickly evaporated” (op.cit.:71).

In this consideration of the ‘EPC’ churches the influence of conservative evangelical theology, charismatic worship and patterns of church governance and church growth techniques are crucial, yet we need to also consider the role of routinisation and cocooning on these churches.

Routinisation which Berger and Berger (1978:16) define as the “process by which something is made to be everyday” is the process through which the unusual becomes organised, routinised and institutionalised. The process is linked to Weber’s ‘church-sect’ typology in which many ‘sects’ are seen as evolving in the direction of becoming churches. The Pentecostal/charismatic movements brought with them new, exciting and vibrant expressions that have inevitably over the years been both routinised and formalised into structures. Knowles (1994:263-279) describes this routinisation process within the New Life churches of New Zealand. His observations are that such routinisation of this group of indigenous Pentecostal churches occurred through pastors being given a clearer status vis à vis the congregation, the emergence of regional leaders as a means to control disciplinary problems, a general feeling that the peak of the movement had passed, and the higher socio-economic status of the congregations.

This process is what Craig and Gabrielle were caught up in as their ‘house-group’ became a ‘church’ with formalised leadership structures, buildings, financial budgets, office holders and plans of institutional expansion. It is a process that many, attracted to the church through the Pentecostal/charismatic movements, have both supported as leaders within their respective churches and struggled to live within.

Cocooning is the final factor shaping the ‘EPC’ churches that we will consider at this point. Fundamentalism’s sectarian nature, although softened within conservative evangelicalism has continued in ‘EPC’ churches. This has been heightened by the ‘church growth’ emphasis on the local church as the site of God’s involvement and the focus on Christianity’s growth. Due to this and other factors ‘EPC’ churches and their participants tend to have a reduced involvement within the wider society. This has led to the emergence of an evangelical sub-culture; a sub-culture complete with its own language, behavioural norms, commercial market, entertainment industry and world view. It is a sub-culture that is increasingly offering its members a totalistic environment within which to live their lives without the contamination of the outside world. The recent trend to bigger and bigger churches offering a ‘seven-day-a-week’ service to their participants including sporting facilities, friendship groups, cafés, an array of services and small group options that cater for a range of people have fuelled a cocooning of those within ‘EPC’ churches from the rest of society. It is a sub-culture that has served to ‘cocoon’ increasing numbers of ‘EPC’ Christians from the wider society. Bill, one of those interviewed in this study who has left the ‘EPC’ churches, said:

(Bill) - It focused all your thoughts on church, and the events that were going to happen at church. Which tended to blind you and draw you away from any social or humanitarian issues elsewhere in your places of work or living. (Be)cause all your motivations and drives and things were focused on being kind of successful at church, and I found that there was sort of a dilemma (58.34).

3.9 Conclusion
In this chapter we have considered five major movements that have shaped the ‘EPC’ churches and more specifically the inherent influence of churches focused on evangelism, charismatic individualism, church growth technologies, cocooning, and the almost inevitable routinisation of their structures and forms. In understanding the churches the interviewees left it is important to understand this historical background to their churches and para-church groups.

Having focused attention on the ‘EPC’ church from which the leavers have emerged it is now important to turn our attention to the concept of ‘faith’. To do so involves an understanding of ‘faith’ itself as well as the changing nature of faith development. In this study it is the work of James Fowler that has provided a

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167 Which was not part of the New Life churches.
theoretical scaffolding from which to analyse the changing character of the interviewee’s faith. We must now therefore turn to the issue of faith.
Chapter Four

The Developing Nature of Faith

In the past, throughout the world, everywhere and at all times, man has lived by faith, both individually and corporately. Faith, then, so far as one can see as one looks out over the history of our race, is an essential human quality. One might argue that it is the essential human quality: that it is constitutive of man as human, that personality is constituted by our universal ability, or invitation to live in terms of a transcendent dimension, and in response to it.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith

4.1 Introduction

In order to discuss a ‘churchless faith’ it is important to consider what we mean by ‘faith’. Is faith taken to mean a set of cognitive beliefs? A world view? Or a religious or spiritual adherence? It is self evident but important to emphasize the place that an understanding of ‘faith’ has within this study. The concept faith is the central issue around which this study hinges. As already indicated, the people identified in this study as ‘EPC’ church-leavers have been heavily committed to their ‘EPC’ church for significant periods of time, the vast majority having held key leadership positions within their churches. It is in seeking to understand this group of people who are leaving the ‘EPC’ church but not their faith, that I have found it useful to employ James Fowler’s theory of faith development (1995).

In this chapter we will consider faith in processual terms principally through the faith development theory of James Fowler (1995). The first section of the chapter seeks to sketch the way ‘faith will be understood in this study, as we analyse the faith of church leavers. It introduces Fowler’s theory of faith development, his methodological base, and his understanding of the term ‘faith’. The second section of the chapter summarises Fowler’s work on the process of faith development. In the third section I will briefly summarise the six stages of faith, as developed by Fowler. The fourth and final section of the chapter considers Fowler’s concept of ‘modal development levels’.

4.2 Faith

Parks in her introduction to a discussion of the development of faith states:

It has been said that the function of an organism is to organise, and that what the human organism organises is meaning. This capacity and demand for meaning is what I invite the reader to associate with the word faith. For most of us, this represents a shift from the usual connotations of the word faith. Faith is often linked exclusively to belief, particularly religious belief. But faith goes far beyond religious belief, parochially understood. Faith is more adequately recognised as the activity of seeking and composing meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience. Faith is a broad generic human phenomenon. To be human is to dwell in faith, to dwell in one’s meaning - one’s conviction of the ultimate character of truth, of self, of world of cosmos (whether that meaning be strong or fragile, expressed in religious terms or secular) (1986:xx; italics as cited).

This introduces us to a broad definition of faith that moves beyond ‘religious’ belief systems (while not excluding them) seeing ‘faith’ as integral to human life. Parks goes on to build an understanding of faith that includes ‘meaning-making’, trust, ‘action’ and suffering. Hence drawing on Parks work we see that
“faith is not simply a set of beliefs that religious people have, it is something that all human beings do” (Parks 1986:12). The second way in which the word faith is used here, that may lie outside of immediate interpretation, is that faith is considered as a dynamic, changing and evolving aspect of ourselves. That is faith changes, not necessarily in its contents but in the ways in which it achieves meaning-making, trust, action and suffering. Finally such faith changes are not seen as simple, natural progressions but often involve massive transformations in the ways of our meaning-making, trust, action and suffering.

It is clear from the explanations given here that the word faith includes religious and non-religious usages. Although this study is concerned with faith in religious terms, specifically Christian faith as expressed in the ‘EPC’ stream of the Christian church, it nevertheless draws for its theoretical base on a wider conceptual understanding of the word. That is, faith is seen as encompassing the range of religious and non-religious based definitions above and is an integral aspect of humanity. The faith development model of James Fowler is also not confined to Christian faith or even religious faith but perceives faith as a universalistic quality of human life. Fowler says “Faith is an integral part of one’s ‘character’ or ‘personality’. In the most formal and comprehensive terms I (Fowler) can state it, faith is:

- People’s evolved and evolving ways
- of experiencing self, others and world
- (as they construct them)

- as related to and affected by the
- ultimate conditions of existence
- (as they construct them)

- and of shaping their lives’ purposes and meanings,
- trusts and loyalties, in light of the
- character of being, value and power
- determining the ultimate conditions
- of existence (as grasped in their
- operative images -conscious and
- unconscious - of them).173

In an effort to bring greater clarity to what is intended by the term faith and what is to be excluded I will repeat here six distinctions that Fowler makes in his understanding and usage of the term. First, as we have seen, faith is for Fowler a human universal quality. As such faith may have both religious and non-religious forms. It is a generic feature of being human. In this way Fowler does not restrict faith to religion. It is therefore significant to note that people can and do exhibit faith without being part of a religious belief

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171 Parks states (1986:21) that “faith determines action; faith is manifest in act . . . when we recognise faith as the composing of what is true and trustworthy at the level of ultimacy, we recognise that faith is intimately related to doing. We human beings act in accordance with what we really trust -in contrast to what we may merely claim”.

172 Parks (1986:23) draws on the work of Richard R. Niebuhr stating that our understanding of faith “in relation to contemporary life is insufficient without a recognition of faith as a ‘suffering’ as well as a virtue of reasoning and willing. By ‘suffering’ he means, in part ‘undergoing’, and he is thus not only recognising the suffering of fury . . . but also the suffering of doubt, of being overwhelmed, of drifting, of struggle, of yearning, and of despair”.

173 Sociologist Andrew Greeley supports this view stating “the basic religious needs and the basic religious functions have not changed very notably since the late Ice Age” (1972:1). The five persistent functions of religion identified by Greeley are: 1) the provision of a meaning system allowing man (sic) to cope with the ‘question of the ultimate’; 2) the provision of a feeling of social belonging; 3) the integration of the forces of sexuality into the rest of human life; 4) the provision of a mystical channel with ‘the Powers that are real’; 5) the provision of leaders supporting the common man in his attempts to ‘wrestle with the ultimate’ (op.cit.:16).


175 Fowler, 1995:93; format as cited.
system.\textsuperscript{176} Examples of a non-religious faith listed by Fowler are: communism, materialism, secular humanism etc. Fowler says ‘Think, if you will, of faith as ‘universal’, as a feature of living, acting, and self-understanding of all human beings whether they claim to be ‘believers’ or religious or not” (Fowler 1985:18). It is therefore a theory applicable to all ‘faiths’, including agnosticism or atheism. Hence his work is not focused on a particular ‘religious faith’, or the content of belief, but on the “psychological concept of faith that abstracts from any particular content of belief” (Nipkow, Schweitzer & Fowler 1991:1). For Fowler an understanding of faith concentrates on the ‘ways of knowing and valuing’ - the operations of faith - rather than the ‘contents’ of faith. Thus his research has concentrated on the processes people employ in faith, moral and personal circumstances, rather than the specific content of their faith. From this perspective a Hindu, a Jew, a Christian, an Agnostic or an Atheist could all be exhibiting a similar stage of faith development in Fowler’s terms regardless of the variant specific contents of their faith system.

In this way Fowler leads to a second distinction; a distinction between faith and belief.\textsuperscript{177} This point is significant for his understanding of faith development. Belief is “one of the important ways of expressing and communicating faith, but belief and faith are not the same thing. . . . Faith is deeper than belief” (Fowler in Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer 1991:22). Faith is more encompassing than the present understanding of ‘belief’ as mental assent to some proposition or propositions. Fowler extends the concept of faith development to embrace the conscious and unconscious aspects of ourselves that are deeper than conscious beliefs.

Thirdly, building on the distinction between faith and belief, it is important to distinguish between a focus on faith contents and faith operations. The contents of a person’s faith can be expressed as a set of ‘beliefs’. This is an important aspect of this study as I will consider the beliefs of those within the ‘EPC’ church and those who have left. In so doing I compare the beliefs of the two groups. Although undoubtedly interesting, such a focus on its own would not help to explain why people have changed the contents of their beliefs. The underlying dynamic of faith change would remain concealed. For this reason faith is considered both in its contents and in structural-developmental terms. Although many theorists have considered the contents of faith, Fowler was “the first to apply principles of structural-developmental psychology to its [faith] analysis, and he was the first to treat it from the standpoint of a developmental or lifespan perspective” (Shulk 1979:5; italics mine). Fowler’s theory concentrates on the process of finding and making meaning as a human activity. Fowler states:

> These stages, which try to describe uniform and predictable ways of being in faith, are not primarily matters of the contents of faith. We are not suggesting that a person goes through a succession of world views and value systems, if we mean by those terms substantive beliefs, themes, images, and stories of faith. Rather, we are trying to identify and communicate differences in the styles, the operations of knowing and valuing, that constitute the action, the way of being that is faith. Our stages describe in formal terms the structural features of

\textsuperscript{176} Although Fowler includes people without a ‘religious faith’ as being people who operate out of a ‘faith system’, he nevertheless concentrates the vast majority of his writing on religious faith development, specifically Christian faith development.

\textsuperscript{177} “Wilfred Cantwell Smith, an historian of religion, has engaged in careful study of the words faith and belief, and his work has substantially informed faith development theory [in general]. He has shown that since in English the word faith is used only as a noun, “to believe” was chosen as the verb form to express the noun-concept “faith.” This was not inappropriate, for in earlier centuries “the Anglo-Saxon derived word ‘believe’ in its various forms meant pretty much what its exact counterpart in German, belieben, still means today: namely, to hold dear, to prize.” It signified to love......to give allegiance, to be loyal to; to value highly.” The Latin credo, meaning, literally, “I set my heart,” was translated “I believe,” and thus was not a mistranslation. “To believe,” connoted an essential human activity involving the whole person (Parks 1986:10-11, my bracketed comment added).” Since then Cantwell Smith has illustrated that belief has come to mean acceptance of dubious irrational knowledge. He goes on to claim that “in modern usage the word ‘belief’ increasingly connotes a lack of trust and confidence: “Do you really think that is so? “ ‘Well he believes so.” (Parks 1986:11).”
faith as a way of construing, interpreting, and responding to the factors of contingency, finitude, and ultimacy in our lives (Fowler 1984:52).

Fourthly, for Fowler faith includes the way we shape and form our lives in their totality. It includes the emotional and passional sides of our being as well as the intellectual.  

Fifthly, for Fowler, the term faith has to be viewed as a dynamic, changing, evolving process not as something relatively static. Thus, in so doing he credits the term with new meaning. In the English language faith is a noun. As such it is viewed as something people either have or do not have. For Fowler faith is better understood as a verb, ‘a way of being’ in relation to others. Thus faith is an active “mode-of-being-in-relation to another or others in which we invest commitment, belief, love, risk and hope” (Fowler 1985:18).

Finally, Fowler sees faith as inherently relational. Drawing on philosopher Josiah Royce and theologian H. Richard Niebuhr he identifies faith as beginning in relationship. “Faith, he says, implies trust in another, reliance upon another, a counting upon or dependence upon another” (Fowler 1986:16). He points to a faith triangle that includes the self, others (society) and the ultimate environment (“the centre of value and power adequate to ground, unify, and order the whole force-field of life”) which in Jewish and Christian terms may be called God (op.cit.:16).

It is therefore clear that Fowler has a very wide vision of ‘faith’ that involves all aspects of life. Indeed this forms one of the most common criticisms of his theory. Friedrich Schweitzer, for example, criticises Fowler for just this breadth of vision. Schweitzer drawing on Ferhout states “for him (Fowler) religious development includes everything, from the cognitive to the social and moral and finally to the symbolic. But in the end it is hard to say for Fowler what religion really is, if it is not to be just everything taken together” (Schweitzer in Fowler, Nipkow & Schweitzer 1991:81). But in Fowler’s broader understanding he captures the inclusiveness of faith and also something of its mystery. Fowler frequently describes faith through the image of a gem. The gem, he says, “has many facets and in order to see faith whole we must turn the gem - or move ourselves around it. Its multiple facets cannot be seen from one angle of vision alone” (Fowler 1986:281).

Before we move to consider Fowler’s faith development model in detail it is important to consider how this model will be used within this present research. Erving Goffman (1959) in the development of his dramaturgical model spoke of his model as ‘a scaffold for insight’. It is in this sense that the faith development model set out by James Fowler will be used in this study. That is, the model provides a useful ‘scaffold’ to make sense of the faith changes, associated with leave-taking from ‘EPC’ churches. To use Fowler’s developmental model in this way is not new. Erik Erikson, on whom Fowler’s model draws, describes his staged model as ‘a tool to think with’ or as a ‘scaffold for remembering’. Thus I, like others before me, am using Fowler’s faith development model as a “hermeneutical framework”.  

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178 Fowler states “Our work, . . . is significantly indebted to the psychoanalytic and depth-psychology approaches used by Erikson and Jung. These recognise the influence on rationality of unconscious dynamics, and emphasize the role of symbolic functioning in the processes of personal development and transformation. Similarly, I am indebted to theological and philosophical traditions in which knowing and valuing are held to be inseparable, and in which will and reason are seen as serving a person’s dominant affections or loves. Thus, I cannot adopt the Plathtian theoretical separation of cognition and affection, of reason and emotion, but rather must account for their interpretation in the dynamics of faith. Faith, as we are studying it, then, is a structured set of operations in which cognition and affection are inextricably bound together. In faith, the ‘rational’ and the ‘passional’ are fused” (Fowler 1985:37).

179 Fowler states “Our use of the term faith does make many people uncomfortable. As Harvey Cox once said to me, “There is something to offend everyone in this way of talking about faith!” Yet I think we cannot afford to give up faith as our focal concept despite its complexity, its likelihood of being misunderstood, and the difficulty of pinning it down precisely. There simply is no other concept that holds together those various interrelated dimensions of human knowing, valuing, committing and acting that must be considered together if we want to understand the making and maintaining of human meaning” (Fowler 1995:92; italics as cited ).

180 This quote of Erikson and Dewayne Heubner’s concept of a ‘scaffold for remembering’ are drawn from Downing,(1986:7 & 287). Fowler too utilises the faith development model in this way, see Fowler, 1992:16.
framework) that provides a perspective on what in reality is a very complex, dynamic and fluid process. The scaffold gives us the ability to reduce the complexity to definable chunks - stages - that can be discussed, and viewed. We need to be sensitive to the way the faith development model is used here. It is a way of representing reality but does not in and of itself equate with that reality. As Goffman (1959:224) states “scaffolds, after all, are to build things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down”. We will now consider Fowler’s theory as this ‘scaffold’ for later insight.

4.3 James Fowler - The Theorist and His Work

James Fowler has, for much of the last three decades, researched and written on the theme of faith development. The product of this research has been the development of a theory which outlines a developmental process of faith. Fowler’s work has had a wide influence in North America and is now influencing thought in Europe, Africa, Latin America and Asia. As well as more widespread regional interest there has also been a growing usage of his theory beyond the traditional domain of psychologists and theologians to ethicists, historians, clinicians, educators, spiritual directors, pastors, social theorists, social activists and many others (Parks 1991:115).

Since Fowler first wrote on the subject of faith development in ‘Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning,’ (first published 1981) other theorists have developed similar frameworks to make sense of faith development. However throughout this period Fowler has remained the principal writer and researcher in the area.

When Fowler began writing, the concept of ‘faith development’ was relatively new to the psychology of religion. Despite this Fowler was able to draw on a rich tradition of Judeo-Christian thought and psychological developmental theory to form the backbone of his stages of faith. He thus builds on the Judeo-Christian traditional concept of faith development and the developmental psychology of Piaget, ('Cognitive Structural Development'), Erikson, ('Stages of Life theory') and Kohlberg, ('Moral Development Theory').

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181 This influence has been extended as Fowler's writings are translated into Korean, Danish, German, Portuguese, Swedish and an Indonesian dialect (Nipkow in Fowler, Nipkow and Schweitzer, 1991:vii). Since its first publication 'Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning' (first published 1981) has gone through 20 printings, (in excess of 60,000 copies). In the United States it has been used as a text book in Catholic, evangelical, mainline Protestant and Jewish seminaries (Fowler 1992:13).

182 For Critiques of Fowler's faith development model see Parks (1991), Power (1991), Dykstra (1986), Fernhout (1986), Broughton (1986), Harris (1986) and Fowler (1986) (his reply to Dykstra, Fernhout, Broughton and Harris) Wuthnow (1983) and Keen (in Fowler & Keen (1985). Here a critique is limited to a brief consideration of the implicitly hierarchal nature of the theory. Parks summarizes the major critiques of faith development saying “a review of the critical literature reveals clearly five primary foci of resistance and concern. They are: (1) the definition of faith; (2) the description of stage 6 - Fowler’s vision of ‘mature faith’; (3) the adequacy of the theory in relation to particular religious beliefs; (4) the adequacy of the account of affect, process-motion, the unconscious, and the imagination; (5) the adequacy of the theory vis à vis a critical socio-political analysis, especially a gender analysis. It is the first two of these that have dominated the discussion to date” (1991:105).

183 Here cited as per 1995 edition.

184 Fowler’s own background is as a theologian, ethicist and developmental psychologist.

185 Fowler himself outlines the history of faith development theory in the following description of its origins: “Faith development research and theory emerged in the late seventies and early eighties of this century. It was preceded by work on the development of moral reasoning by Lawrence Kohlberg and his associates. They in turn were dependent upon a tradition in philosophical psychology that began with Immanuel Kant and included centrally the cognitive developmental structuralism of Jean Piaget, the symbolic interactionism of George Herbert Mead, and the genetic epistemology of J. Mark Baldwin. In addition, faith development theory has depended upon the psychosocial theory of ego development offered by Erik H. Erikson. In its theological background it has relied upon the work of Paul Tillich, H. Richard Niebuhr, and the historian of religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith.” (Fowler, 1991:16).
Fowler draws on the modernist processual understandings and also structures his theory in such a way that it looks beyond the limitations of modernist theory. He claims his theory in many ways... makes an Enlightenment move when it seeks to provide formal definitions of faith and formal characterisations of “structuralist” stages. Not until the Enlightenment did this kind of “separation of the “structuring” and the “content” of ideological perspectives came into play... in contrast to the Enlightenment, however, and in ways that show its indebtedness to post-Enlightenment hermeneutics, faith development theory knows that the structural features of faith are at best half the picture and that any adequate study of lived religious faith must balance the initiative of the interpreter and the inquirer with the hermeneutic initiatives of classic traditions. Moreover, faith development theory seeks to acknowledge and systematically account for the important shaping role of the emotions and of the unconscious-personal and social-in the life of faith (Fowler 1996:157).

Fowler and his team of researchers initially interviewed 359\textsuperscript{186} people from four to 84 years of age. From these interviews they developed a theory of six-successive faith stages which, Fowler states, hold to three overarching properties in being ‘Sequential’, ‘Hierarchical’, and ‘Invariant’. In this they are like the structural-developmental approaches of Piaget and Kohlberg, (Fowler 1985:36). Because much of the significance of Fowler’s theory is encapsulated in these three terms it is therefore important to define what he intends by them. Sequential means that the stages occur in the same order. By hierarchical he means that each stage is carried forward in a modified way in the operations of the previous stage. And by invariant he means each stage builds on the previous and cannot be skipped. It needs to be stated that Fowler however does not claim that the faith development stages he is developing are universal.\textsuperscript{187} It is therefore clear that Fowler envisages a wide application for the theory he has developed.

Before introducing his staged model of faith development it is necessary to keep in mind two cautions that Fowler raises in using his theory. First, the descriptions of stages are “still shots” in a complex and dynamic process. As such they “constitute interruptions of a complex and dynamic process” (Fowler 1985:37). Hence “the process of ‘staging’ a person should not be approached with a cubbyhole mentality. The stages are not boxes into which people can be stuffed. Rather, they are models by which certain interrelated patterns of our thinking, valuing, and acting may be better understood” (op.cit.:38).

Second, “It is a serious mistake to think of these stages as constituting an achievement scale according to which we can build an accelerator-educational program. Nor should we view them as an evaluative scale by which to establish the comparative worth of persons” (op.cit.:38) or understood as stages in soteriology (1987:80). Fowler states that is is a “paramount concern” of his that “the stages should never be used for the nefarious comparison or the devaluing of persons” (Fowler 1987:80).

Having taken note of these cautions it is clear that inherent in the faith development model, as in the

\textsuperscript{186} See Fowler, 1995: Table B.3, p.318, this has been extended since to over 500 people (Fowler 1984:51).

\textsuperscript{187} Fowler says “because of the lack of cross-cultural and longitudinal data thus far, ... it would be premature to claim universality for our stages” (1985:36) In his writing in 1981 he suggests that more cross-cultural research needs to be undertaken (1995:296-297). The sample of interviews undertaken by Fowler was not culturally inclusive, a point which Fowler himself acknowledges. He says “the sample is not random; we make no attempt to suggest that this group of respondents is like any other” (1995:315) The sample interviewed by Fowler ranged “from 3.5 to 84 years of age, with the largest number in the 21-30 age group. The majority (54.1%) of the respondents ranged in age from 13 to 40 years old. Males and females shared almost equal representation in the sample, but whites (97.8%) dominated the sample. There were more Protestants (45%) than Catholics (36.5%) or Jews (11.2%) in the sample, and only a small representation of Orthodox (3.6%) and other orientations (3.6%). In sum, the sample is overwhelmingly white, largely Christian, evenly divided by sex and distributed throughout the age categories” (Fowler 1995:316-317). A study undertaken by Furushima (1985) involving twelve interviews with Buddhists in Hawaii generally supported a claim to cultural universality of the faith stages.
development models of Piaget and Kohlberg, is an implicit hierarchical structure. Parks (1986:31) states that “development connotes a process of unfolding, revealing, maturing, differentiating, growing, expanding, evolving, elaborating”. This is so for faith development as well. There is a faith career or pilgrimage involving qualitative changes in one’s depth and breadth of ‘knowing’ and ‘valuing’. These are qualitative changes that encompass cognitive, emotional, passionate and operational changes. Each successive faith stage has as Parks states “the capacity to handle greater complexity and thereby to be more inclusive”. Fowler (1996:157) careful not to take the evaluative ability of the model too far does however state that development theory provides a “criteriology for assessing the adequacy of a given person’s or group’s appropriation of its religious content tradition, and of the adequacy of the tradition itself”. Therefore implicit in this model is a faith trajectory.

4.3.1. Faith Development

Fowler’s concept of faith development is built on two processes which taken together constitute, what he calls, the ‘dance of faith development in our lives’. These two processes are conversion and development. Conversion is the radical and dramatic changes that occur in our centres of value, power and master story. He illustrates such conversion by the biblical account of the conversion of Paul. This conversion process is the process of transformation and intensification of faith. The second process, that of development, is less radical and involves a maturing or evolving process, similar to the biological process of maturation. Faith development occurs through the ongoing “dance of faith” involving these twin movements of radical conversion and gradual maturation. Both are integral movements in “the dance”.

The goal of faith development is not to get everyone to move to successively higher stages of faith. Fowler is quite clear that people located at each stage can experience a sense of personal fulfillment in faith and life. There is no intention that a particular stage needs to be reached or attained, or that people described at one stage are in some way better or more advanced than those at previous stages. However despite Fowler’s cautions the model of faith development comes under criticism for the inherent hierarchical nature of the theory. Fowler himself describes the goal of faith development as being for “each person or group to open

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188 Parks (1986:71) points to the role of ‘pilgrimage’ in many of the world’s religions. She says - “Hindu wisdom has recognised stages of life in the imagery of a journey from apprentice (the dependent one), to householder (the responsible one), to seeker of spiritual truth (the wise one). The Buddhist vision begins in a story of a young person who went forth and found wisdom only on the other side of an encounter with suffering. Indeed, virtually all religious traditions have some story of pilgrimage”.

189 Here Parks (1986:67) draws on the work of Ronald Marstin in ‘Beyond Our Tribal Gods’ (1979). She says of Marstin that he is “not shy about acknowledging that implicit in developmental theory is the assumption that each succeeding stage is ‘better’ in that each succeeding stage can account for more. . . . Marstin’s boldness comes, not from an indifferent or arrogant elitism, but from a commitment to a social justice”.

190 Fowler defines conversion as “a significant recentering of one’s previous conscious or unconscious images of value and power, and the conscious adoption of a new set of master stories in the commitment to reshape one’s life in a new community of interpretation and action” (Fowler 1992:16). For a more comprehensive definition see Fowler (1984:140). Fowler clearly distinguishes between conversion and stage transition. Conversion is principally about the ‘contents’ of faith ; where stage transition is about the ‘operations of faith ( i.e. the operations of knowing, valuing and committing). For further detail see Fowler (1995:285-286).

191 Paul was a devout Jew, who was actively persecuting and oppressing the new group of Jewish Christians. On the road to Damascus he was confronted in a vision of Jesus and his radical conversion occurred. The net effect of this conversion was that Paul the persecutor of the Christians became one of their most influential and decisive leaders.

192 Amongst my interviewees who were aware of Fowler’s faith development theory the hierarchical nature was a detracting factor in their use of the theory. As one interviewee said “I don’t see my faith as better now than it was. It is just different. I’m not where I used to be.” From a sociological perspective Wuthnow also criticises what he sees as a ‘normative’ structure to Fowler’s developmental faith theory (Wuthnow 1983:217). Fowler states “It would be a mistake to take the movement from one faith stage to another as analogous to climbing stairs or ascending a ladder, for two reasons: (1). It unnecessarily locks us into a kind of ‘higher’-‘lower’ mentality in thinking about the stages, when the real issue has to do with a successive progression of more complex, differentiated, and comprehensive modes of knowing and valuing. (2). The stair or ladder
themselves, as radically as possible - within the structures of their present stage or transition - to synergy with spirit” (Fowler 1984:75). Fowler does not intend for his theory to be used in a prescriptive manner. It is intended rather to be descriptive of a normal or most people’s journey of faith.

Thus while Fowler lists six successive stages there is no implication that each individual will reach a point where they operate at the sixth stage or any other particular stage. Rather, as has already been stated, his theory holds that adults equilibrate at various stages. The stage adults may equilibrate at varies, yet for each individual there are a number of significant changes that occur in the faith journey. These changes are the transition points between stages. During these transition points a major change in the basis of our operations (although not necessarily the content) of faith occur. As Hull states it is quite possible for the same belief to be carried through each of the faith stages. This belief will be viewed and used in different ways but may not substantially change its content as the person moves from one faith stage to another. Hull uses the example of a continued belief in God as a father to illustrate this (Hull, 1985:193).

### 4.3.2. Transitions Between Stages

The development of faith is not a gentle undemanding stroll through life, involving gradual and imperceptible maturity but a series of major faith transformations. It is a series of progressive growth stages followed by radical upheavals in our faith operations. Again it needs to be made clear that these upheavals that may result in a person moving to another stage of faith development do not necessarily involve a change in the contents of one’s faith beliefs.

The analogy, further, might lead us to think of transition as a matter of the self clambering from one level or rung to another, essentially unchanged. Faith stage transitions represent significant alterations in the structures of one’s knowing and valuing and, therefore, in the basic orientation and responses of the self. In the process of transition we have the feeling, as one character in the film *Green Pastures* put it, ‘that everything nailed down is coming loose’. Because of new operations and comprehensiveness in our knowing and valuing, both our previous knowledge and values and our very ways of verifying and justifying our perspectives and our actions undergo change and must be reworked. Our very life meanings are at stake in faith stage transitions” (Fowler 1984:58-59; italics as cited). Despite Fowler’s protests at a stair or ladder analogy the stage shifts do, as he indicates, involve “a successive progression of more complex, differentiated, and comprehensive modes of knowing”. Whether we regard any particular stage as ‘better’ or ‘higher’ than another may be a moot point. Regardless there is an implicit faith career here that involves faith transitions to successively more complex, differentiated, and comprehensive modes of knowing.

Fowler continually affirms the worth of each person. He says, “in no way will we be suggesting that a person characterised by one of the less developed stages is any less a person than one described by a more developed stage” (Fowler 1987:57). In this way he is reaffirming the dignity, creativity and richness of each stage.

Fowler comments “I acknowledged the normative character of the stage theories of faith and selfhood and affirmed that steady support and encouragement should be given to keep development, as a byproduct of faithfulness in vocation, in process. I also cautioned against making development an end in itself or seeing movement from one stage to another as something that can be accelerated or pushed. We must always remember that genuine development in faith and selfhood, and the ongoing *metanoia* of real conversions, are the results of both our work and encouragement and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit” (1987:95; italics as cited).

Hull describes this faith journey using the image of a journey down a river in a canoe. - “The placid waters of one great lake may be separated from those of another by a series of rapids and waterfalls. It is in these passages between the lakes that the character of a canoeing expedition will be tested. It is here that the great power stations are built. The source of testing and danger is the same as the source of power. So it is with the changes in the life of an adult. It is during these times that learning is most significant. During these turbulent periods Christian faith will be re-learned or there will be resistance to re-learning it, as the case may be”. (Hull, 1985:185)
The transition between stages is a difficult and often painful process. It involves relinquishing a previously held way of knowing and valuing. A new master story, or new interpretation of a previously significant master story has to be developed. A new or re-worked attachment to centers of value and power are necessary. A major transformation is therefore involved. We need to be aware that such transitional changes can be very difficult for the person involved and may seem like being at sea, even shipwrecked with a loss of all anchor points. Such transitions typically occur over protracted periods of time. It would not be unusual for someone to be characterised as being in transition between two stages for a number of years.

Another significant point needs be considered here. Fowler suggests that when the transition between stages is delayed beyond its normal optimal correlation with maturation it becomes increasingly difficult to make the stage transition later in life. Fowler writes:

Implicitly I have wanted to communicate that if one equilibrates or ‘locks in’ at one of the two childhood stages and carries that stage on through the season of adolescence and into adulthood, it gets more and more difficult to undertake transition to the next stage (Fowler 1987:96).

That delayed faith transitions are more difficult to traverse is not surprising since Fowler states “stage transition means enduring the dissolution of a total way of making sense of things. It means relinquishing a sense of coherence in one’s near and ultimate environment. It frequently involves living with fundamental ambiguity and with a deep sense of alienation for considerable periods” (Fowler 1985:38). Because it is such a demanding and difficult process to transcend from one means of faith operation to another, Fowler suggests that many people equilibrate at their present stage rather than face the difficulty or uncertainty of the

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196 This could be considered a paradigm, as in Kuhn’s paradigm shift theory. Kuhn defines paradigms as “universally recognised scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners” (Kuhn, 1970:viii).

197 Fowler writes of this process within Christian faith quoting Alfred North Whitehead. He states “Alfred North Whitehead wrote, in Religion in the Making that religion involves the transition from God the void to God the Enemy, and from God the Enemy to God the Companion. Faith development theory helps us recognise that there are times in faith when God seems to approach us as Nothingness or as Slayer. We do not make the transition from one stage to another without disruption, pain, confusion, and a sense of loss. All growth involves pain. To see this does not mean that we can avoid the pain of growth. But it does mean that we can reimagine faith growth so as to embrace the necessary pain and disruption as essential elements in it, thus diminishing the anxiety and fear pain brings” (Fowler 1986:40).

198 Parks uses the image of being shipwrecked saying - “it may feel something like shipwreck. To undergo shipwreck is to be threatened in a most total and primary way. Shipwreck is the coming apart of what has served as shelter and protection and has held and carried one where one wanted to go - the collapse of a structure that once promised trustworthiness. Likewise, when we undergo the shipwreck of meaning at the level of faith, we feel threatened at the very core of our existence” (1986:24).

199 In his 1987 text ‘Faith Development and Pastoral Care’ Fowler links his stages of faith with Robert Kegan’s stages of selfhood (1982). The following correlations incorporate Fowler’s faith stages and Kegan’s stages of selfhood. For further details see Fowler (1987:53-77). The correlations Fowler (1987:96) makes are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Faith Stage</th>
<th>Selfhood Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Primal faith, incorporative self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool age</td>
<td>Intuitive-Projective faith, impulsive self - (stage 1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-childhood</td>
<td>Mythic-Literal faith, imperial self - (stage 2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Synthetic-Conventional faith, interpersonal self - (stage 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young adulthood</td>
<td>Individuative-Reflective faith, institutional self - (stage 4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle adulthood</td>
<td>Conjunctive faith, inter-individual self - (stage 5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle adulthood and beyond</td>
<td>Universalizing faith, God-grounded self - (stage 6)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
transition. People may also spend long periods of time and energy transitioning. For this reason some people are best described as being in a transition phase.

Equally because of the difficulty of the transition process, Fowler claims, “it is understandable why we defend, shore up and cling to our constructions of the ultimate environment [faith] even when these prove constricting, self-destructive, or distorted” (op.cit.:38).

With these introductory remarks on the processes, and the difficulty of faith stage transitions, I will now introduce the six stages of Fowlers faith development theory. At this point a brief introduction is sufficient. Greater detail will be added to this brief introduction in subsequent chapters.

4.4 The Six Stages of Fowler’s Faith Development Theory.

4.4.1 Stage 1 Intuitive-Projective
Fowler’s theory involves a six-staged progression of faith development which begins at around the second year of a child’s life. The first stage (Intuitive-Projective) begins at approximately age two. At this age children begin to develop language ability, they can now move around freely and investigate and question for themselves. At this age their lives are a seamless world of fantasy, stories, experiences and imagery. During this stage self is the centre of experience, and there are no existing inner structures for sorting and understanding the experiences of the child. Life at this stage is therefore a collage of dis-organized images. These images include the real events of daily life and the imaginary fantasy life of the child. The transition to the next stage involves the child’s growing concern to know how things are and to clarify what is real and what only seems that way (Fowler 1995:122-134).

4.4.2 Stage 2 Mythical-Literal
In the move to the second stage (Mythical-Literal) children will necessarily have moved to the cognitive developmental level of ‘concrete operational thinking’. From this the child can draw stable categories of space, time and causality. This makes the child’s constructions of experience much less dependent on feeling and fantasy. For children at this stage the world has now become linear, orderly and predictable (Fowler 1984:55). Here they are better able to think logically. They can take the perspective of someone outside of

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200 One theological lecturer in the area of pastoral care (Mike Riddell - 28.11.94) suggested that an average transition between adult faith development levels takes around two years. During this time the person feels that their faith is very tenuous, under threat, or evolving.

201 Bracketed insert added.

202 Fowler does however note the significant faith learning that occurs prior to this age under the heading ‘Primal Faith’. During these first two years Fowler states “The first symbols of faith are likely to take primitive form in the baby’s hard-won memories of maternal and paternal presence. As dependable realities who go away but can be trusted to return, our primary care givers constitute our first experiences of superordinate power and wisdom, as well as our dependence. These primal others, in their mixtures of rigidity and grace, of arbitrary harshness and nurturing love, are doubtless present in the images of God that take more or less conscious form by our fourth or fifth years” (Fowler 1984:53).

203 Yet at this early stage essential life-long foundations are laid. Here Fowler claims:- “Our interviews with older persons and our biological studies of outstanding religious and cultural leaders alert us to the fact that these intuitive-projective constructions, and deep sentiments both of love and dread that are attached to them, frequently constitute a powerful bedrock of conviction on which later, more adult forms of faith may be grounded” (Fowler 1985:48). This has a number of connections to Gidden’s concept of ontological security. Giddens (1992:94) describes ontological security as “the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action”.

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themselves. This means they can develop a clear sense of fairness. “Faith at this stage becomes a matter of reliance on the stories, rules and implicit values of the family’s community of meaning” (op.cit.:55).

At this stage the bounds of the child’s world have widened. The primary influence of the family has been added to by the influence of teachers, school, other pupils, television, movies and reading. Because of this the variety of influences affecting the child increase. Here the child typically makes strong associations with ‘people like us’ and tends to look critically at those who are ‘different’ (Fowler 1985:50-51). During this stage the child begins to “accept the stories, and beliefs that symbolise belonging to her community. . . . Symbols are taken as one dimensional and literal in their meaning. Story becomes the major way of giving unity and value to experience” (Fowler 1995:149).

These two stages are typically part of the childhood and early teenage phases of people’s lives and therefore are not as relevant as the next three stages which deal with more typical adult faith stages. We will therefore deal with the next three stages in greater detail.

4.4.3 Stage 3 The Synthetic-Conventional

By the term ‘Synthetic’ Fowler means that at this level the individual attempts to draw together the disparate elements of his/her life into an integrated identity. By the term ‘Conventional’ he indicates that the values and beliefs they hold are derived from a group of significant others and for the most part are accepted

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204 This is connected with Mead’s concept of taking the role of the other. Mead states “In the same sociopolitical way that the human individual becomes conscious of himself he also becomes conscious of other individuals; and his consciousness both of himself and of other individuals is equally important for his own self-development . . . This requires the appearance of the other in the self, the identification of the other with the self, the reaching of self consciousness through the other” Mead (1934:253).

205 Story and narrative are powerful influences at this stage. Narrative is often the most powerful way of gathering personal and shared meanings. Although powerfully influenced by narrative and story, children at this stage cannot stand back and view the events from the position of a neutral observer. Here they lack the ability to reflect on either their own position or the position of others from a ‘value free’ position. Fowler points out that adults may equilibrate at this stage two level of faith development.

206 Fowler does indicate that a number of adults are best characterised as operating at a stage two faith level. M. Scott Peck reduces Fowler’s six stages to a four staged progression. To do this he combines Fowler’s stage 1 and 2 and 5 and 6. Peck estimates his first stage (which corresponds to Fowler’s stages 1 & 2) description applies to about 20% of the adult population. If he is correct in this estimation we can expect to meet significant numbers of people who, even as adults, will be best described as operating at a childhood or early adolescent level of faith development (Peck 1993:121).

207 M. Scott Peck (1990) calls his similar stage -stage II. Peck says of his theory in relation to Fowler’s that he has restricted himself to four stages. But that “our different systems quite clearly overlap, and in no way contradict each other” (p.187). Of his second stage the Formal, Institutional stage he says - here people are very attached to the forms of their religious life (worship and structural styles) and “that they become very upset if changes are made in the words or the music or in traditional order of things” (p.190). He states - “Another thing characterizing the religious behaviour of Stage II people is that their vision of God is almost entirely that of an external, transcendent Being. They have very little understanding of the immanent, indwelling God - the God of the Holy Spirit, or what Quakers call the Inner Light. And although they often consider Him loving, they also generally feel He possesses - and will use- punitive power. But once again, it is no accident that their vision of God is that of a giant benevolent Cop in the sky, because that is precisely the kind of God they need -just as they need a legalistic religion for their governance” (p.190).

208 Fowler states - “The drawing together in question is two-fold. Due to the rich new possibilities of interpersonal perspective taking, the young person now has available a variety of reflections or mirrorings of the self. In every significant face-to-face relation, he or she has access to someone’s construction of the self he/she is becoming. Like distorting mirrors in an amusement park fun house, the images of self that one discerns that others have constructed do not necessarily fit nicely together. Nor are they necessarily congruent with one’s own felt images of self.....Synthesis, in the first instance then, means a drawing together, an integration into one, of that viable sense in selfhood that we have come to call ‘identity’” (Fowler 1984:59-60).
Compartmentalizing dissonance of expectations and judgements placed on them in their different roles. The heavily on them. Fowler suggests that individuals may employ one of self-identity is so integrally tied to the expectations and judgements on the individual. Because at this faith stage self-identity is so integrally tied to the expectations and judgements of others such expectations weigh heavily on them. Fowler suggests that individuals may employ one of two strategies to cope with the dissonance of expectations and judgements placed on them in their different roles. The first of these he labels ‘Compartmentalizing’. Under this strategy the individual behaves within the expectations of one group.

According to Fowler people at this stage are generally committed workers and servers who have a strong sense of loyalty to their religious, ideological or political group. They are not typically innovative thinkers and would not normally be interested in analytical approaches to faith. As such they “may take a stance that seems anti-intellectual, oriented to emotions and experience, and defensively conventional” (Fowler 1987:88).

It needs to be borne in mind, of course, that given the segmentation of contemporary society such an individual is likely to be involved in many different roles or ‘theatres of action’. In each of these there may be different views, beliefs, ideologies and ways of operating to be taken into account. This is coupled with the fact that each of these roles may place different expectations on the individual. Because at this faith stage self-identity is so integrally tied to the expectations and judgements of others such expectations weigh heavily on them. Fowler suggests that individuals may employ one of two strategies to cope with the dissonance of expectations and judgements placed on them in their different roles. The first of these he labels ‘Compartmentalizing’. Under this strategy the individual behaves within the expectations of one group.

209 “Tacit means unexamined; my tacit knowing, as Michael Polanyi calls it, is that part of my knowing that plays a role in guiding and shaping my choices, but of which I can give no account. I cannot tell you how I know with my tacit knowing. To say that Stage 3’s system of images and values is tacitly held reminds me of a statement attributed to the philosopher George Santayana. “We cannot know,” he said, “who first discovered water. But we can be sure,” he continued, “that it was not the fish”. To live with a tacit system of meaning and value is analogous to the situation of the fish. Supported and sustained by the water, it has no means of leaping out of the aquarium so as to reflect on the tank and its contents. A person in Stage 3 is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, as a system, the object of reflection” (Fowler 1995:161-162; Italics as cited).

210 For example such individuals would normally have a limited ability to take account of the systems that shape, constrain and sometimes oppress persons and hence would not be too open to the insights of the social sciences.

211 Fowler (1996:63) speaking of the way people can act at different stage levels in different contexts says - “we see a fair number of persons - most frequently though not exclusively men - whose emotional development exhibits arrest at a stage at least as limited as the operations of the Mythic-Literal stage. At the same time, their cognitive functioning exhibits the selective use of operations that correlate with the Individuative-Reflective [stage 4] stage. Confident and authoritative in their professional and occupational domains, these people are often unaware of the sharp limits of their empathy and their abilities to construct and identify with the interior feelings and processes of others. Religiously, these persons are often drawn to the rigidities and seemingly unambiguous teachings of Fundamentalism and of authoritarian leaders. (We should remind ourselves that there are liberals and radicals as well as conservatives with Fundamentalist spirits.) As spouses, parents, and bosses, such persons are at best insensitive and at worst rigid, authoritarian, and emotionally abusive” (bracketed insert added).
when they are with them and behaves under the expectations of another group when with them.\textsuperscript{212} The other strategy to cope with this dissonance is to form a personal ‘hierarchy of authorities’, whereby the expectations and authority of one group is seen as primary and others must fall below these (Fowler 1985:61).

In a church situation Fowler describes people at this stage as “looking for a relationship with God and with the important persons of their lives in which they feel that they are living up to the expectations these important others have of them” (Fowler 1987:87). He states that “they may feel a special gladness in thinking of the congregation as an intergenerational community bound together in friendship and shared experiences” (op.cit.:87). Because of this, conflict and controversy are threatening to them. They will tend to work for harmony and would often prefer to bury conflict rather than allow it to surface and potentially destabilise the sense of community which is so important to them.

Jack Pressau\textsuperscript{213} takes Fowler’s stages and looks at them from a Soteriological\textsuperscript{214} perspective. In this analysis he speaks of the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith as having that ‘arrived feel to it’. Religious groups that reinforce this ‘arrived feel’ are typically fast growing. Here he draws on the work of Dean Kelley (1972)\textsuperscript{215} in ‘Why Conservative Churches Grow’. Kelley asserts that a strict conventionalism is one trait of the growing church. Such churches he suggests are characterised by: Absolutism, a sense that they have the only, complete, unambiguous explanation of the truth, Conformity, that is a climate in which members who think differently must confess their error or be shunned; and Fanaticism, which is prepared to share its own version of truth but since it is the only truth we won’t seriously engage in any dialogue.\textsuperscript{216}

Such churches, religious groups or ideological groups appeal to individuals operating at the Synthetic-Conventional stage. To quote Pressau they provide a ‘walled in’ religious commitment, which can be reassuring to a person whose faith operations are characterised by the Synthetic-Conventional faith stage.

\textsuperscript{212} This compartmentalisation links with Goffman’s notion of segregation of audiences where a performer segregates “his audiences so that the individuals who witness him in one of his roles will not be the individuals who witness him in another of his roles” Goffman (1959:119).

\textsuperscript{213} In his book -‘I’m Saved, You’re Saved - Maybe, (1977)’ Pressau says of his theory of six stages of Soteriology that “it is a giant hypothesis. It is a grandchild of Piaget’s theory on cognitive development, the son of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, and, the half-brother of James Fowler’s stages-of-faith-development concept, which is receiving empirical testing at Harvard now. . . Fowler’s work differs from mine in breadth and focus. He researches faith-ing (the process of thinking one’s religion) in general whereas I have limited my focus to the failing of just one doctrine, salvation” (1977:115).

\textsuperscript{214} A soteriological perspective looks at what is necessary for salvation from a Christian perspective. Fowler states - “it often comes as a challenge for persons to understand that stages of faith are not stages in salvation, at least if salvation is understood as the assurance of eternal life with God in heaven. These are not stages in soteriology; there is not an ‘X’ stage one must attain in order to be in a right relations with God. In fact, one can be “in Christ” or stand in a saving relation to God while being operationally described by any of the faith stages. Similarly, one can exhibit a relatively high stage of faith development and be marked by doubt, alienation, and anxious absorption in self-preservation. Faith development theory relates most readily to the understanding of eternal life found in John’s gospel. There the term “eternal life” refers not only to one’s assurance of life with God beyond physical death, but also to a quality of this life in which one’s belief in Christ, and in the love and light disclosed in Christ, mediates communion with the one Christ called “Father”. The succession of stages in faith development theory does describe a sequence of patterned operations of knowing and valuing, by which persons construe their relatedness to God, world, self, and neighbour. In this sequence each later stage brings augmented potential for depth and breadth of trust in and partnership with God. Each later stage adds dimensions of consciousness, reflectivity, independence in responsibility, and capacities for taking the perspectives of others. At the same time, each later stage can strengthen the tendency to self-groundedness and defensiveness, supporting a false autonomy and issuing in alienation from God” (Fowler 1992:19 emphasis as per citation).

\textsuperscript{215} I intend to come back to this style of church later in the discussion of the relevance of Fowler’s theory to why people choose to leave ‘EPC’ churches.

\textsuperscript{216} There is however much debate regarding Kelly’s work - see Bibby & Brinkerhoff (1983).
The transition between the third and fourth of Fowler’s stages is often a difficult and protracted affair.217 Because of the walled-in, secure feel of the third stage it often takes a major ‘upset’ for the transition beyond stage three to begin. Fowler says:

Factors contributing to the breakdown of stage 3 and to readiness for transition may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unbreachable . . . or the encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one’s beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how “relative” they are to one’s particular group or background (Fowler 1983:188).

The move to the Individuative-Reflective stage (Stage 4) is “occasioned by a variety of experiences that make it necessary for persons to objectify, examine, and make critical choices about the defining elements of their identity and faith” (Fowler 1984:62). Often this experience is significantly destabilizing of the person’s sense of identity and faith.

4.4.4 Stage 4 Individuative-Reflective218

During the transition from the Synthetic-Conventional stage (stage 3) to Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4) two key processes occur. Fowler describes these as follows:

First, there must be a shift in the sense of the grounding and orientation of the self. From a definition of self derived from one’s relations and roles and the network of expectations that go with them, the self must now begin to be and act from a new quality of self-authorization. “There must be the emergence of an “executive ego”- a differentiation of the self behind the personae (masks) one wears and the roles one bears, from the composite of roles and relations through which the self is expressed” (Fowler 1984:62).

Fowler illustrates with the comments of one interviewee:

Who am I when I’m not defined by being my parents’ daughter, the friend of my friends, by my job, or by any other of the roles I play?” There is an I that has these roles but is not identical with any of them. I guess it is this I that organizes the many roles I play and the relations I have. And I have had to struggle hard to get it established (Fowler, 1984:63; italics as cited).

217 Moseley, Jarvis & Fowler (1993:43) state in the revised ‘Manual for Faith Development Research’ that “because our culture generally does not provide a range of ideological alternatives around which stage 4 processes can initially be organised, it has been found to be fairly common for the transition from Stage 3 to Stage 4 to be a protracted one, often lasting several years. It is quite probable that the researcher will encounter interviews containing mixtures of Stages 3 and 4 that cover a wide range of ages, from late adolescence to the mid-thirties and beyond. Thus age alone is not apt to be a very reliable clue for coding an interview above Stage 2.

218 Peck calls his comparable stage the Skeptic, Individual stage (his third stage). He says of people at this stage that they ‘make up their own minds about things. . . . and are active truth seekers. If people in stage III (Peck’s stage III) seek truth deeply and widely enough, they find what they are looking for - enough pieces to begin to be able to fit them together but never enough to complete the whole puzzle. In fact the more pieces they find, the larger and more magnificent the puzzle becomes. Yet they are able to get glimpses of the ‘big picture’ and to see that it is very beautiful indeed - and that it strangely resembles those ‘primitive myths and superstitions’ their Stage II parents or grandparents believe in. At that point they begin their conversion to Stage IV (1990:192)
Second, “There must be an objectification and critical choosing of one’s beliefs, values, and commitments, which come to be taken as a systemic unity. What were previously tacit and unexamined convictions and beliefs become matters of more explicit commitment and accountability” (op.cit.:62).

When this transition occurs in early to mid twenties there is a good deal of struggle involved for the individual. However when it is delayed until an individual’s thirties or forties, “it can be quite disturbing to the whole network of roles and relations they have formed. Sometimes people will work through only one of the two shifts we examined above. They will carry out the critical examination of beliefs and values and make choices in that regard but will not evolve the self -authorization of the “executive ego” (op.cit.:63).

People at this stage tend to hold themselves, and others, more accountable for their own “authenticity, congruence, and consistency” (Fowler 1985:70). It is important for people at this stage that they take responsibility for their beliefs, actions and decisions. They no longer tolerate following the crowd, or previously held significant others. The making of their own decisions becomes increasingly important to them. Because of these changes the place of relationships changes too. In the Synthetic-Conventional stage (stage 3) relationships were essential to the formation and maintenance of identity, now, at the Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4), relationships are built on a sense of personal autonomous identity and a respect for other’s autonomous identity. At this level Fowler claims that “a person’s reference group(s), for purposes of identification and inclusiveness in calculating moral responsibility may be quite wide”.220

At the Individuative-Reflective faith stage symbols, myths and ritual are found “meaningful if their “content” can be translated into usable concepts” (Fowler 1985:73). Here their usefulness is limited to the extent that they help the individual to make personal meaning and ‘sense’ of their beliefs, actions, position and decisions. The rituals, symbols and myths are useful because of their perceived underlying meaning. They can be accepted as illustrations of truth. In this way Fowler claims the “ knowing, inquiring subject brings to light and controls the object - the uninterpreted symbol, ritual or myth, which only rarely can act on us” (op.cit.:73).

Fowler states that stage 4 people are looking for the religious or ideological groups to which they belong to provide an acknowledgment and support of their self-authorization. The group needs to celebrate their responsibility for choices and beliefs. Speaking of church groups he says, that:

worship and other settings will make this possible if they combine a certain measure of intellectual stimulation and challenge with a quality of community fellowship that does not try to reimpose external and conventional religious expectations and authority. . . The underlying metaphor of the church correlated with this stage is likely to be a kind of unspoken pragmatic contractual individualism (Fowler 1987:90-91).

People at Stage 4 typically see themselves as ‘self sufficient, self starters, self-managing and self-repairing units (op.cit:91). It is this over emphasis on the place of self as against the need for community and relationships which can undermine the strengths of the stage. The over emphasis on the place of self can lead the individual into one of two distorted views. Firstly they can fall into a sense of self-aggrandisement. In

219 These relationships do not have to be current but may be the memory of previous significant others, that still hold sway on the individual's sense of identity.

220 Certainly wider than they would have comfortably referred to during the previous stage. Here there is at least a formal recognition of the diversity and relativity of different group interests and an implicit recognition of the obligation to take the claims and perspectives of other groups (classes, ethnic or racial groups, national communities, religious communities and the like) into account over against one’s own” (Fowler 1985:72).
this state of over inflation they can end up allowing themselves privileges and moral leeway that later prove to be destructive of either themselves, their relationships, or their values which they have ended up taking for granted. Or their dependence on self can lead to a deflation and excessive criticism and despair about self (Fowler 1987:91-92).

Individuative-Reflective individuals (stage 4) respond to a different style of leadership than they would have required in their previous Synthetic-Conventional stage. They do not sit easily within a leadership structure that requires them to be dependent upon it. They want a leadership structure that acknowledges and respects their personal positions and allows room for them to contribute to the decision making of the group. People at this fourth stage are more comfortable with criticism and debate, even disagreement. The conflict and disagreement that was once seen as potentially threatening is now viewed more positively, perhaps even relished. Here people are impatient with faith statements that are not objectified and rationalized. They require less of a religious hierarchy where leaders perpetuate a group dependence on themselves.

4.4.5 Stage 5 Conjunctive

Fowler (1995:184) indicates that he has difficulty explaining this stage and so introduces it with a number of analogies which encapsulate something like the emergence into the Conjunctive stage (stage 5). Two of these are:

Realising that the behaviour of light requires that it be understood both as a wave phenomenon and as particles of energy.

Looking at a field of flowers simultaneously through a microscope and a wide-angle lens.

These analogies illustrate what he calls *dialogical* knowing. “In *dialogical* knowing the multiplex structure of the world is invited to disclose itself. In a mutual “speaking” and “hearing”, knower and known converse in an I-Thou relationship. . . . Stage 5’s *dialogical* knowing requires a knower capable of dialogue. Epistemologically, there must be sufficient self-certainty to grant the known the initiative” (op.cit.:185).

Transition to Stage 5 is rare before age thirty, although people who have suffered much or felt the effects of injustice may develop this stage earlier than those who have lived more comfortable lives. Stage 5 requires

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221 Fowler describes the history of the term ‘Conjunctive ‘ in the following way. “ This name can be traced to Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), whose greatest work, *De Docta Ignorantia*, developed the idea of God as the *coincidentia oppositorum* - “the coincidence of opposities” - the being wherein all opposites and contradictions meet and are reconciled. Carl Jung adapted this idea in many of his psychological writings on religion, altering the term to the *coniunctio oppositorum* - the conjunction of opposites”. In some of Fowler’s earlier descriptions of the stages the fifth stage was titled ‘Paradoxical-Consolidative’ (e.g. 1985:79).

Peck’s comparable stage is the Mystic communal stage. Here Peck seems to bring together Fowler’s fifth and sixth stages under the one heading. Peck speaks of the Mythic communal stage drawing on the understanding of mystics through the ages saying: “Through the ages, mystics of every shade of religious belief have spoken of unity, of an underlying connectedness between things: between men and women, between us and the other creatures and even inanimate matter as well, a fitting together according to an ordinarily invisible fabric underlying the cosmos. . . . Mysticism also has to do with Mystery. Mystics acknowledge the enormity of the unknown, but rather than be frightened by it, they seek to penetrate ever deeper into it that they may understand more - even with the realization that the more they understand, the greater the mystery will become. They love mystery. . . . I have labeled Stage IV communal as well as mystical not because all mystics or even a majority of them live in communities but because among human beings they are the ones most aware that the whole world is a community and realise that what divides us into warring camps is precisely the lack of this awareness. Having become practiced at emptying themselves of preconceived notions and prejudices and able to perceive the invisible underlying fabric that connects everything, they do not think in terms of factions or blocs or even national boundaries; they *know* this is to be one world” (1990:192-193).
that one know suffering and loss, responsibility and failure, and the grief that is an inevitable part of having made irrevocable commitments of life and energy” (Fowler 1985:80-81).

At the Conjunctive stage Fowler says the “firm boundaries of the previous stage begin to become porous and permeable. The confident conscious ego must develop a humbling awareness of the power and influence of aspects of the unconscious on our reactions and behaviour - the individual, the social, and the archetypal unconscious” (Fowler 1984:64). This transition coincides with a realization of the power and reality of death. Typically this stage is not reached before the onset of mid-life, by which time numbers of friends or family members will have died confronting the individual with the realities and immanence of death, the feelings of growing and looking older, one’s own children reaching teenage or adult years, and an awareness that there are aspects of our own identity that we will not be able to change. Fowler sums up the necessary life experience for beginning the transition into this stage as having learnt “by having our noses rubbed in our finitude” (Fowler 1987:93). What is formed is a multi-dimensional self knowledge.

There are 4 hallmarks, listed by Fowler, of the conjunctive stage of faith development.

First, there is “an awareness of the need to face and hold together several unmistakable polar tensions in one’s life: the polarities of being both old and young and of being both masculine and feminine. Further it means integrating the polarity of being both constructive and destructive and the polarity of having a conscious and a shadow self” (Fowler 1984:65; italics as cited).

Second, “Conjunctive faith brings a felt sense that truth is more multiform and complex than most of the clear, either/or categories of the Individuative stage [stage 4] can properly grasp. In its richness, ambiguity, and multidimensionality, truth must be approached from at least two or more angles of vision simultaneously” (op.cit.:65). . . . Conjunctive faith comes to cherish paradox and the apparent contradictions of perspectives on truth as intrinsic to that truth (op.cit.:65). People at this level will “resist a forced synthesis or reductionist interpretations and are generally prepared to live with ambiguity, mystery, wonder, and apparent irrationalities” (Fowler 1985:81).

Third, “Conjunctive faith moves beyond the reductive strategy by which the Individuative stage interprets symbol, myth, and liturgy into conceptual meanings. . . . Conjunctive faith gives rise to a second naïveté, a postcritical receptivity and readiness for participation in the reality brought to expression in symbol and myth” (Fowler 1984:65).  

222 There is some evidence that persons who are disadvantaged and who suffer class, racial, sexual or ethnic discrimination and oppression - and who have previously made the difficult transition from stage 3 to 4 frequently confront stage 5 issues and construct stage 5 perspectives than do advantaged persons” (Fowler 1985:80).

223 Fowler goes on to illustrate this point with reference to a scientific example. “Like the discovery in physics that to explain the behaviour of light requires two different and unreconcilable models - one based on the model of packets of energy and one based on wave theory (Fowler 1984:65).”

224 Fowler (1995:187) explains the concept of second naïveté in stating - “In Paul Ricoeur’s powerful language, Conjunctive faith is not to be equated with a ‘first naïveté,’ a precritical relationship of unbroken participation in symbolically mediated reality. That style more aptly describes Stage 3 Synthetic-Conventional faith. Conjunctive faith has experienced the breaking of its symbols and the “vertigo of relativity.” It is a veteran of critical reflection and of the effort to “reduce” the symbolic, the liturgical and the mythical to conceptual meanings. . . . Ricoeur’s term “second naïveté” or “willed naïveté” begins to describe Conjunctive faith’s postcritical desire to resubmit to the initiative of the symbolic. It decides to do this, but it has to relearn how to do this. It carries forward the critical capacities and methods of the previous stage, but it no longer trusts them except as tools to avoid self-deception and to order truths encountered in other ways”.

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Fourth, “a genuine openness to the truths of traditions and communities other than one’s own. This openness, however, is not to be equated with a relativistic agnosticism (literally a not knowing) . . . Conjunctive faith exhibits a combination of committed belief in and through the particularities of a tradition, while insisting upon the humility that knows that the grasp on ultimate truth that any of our traditions can offer needs continual correction and challenge. This is to help overcome blind spots as well as the tendencies to idolatry (the over identification of our symbolizations of transcending truth with the reality of truth) to which all our traditions are prone” (Fowler 1984:65-66).

In describing people of Conjunctive faith, Fowler has stated that these individuals are “not likely to be ‘true-believers’, in the sense of an undialectical, single-minded, uncritical devotion to a cause or ideology. . . . they know that the line between the righteous and the sinners goes through the heart of each of us and our communities, rather than between us and them” (Fowler 1984:67).

Again as with all the stages the inherent weaknesses of this stage are the shadow side of their strengths. Fowler is quick to add that because of each stage’s weakness there is a need to remain open to the strengths and “correcting emphases and energies” of people at other stages (Fowler 1987:95).

4.4.6 Stage 6: - Universalising

Two key transitions occur in the move to a universalising faith. Firstly there is the “decentration from self” here the self is moved from the centre or focus in the individual’s life. This is coupled with a continued widening of the circle of “those who count”. Where the individual is better able to see the world through the perception of others who may be quite different from themselves. The second move is a move in the things an individual values and the sense of valuation they receive from them. Fowler acknowledges that it is only the rare individual who reaches this stage of faith development. The examples that he uses of people who have attained an equilibrated stage six level include- Mother Teresa, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi. Each of these are individuals who have given up the ‘self’ for the

225 Fowler lists the following weaknesses of the Conjunctive stage of faith:
1. “People can develop a deep sense of cosmic aloneness or homelessness.
2. The dark side of their awareness of God’s revelation, both as discourse and concealment, lies in a deepened appreciation of the otherness and the non-availability of God.
3. The dark side of their receptiveness to the witness and the truth of other traditions can be a subdued sense of the imperative to commend the Christian story in evangelisation.
4. The dark side of their awareness of being enmeshed in vast and complex systems can be a sense of paralysis and a retreat into a private world of spirituality. . . . Conjunctive Christians can fall into a kind of immobility that - if prolonged cuts the nerve of the call to partnership with God” (Fowler 1987:94-95).

226 Fowler states that “I am not sure that stage 6 really describes or requires any basic structural advance beyond stage 5. But its radical relativation of the self as centre and its self-spending action on behalf of a universal commonwealth of being result in so dramatic a redirection of the structures of faith that it constitutes a qualitative revolution”(Fowler 1985:90).

227 As people have moved through the stages of faith there has been a successive widening of the groups and individuals whose values become a matter of their concern as well, “This process reaches a kind of completion in Universalizing faith, for there a person decenters in the valuing process to such an extent that he/she participates in the valuing of the creator and values other beings - and being- from a standpoint more nearly identified with the love of Creator for creatures than from the standpoint of a vulnerable, defensive, anxious creature” (Fowler 1984:68). See also Fowler (1987:75).

228 See Fowler 1995:203-204.
230 Fredrick Downing (1986) describes the faith journey of Martin Luther King Jr and concludes that “not only does Fowler’s stage six seem congruent with the final phase of King’s life, but that life, so full of complexity yet so full of faith, seems to demand a construct that pushes in the direction of the universal and helps one begin to explain King’s journey toward the vision of life for all persons in the ‘world house’” (1986:293).
sake of the community. This, Fowler says, is a rare characteristic. They are able to behave in this way because they have penetrated the usual human obsessions with survival, security and significance.232

At each successive stage the ‘circle’ of people who are significant to the individual increases. Here at this final stage Fowler says “it means knowing the world through the eyes and experiences of persons, classes, nationalities and faiths, quite different from one’s own” (Fowler 1984:69).233

4.5 Using Fowler’s Faith Development Theory

Having outlined the basis and stages of Fowler’s theory of individual faith development it is now necessary to turn to the role of the church in the development of an individual’s faith. Put simply, Fowler suggests that as an individual can be described as ‘operating at a particular faith stage’ so too can a group of people, a family, a work-place community or a church or para-church group. It is to this aspect of his theory that we will now turn.

4.5.1 Modal Development Levels

To explain how groups can operate at a particular stage level Fowler draws on the work of Kenneth Keniston who has used the concept of ‘modal development levels’ to indicate the average acceptable level of development for adults in a given community. Fowler (1995) briefly mentions this work and how it could be used to stage religious groups and churches. He writes:

The faith stage model enables us to see the readiness and capacities of persons at each stage to be part of the covenant intended by their communities. Attention to the capacities of each stage help us to avoid expecting too much too soon. On the other hand, stage theory warns us against the coerciveness of what Kenneth Keniston has called the “modal developmental level” in communities. The modal development level is the average expectable level of development for adults in a given community. In faith terms, it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in a community all aim. The modal level operates as a kind of magnet in religious communities. Patterns of nurture prepare children and youth to grow up to the modal level but not beyond it. Persons from outside the community are attracted to the community because of its modal development level. The operation of the modal level in a community sets an effective limit on the ongoing process of growth in faith (Fowler 1995:294; italics as cited).

In ‘Faith Development Through the Family Life Cycle’ (1990) Fowler extends his analysis of modal development levels to consider the faith stages operative in family life and marital relations. In order to look at the operation of faith stages within churches we will need to consider the work Fowler has done on faith stages and family systems. Because of the focus of this present study I will limit the summary of Fowler’s descriptions to those which apply to families operating in ways conducive to faith stages 2-4.234

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232 He goes on to claim that people who operate at this stage often become martyrs for the visions they incarnate.
233 Appendix 3 summarizes the ‘aspects’ of each faith stage as described by Fowler.
234 A fuller treatment of the family organisational and relational operations is provided in (Fowler 1990:116-120). Fowler introduces his discussion with the following caution - "Please understand that this model is based not on empirical enquiry and demonstration, at this point, but upon hypothetical theoretical construction, buttressed by informal observation (op.cit.:116). A summary of table of family systems and faith stages is presented in Appendix 4. Fowler does not provide detailed information on the differentiated family style.
4.5.2 The Legalistic Family Style

The legalistic family style “correlates most explicitly with the Mythic-Literal Stage” (stage 2) (op.cit.:120). Families functioning in this way make decisions through following rules or established procedures. Fowler says “there will be adherence to authoritarian teaching, an adherence to rules, even if conflict or hurt result.” 235 Discipline is based on ‘moral reciprocity’, in which ‘good’ is rewarded and ‘bad’ is punished. This stresses obedience to the rules even though there may be little explanation given to justify the rules that are employed. The images of God tend to involve a “stern, and just, but loving parent” who is related to “in external ways as a maintainer of justice and a law giver” (Fowler 1990:120). Such family organisations are often employed by fundamentalist families. 236 Fowler says that “these may be families where you have leaders who have had conversion experiences early in their lives, or may have had brokenness early in their lives, and in reconstructing have formed fairly rigid roles and role-expectations for family members” (Fowler 1990:117).

4.5.3 The Symbiotic Family Style

The symbiotic family style correlates to the Synthetic-Conventional (Stage 3) faith stage. Here Fowler says “The family style exhibits a good deal more internal differentiation and interpersonal sensitivity. It likely places reliance upon traditional expectations regarding patterns of leadership, and has a fairly well developed set of interpersonal sensitivities within clear roles” (1990:120). There is an avoidance of conflict in order to maintain relationships and discipline is maintained through the “threat of emotional exclusion or of isolation coupled with the appeal to conscience” (op.cit.:120). Here images of God include “God as a friend, a life-line, a companion, a spirit of harmony and protector of relationships. . . here we have an internal, personal, relationship with God”(op.cit.:120).

4.5.4 The Individuating Family Style

The Individuating family style correlates to the Individuative-Reflective (Stage 4) faith stage where “consistent leadership is based upon reasonably separate roles and relationships.” Here decision making is more democratic in the “expression of points of view.” Expectations and traditions are valued but not held to slavishly. “Conflict is minimalized through discussion and generation of options, and a more conscious and shared kind of control becomes possible”(op.cit.:120). Fowler says the images of God “will be both personal and conceptual, and correlated with a fair amount of conscious and critically aware commitments” (op.cit.:120).

In this analysis of family styles we gain a glimpse of how the faith stages might be applicable not only to individuals but also to the faith operations of groups of people, whether they be as family units, work groups or churches and para-church groups.

These ‘modal development levels’ provide a way of understanding the relationship between the faith level of an individual and that of the ‘group’ to which they belong. Fowler (1990:118) notes that “these stages trail the personal development of partners (in a family situation) because they require systems modifications - which take more time and may be blocked by relations in the extended family, or by the influence of immediate cultures or religious groups, or by unevenness of spousal development, or by critical events or circumstances, or some combinations of all of the above.” 237

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235 Fowler (1990:117) continues saying - “we understand this if we see that in the Mythic-Literal stage, with which this style corresponds, there is not yet a fully developed sense of the interiority of the self or an interiority of others. . . . This means that reliance on rules is frequently more important than the consequences of rule adherence for the persons involved. The family leaders are so concerned about being ‘right’ persons, or a ‘right’ family, that they literally cannot see and feel what it is doing to the persons affected”.

236 Here Fowler points out that there both Catholic and Protestant versions of the legalistic family style (op.cit.:117).

237 Here Fowler draws on the principle of homeostasis, claiming it’s applicability for family systems understandings. Where there is a change in family dynamics, for what ever reason, Fowler suggests there is
From Fowler’s work it is clear that he believes churches too can be characterized as operating at particular developmental levels. The faith levels are seen in the educational practices, the religious celebrations and patterns of governance of the church or para-church. In the Christian church Fowler isolates five dimensions of the churches life and mission which act as models and faith stage sponsors within the church. He describes these five dimensions by drawing on Greek New Testament terms: *kerygma* (preaching and teaching), *leitourgia* (worship and sacraments), *koinonia* (personal and group prayer and study), *diakonia* (involvement in mission), and *paideia* (practical theological reflection on vocation) (Fowler 1991:178).

Through these five dimensions churches act as sponsors for individuals to particular stages of faith. They create a climate which can nurture a “developmental expectation” for individuals approaching in their individual faith journeys the modal development level operative within the church community. Churches also provide developmental constraints for those individuals exploring faith stages beyond the modal developmental level operative within the church community to which they belong. As will be seen shortly this is a point of some significance to the present study.

The modal development levels operative within a group are attractive for people who are looking for faith presentations and operations at the same stage or are in the process of transitioning into that stage. Fowler calls the church’s modal development level a magnet to people seeking to find answers and a way of faith-operation at that level. Equally though, the modal development level of a church can become limiting, even stifling for the individual who is moving beyond the modal development level operative within the church. Speaking of the tensions between stages 3 and 4 Fowler says:

> Commonly those churches which have as their modal developmental level the Synthetic-Conventional and Interpersonal stage have found it hard to make space and welcome for the Individuative types. By the same token, persons in transition to or already equilibrated in the Individuative stage often find life in Synthetic Conventional communities stifling and dull. (Fowler 1987:92)

He goes on to say “If an adult does not develop to the modal level, he or she is made to feel deviant and somewhat deficient. If, on the other hand, a person develops to a stage beyond the mode, then he or she is also made to feel deviant. There is a powerful coerciveness about the modal developmental level in a community” (Fowler 1987:97).

In summary Fowler suggests that religious groups can be characterized as exhibiting certain stages of faith development. These modal development levels are part of the attraction of a particular group in ‘a season’ of a person’s faith journey. Fowler sees that the modal development level of the church can act as a sponsor to the continued faith journey of the individuals that make it up. However if the individual is in some way out of step with the modal level operative in the religious community then they can be made to feel deviant. Fowler states that his observations have lead him “to judge that the modal development level in most middle-class American churches and synagogues is best described in terms of Synthetic-Conventional faith or perhaps just beyond it” (1995:294). Table 4.2 shows the strengths and weaknesses of each faith stage and a tendency for the system (family operating systems) to restore and return to balance. Therefore he says - “If one of the partners begins to grow or develop through religious education, therapy or taking on new responsibilities, and if he/she begins to differentiate in new ways, the other partner is likely to regress. Why? The regression is an unconscious effort to try to preserve the homeostasis in balance” (op.cit.:116).

238 Fowler says (1995:286-287) - ‘In speaking of faith sponsorship, I take a term that Erik Erikson has reclaimed in our time - a term that has had long antecedent use in the context of preparation of children and adults for Christian baptism and church membership. By sponsorship in this context I mean the way a person or community provides affirmation, encouragement, guidance and models for a person’s ongoing growth and development. The sponsor is one who walks with you; one who knows the path and can provide guidance”.

239 Fowler 1995:296

240 Fowler says that “enabling such groups to coexist and work together with integrity in a church represents, when it occurs, one of the major accomplishments of pastoral leadership and care” (Fowler 1987:92).
alongside those the styles of ‘educational practices’, the ‘religious celebrations’ and ‘patterns of governance’ appropriate for each stage.
4.5.5. Cross-stage static

Fowler uses the concept of ‘cross stage static’ to indicate the misunderstandings and problems that occur when a person or group operating at one faith stage confronts a person or group operating at a different stage. “Clashes or antipathies between persons in these stages represent one common form of ‘cross-stage static’” (Fowler 1987:92). The term “cross stage static” indicates some of the difficulties experienced between individuals of various faith stages or between individuals and churches operating at different faith stages. M. Scott Peck highlights the cross stage static by saying- “Mostly we are threatened by people in the stages above us. . . . stage II (Peck’s stage II which corresponds to Fowlers stage 3) people are . . . very threatened by the individualists and skeptics of stage III (corresponding to Fowler’s stage 4), and even more by the mystics of stage IV (Fowler stage 5 & 6), who seem to believe in the same sorts of things they do but believe in them with a freedom they find absolutely terrifying. . . . stage III (Fowler stage 4) are cowed by stage IV (Fowler stage 5 & 6) people, who seem to be scientific-minded like themselves and know how to write good footnotes, yet somehow still believe in this crazy God business” (1990:195). It is very difficult for a church that is operating at an earlier staged modal development level to allow the space and freedom needed by individuals operating in the latter stages.241

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the understanding of faith and the faith development model employed by James Fowler. I have presented Fowler’s faith stage model as a ‘scaffold for insight’ in a similar way that Goffman utilises the dramaturgical model for understanding everyday life. In this way the strength of the ‘scaffold’ as a means of understanding what couldn’t otherwise be understood is held to while also reminding ourselves of the limitations of scaffolding and difference between the scaffold, however solid, and reality. The chapter has then moved to consider the usefulness of Fowler’s faith stage theory not only at the individual level but also at the level of families, groups and church or para-church groups. To do this we have considered his use of modal development levels and cross-stage static. In the next chapter we consider the leaving process of the ‘EPC’ church leavers. To date the common sociological explanation for people leaving church has been connected to the theory of secularisation. We must therefore consider the applicability of secularisation as a mechanism for understanding the leaving process of those interviewed in this study.

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241 Fowler says that “enabling such groups to coexist and work together with integrity in a church represents, when it occurs, one of the major accomplishments of pastoral leadership and care” (Fowler 1987:92).
Chapter Five

The Leaving Process

5.1 Introduction

As has been previously indicated ‘EPC’ churches have experienced tremendous growth in recent decades across the entire globe. This has been no less significant in the New Zealand situation where this stream of the church has shown positive growth figures for the last three decades, and this in a social environment where other streams of the Christian church have been in steady decline. Despite this growth there are now also indications of a plateauing of previous growth rates within at least some of the ‘EPC’ churches and large “back-door” losses in others that are masked by larger growth figures.

Such movements of both growth and exodus from ‘EPC’ churches is of interest to sociologists and historians of religion. There is also increasing interest among sociological researchers in the area of religious disengagement and disaffiliation. Recent trends involving the plateauing of some charismatic and Pentecostal churches and the increase in the number of leavers is also a concern to leaders of these churches. In 1997 the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of New Zealand wrote in the denomination magazine as follows:

The statistics of New Zealand Baptist churches reveal a ‘plateau’ with attendance in our churches fluctuating between 36,000 and 39,000 with a figure at the end of 1995 of 37,367. Membership has also remained static for several years at about 23,000 . . . Compounding our problem appears to be a constant (and disturbing) stream of people leaving our churches - some of those who have been actively involved in the past but who claim to have “lost heart”, “felt abused by leadership”, “nothing here for our family” or simply feel they no longer identify with what was once their church.

Despite this interest on the part of sociologists and concern expressed by church leaders there appears to be little awareness of the reasons why people leave or what happens to them or their faith after leaving. One influential Pentecostal pastor, leading a large church, who was interviewed in the course of this study expressed his surprise that numbers of people would be leaving ‘EPC’ churches and not attending a church at all. He said: “I would have thought there would be a low percentage of people who would just not go to church at all.” He also indicated that he would be very surprised if my research showed otherwise. His comment was not an isolated incident.

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242 Bromley states “The large, continuing membership losses in mainline denominations, the high rate of defections from Catholic religious communities, and the abrupt decline in affiliations with new religious movements accompanied by high rates of disaffiliation of existing members all triggered research on the exit process” (Bromley 1988:10)


244 Very early on in the research I found that in general pastors and ministers had not remained in touch with people who had previously been a part of the church they led. I initially thought their reluctance to identify leavers was linked to a concern that my interviewing such leavers might reflect badly on their church. Trying to overcome this I asked pastors and ministers to simply tell me the stories of people who had left without giving me any identifying material about the person. Many pastors could then tell me about people who left in very declarative terms, but most were unable to tell me about what had happened to such people since leaving the church. Nor were they typically able to identify the leavers who simply drifted out over a period of time, although this was the predominant manner of leaving described by the leavers themselves.

245 (125.38) His assumption was that they would be moving from church to church.
There were others among the ‘informed insiders’ who were aware of leavers and who had made a point of finding out what these people were doing and why. These ‘informed insiders’ had maintained contact with at least some of these ex-church people. I met four pastors in New Zealand and three in Melbourne whose concern for church leavers had encouraged them to become involved personally in supporting leavers in their faith and helping them to find faith communities more responsive to their concerns.

This chapter will seek to outline the understandings of both sociology, (drawing on the theory of secularisation), and of church leaders in addressing this issue. The reasons given by church leaders are those drawn from interviews with fifty four informed insiders as well as the general observational data of the researcher as a minister within an ‘EPC’ church for eight years, and a member of such churches for 16 years.

5.2 Secularisation

The theory of secularisation dates back at least as far as the beginnings of the discipline of Sociology. Indeed for a number of the early sociologists secularisation - the decline of religion and its imminent replacement with the achievements of social science - were looked forward to with delight and certitude. For most of this century secularisation has been simply accepted -Stark and Iannaccone state, “it seems fair to suggest that perhaps no other single social scientific proposition has been so widely accepted” (Stark and Iannaccone 1994:249). Today, however, the general acceptance of secularisation has almost been completely forsaken. This is true where secularisation has been taken as a threefold move in religious beliefs and practices involving: first, a disenchantment with the teachings and practices of the church (both for individuals and for society in general); second, a trend to disengagement with Christian churches or institutionalised faith, and third, a transposition from religious explanations for events in individual’s lives and the lives of others around them to secular explanations and beliefs. Where secularisation has been perceived as involving this three-phase process of disenchantment, disengagement and transposition it has in effect been taken to mean the imminent decline or decay of religion.

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246 I interviewed five of these pastors in the final stages of my research, when I had been conducting interviews for over 18 months. Prior to this I had thought that this was an issue that concerned theologians and church leaders but about which few were actively involved in trying to understand and confront. The interviews with these five pastors came as a pleasant surprise. One of the Melbourne pastors I spoke to had himself published a book dealing with this issue— “So Long Farewell and Thanks For the Church” (Stuart 1992).

247 “The word ‘secularisation’ has been in official use since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 when it was used to describe the transfer of ecclesiastical territories to Brandenburg. With the advent of sociology the idea became part of a grand vision in which modern, rational, ‘secular’ ways progressively replaced primitive and traditional ways of behaving and thinking” (McCallum 1987:407).

248 For the founding fathers of Sociology the sociology of religion was central to the sociological enterprise. Berger and Luckmann (1963) lament the later marginalisation of this area of sociology. Both Berger (1967) and Luckmann (1967) proposed a new approach designed to bring the sociology of religion back into the centre of Sociological theorising (Tschannen 1994:78).

249 “When Comte coined the word sociology he expected this new science soon to replace religion as the basis for moral judgements and thus to be the culmination of the secularisation process. That the most famous early social scientists gave much of their scholarly attention to religion is best understood in terms of their fervent hopes that it would soon disappear” (Martin 1969: Quoted from Stark & Iannaccone 1994:249).

250 In the Australian context Black (1991:3) states - “writers such as Bruce Wilson (1982; 1983), Kaldor (1987) and McCallum (1987) have pointed to marked declines in church affiliation, church attendance, belief in God, participation in religious rites of passage. . . . McAllister (1988) sees such changes as evidence of an ongoing process of secularisation. Mol (1985), Kaldor (1987) and McCallum (1987:1988) see the changes as significant, but not necessarily as part of an ongoing process. Bouma (1983) argues that the fluctuations in church attendance which have occurred for the population as a whole during the past twenty years or so have been relatively minor, and that they should not be regarded as decisive evidence of a process of secularisation. Likewise, Bouma and Dixon (1986) use data from the Australian Values Study to challenge ‘the myth of secular Australia’”.

251 For example Hadden records “Few forecasts have been uttered with more unshakable confidence than sociology’s belief that religion is in the midst of its final death throes. writes Gerhard Lenski in the introduction to The Religious Factor in 1961: . . . from its inception [sociology] was committed to the positivist view that religion in the modern world is merely a survival from man’s primitive past, and doomed to disappear in an era
Secularisation interpreted in this way has been vigorously attacked. The emergence of ‘new religious groups’, Pentecostalism and the charismatic movements as well as the rapid growth of American ‘conservative Protestant churches’ have been held up as contrary evidence. This has been added to by survey data indicating the continuance of religious belief for individuals across modern Western societies. Added to this at a theoretical level has been the contrary evidence to secularisation contained in the ‘religious economies model’ for understanding religious practice which has critiqued the secularisation theory. Finally secularisation theory has been questioned at the empirical level with data like that produced in ‘The Churching of America’ in which “Finke and Stark argue that between 1776 and 1990, religious ‘adherence’ in the United States grew from 17% to 60%” (Yamane, 1997:111). The cumulative effect of these counter arguments to secularisation has lead Stark and Iannaccone to propose:

... dropping the term secularisation from all theoretical discourse, first, on the grounds that it has served only ideological and polemical, not theoretical, functions - as David Martin (1969) has long argued; second, because observable instances to which to apply it seem lacking. Indeed what is needed is not a theory of decline or decay of religion, but of religious change, providing for rises as well as for declines in the level of religiousness found in societies, and indeed a theory that can account for long periods of stability” (1994:23; italics as cited).

Indeed the debate has moved to question “whether or not ‘secularisation theory’ itself exists” (Tschannen 1991:395). Despite the prominence of the theory in sociological literature there appears to be little precision regarding what the theory itself involves. Jeffrey Hadden (1987:598), for example, states that

of science and general enlightenment. From the positivist standpoint, religion is, basically, institutionalised ignorance and superstition (p.3).” (Hadden 1987:587).

Turner (1991:3) speaking of the New Zealand situation recently wrote - “Gurus, healers, therapies, personal development and human potential movements, meditation and spirituality techniques, American, Chinese, Japanese, Buddhist and especially Hindu systems, all offering seminars and courses promising to enable anyone to reach any desired goal, and often changing accordingly. . . the New Age philosophies and teachings: yoga, meditation, spirituality, personal fulfillment, self-esteem and self-assertion courses . . . all offering true teaching and the effective techniques. . . all this religious variety show, denies a merely secularised society. . . In fact this thesis has been steadily disproved. In the West it has not been the century of secularisation, but of unprecedented religious innovation. From a wider perspective than just New Zealand”. Tschannen (1994:71) writes “perhaps the most impressive gathering of scholarly forces to examine this issue has been assembled around Jeffrey K. Hadden and Anson Shupe (1986;1988;1989). New fundamentalism in America, Liberation Theology in Latin America, Islamic Fundamentalism, Catholicism in Poland, Soka Gakkai in Japan, Christian Democracy in Europe are only a few of the topics addressed in these collections of essays, each underscoring the health of religion in the modern world. (Tschannen, 1994:71).

Tschannen (1994:72) believes that “Perhaps the most convincing evidence of this type is given by Greeley's American surveys (1989)”. The ‘religious economies model’ is based on a view of society that sees a religious economy consisting “of all the religious activity going on in any society. Religious economies are “like commercial economies in that they consist of a market of current and potential customers, a set of firms seeking to serve that market, and religious ‘product lines’ offered by various firms (Stark 1985, Stark & Bainbridge 1985, 1987)” (quoted in Yamane 1997:111). Finke “summarizes the logic of the model: deregulation leads to pluralism, pluralism to competition, competition to specialisation of product (catering to market niche) and aggressive recruitment, specialisation and recruitment to higher demand, and higher demand to greater participation”. (Finke 1990:622).

And others - Peter Berger (1992) wrote of secularisation theory - “By the late 1970's it had been falsified with a vengeance. As it turned out, the theory never had much empirical substance to begin with. It was valid, and continues to be valid, for one region of the world, Europe, a few scattered territories, such as Quebec which underwent an amazing process of secularisation after the Second World War, and a fairly thin stratum of Western-educated intellectuals everywhere. The rest of the world is as fervently religious as it ever was, and arguably more so than it was earlier in this century” (Berger 1992:15).

Berger (1979:138) states “Historians and social scientists find it hard to agree on what secularisation has been in the past and on what it is today - let alone on what its future course will be”.
secularisation theory “is a hodgepodge of loosely employed ideas rather than a systematic theory.” And David Yamane (1997:112) concurs with this saying that “‘secularisation’ has come to mean so many different things to so many different people that it has in certain respects become meaningless.”

The supporters of secularisation have replied to these attacks in two ways. First, by using empirical data suggesting that religious decline is in fact occurring and that this can be measured by declining attendance patterns at church and by statements of belief in survey data. The second means of fighting back has been to call for a renewed look at what is meant by the term secularisation itself. For some this has led to a return to find the original intention of the exponents of secularisation within the sociology of religion while others have sought the introduction of neo-secularisation as an emergent paradigm with more precise and less sweeping claims.

Tschannen (1991) has mined the theoretical understandings of secularisation proposed by Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, Bryan Wilson, David Martin, Richard Fenn, Talcott Parsons and Robert Bellah not in search of a super-theory but rather to identify some exemplars that encapsulate the core essence of these respective understandings. The three core exemplars he identifies from these works are ‘differentiation’, ‘rationalisation’ and ‘worldliness’. Together they act as the driving force behind secularisation.

Of the Neosecularisation paradigm Yamane (1997:116) writes:

Neosecularisation theory suggests that while the quantities of individual religious beliefs and behaviour may be high, as in the United States, these are not the relevant data. What needs to be assessed is the orientation people have to religious authority structures. A secularised society is one in which people will feel free to believe and act in ways which differ from or even go against the prescribed views of religious authorities. People’s views and behaviours will be characterised by autonomy and choice (italics as cited). Two recent examples are - “The truth about Religion in Britain” (1995) by Steve Bruce in The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 34: 417-430. And ‘Secularisation in the Netherlands?’ (1996) by Frank J. Lechner in The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion 35 (3) : 252-264. And Karel Dobbelaere (1984).

In so doing he is aware that he leaves out significant other secularisation theorists “most notably Sabino Acquaviva (1961 1966), Jurgen Habermas (1969), Daniel Bell (1977), Niklas Luhmann (9177), and Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge (1985)” (Tschannen 1991:396). He does this because of his use of Kuhnian framework where he sees that a paradigm must be grounded in a concrete scientific community. To achieve this he has chosen the theorists mentioned above who are prominent members of the ‘Conférence Internationale de Sociologie religions’

He defines exemplars from Kuhn’s paradigm shift theory in scientific knowledge as “shared examples of past scientific achievements, or as problem solutions. These simple cognitive devices help the scientific community function even in the absence of universally shared rules and theories” (Masterman, 1970-quoted from Tschannen 1991:396)

Tschannen states “ In order to be effective, a paradigm must be simple and be based on typical examples rather than on elaborate definitions. This paradigm is based on a core of three elements: differentiation, rationalisation, and worldliness. In the course of history, religion becomes progressively differentiated from other domains of social life, eventually emerging as a very specific institutional domain within a new type of social structure made up of several such institutions (education, politics, economics, etc.). For example, the Church and the State become clearly differentiated (differentiation). At the same time, the different non-religious institutions born from this process of differentiation start working on the basis of criteria that are rationally related to their specific social functions, independently from any religious control or guidance. Thus, for example, the economy starts to work in a rational way dictated by its own inherent logic (rationalisation). The impact of these processes on the religious sphere itself causes it to lose some of its specificity and to become more worldly. Religious organisations start to cater to the psychological needs of their members (worldliness)” (Tschannen, 1991:400-401).

The religious environment has changed within Britain in different ways to that of the USA. Generally secularisation in Britain has meant reduced involvement in church while in the United States secularisation
Chaves (1994:750) is the key contributor to a Neosecularisation paradigm, stating that secularisation is “best understood not as a decline of religion, (the old paradigm) but as the declining scope of religious authority.” This Chaves sees occurring at three levels, the societal, organisational and individual. He says:

Secularisation at the societal level may be understood as the declining capacity of religious elites to exercise authority over other institutional spheres. Secularisation at the organisational level may be understood as religious authority’s declining control over organisational resources within the religious sphere. And secularisation at the individual level may be understood as the decrease in the extent to which individual actions are subject to religious control. The unifying theme is that secularisation refers to declining religious authority at all levels of analysis (Chaves, 1994:757).

This renewed focus on redefining secularisation either by a return to some of the key theorists or in the work of neo-secularisation theorists has focused attention on religious change rather than religious decline. In this study secularisation perceived as religious decline is of no value although some of the new perceptions found in the work of Tschannen and Dobbelaere to return to the intent of older understandings of secularisation and the work of the neo-secularisation theorists (like Yamane) have been found to be quite useful. A common component found in both the work of Tschannen and Dobbelaere and the neosecularisationists is their focus on the privatisation of religion.

Tschannen drawing on the list of theorists above focuses attention on differentiation, rationalisation and worldliness as the driving forces of secularisation. One of the resultant outcomes is an increased privatisation of religion. Drawing principally on the work of Thomas Luckmann he describes this as follows:

. . . the individual must construct his own (privatised) vision of the world by drawing freely on the elements he finds in the different competing world views. This privatisation has two corollaries. On the one hand, religious themes born in this private sphere (such as “individual autonomy”) become generalised and start to function as elements of a new “invisible’ religion.” On the other hand, this privatised religion becomes even more worldly as it increasingly concerns itself with the “little” transcendences of daily life (for instance, in the “cults’ of togetherness”) (1991:398)

From this understanding people are producing their own cocktail of religious beliefs and practices. Luckmann continues:

. . . Therefore he/she (the individual) must construct his/her own personal identity. Personal identity becomes, essentially a private phenomenon...internalised system of

has occurred within the churches themselves. Stark & Iannaccone (1994:231) speak of Wilson’s work in this area saying “ In the book that established him as Europe’s leading proponent of the secularisation thesis, Wilson (1966:126) claimed that ‘religious attendance is itself a secular value in America.’ He then argued that ‘the decline in membership and attendance in Britain, and the secular meaning of such affiliation in America together with the lack of depth of many religious manifestations in the United States suggest that religion is in decline in both countries’. In a more recent book Wilson (1982a:152) repeated his claim noting that ‘few observers doubt that the actual content of what goes on in the major churches in Britain is very much more ‘religious’ than what occurs in American churches”.

One aspect of the differentiation process (laicization) described by Dobbelaere involves the reduction of the social impact of religion and the restriction of it to the personal life. (Dobbelaere 1981:116) Tschannen (1994:74) speaking of this religious eclecticism says “ most empirical research brings support to the theoretical eclecticism. For example, after questioning 719 subjects on their religious attitudes, Cipriani (1993:92) found evidence for the existence of a ‘diffused religion’. On the one hand, this form of religiosity can be taken as a kind of falsification of ‘secularisation theory’. But on the other hand Cipriani contends that it could also represent ‘a new version of secularisation.”

Inclusive gender terms in italics mine.
ultimate significance. But this system can no longer be internalised as a whole. The individual must construct, not only his/her personal identity but also his/her individual system of ultimate significance (quoted in Tschannen 1991:408).

As will become increasingly obvious this study finds people changing, re-evaluating and critically choosing the substance and practice of their faith in new ways both during and after the process of leaving the church. Their leaving does not necessarily lead to a decline of faith but to significant changes to their faith both in substance and practice. As Wright (1996:1) says “religion is not disappearing but mutating.” This is supported by Davie (1994:198) who links the change to the shift in postmodernist society saying - “religious life - like so many other features of Post-industrial or postmodern society - is not so much disappearing as mutating for the sacred undoubtedly persists and will continue to do so, but in forms that may be very different from those which have gone before.” Therefore an understanding of secularisation that concentrates on a decline of faith, or apostasy is of little use. In fact the results of this study could be added to those already mentioned that are being marshalled to falsify such a secularisation paradigm. The work of Tschannen and the neo-secularisation theorists with their focus on religious change rather than decline has been found to be more helpful. Of special significance is their focus on the privatisation of religion.

Having considered the insights offered by the secularisation theorists to this present study I will now consider the understandings of the ‘EPC’ church leaders as to why people leave ‘EPC’ churches.

5.3 The Understandings of Church Leaders and Informed Insiders

Whatever the reasons offered by pastors and ministers for why people leave churches like theirs, for most, their puzzlement and tentative explanations are as close as they ever get to the leavers themselves. As one pastor who had seen a number of people leave his church in recent months said, “You can’t do much about them. It is an awful thing to watch. But ultimately people have to decide for themselves don’t they.” This inactive speculation regarding leavers was prevalent amongst pastors and ministers, both those I formally interviewed and those with whom I spoke informally at conferences, seminars and other gatherings of church leaders. This side-line speculation continued despite their knowledge that many of the leavers are intelligent, creative, and innovative people who had previously been significant leaders within their churches.

The understandings of church leaders and informed insiders as to why people leave the church can be divided into four categories: societal factors, individual factors, church leadership factors and faith concerns. I am going to look at each of these categories in more detail highlighting the principal factor in each case. Table 5.1 gives a summary of the reasons suggested by the church leaders and informed insiders (n=43).

5.3.1 Societal Factors

A number of pastors and ministers commented on changing societal factors that influenced people towards leaving the church. These ranged from the introduction of television, to increased work pressure, the return of increasing numbers of women to the workforce, increased leisure options and a general increase of socialisation.
pressure on people’s time and commitments. All of these societal changes are seen as giving the individual either less discretionary time or more competition for such time. Although these factors were commonly mentioned by pastors and leaders of the churches and are no doubt factors affecting church participation within our present cultural situation, they do not appear to be highly significant for the leavers themselves.

Table 5.1 Reasons Provided by Church Leaders and Informed Insiders as to Why People Leave ‘EPC’ Churches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Societal Factors</th>
<th>Individual Factors</th>
<th>Church/leadership Factors</th>
<th>Faith Factors</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- work</td>
<td>- giving up faith</td>
<td>- dictatorial, authoritarian styles</td>
<td>- lack of clear conversion experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- leisure activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>- lack of women leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Sunday shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td>- sexual/spiritual abusive leadership</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- television</td>
<td></td>
<td>- change of leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Changes in societal attitudes</td>
<td>2. Stage of life issues</td>
<td>2. Unable to find a place of service or role in church.</td>
<td>2. Crisis of faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>- reduced loyalty</td>
<td>- demands of work or family</td>
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<tr>
<td>- lack of resilience</td>
<td>3. Become comfortable with lifestyle and give less energy to church/faith</td>
<td>3. Hurt, bitter, disenchanted or disillusioned by church decisions, direction or vision</td>
<td>3. Lack of theological framework within which to make sense of pain and difficulties of life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Focus on financial security, and job.</td>
<td>4. Church no longer relevant to life concerns of people leaving.</td>
<td>4. Demonic oppression</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Hurt or burnt-out people</td>
<td>5. Lack of space to raise concerns about church direction, decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Leave through personal moral ‘failing’.</td>
<td>7. Lack of theological and intellectual depth</td>
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<td>8. Children wanting to stop going to church.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Get out of touch with the church.</td>
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</table>

Of those interviewed who had left the church seven (10%) indicated that time pressure was a factor in either their withdrawal from church or their final decision to leave. Six of these related to time pressure as a result

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273 Fanstone (1993:39). speaks of the changes to the options available on Sundays ‘garage sales, open homes, flea markets, sport, school fairs, restaurants and shops being open, video and film outlets open. For many church is just one more leisure option.
of working hours and one was pressure brought on by the need to spend time with young children.\(^{274}\) None of the people who mentioned time pressure as a factor indicated that it was the major factor in their decision. Underlying each case there were more significant issues raised than the time involved in being part of a church body. Six of the seven (who mentioned time pressure) joined another group soon after leaving the church. Although the time commitments of the groups was less than that required by church attendance\(^{275}\) it was still a considerable investment of time that they were making towards the maintenance of their faith.

The last interviewee who mentioned time pressure as a factor and did not join a group indicated that time pressure was a convenient excuse.

(Tracey) - . . . yeah I drifted out . . . I was still going ‘til I started work. And I still went for a while after that. And then I started using that as an excuse. Oh I'm really tired, I'm not going. And it was hard work, it was 15 years since I had worked full-time. I had two young children. I was running a house and working 5 and a half days a week in a job where I was leaving at 7.15 in the morning and getting home at 6 at night. And working Saturdays. . . . In lots of ways it was not unintentional. There can be intentional and unintentional drifting and I think this was intentional drifting. Because I wasn't happy with the way it was going (51.83).

5.3.2 Individual Factors

The individual factor that was most commonly reported by the pastors and ministers was that these people were ‘backsliding’\(^{276}\) - they are giving their faith away and returning to a previous style of life without the demands and costs required in living a Christian life. Some saw this as a result of being drawn back into the values and lifestyle of the ‘world’, others saw it as a result of some disappointment within the church (not getting a position they would have liked\(^{277}\)) or a general drifting into apostasy.

The leaver’s transcripts reveal a different story than those expressed by the pastors and ministers above. Firstly only one of the interviewees left with the intention of moving away from his Christian faith.\(^{278}\) The

\(^{274}\) Time pressures from within the church itself may be a factor as much as time pressures from outside the church. One of the leavers, described in Hendricks (1993:113) had left a mega-church in the United States because of an inundation of programmes and activities at the church. Hendricks writes about such comments that “the statement ‘I’m too busy’ may say as much about the church as it does about the person. In fact, Canadian Sociologist Reginald Bibby (Reginald Bibby 1987) argues that some churches today may be declining not because they offer too few choices, but too many. Churches have responded to a cultural demand for a specialised contribution by being so graciously compliant, the groups have essentially served up religion in whatever form consumers want. They have not provided a religion based on what religion is, but a religion based on what the market will bear . . . . The result is that service attendance is just another fragment to be drawn on when customers find it convenient to do so. Ironically, religious groups are losing attenders not because they are failing but because they are succeeding.”

\(^{275}\) For five of the people their groups only met fortnightly and for the other one it was a continuation of a midweek group she had been committed to for some time.

\(^{276}\) The concept goes back to early New Testament understandings. Demas (a biblical character) was described as the first Christian ‘backslider’ whom Paul ( 2 Tim 4:10) writes about saying - “for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.” And in the letter of John (1 John 2:19) it states “they went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us (NIV).”

\(^{277}\) One pastor interviewed said - “In our situation we haven’t lost too many to nothing (no church). People who have moved out generally have gone somewhere else but at the moment I can think of a couple of families who over a period of time have not been happy, and have ended up not going anywhere. So that phenomenon has caught up with us. I’d say (over the last) 3-4 years. It’s been this middle age sort of thing again, where they gradually seemingly either become disillusioned or (they have) not got to the height maybe of leadership they were expecting to as a younger person” (74.13; italics mine).

\(^{278}\) This interviewee was a unique case among those interviewed in this research. He had been brought up in a family that was heavily committed to a mainline Christian church, and he had himself become very involved in his late teenage years and then been a part of ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups for over a decade.
vast majority were clear that they were not leaving their faith in the decision to leave the church. This statement is reinforced by the high number of leavers who joined Christian groups after leaving the church. If their intention was to move away from the cost and commitment of Christian faith this is not consistent with them then giving time and energy to groups focused on their faith.

Many of the interviewees were aware that those within the church structure would see their actions as backsliding and chose to comment on this. A selection of their comments follows:

(Robyn) - And I just think, don’t turn round and tell me that I pulled out because I was backsliding. I just thought it is because of the spiritual side of me that I pulled out (62.79).

(Delwyn) - I found that the disillusionment came with the church, how effective are we. And I came to a place of being so disillusioned that I began to question whether I was backslidden because of it. I had no real zeal any more for ‘Churchianity’. In fact lots of it so frustrated me that I just found it difficult even to go. So the whole question came was I backslidden? And it wasn't until we met with ones of like mind that I began to realize that it is not the case. There are other people out there who feel exactly as I do. And so that whole condemnation of backsliddenness began to leave me. And I began to feel well there have to be answers for the church of the nineties. We were still in that church two hundred years ago. We've not advanced at all. We are still doing exactly the same things as we did 200 years ago. And little wonder that we are not effective (61.47).

(Jim) - So it’s not that I've backslidden over the last four years. Well hey I've been trained and I'm highly equipped and I'm working out in the community over the last four years, and just meeting some people and just doing some good things. And I mightn’t have my little badge from the Sunday meeting, but I've come to the realization that's totally unimportant (38.58).

(Wayne) - At that point, we were needing to (join a group) and partly for other people, (to show) that we weren’t backsliding out. We felt fine ourselves, we were moving on (28.59; italics mine).

(Tim) - And I had to give it up (his church) for the sake of theology (his theology had moved). I could have kept all our network but our theology changed. I don't think we could have stayed in Suburban Baptist (name of church) thinking what we do. That's obvious so we had to leave. We felt exiled really banished by shame and a change of theology and a sense that - you know - that we were no longer stage 2,279 we were stage 3 believers. And it is very sad. And to have people think that you have backslidden and in fact you have done quite the reverse. So there is still a very big hole in my heart and a lot of sadness really. Just like if I had a kid that grew up and died before they had lived out their life I would still be sad and I'm still sad about having to leave Suburban (Baptist Church). I'm sad about that (82.272; italics mine).

The net result is that although one person indicated that he was leaving the Christian faith in his decision to leave the church this was not the case for the vast majority of interviewees - the remaining 107. Their

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279 Here the interviewee is talking about a staging of faith that he had read about which is based on a four staged model proposed by M. Scott Peck. Peck has reduced Fowler’s six stages into a less complex package in four stages. His analysis is described alongside Fowler’s in footnotes throughout Chapter 4.
decision to leave cannot be explained away by stating that they were ‘backsliding’ or ‘giving away’ their Christian faith.

5.3.3 Church Leadership and Structural Factors
A common theme from the interviews with pastors and ministers is the focus of attention on church leaders and the church structure as the major reasons people leave. For example one pastor said: “It is usually out of deep disappointment and disillusionment with leadership, either leadership decisions or poor counselling. So it is disappointment with leadership again.” These leadership decisions can lead to disagreements about the direction and future of the church and because of such disagreements people leave. Others leave because they perceive they have received inadequate care during a time of personal crisis. The resultant disillusionment indicates an expectation of the church or the church leaders that has since been proven to be false and unfounded. For 17.5% of leavers interviewed such factors were the predominant reasons given for leaving. However for the remaining 82.5% such disillusionment may have been a factor but not a critical factor in their decision to leave the church. It is therefore clear that although disillusionment in the leadership of church or para-church groups may be a factor for some people, it is only a crucial factor in the case of a minority (17.5%) of leavers.

One aspect of leadership disillusionment that was mentioned regularly by pastors and ministers was a number of situations where church leaders had ‘fallen’ and subsequently disillusioned large numbers of people. This is where pastors were found to be involved in adulterous relationships and/or financial impropriety. There appeared to be a general understanding that where significant leaders ‘fell’ in this way there was a high degree of disillusionment and subsequent leaving of the church. Although I interviewed a number of leavers who had been involved in churches where the senior pastor had ‘fallen’ in some spectacular fashion, no-one identified this as a major factor in their decision to leave. Such events undoubtedly caused disillusionment with that pastor and often pastors in general. It also motivated a number of interviewees to move from one church to another, and may have been a factor in their decision to leave church altogether. But, no-one identified this as the principal or sole reason for their leaving the church. On the contrary many discussed the disappointment of being deceived by a leader as a situation through which their faith in God had strengthened and matured as they learned to be less dependent on church leaders.

Another factor identified by pastors and ministers was the disillusionment with the system of church. This was seen to be a disillusionment with the meetings, structure, bureaucracy and institutionalism characteristic of some churches. Interestingly this was mentioned by ministers of charismatic churches in ‘mainline denominations’ where denominational structure and control is more of an issue than in the more autonomous churches of the Baptist and Pentecostal streams.

5.3.4 Faith Concerns
The final grouping of factors identified by pastors and ‘informed insiders’ as significant in the decisions of people to leave the ‘EPC’ church were personal faith issues. Here I am not discussing the more simplistic assessment that leavers are backsliding (giving their faith away) but that there are significant faith concerns that call into question the validity and usefulness of their received ‘EPC’ faith. The number of pastors who identified such factors was very small. The information that I am now drawing on was provided by a small group of pastors who had a clear understanding and feel for the faith issues involved in people’s leaving.
the crucial issues that alienate people from church structures. Their ignorance remains despite the detailed knowledge of lecturers in theological colleges, counsellors and a number of leavers who have well articulated and comprehensive understandings of the changing faith dynamics that lead people to leave the ‘EPC’ church. The perpetuation of this situation indicates the relative isolation of pastors within ‘EPC’ churches and the lack of dialogue with those outside of their own ranks, albeit that these are allies in their cause.

5.3.5 A Changing Faith (or Crisis of Faith) Not a Declining Faith

Both the old paradigm of secularisation and the backsliding and disillusionment understandings of church leaders have proved to be of little use in this study. Such understandings focus on a decline of faith rather than a crisis or change of faith that may ultimately lead to either a strengthened or a declining faith. It will be the focus of the next four chapters to analyse this change of faith. For now it is sufficient to identify the fact that such understandings do not do justice to the complex matrix of faith crises and changes revealed in the interviews with the leavers themselves. An illustration drawn from Morris Stuart’s book (1992) highlights something of this dilemma. It is drawn from a letter from a church leaver.

‘Believe me, I tried. (I can almost hear you say, ‘That was his trouble; he tried. He didn’t rely on the Holy Spirit.’ Wrong again! I was baptised ‘in the spirit’. It was exciting stuff.) Yes, I did try. I read my Bible, eagerly, (almost) every day. I prayed and prayed and prayed. I sang and danced and marched and did my spiritual warfare. It was real. But it was a searching non-Christian friend who disturbed me with this question: ‘If something is real, it isn’t necessarily true, is it?’

That was my problem. I was searching all the time for the truth. . . . Over the years I found that in order to feel accepted in the church I had to separate my mind from my experiences, and separate both from the real world in which I lived and moved. When I asked questions, you cut me off with stories of your experiences. They were supposed to be total proof of God at work; and the more bizarre the experience, the more evidence this was of the presence and power of God. I knew God was mystery, but it seemed strange that God was so irrational. When the experiences were unconvincing to me, you capped it off by giving me half a dozen very powerful but totally irrelevant Bible quotations which, you said, would deal with my problem. But they didn’t. In fact, as time went on, I found that I was beginning to hate the Bible. It used to be the light. You made it into a bludgeon. Sorry!

The following Senior Pastor of a church reflects this ignorance in his answer to the question asking for reasons people leave. He says “The only thing you’ve got those kinds of groupings of people who you’re perhaps leaning to who would tend to, I haven’t given a lot of thought to this really, but I’m just thinking there tends to be groupings of them packs of them really, as opposed to just individual people who become disillusioned and leave. Because those people I think would either, would tend to drift off into another church, if they leave another church. But I think you tend to have packs, groups of people” (88.6). In a separate interview with another senior pastor of one of the largest Pentecostal churches in New Zealand I asked a question about church leavers who returned to church. The question was “Of the people who came here after a period of time of being out of the church and come and try again, do they stay and become part of the church?” he replied “ I wouldn’t know. I wouldn’t identify them that clearly. The ones that didn’t go anywhere for a long time and came here, do they stay? I can’t answer it. I wouldn’t know.” (125.16-17) Further probing of the question revealed that probably no-one on the team of pastors who lead this particular church would be able to answer that question.

The informational base of such ‘EPC’ church leaders appears to be drawn from the ever prevalent seminars, conferences, programmes and models of church growth emanating from the United States or South Korea that has little interest in those who are leaving the church. There does not appear to be much dialogue between the lecturers, counsellors and leavers who understand a great deal about this issue and the church pastors.

By faith crisis I am referring to more of an existential crisis of faith than an intellectual one. For example the concerns are not so much is there a God? But how is God engaged with this world, or in my life?
There were times when I was in such pain, but it was drowned out by the noise of the ‘happy-clappy songs. There was a limit to how many times I could sing the same three words’.

Jane, one of the leavers I interviewed struggled to remain linked in a church that appeared to be asking her to separate her faith from the ‘real world’ and like the “refugee” in this letter she tried to stay part of the church.

5.4 A Leaver’s Story

Jane had been heavily involved in a number of Pentecostal churches prior to leaving the church in which her husband was part of the pastoral staff. She originally became involved in Pentecostal churches through a friend who had introduced her to the local church as a teenager. Initially Jane was heavily involved and fully supportive of the church and the ‘EPC’ faith that it represented. But after a number of years as a pastor’s wife and also a missionary (with her husband) Jane began to distance herself from the church. For Jane this was a process of leaving which took over ten years. She says - “So I would have got involved in church about 1973 and stayed with this particular church ‘heavily’ (said emphatically) until 1990. But the last ten years I was disengaging and I would have been out a lot earlier if it hadn’t been for my marriage. I just basically hung in there for that. . . and it was quite a long time”.

Throughout this time Jane and the church leaders were trying to help her to cease her questioning and her sense of not fitting and be an active part of the church community. Jane mentions on two or three occasions throughout the interview that she was trying to fit in, trying to comply - “And I did try, I really did try, but I couldn’t go against what I felt was wrong in certain situations”. At times the church leadership was helpful in trying to accommodate her within the structures. At other times the hierarchy would call her in to meetings to be spoken to. As she said “I was constantly on the mat. Constantly being hauled up”.

When I asked her what the purpose of these leadership meetings was when they ‘put her on the mat’ she replied:

(Jane) - The purpose, I think it was to try and get me to comply and come over to their way of thinking, and be one of them, it was a sense of that they all thought a certain way and I didn’t and I needed to adjust and be like them.

Hence despite her own efforts to try to fit in and the pressure of the church leadership to help her or at times seemingly force her to comply, Jane continued to feel out of place in the church. At one point Jane was “taken under the wing of the head pastor’s wife” but that too failed to alleviate the rumbling sense of dissatisfaction within. In some cases Jane’s questioning was quite explicit and in others it was a determination not to be told how to behave.

(Jane) - And my kids went through a stage of wanting to wear jeans, they wanted to wear trousers to church. And I was told at the time that my children were not to wear trousers to church because it was a bad example. I basically refused, because I had always gone by my own instincts as far as being a parent. I never bought into their things about parents being the boss, and all that. And I had been to a few parenting seminars where they were really into discipline and everything, we used to get, I used to get really angry and churned up about that kind of thing. So it was a constant battle.

Realising that she was beginning to move out of the church Jane started Polytech classes and built support networks for herself outside the church. Then for over a year she stopped attending the church services.

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286 Morris Stuart (1992) - “So Long, Farewell and Thanks for the Church?” p123. This comment is drawn from a letter from a refugee (Stuart’s term). It is not a specific quote but an amalgam of comments that Morris had reflected on and brought together in the writing of his book.

287 Her husband was a full-time employed pastor of the church.
created difficulties for the family and for her husband in particular. Jane then tried to make herself attend, if only for the children. Eventually the head pastor became concerned about her non-attendance as it was being picked up by a number of people in the church. He came around to see her at her home and tried to make a compromise with her. In the agreement he would accept that she wasn’t cut out to be a pastor’s wife and release her from those obligations, if she would come to the Sunday services.288

But by now Jane knew that church was becoming destructive for her, as she said “very destructive. . . Over the last few years I was just really stuck, and I knew that I was stuck, and I wasn’t going anywhere. And I think too I was hungry for knowledge and I wanted to move on” (65.89). However Jane was aware that this wasn’t the same for everyone in the church:

(Jane) - So for a lot of people who don’t experience that and are just happy to be in that structure that is functioning well and that could be OK. But it didn’t work for me. Because I questioned too many things, and I couldn’t accept the theology (65.91).

Eventually in her desperation Jane reaches a point of decision.

(Jane) - I remember one day thinking I’m going to get out of this, I’m not going to be stuck here the rest of my life. I don’t care what it takes, I don’t care if I lose my marriage, and I remember saying to God I don’t care if I lose you, or whatever the cost is I’m going to do it. It was something I decided in spite of myself. It was sort of a turning point for me really (65.104).

But in the end she did go back to church, if only to be with the family for the Christmas service. Once there she had to listen to the message, in this case a joint message given by two people who she remembers spoke “berating” the congregation. - “It should have been a nice joyous service, but the pair of them went on and on. They just talked too much dribble, talked absolute nonsense. They had a sermon which I went home and picked to bits basically, and I said to my husband I’m not ever going back to that church. I’ve left. That’s it. . . and I never went back and I never thought oh I’ve done the wrong thing”(65.105). But although Jane never went back to that church she did begin to attend a small theologically liberal289 church, for two years.

(Jane) - It was just completely different, it was high church, it was completely non-threatening. They were quite liberal and eclectic. I mean I couldn’t have coped with anything that had pressed any buttons. It was more that I needed some sort of church family because I lost 99% of my support network. . . . So I really had this as a kind of bridge, a transitional stage I went to this little church. But I wasn’t that involved, not in the same way.

The day I interviewed Jane she no longer attended services at this or any other church. Rather she sees her energies going into her studies,290 family and the voluntary health association that she is a part of. Jane’s story exemplifies to a large extent the process of leaving undertaken by the interviewees. Jane’s story does however have one exceptional feature - the length of time she took to leave. For the majority of interviewees the leaving process was condensed in time to approximately a two year period. Jane’s exit took longer because there were a number of factors that served to hold her in the church. These included her husband’s job as a pastor, her young children and her marriage. Although Jane’s story in this regard is exceptional it does however highlight the journey of leaving as undertaken, albeit more quickly, by church leavers interviewed in this study. It is this process of leaving to which we will now turn.

288 (65.73)
289 See Appendix 5 for a comparison of Fundamentalist and Liberal beliefs.
290 She was completing the last year of a Bachelor’s degree when I interviewed her.
5.5 A Processual Understanding of Leaving

Analysis of the transcripts of leavers reveals that the vast majority of those who were interviewed did not leave their church suddenly. In fact the majority of leavers indicated a gradual process of reflection, questioning and withdrawal which lasted a considerable number of months or years prior to their decision to leave. The majority of interviewees drifted out of the church often realising, only in hindsight, that they had left. Because of the nature of church participation it is possible to drift out on a trial basis, or change one’s attendance patterns to the point of being increasingly less regular attenders at church. Because a person can move out for a while and still come back if they so decide, leaving church participation is much easier than nuns leaving a convent or workers leaving a job. This comparatively easily reversible nature of the decision to leave makes it an easier and often less intentionally planned decision on behalf of leavers. A number spoke of a process of feeling dissatisfied, questioning and reducing their participation over a long period of time followed by a reduced frequency of church attendance to the point that they woke up one morning deciding they wouldn’t go to church again today; this was usually against the background of not having been for a number of weeks anyway. In this sense it is a gradual drift out to the point of a retrospective decision that they have in fact left. It is the voluntary nature of church participation and the potential reversibility of the decision that makes such an imperceptible leave-taking possible.

Some people did, however, leave more suddenly. Of those who did leave suddenly (n=22) 10 people spoke of a process of withdrawal that was already in progress prior to an event that encouraged a sudden leaving.

The final 12 who left suddenly (without indications of a prior process of withdrawal) left for reasons other than those mentioned by the pastors above. Three of these left during a marriage breakup, two left because

291 What is described here is a gradual process of reflection, questioning, reassessment and decision making regarding the participation and faith of the interviewees. Although this is a gradual process it is not one which the leavers are unaware of and not involved in as agents in the process. This stands in contrast to an understanding of a gradual and imperceptible drift away from church that is almost unrealised by the individual. C.S. Lewis (1943:124) wrote that “if you examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?” In reply to Lewis’ question Hendricks (1993:268) says - “Well, we haven’t examined a hundred people, but we have talked to a couple of dozen. And most of the people we’ve interviewed haven’t exactly lost their faith, but they have pulled out of various faith communities. So, having gone through the exercise, I think we can say with some confidence that the answer to Lewis’ conjecture is yes, people do drift away (though) I’m not sure how ‘simply’. Just as spirituality is a process, disillusionment with the church - or the faith - is a process, too. It doesn’t happen overnight.” Hendricks goes on to outline a process which he saw in the leave-taking of the people he interviewed. In his process he sees people join the church and at first find it helpful and are well connected, “over time, however, questions and doubts begin to emerge, especially doubts related to spirituality, to how he applies the faith to life” (op.cit.:269). Initially the person assumes the problem is with them, and they then try harder, but if this continues not to work the person may give up trying.

292 It is difficult in a number of interviews to distinguish between what was going on for the person in the process of leaving and what was a later reconstruction of the process. This is particularly difficult where they had later been part of a group of leavers where their respective journeys were discussed and where they had read or heard of a framework that made sense of their journey. I attempted to overcome this by including in the interview sample a number (n=10) of interviewees who were on the edge of leaving and some who had quite recently left their church.

293 Toch (1966) drew a distinction between ‘gradual defection’ and ‘de-conversion’. He saw de-conversion as occurring more swiftly and dramatically while defection was more gradual. (Quoted in Wright 1988:161). De-conversion he correlated with the process of conversion which he saw as being equally swift. But as Wright states there are many types of conversion both sudden and gradual. The de-conversion concept has not been used here because: firstly, the process of leaving although appearing sudden, even to the person involved, is often preceded by long periods of dissatisfaction and disillusionment. Hence despite a rapid and decisive exit there is a prior process that needs to be considered. And secondly, deconversion speaks of a rejection of prior faith and while interviewees in this study have chosen to leave the church they have not, predominantly, chosen to leave the Christian faith itself.
their church had closed,\textsuperscript{294} two were invited to join a house group which they thought was a good idea at the time, and two left quickly due to traumatic family and health concerns which they felt were not being addressed within the church. These two women subsequently moved away from a Christian faith towards a new age-based belief system. The final three left because of difficulties within the church. These three people had struck major difficulties. Of these three one couple left as a result of what they perceived to be overly autocratic leadership. They had been leaders in the church for over 30 years. Although they were thoroughly disillusioned with this particular church leader they quite quickly joined another church in which they indicated they were becoming increasingly involved.\textsuperscript{295} The final person left the church after his wife had also left. It appears that while this may have been a sudden decision for him it was not for his wife.

\textbf{5.6 Helen Ebaugh’s Theory of Role Exit}

Helen Ebaugh’s role exit theory (1988) has been used in this study as a theoretical framework which can be set alongside the material gained from the interviews of church leavers. This was done because of the empirical links between Ebaugh’s study of nuns leaving the convent and the present study. Ebaugh also based her research on a group of voluntary leave-takers who had previously been very committed to their religious institutions, institutions they had been actively involved in for a considerable number of years. Secondly I have used this theory because of the processual nature of the theory which reflects the accounts of leavers,\textsuperscript{296} and finally because of the close connections between the process of leaving described by Ebaugh and the descriptions of the leavers in this study.

Ebaugh describes a four staged leaving process: (1) first doubts, (2) seeking and weighing alternatives, (3) negotiating turning points and (4) post-exit adjustment which she calls ‘creating the ex-role’. I will discuss each of these in turn and connect these to the journeys described by the leavers within this study.

\textsuperscript{294} While the final decision to leave was precipitated by the closure of their church the couple involved had been questioning their ongoing involvement for some time and had felt increasingly disillusioned. Nigel said “So basically the decision was made for us. We were committed to the church. And I am the sort of person, I have always been the sort of person who is faithful to the end, and um although I had been really having grave doubts, big doubts, particularly in the last year about the church and what it was doing, and that generally, I probably wouldn’t have left it. Well - it would have been very difficult. But the fact is that the church disintegrated in front of our eyes, so all of a sudden the church left us, we didn’t leave the church. So it was a lot easier to cope with. For me anyway. Because I didn’t have to cope with the guilt of leaving church and that sort of thing” (47:43). When their own church closed there was provision made for people to move to another church of the same denominational grouping but this couple chose not to join most of their other church friends in this move. Rather they chose to make a break from church entirely at the point of their own church closing. They also did not look at other possible churches. For these reasons the sudden nature of the decision to close their church provided a context in which their own feelings of dissatisfaction came to the fore and while not directly causing them to leave church these feelings, doubts and questions nevertheless prevented them from simply going to another church with their friends or looking to join a different church.

\textsuperscript{295} (5.10-12)

\textsuperscript{296} Ebaugh states:- “Very rarely does it (role-exit) happen as a result of one sudden decision. Rather role exiting usually takes place over a period of time, frequently originating before the individual is fully aware of what is happening or where events and decisions are leading him or her” (Ebaugh 1988:23; italics mine).
5.6.1 First Doubts

Figure 5.1 Ebaugh’s Role Exit Theory -First Doubts (Stage 1)

Ebaugh’s Role Exit Theory

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Catalyst</th>
<th>First Doubts (stage 1)</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Organisational changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Burnout</td>
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<td>- Changes in Relationships</td>
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<td>- Events</td>
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<td>Cuing Behaviour</td>
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<td>(1) Negative Reactions</td>
<td>Positive reactions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Re-evaluation of doubts</td>
<td>Reinforcement of doubts</td>
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<td>Stage 2</td>
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The doubting stage Ebaugh describes as “essentially one of reinterpreting and redefining a situation that was previously taken for granted. . . . First doubts involve a re-interpretation of reality, a realization that things are not what they seemed to be” (Ebaugh 1988:41). This doubting can be triggered by a range of circumstances of which Ebaugh discusses four: organisational changes, burnout, disappointment or changes in relationships and events. This fourth grouping of events that spark the first doubts includes both events that occur within the organisation or the individual.

For numbers of the interviewees in this present study an event or series of events in their own lives prompted a process of re-evaluating their continued participation in the church. Such events included a period of personal sickness, loss of a job, a career or geographical move, or beginning a new course of study that provided a differing view on life than that espoused in the church. Jane for example spoke of a number of

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297 In this case changes to the direction, vision or leadership of the church.

298 Parks (1986:57) quotes Carol Gilligan who suggests that for many the burnout is from taking the role of caregiver for others at the expense of self. She sees this as being especially the case for women and part of what is needed is a greater priority for personal care.

299 Ebaugh writes that “in the cases of both burned-out professionals and individuals who exited familial roles, a central theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the discrepancy between an idealized image of the role and what it was like in reality” (Ebaugh 1988:65). This links with the perception of pastors and ministers of disillusionment.

300 “In some instances events trigger doubts. . . while the individual may have had vague, ill-defined usually unconscious feelings of dissatisfaction, some event will focus these feelings and make them conscious to the individual. First doubts might be triggered by a number of circumstances ranging from changes in the organisation to which one belongs to unique events that occur in one’s life” (Ebaugh 1988:65,69). Ebaugh describes the trigger events in a number of people who left their marriages as finding out that their partner was having an affair, or lied to them. In two instances she said the death of a child prompted initial doubts regarding a role performed by an individual. Or the examples of alcoholics for whom a specific event like a car accident, a spouse’s departure or a frightening medical report caused them to see themselves as having a drinking problem (op.cit.:66-67).

301 Stacey (1990:46) found that women interviewed within Silicon Valley found study courses provided the stimulus for many of the women to make key life changing decisions that they may not have made without the
trigger points in her own process of leaving that were intimately connected with her own internal struggle with the church and its faith. These included church structural events such as being called into leadership meetings to be spoken to. But they also included events in her personal life like her hunger for knowledge and eventual decision to begin tertiary study, and going back to work. For other women being exposed to feminist literature or feminism courses through polytech or university also acted as trigger events in their leaving process.

At this point there are also links between the comments of pastors regarding disillusionment due to the actions of church leaders or changes in church structures and direction and Ebaugh’s first stage in the leaving process. Disillusionment with leaders or the church structure was one consistent theme identified by the pastors I interviewed as a reason for people leaving. Here such disillusionment is categorised as a catalyst that acts as a trigger to the doubting process. The doubting process described by the majority of interviewees (56%) indicates a disgruntledness or disenchantment that was more than a leadership or structural issue. In contrast it was a disenchantment with the whole package of church. This is a far wider disillusionment than that spoken of by the pastors. It was not that the leaders didn’t meet expectations but that the whole package didn’t work. Below are the comments of four of the leavers:

(Sarah) - Yes it probably was, my own life style and work, and the crisis happening around me at work. And turning thirty, was sort of the final straw. I can’t sit here in church any more. It doesn’t resonate any more (17.115).

(Stuart) - But I increasingly came to see that people were where they were at and I was where I was at and it wasn't necessarily for them to follow the same path that I was following, ask the questions I was asking. But I was never going to be satisfied within that sort of framework. Not that I was really actually looking for satisfaction but it just came to a point where it was pointless really to continue on with and for the first time this other opportunity came up and in a number of ways I actually felt free on the inside to lay it aside which I never had before (4.21).

(Paul) - There are probably two or three main things, I would think. One of them was just the growing dissatisfaction over a few years of - Is this all there is? You seemed to be going over the same ground. And I would say not growing as a person, though I may not have said it in those words then. Social needs, the whole, just kind of the things that used to excite you, now you are doing them because that is what you have to do. Just in the whole service and the way of worship. . . And just a growing sense, I guess of something just doesn’t fit. I’m a round peg in a square hole sort of thing. Doors were being opened up to us to go full-time if we liked. And we were just not interested. And it was kind of unusual at that stage to turn down opportunities, that others were striving to get. So I couldn’t put it in so many words except to say that I probably felt, this is no longer where we are at (48.70).
(John) - As I talk about my journey which I do so quite openly, people say to me things like, the catch phrase is well that’s interesting because and they start to talk about themselves. . . .

‘I mean I go along with how everything is here, but personally I’m disgruntled, is a word I have come across twice in the last two weeks, just from two people. The person last night was essentially saying my spirituality has dried up, I want to get out of the church. I mean they were saying I go through this rote every week, I come to church twice a day, I sing the songs and I listen to the messages and my spirituality has dried up. I want to get out and get to something, not just another church, but something that brings their spirituality alive again. That really means something to them, with a deep conviction. It is not just a routine you go through, this is what you are supposed to do, to be a good Christian and hang on in there until heaven comes (laughs). And my willingness, they recognize that after 12 years in the ministry I obviously had some seriousness about my Christianity, so I’m not talking out of nowhere (117.69).

Ebaugh points out that at this first doubting stage the “process is usually gradual in that the individual first experiences overall dissatisfaction in a generalised way and only eventually is able to specify and articulate what he or she finds lacking in the situation” (Ebaugh 1988:41). Hence while these four circumstances may provide people with incidents that are associated with their first recollections of beginning to move out, the leaving process may, however, have already been operative at a subconscious level for quite some time prior to this recollection of a specific incident or issue.

During this doubting stage people frequently emit cues that they are dissatisfied, and these may be noticed by others. Ebaugh claims that the way significant others respond to these cues is crucial when and if the person enters the second stage. Where the cues are negatively reinforced the process can be retarded as indicated in the diagram at point (1). The reverse is true where the cues are positively reinforced by significant others. Ebaugh states that:

Positive response in the form of empathy, support, understanding, and even encouragement to leave often reinforces initial doubts and confirms a person’s feelings of dissatisfaction. . . . On the other hand if significant others react negatively to cues that one is dissatisfied, such negative reinforcement of initial doubts may cause the person to reinterpret his or her early signs of dissatisfaction and reevaluate the positive aspects of the current role. This reevaluation may end the doubting process, or at least prolong it until other events or conditions arise that again elicit doubts (Ebaugh 1988:71).

This cuing behaviour serves to test the person’s perception of reality and where these perceptions are reinforced by others this solidifies the leaving process further. The role of others is very important at this stage. Significant others provide the feedback that can either encourage or discourage the potential leaver in their doubts. They can remind individuals of some of the benefits of continuing to belong to the church and could also provide them with alternative courses of action that the potential leaver may not have thought of.

5.6.2 Seeking Alternatives
The second stage in Ebaugh’s role exit theory (see 5.6.2) involves seeking alternatives. Here the individual intentionally considers alternative courses of action to remaining as an active church member. At this stage

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302 In a study of Detroit area Catholics Koller (1979:302) showed that “the plausibility of church teaching is affected by the exposure to a number of contradictory and competing definitions of reality”.

303 As Toch (1966) said “this kind of experience is partly illusionary because reservations pre-exist their discovery” (quoted in Wright 1988:161).

304 Ebaugh comments that “the entire process of role exiting is influenced by interactions of the individual experiencing exit with significant others in his or her life” (Ebaugh 1988:75).
some weighing of the outcomes of various options will be undertaken. Jane describes this process for herself saying:

(Jane) - I didn’t have the luxury of just being able to pull out in the way that people who wouldn’t have been on the pay roll would have. But I certainly disengaged mentally and I started to build support networks outside of the church tentatively. So I would go to polytech courses and things like that. . . . And then I went to work, so I started to kind of make steps out without doing anything too drastically (65.67 & 71).

When the weighing of alternatives leads a person to consider leaving in further detail people will often shift ‘reference groups’ as Jane began to do above. Ebaugh says:

There is a pattern among people seriously considering a role change to begin identifying with values, norms, attitudes and expectations held by people who are already enacting the role being considered. There is a shift in focus from the role expectations of the current role to those associated with the anticipated role . . . prior identification with a group to which one aspires helps the person internalise values, norms and attitudes of the new group and serve as a kind of bridge to membership in the group. The person, in a sense, psychologically becomes part of the group before he or she actually becomes a member. (Ebaugh 1988:107-108)

Another means of weighing the alternatives may involve a period of ‘role rehearsal’. “Role rehearsal can take place in two basic ways: by imaginary role playing and by trying out new roles in reality” (Ebaugh 1988:112). In the case of this present study, spending Sunday morning at the beach, with friends, going shopping, or sleeping in can be a form of role rehearsal which allows the person to ‘trial’ what it would be like not going to church every week.

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305 “The process of seeking and evaluating alternatives is an interesting and complex one. As long as individuals are content in given roles, they are aware of numerous alternatives in a vague and general way. They have family, friends, and acquaintances engaged in all kinds of alternative roles. Through the media and casual conversation, these alternatives are known and perhaps even vicariously experienced. However, under conditions of personal dissatisfaction with an existing role, vague alternatives take on a new perspective and focus” (Ebaugh 1988:92).
Once a person moves this far down the leaving process Ebaugh claims that the final decision is usually close at hand.\(^{306}\) Again where the person receives negative feedback from key significant others it can retard or set back the process as indicated by the return arrow marked (2) in the figure above.

Seventeen percent of interviewees spoke of a sense of no longer fitting in the church. They had moved to a point where they were no longer part of this group anymore. Twenty five percent spoke of a parting of the ways where what was important to them, and was their growing edge, was simply foreign to the concerns and focus of their church community. This promoted a sense of alienation between the church’s focus and journey and their own.

(Anthea) - Another big crack up was when I had brought my maiden name back into my married name. I mean if I had gone out and committed adultery and come back and said how really sorry I was about this there would have been openness and forgiveness. Because I dared to think for myself and bring my maiden name back into my married name, and I was not sorry, I mean there was a three hour meeting over that (43.40).

(Pam) - I think one of the things that disturbed me greatly was when we got back from Amsterdam, in 1983, as I remember it we walked into the middle of the homosexual law reform controversy. I was deeply disturbed by what I felt was incredible bigotry and prejudice that was coming out of the church at that stage. I suppose having lived in Amsterdam where there is a strong homosexual population and an awareness of those issues.

\(^{306}\) “It is almost as though once people ‘see the lights of the city, you can’t keep them down on the farm’. If the alternative role is indeed a good “fit” and the individual feels comfortable with the anticipated role expectations, the new role takes on an attraction and compelling force which serves to draw the person away from a current role; the “pull” of the new role becomes an added incentive to the “pushes” or dissatisfactions of the old one. . . . all that remains is a final decision to make the transition” (Ebaugh 1988:117).
and also friends and just my own personal understanding, I just felt sickened, ye was sickened, yea really sickened by the kind of rhetoric, anti-homosexual rhetoric, that was being bandied around at that point. That for me was a major factor of my disillusionment with the Pentecostal church. There was this clap-trap about you love the sinner but don’t love the sin. I just felt that was incredibly false and insincere. And just the energy that there seemed to be in fighting the homosexual law reform bill that came out for the church. That that was such a major priority for so many people. I felt that if people feel that is so important, and other issues that Christians should be addressing aren’t, then I guess I felt very alienated. I don’t belong in this group. I don’t share those same kind of priorities. I felt very out of touch with it (23.60).

(Lynne) - I used to go for a bike ride, I couldn’t hack it, and I would come back to talk to people after the service. Because it was just going quite against my own Christian growth, it was hindering my growth. I couldn’t hack it for about the last year we were there really (58.23).

(Emily) - And I found out a little bit about the Palestinian History, and realised that the politicians that are in the Israeli parliament today, . . . those very same people were terrorists, because they were bullying and killing people and shooting people in the name of God to get their land back. And people from the New Zealand church just kind of think the Jewish church got back their land. But in order to get back the land, they shot people and they killed them, bombed them and took the land back. The Israeli government is still to this day occupying Arab land. And this is all in the name of God. And I thought how can I support this? This isn’t love. How can I support this? So began to get cross with people. So I went up there (Palestine) and made contacts and it just didn’t add up to me at all. And this is blind support. I mean my sister’s one of them in particular, I mean hey- What the Israelis do is fine (49.29).

Ebaugh isolates a common feeling among leavers that may occur at different points in the process of leaving for the individual which she calls the “vacuum.” She says:

There is one emotional experience that characterises over three quarters of all those interviewed. The point in the process at which it occurred varied; some people experiencing it before the turning point, during the process of weighing alternatives, and others after the turning point. Regardless of when it occurred, the majority of the interviewees went through a period of feeling anxious, scared, at loose ends, that they didn’t belong. The experience is best described as a vacuum in that the people felt ‘in midair’, ‘ungrounded’, ‘neither here nor there’, ‘nowhere’ (Ebaugh 1988:143).

A considerable number of my interviewees spoke of having a sense of disenchantment and major faith, theological or church based questions but at the same time being unable to leave for other reasons. This group represented 38% of the leavers. For some people, like Jane, they were held in by their job, or their spouse’s job, within a specifically Christian organisation or by their family needs (e.g. concern for children’s Christian faith). Others were tied to continued church participation out of a fear of becoming like others they have seen who left the church and did not return. Often this is tied to a perception that such people ‘lose their faith’ in the process of leaving the church. Becker (1960) uses the concept of “side-bets” to explain this incentive to remain attached. Becker states: “when an individual has made a side bet, he has staked something of value to him, something originally unrelated to his present line of activity” (Becker 1960:32-40). Becker contends that in general the greater the number of side-bets the greater the commitment of the individual to stay. Some of the leavers (9%) spoke of staying but under severe duress and through considerable personal discomfort.

(Jane) - But I had to go to church. The last year that we were there, that (husband’s name) was on the pay-roll I didn't go to church at all. I couldn't. Saturday night I would work myself
up and say I've got to go to church tomorrow I've got to go to church tomorrow. And then on Sunday morning I would be sick really sick. And then I just decided I wasn't going. And my kids it was really awkward because they would get accosted. They went with (husband's name) and they would get accosted in the main foyer. Where's mum? Why isn't she here? And it became very awkward for them. So they used to pressure me to come as well (65.71; italics mine).

(Robyn) - And then, I remember saying to these friends of mine I said that it is exactly the same feeling, when I think about going to church, that is exactly the same feeling as when I’m in Christchurch and I look down and there is a red bus coming towards me. And everything inside me says don’t step out. And I said I have that exact feeling when I get up Sunday morning and think should I go to church. Everything inside me says no. And they said “Do you think that is of the devil? (62.27).

In an attempt to resolve the growing sense of not fitting a number of leavers (14%) spoke of making a sideways move in the process of leaving. For some this was a move to teaching the Sunday school that removed them from the Sunday service. Others talked of moving church or trying a few different churches.

5.6.3 The Turning Point
Figure 5.3 Ebaugh’s Role Exit Theory -Turning Point (Stage 3)

The third stage in the process is the ‘turning point’. Here the person, as Jane described above, makes a firm decision to exit. “A turning point is an event that mobilises and focuses awareness that old lines of action are completed, have failed, have been disrupted, or are no longer personally satisfying and provides individuals with the opportunity to do something different with their lives” (Lofland and Stark 1965). For the majority of leavers the decision to leave involves an abrupt turning point associated with a specific event. There are five major types of events to be considered here: First, Specific Events -these events crystallise a person’s ambivalence toward a current role. One example that Ebaugh gives is of a nun who left the convent after a new rule to stop smoking in the convent was introduced. Interestingly the nun was not herself a smoker. Second, ‘The Last Straw’ - this is an event in a series of similar events that simply tips the person over the edge. One of the interviewees in this study talked of her final night at church (the night she finally decided to leave). She was sitting in the church when she began to read the newsletter and saw who was down to preach that night. She said that she just burst into tears realising that she couldn’t take another of his sermons and left. This was the last time she went to the church. Third, ‘Time Related Factors’ - time related factors include for example turning a particular age. One of the interviewees in this study indicated that turning 30 and still being single was a crucial point in her decision making to leave the church. Fourth, ‘Excuses’ - here a person waits for a reason or excuse before they finally decide to leave (for example a disagreement with a key leader). And fifth, Either-or-alternatives - where a person reaches a point where they must choose between one of two alternatives. Ebaugh cites the example of alcoholics who reach a point where they realised that either they received help or they would die (op.cit.:132).
Despite the role of such events for many, Ebaugh says that for approximately one fifth of interviewees in her study it was more of a gradual process to the point of deciding. Turning points serve to mobilise the resources needed from within the individual to finally leave. They act as final markers reducing cognitive dissonance and announce the decision to leave.

Forty one percent of leavers indicated that there was a final factor that tipped the balance and acted as a turning point in their decision to leave the church (see table 5.2).

Table 5.2 Turning Points in the Final Decision of Leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turning Point in Decision to leave</th>
<th>All Churchless Faith and Returned to Church Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knocked back by church</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal struggle or Crisis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer to join a Group</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of Geographical Location</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer to Study - theology</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This lends some validation to the comments of a number of the pastors that I spoke to who indicated that ‘knock backs’ by the church, especially by key leaders, were the main reason people left the church. Perhaps it was easier for pastors to pin the decision to leave on a particular incident rather than investigate the leaver’s underlying reasons. A significant number of interviewees spoke of such a ‘knock back’ as the final factor in their overall decision to leave the church. Seldom did the interviewees talk of this knock back by the church as the major reason or impetus for their decision to leave. This indicates that pastors in the ‘EPC’ churches have some feeling for the final factor that entices people to leave the church but not for the underlying process of leaving that the majority seem to go through. Their focus on this final (turning point) factor misses the underlying faith questions and disenchantment that appears to be part of people’s journey out of the ‘EPC’ church.

In this processual understanding of role exit the individual is not the only actor involved. Within Ebaugh’s process of role exit she highlights the place of “mutual withdrawal.” Here she is drawing on the work of Cumming and Henry (1961). Mutual withdrawal is seen as a process which “involves both the individual’s decreased association with a group and, simultaneously, the group’s decreased demands on and involvement with the individual. As a group expects less from an individual, the rewards of belonging also decrease, such that withdrawal from the group becomes an increasingly viable option” (Ebaugh 1988:10). Leavers spoke of a sense that not only were they withdrawing from the church but the church was withdrawing from them at the same time. Where, for example, previously they would have been invited to leadership events or to be involved in ministry at the front of the church, many said that they were subtly excluded from such events.

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307 Cognitive dissonance Ebaugh defines as a “state of tension that occurs when a person holds two incompatible or contradictory perceptions at the same time” (Ebaugh 1988:135).

308 Ninety eight people interviewed had left an ‘EPC’ church at the time of the interview. In the total of 108 interviewees there were another 10 who were considering leaving at the time of the interview.

309 Cumming and Henry dealt specifically with the process of growing old and disengagement from prior roles in work family and society.

310 For some the sense of a mutual withdrawal feels like an expulsion and later being locked out of the church. This is illustrated in a poem written and presented by Scott Malcolm a New Zealand Baptist minister to a Baptist mission conference in September 1996.

I am waiting outside my home.
Standing on the deck,
Looking in through the windows.
I can see all my personal possessions,
my private things,
5.6.4 Creating the Ex-role

After the decision to leave has been made people often experience feelings of euphoria, relief, and excitement, although these are also often tempered with feelings of concern about the next step. The creation of the ex-role involves the building of new role expectations, and sources of identity, in short being socialised anew. For the majority interviewed in this study the negotiation of an ‘ex-role’ was enhanced by involvement in a group of ‘EPC’ church leavers also recently engaged in the same process. The processual model of leaving produced by Ebaugh is expressed in the following diagram.


312 In using Ebaugh’s role exit theory we need to be aware that Wasquant and others (for example Giddens 1979: 115-120) critique role theory per se because it “lacks a theory of action and therefore cannot account for the logic that informs the practical strategies whereby agents and institutions make and break, take and forsake ‘roles’” (Wacquant 1990:400). He goes on to say that “while role theory can provide a descriptive terminology, it contains no theoretical principle for explaining the very phenomenon it highlights because it has no dynamic mechanism, no motor of action” (op.cit.:400). In this present study I have used Ebaugh’s analysis and the interpretation of role theory she employs not as a mechanism to explain why people leave but as a descriptive processual model that gives labels for the process discussed by leavers. In this way I am seeking to utilise a processual model without isolating role theory as the mechanism which explains people leaving ‘EPC’ churches. In this sense I am using Ebaugh’s theory in a descriptive not explanatory fashion.
Figure 5.4 Diagrammatical Summary of Ebaugh’s Role Exit Theory

**Ebaugh’s Role Exit Theory**

Catalyst
- Organisational changes
- Burnout
- Changes in Relationships
- Events

**First Doubts (Stage 1)**

Cuing Behaviour

Negative Reactions  Positive reactions

Re-evaluation of doubts  Reinforcement of doubts

**Seeking Alternatives (Stage 2)**

conscious cuing

Negative Social support  Positive Social support

Realisation of the freedom to choose

More serious weighing of alternatives

Shiftin reference group &/or Role rehearsal

**Turning Point (Stage 3)**

Catalyst:
- Specific events
- final straw
- Time Factors
- Excuses
- Either /or alternatives

Announcement to others

Reduction of cognitive dissonance

mobilisation of resources

Role Exit.

**Creating the Ex-Role (Stage 4)**

5.7 Utilising the Theoretical Models Provided by Fowler and Ebaugh to Chart a Way Forward
By drawing on the respective theories of James Fowler and Helen Ebaugh it was possible to develop a simple typology (see Figure 5.5) of people which considered both their communal identification with church as well as taking into account whether the nature of their faith had changed.

Figure 5.5 Faith Change and Communal Identification with Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical examination of underlying faith. (Fowler)</th>
<th>Ebaugh -Role Exit</th>
<th>Communal Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does not occur</td>
<td>Church Attender</td>
<td>Cell 1: Fervent Follower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cell 2: Displaced Follower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does occur</td>
<td>Cell 3: Marginal</td>
<td>Reflexive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cell 4: Exile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those in the first cell, labelled ‘Fervent Followers’, are the continuing participants of the ‘EPC’ church. The title - ‘Fervent Follower’- is drawn from Brinkerhoff and Burke’s (1980:43) typology\(^{313}\) of religiosity and communal identification. They are characterised as ‘fervent’ because they attend church services regularly and are active participants in the organisation, leadership, programmes and activities of the church. They are described as followers because they are those who continue to believe the teachings of the church. I wish to extend this definition to include those whose faith ‘follows’ the beliefs, values and expected behaviours of the ‘EPC’ church. Those in the second cell, ‘Displaced Followers’ differ from the ‘Fervent followers’ only in the sense that they are no longer participants in church activities. Albrecht & Bahr (1989:197) define the displaced as “fervent believers with atypical problems or unusual circumstances whose needs were ignored or who were ‘pushed’ into alienation by apparently well-meant attempts to force ‘standard solutions to their non-standard problems’.” I will extend this definition to include those who are displaced due to major disagreements with the direction or leadership within the church.

Those in the third cell, ‘The Marginal Reflexives’, represent those who remain participants of the church while reflexively critiquing the beliefs, values and expected behaviours normalised in ‘EPC’ churches. This cell represents those who are undertaking the same critical re-assessment of their faith as the ‘reflexive

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\(^{313}\) Brinkerhoff and Burke (1980:43) define religiosity as referring “to all those factors which constitute a commitment to beliefs relative to the given sect or denomination to which one belongs.” In delineating between communality and religiosity they set up the following typology.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Communal Identification</th>
<th>Degree of Religiosity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Fervent Followers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Ritualists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsiders</td>
<td>Apostates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fervent Followers they define as “those who both identify with their religious community and maintain a strong belief system. Ritualists “have lost some of their religious beliefs but continue to identify with their religious community” (op.cit.:43). (They say about the ritualists that “they are often identified as defectors or disaffiliates, but may still be in the ‘process of disengagement.’ People classified as Ritualists can remain so throughout their lives without becoming Apostates” [op.cit.:43]). Outsiders “profess strong religious beliefs, but no, longer identify with their religious community” (op.cit.:43). Apostates “are those who have both disavowed their beliefs and severed ties with their religious community” (op.cit.:44). It is from this typology that the typology above is produced. The fundamental difference being that religiosity is not differentiated as being either high or low but considered using Fowler’s faith stage model to show those who are undergoing major faith stage changes in the process of leaving and those who are leaving for other reasons than those commensurate with faith stage transitions.
exiles’ but are still within the church. To achieve this they move to the margins of church involvement and participation.

Those in the fourth cell - Reflexive exiles- are those who have left the church and are not involved in any church participation and whose faith is better described as reflexive. This term is used in tension with the term follower, where the follower adheres to and accepts the beliefs, values and expectations of the church. The reflexive person is engaged in a process of objectification and critical examination of the beliefs, values and expectations of the ‘EPC’ church. The term ‘exile’ is normally taken to mean somebody who is forced to leave their home land. Here I am using it to show those who have chosen to become exiles. The idea of a chosen exile is taken from Veling (1995) who speaks of exile too as being an option.

The individuals identified in cells two and four of the previous typology form the focus of the next two chapters. The Displaced Followers will be the focus of the next chapter, (Chapter 6) and the Reflexive Exiles will be discussed in Chapter 7. As already indicated the ‘Fervent Followers’ (cell 1) represent those who remain active participants in the ‘EPC’ churches without engaging in a process of reflexive critique of the beliefs, values and behaviours espoused by ‘EPC’ churches. These committed participants are not the focus of this study, but their presence serves to provide a point of contrast for the leavers from the church, who were themselves previously very much a part of the fervent followers grouping.

The ‘Marginal Reflexive’ individuals will not be discussed in detail in the next four chapters although their presence will be acknowledged as some of them become leavers later in the process of faith reflection, critique and self-ownership discussed in Chapters 8 and 9.

The next four chapters will focus on four groupings of leavers that I have developed as a means of understanding why people leave ‘EPC’ churches and what happens to their faith in the process of leaving. The next two chapters will give more detailed information about the ‘Displaced Followers’ and the ‘Reflexive Exiles’ while Chapters 7 and 8 will describe the ongoing journey of some ‘Reflexive Exiles’ who move beyond a faith position best described as Reflexive Exiles to faith positions that I will categorise as Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders. These Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders will be respectively the focus of chapters 8 and 9.
Chapter Six

Displaced Followers

(Keith) - I'd lost it. I'd lost the Lord in all the politics. We became involved in church politics, and we lost sight of God. Totally! And when you get that back after all those years, when you get Him back after all those years of . . . that, I mean, I can’t explain the joy. It's a priceless thing (78. 435).

6.1 Introduction

The timing of my first interview with Keith and Laura Brown coincided with the end of Keith’s work day. As I approached their upper middle class home on a cold winter’s night Keith was finishing up with his last client for the day as Laura tidied up the work area ready for the next day. Laura and Keith Brown are a married couple in their early forties. He runs a business from home that allows him and Laura to make a comfortable income. I was warmly invited into their spacious lounge. Their two children had had their evening meal, one had gone off to bed and the other was completing the last of her homework in her room. I was ushered by Laura past the working Keith into the lounge where I was offered a coffee. Keith joined us a few minutes later. As we talked they both interrupted the flow of conversation with excited comments about their enthusiasm to be part of my research and their impression that what I was doing was really important for ‘the church at large’. They both mentioned that they had been keen to talk with me since I rang them a few nights earlier.

When we began the formal interview Laura and Keith launched straight into the reasons for them leaving their church and the pain they experienced in doing so. They had been heavily involved in a local Pentecostal church for 16 years. It had been during a period of separation in their marriage that they became Christians and subsequently joined the church that they were to be a part of up to a year prior to this interview. They attributed their then “new found” Christian faith to bringing their marriage back together again and starting their relationship off on a new footing. As a result they had very excitedly become involved in the church. Keith and Laura’s joining of this particular Pentecostal church influenced Laura’s brother Steve and his wife Gwyn who also became Christians to join the same church where they too had been heavily involved.

For the Browns, church became a very large part of their life. Over the previous sixteen years they had been part of the church leadership, leading home groups, prayer groups, and being called on to ‘minister’ during ministry times at the church. In recent years they had become involved in a second Pentecostal church which was unconnected to their ‘home’ church. In this second church, which they attended on Sunday evenings they were also asked to ‘minister’ during the services. When this second church began to take on a new direction and include a different programme (to include the Toronto Blessing) the Browns embraced it and were fully supportive of the changes. However they were to question this later.

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314 Ministry times refer to the term used within ‘EPC’ churches for the time within or immediately after a service when people can ask others to pray for them. In this particular church, as is the practice within many churches, there were specific people authorised to pray for those seeking prayer in the ‘ministry times’.

315 Keith and Laura were to be involved in both these churches for a number of years. Their primary church involvement was to their regular church, the one they had been converted within. This church they attended each Sunday morning and is here called their ‘home church’. The second church they attended only on Sunday evenings.

316 The Toronto Blessing began at the Airport Vineyard Church in Toronto where it was reported during 1994 that a new ‘visititation’ of God had been occurring. This ‘visititation’ was later named the ‘Toronto Blessing’ by the British Press (Anderson 1995:7). The ‘visititation’ has been experienced by six or seven thousand visitors a week for over three years (1994-1997) as visitors from all over the world visit to ‘catch the fire’. Many New Zealand pastors and church leaders have visited the Vineyard Church for this purpose as well, some attempting to bring ‘the blessing’ back to their New Zealand churches. The importation of this blessing within churches has created debate and some division as church leaders and attenders differ as to whether this
When the pastors of both their morning and evening churches, like many others in New Zealand at the time, wished to move the activities of the church to include more and more of this new ‘blessing’ the change of direction was seen by Keith and Laura as being contrary to what they believed God wanted to do within their church. Keith saw the introduction of this new focus as a man-made phenomenon rather than something from God. Laura saw it as evil.

(Keith) - We've seen with our own eyes a progression of people beginning to idolise and worship men. Their eyes have been moved off God to the eloquence, to the charismatic gifts. I'm not talking spiritual gifts, I'm talking natural charismatic gifts of men and of women and of leaders, with brilliant oratory skill and humour. So (they) manipulate, induce, suck in and abuse people. I am longing for the day when men of God will stand up in the true mantle of prophets and say "That is not God. Sit down and shut up!" (78.35).

(Laura) - We actually began to have physical symptoms... We would come home and we would feel physically ill. And we'd be driving off to church and feeling ill, and you'd get into the building you'd just have a physical... You know, it was so... I particularly tried to overcome it, because I was determined I wasn't going to leave my church family. I've been with them, these are my friends for the last 15, 16 years and I thought "No, it’s my problem. I'm going along with this if it’s the last thing I do" (78:19).

The progression of these feelings and the continued movement of the church into more and more of this new ‘Toronto Blessing’ led the Browns to see that it wasn’t an issue where they were the ones who needed to change. Rather they increasingly began to feel that the church was heading down the wrong track.

(Keith) - That was our experience. We realised that what we had been reading in the Word of God was coming into conflict with what we were hearing, and so there was something transpiring in our own spirit about what was going on. It was hell in many ways. This internal conflict and torment at times. Mental anguish going on. Trying to think what we were sensing in our spirit was in conflict with what we were hearing (78.10).

Eventually a transition occurred within Laura and Keith to the point that they no longer saw that something was wrong with them but that their church was making some serious wrong turns. This shift in the focus of attention off themselves and on to the church was not an easy one and involved them in a protracted period of confusion before they developed confidence in their own viewpoint. Eventually Laura and Keith came to interpret the new move of the church as something not from God but from the devil.

(Laura) -... we believe that what is happening here is witchcraft. Wherever there's domination, intimidation, control of this kind it’s witchcraft. That's a very unpopular thing to say. And with that a scripture in Revelation became very, very meaningful to us, Rev 2:20, that says “Those who tolerate Jezebel, those who commit adultery with her, will be cast upon a bed of suffering and affliction.” I still believe to this day, that if we enter into a relationship, if we submit ourselves to this sort of thing... (78.30).

'visitation' is of God. This Toronto Blessing encapsulates "phenomena such as slaying in the spirit (euphemistically called 'carpet time'), jerking and convulsive movements, rapture-like experiences of God's presence, and laughing and roaring" (op.cit:7). The movement has both its critics like Keith and Laura and those who endorse it like Clark Pinnock. Clark H. Pinnock, (Professor of theology at McMaster Divinity College) writes (1995) “Personally, I have found myself made more radically open to God's presence and have come away with my faith enhanced. It has helped me to place myself more at God's disposal and rely less on my own plans and more on his power and direction. Unquestionably there are dangers here. In any visitation there are genuine theological and pastoral concerns. But the Toronto Blessing seems relatively free of aberrations so far" (1995:4).
Convinced that their evening church was heading into error the Browns stopped attending that church and attempted to convince the leaders of their ‘home’ church, especially the pastor that this new direction was the wrong way to head. They wrote to, met and discussed their concerns with the elders of the church and the pastor. After repeated attempts to rescue the church from its involvement, and in their minds, total capitulation to this new ‘move’ they began to become disillusioned. The focus of disillusionment for the Browns was the church leadership who could not or would not see what they saw.

The Browns, who were always in the front row at their ‘home’ church began to sit further to the back on Sunday mornings. Where before they were actively participating in the service ‘ministry’ times they now began to hang back and watch, initially observing but as the months went by they showed their disgust with what was going on at the front.

(Laura) - So often people would be being told “Now we will pray in tongues. Now everybody will come up the front. Now we will do this, now we will do that.” And we'd be standing in the back row on our own, looking around and everyone else would have gone. Well that becomes very obvious in the end that you are not flowing with what . . . And that happened time and time again.

(Keith) - To be left standing on our own.

(Laura) - Because we couldn’t do it. We just couldn’t do it (78.120).

In response the leadership began to question their actions, accusing them of ‘bad body language’, of not being a part of the new move of God and ‘resisting the Spirit’. The Browns found they were no longer asked to be involved in ‘ministry’ in the services or leadership positions within the church. People who would previously have been referred to them for prayer were now encouraged to go to others. Not long after this the Browns were formally asked by the church leadership not to pray with people in the church.

Finally after months of going to church reluctantly, with a growing feeling of disgust for what the church was becoming the Browns left. They were angry that the church couldn’t see what they saw - that God was not a part of this new ‘Toronto Blessing’. Angry and confused they began to practice their Christian faith outside the church.

6.2 Angry & Hurt Leavers

I have found it useful in the present study to distinguish between two categories of church leavers, the ‘Angry’ and the ‘Hurt’. Both of these groups for varying reasons become disillusioned with the church. By this I mean that they have accepted or formed an expectation of what the church will be, how it will function and what its goals, practices and processes should be like. For both the ‘angry’ and the ‘hurt’ this expectation or illusion of the church has been severely undermined by the practice of a particular church or their experience of churches in general.

It is important to bear in mind that the leavers I have interviewed had been strongly committed to their church, and the vast majority were active in significant leadership positions for considerable periods of time prior to leaving. I calculated the number of years each person interviewed had been a part of the church as an adult (taking 18 years of age as a beginning point for adulthood(317)). The mean figure for all the interviewees was 15.8 years. The longevity of the interviewees’ commitment to the church is an indication that this disillusionment is not as a result of some relatively minor incident or issue.

317 Taking my beginning point as 18 years of age meant that those brought up in a church environment did not skew the figures by the inclusion of their childhood and early teenage years.
6.2.1 The Angry

The Browns are representative of the ‘Angry’ leavers. Although the specific issues that this group of leavers face vary, the sense of anger at a major church decision, direction, leadership structure or person is consistent. This grouping of leavers base the ‘incorrectness’ of the church’s decisions on what they understand of scripture. Twice Keith referred to scriptural passages as the measuring rod for what the church should be, compared to what it had become.

(Keith) - The thing that really began to concern me was the fact that we began more and more to move experientially, rather than on The Book, and the validity of the Word of God. And so I began to have problems internally. I kept thinking that "this is wrong because what is actually being said is not adding up with the Word of God." But because those in positions of power and authority in the institution were directing traffic, and telling people this is God, this is God doing this, this is God doing that, incredible layers of claptrap were going down.

And then what happens is there seems to be no voice, or voices, saying "Hang on a minute, let’s weigh this thing up." Cause the Bible says if somebody prophesies let the other prophets test it and weigh it up. . .(78.19-20)\(^{318}\)

For other ‘angry’ leavers, the focus of their disillusionment is on areas of church life other than those that concerned the Browns. For one couple, Rodger and Christine, it was the dictatorial way the senior pastor of their church was seen to control the church without reference to his elders or the people of the church. As an elder, Rodger began to confront the senior pastor but found that he was fighting a losing battle. Eventually this couple left their church too.

(Rodger) - I was an elder at the church. I was brought onto the eldership after our present pastor came on board. I was asked to join the eldership and was voted on. A lot of people came to see me at that point and said we are glad you are on, you’ll be able to bring some stability, some control into the situation. I didn’t quite understand what was happening. But I no sooner got into the eldership when I found I was in a head on clash with the pastor. No support from the other elders. They all scurried off and left me in a head on clash with things that I felt were important. Things I felt were basic to the Christian faith. From that point-and that is going back two years - I was constantly battling to hold ground. That is what staggered me - that I was alone (20.7).

(Rodger) - . . . He is the only one who can hear from God. . .(20.29).

(Christine) - Over a period of time you just began to question more and more of his (the pastor’s) own spiritual standing, because you couldn’t even encourage the eldership to get together and pray about these things, because he didn’t have time. So I began to question - what do I hear from this man?. He would say things about prayer, but he didn’t appear to practice what he preaches - not even getting together with his elders to pray (20.30; italics mine).

For this category of leavers, anger at the direction and leadership of the church is the common linking factor. Anger, though, is not the only emotion felt by this group of leavers. Many also feel betrayed and find the leaving very difficult. Their church has been highly significant to them and the decision to leave is therefore very traumatic. The degree of trauma these people go through reflects both their commitment to the church and the anger they feel about the direction or leadership of the church. The pain of this is accentuated because they believe the church has in some significant way not only betrayed them but also the gospel, the heart of the Christian faith.

\(^{318}\) Here Keith refers to 1 Corinthians 14:29 which states “Two or three prophets should speak, and others should weigh carefully what is said.”.
(Christine) - It was particularly traumatic for both of us. Particularly so for (Rodger) having been involved in his home church all his life. He has grown up in that church. And that particular church has supported us in mission ever since. So it has been very traumatic. Having been in leadership in it. We had to come to the decision to say enough is enough we are out. . .(20.4).

6.2.2 The Hurt

A number of leavers leave through a sense of disappointment and hurt with their church. These disillusioned people leave because they have accepted an understanding of how the church will care for and respond to people in need and later found themselves in extremely needy or painful situations without the kind of support or care they had expected from the church. In this sense they are disillusioned. As Hendricks says of one of the leavers he interviewed the person had heard “countless messages over the years, both explicit and implicit, to the effect that ‘we’re the body of Christ. We care. We are here to help. We are going to weep with those who weep. We’ll show the world what true community is all about’ (1993:175). When this person and the people I interviewed who left in a similar way found that they were in great need, they also found that the church wasn’t there for them in the way they had come to expect it would be.

The four interviewees in this category all ended up leaving the church as a result of the process of working through difficult personal situations. For two it was marital separation and the resultant responsibility of the children, low income, and the emotional pain of being stigmatized as a separated person within the church. For the other two, a married couple, it was the cumulative pain of serious illness, severely rebellious teenagers, depression and resultant loneliness.

(Elizabeth) - We are human beings aren’t we, and I think God realizes that, and God came in the form of Jesus etc. to show us that God can encompass all things. But somehow, it is not in the church. It is just not there. Unless you kind of fit the straight Christian. And yes they try to help but they don’t seem able. Do you know what I mean? I just feel that I don’t fit. And now I have got another friend and she said the same thing. She has been a separated person for years, and she said I just don’t fit, I don’t fit in the same way (92.39).

6.3 Specific Grumbles

Both the ‘Angry’ and the ‘Hurt’ church leavers had doubts and questions about the church that they belonged to or by extrapolation to churches like theirs or even churches per sé. These grumbles centre on specific or particular situations to do with the leadership, direction or vision of the church. For some it was the lack of support, acceptance or care offered by the church leaders and community. For the angry group the principal reasoning revolved around a conviction that the people within the church (i.e. the leadership) were behaving in a way contrary to how they ‘should’ behave. For both groups it was the critical issues related to the church and its practices. Hence I have labelled their concerns - ‘specific grumbles’. These ‘specific grumbles’ are in contrast to the ‘meta-grumbles’ of those who will be discussed in the next chapter. The level of critique of the “angry” or the “hurt” does not extend to questioning the whole basis of evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic faith itself. On the contrary it is these understandings of what the church ‘should be’ that such leavers use as the foundation for their claim that the church has failed.

319 For example Grant said of his situation - “Much later when things got much worse I went to my pastor and said look now I'm here tonight I need some answers. He couldn't say anything. . . never came back to me. In the end I just walked out and said hey man you just left me hanging. I was crying. I said the wheels are off the cart, I'm in dire straights. I started to lose reality. This is what I hear of Christianity it's good while everything is going right. But now the wheels are off the cart I want someone to give me a hand to put them back on, there was no one there. Then I started to lose faith in the actual people of the church. And what they said, and what they preached wasn't matching up. We drifted” (6.75).
The expelling doubts or questions for these people are therefore specific grumbles to do with the practice and leadership of the church (see Figure 6.1). In this respect the Displaced Followers differ from other leavers that we will discuss in subsequent chapters.

### 6.4 Displaced Followers

Both the ‘Hurt’ and the ‘Angry’ can be categorised as ‘Displaced Followers’. This title indicates that while they have left the church because of specific grumbles about the direction, leadership or level of care offered by the church, this has not led to a reflective questioning of the ‘taken-for-granteds’ of the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic faith that they have received from the church. Hence faith for this group remains fundamentally the same as the faith they held to during their time in the church. For a number this faith is held to even more tightly and with higher degrees of commitment than in their church days.
The ‘Displaced Followers’ amounted to 17.5% (n=19) of those interviewed. On average they had been participating adult members of their respective churches for 13.5 years and had been outside the church (i.e. the time since they had left) 3.5 years (mean figure) when I interviewed them. Two of the nineteen Displaced Followers grew up within an ‘EPC’ church. For one of these, Rodger, the decision to leave the church was short lived as he and his wife found another church after six months of being outside of any church. The remaining seventeen had made adult decisions to join the ‘EPC’ church they eventually left. For nine of them there had been some childhood involvement in a ‘mainline’ church prior to their decision to join an ‘EPC’ church. The remaining eight had no childhood church involvement.

We now need to consider the nature of the ‘Displaced Followers’ faith in greater detail. To do this I will outline four characteristics of the Displaced Follower’s faith as expressed by those interviewed.

6.4.1. A Received Faith

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Although the Displaced Followers have disengaged from the church as a place of participation, they have not disengaged from the faith they received when they entered the church. In fact for many, particularly the ‘angry’ leavers, part of their claim is that they, unlike the church, have remained true to the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic faith.

I have characterised their faith as “received” because it is a faith that was given to them at the time of entering the church. The Displaced Followers had been through a process of conversion and acceptance of the Christian faith as truth. This faith is something they received as a complete package as they entered the church community. This has links with William Perry’s work on the development of cognition. Perry

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320 Nineteen of those interviewed (n=108, 17.5%) were categorised as Displaced Followers.
321 Eighteen years of age or over.
322 Forde et al. claim that where social structure is “received emphasis is on the imperative nature of the mores without reference to a legitimating rationale. The only possible answer to the question ‘Why?’ is ‘Because it is right’ ” (Forde et al. 1967:370).
(1968) developed a nine point cognitional development model which Parks later reduced to four positions. The first of these four positions is titled the ‘received faith’ which connects with the first of Park’s Authority-bound and dualistic forms of cognition. “In this form of knowing what a person really trusts, knows, and believes is finally based on some Authority “out there” . . . when persons compose their sense of truth in this form, they may assert deeply felt and strong opinion but, if they are asked to reveal the basis for their knowing, eventually they will reveal their uncritical, assumed trust in a source of authority located outside of self” (Parks 1986:44-45). Such knowing tends to be dualistic, with clear divisions between what is true and untrue, right and wrong.

6.4.2. A Dependent Faith

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Although the Displaced Followers have disengaged from a particular church community they nevertheless continue to be dependent on the wider “EPC” church. Because they no longer receive the teaching and support for their faith in a church community they now have to find this from other sources. A whole variety of these are available and are used by the Displaced Follower including listening to Christian radio or watching Christian TV programmes, attending non-church based seminars and workshops, and reading Christian books and magazines. The following is from an interview with a married couple:

(Rebecca) - Well we have Radio Rhema on regularly, all day, that’s.

(Murray) - That certainly helps, yeah….

(Rebecca) - We tape all Kenneth Copeland’s things that come on in the mornings.324

(Interviewer) - And you would listen to them at some point?

(Rebecca) Oh yes, . . . (100.66).

Another interviewee who had no connection with Murray and Rebecca said:

(Hamish) - Yes. I like listening to James Dobson or Derek Prince.325 It's a good way to start your day by having a dose of Derek Prince, and go off to work! (83.120).

It is therefore clear that this category of leavers has disengaged from the church in the sense of leaving the church that meets in particular buildings on a Sunday morning or membership of a particular church body. Despite this their faith nevertheless remains dependent326 on the wider evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic community. While these leavers have disengaged from the church they nevertheless remain affiliated with the faith espoused by the church. One interviewee talked of joining ‘Promise Keepers’327 and really loving

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324 Kenneth Copeland is an American tele-evangelist whose programmes were then available on an early morning New Zealand television station.
325 James Dobson and Derek Prince are both American Christian leaders who have regular preaching programmes on Radio Rhema (the New Zealand Christian radio station).
326 The term ‘dependent’ faith is drawn from the analysis of Sharon Parks’ (1986:54-61) work on faith development which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
327 ‘Promise Keepers’ is an evangelical Christian men’s movement which began in the United States. The movement is described in its own promotional material in the following way: “Promise Keepers is a Christ-centred ministry, dedicated to uniting men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world.”
Others attend specific seminars led by Christian speakers or prophetic ministry seminars. One talked of a network of ex-Pentecostal church goers around the country that met together occasionally or called in on each other when they were visiting each other’s town. Four of the Displaced Followers who had been part of the same church talked of joining together with a number of others once a fortnight for a house church gathering. Regardless of which medium is used they all connect into the wider evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic community for ongoing ‘nourishment, fellowship and growth in their faith’. Although this group of leavers has rejected specific involvement in a local church they nevertheless hold to the tenet of evangelical faith expressed by McGrath - “the importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth”.(McGrath 1994:51). This wider community continues to provide the external source of authority for their faith. As Laura’s brother Steve says:

(Steve) - I think the fellowship aspect with other Christians is very important. That phrase that the Bible uses about iron sharpening iron; and we hone each other for refining, and we can encourage each other in the faith. That would be a key thing for people who leave the church system, is to maintain some sort of fellowship network. Whether that be formal, or informal is up to the people I guess (80.87).

While the Displaced Followers remain dependent on the wider ‘EPC’ community they also adhere to the personal faith practices of the ‘EPC’ church. Part of the evangelical emphasis has been on the personal practices of prayer, Bible reading, financial giving and service to others and God’s work in the World. The Displaced Followers typically continue on in these personal practices.

(Anne-Marie) - (a friend330) gave me a good Bible, which I read and “Praise Be” on TV. I always watch that. I've kept some really good hymn books, “New Glory”. And a lot of singing, often songs do come to me and I need help or I'm out on my own, but can still have the 'worshippy' spiritual thing. Like I do a lot of walks and I often walk and sing. I take my song book to the bath before the kids get up and have a good old half an hour. I'm always up before the kids get up. I get up a good half to three quarters of an hour before them. So I have a quiet time before the kids get up. So I read the Bible. It's a time alone. And maintain contact with the people I know are Christians (34.42).

For these ‘Displaced Followers’ whether the Bible is read regularly or irregularly it is always approached in a relatively uncritical fashion. The attitude is one which says - “here is the word of God, if I read it God will speak to me or guide me”. Prayer is equally engaged in the same form as they used to pray within their church. However most mention that it is harder to give time to prayer without the external encouragement of the church community with its prayer meetings and reminders of the importance of prayer. In this way these leavers often experience a sense of guilt that they are not carrying on their prayer lives as they should.

In interviewing these leavers about their Christian practices the significant word is “should”. Those in this grouping accepted uncritically the expectations of ‘EPC’ Christians to spend time in prayer, reading the Bible, meeting with and serving others. A number were not holding to this sense of “should” and in that way felt they were doing less than what they would expect of themselves. What is important to note is the acceptance of the “shoulds” if not the continuation of the practices themselves.

(Gwyn) - Yeah, but I would have to admit I don’t pray, and I don’t read as much as perhaps when I was in a church situation. And some of that would be because the responsibilities and positions I've held within the church system necessitated me pushing in that much harder. And so there's a slackening off, if you like. But in there, there is that core, that thread that remains (80.87).

328 (83.86).
329 The couple who led this were Keith and Laura. Most often it was held in their house. When I met with them the group had been going for over a year.
330 The name of the person indicated has been removed here.
The Displaced Follower’s faith therefore remains a dependent faith both on the wider ‘EPC’ community and by adhering to the private devotional practices at the heart of evangelicalism.

6.4.3 An Un-examined Faith

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This group of leavers has disengaged from the church but has not gone on to disaffiliate from the faith of the church. Hence the specific grumbles they have with the church or churches in general have not driven them to examine the ‘taken-for-granteds’ of the ‘EPC’ faith as such. The following comments from three of the Displaced Followers illustrated this:

(Amanda) - In the end (I) adopted the attitude we’ve not lost faith but become critical of the people in the church. I felt that if you are a Christian I had the right to expect to see some form of Christ-likeness in you. And I thought these are people who don't even know the basic parts of God's word. . . . I became disappointed in my expectations of a Christian brother or sister. . . .(6.43).

(Elizabeth) - Yes I will always be a Christian. I still have got my beliefs and it is quite strong my beliefs in it, it is just that, I don’t know I am just dysfunctional at the moment. . . . It doesn’t matter what you do I will always believe that God is God. I mean that is it (92.58 & 92.64).

(Ann-Marie) - But you don't lose your faith. I didn’t. You cling to certain verses like Psalm 8 that says that “nothing can separate us from the love of God”. I thought church is not whether I go to a building. That was the revelation when I became a Christian it's not going to Sunday Mass each Sunday. It's taking it all on board. So not feeling settled in one particular church isn't going to take your faith away (34.88).

Whenever the Displaced Followers consider the ‘taken-for-granteds’ of the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic faith these are reinforced for them through one of four authorities. The first of these is through reference to the Bible. The second involves reference to key authority figures which nullifies any anomalies by the notion that even if they personally don’t have sufficient knowledge or experience of God others do and they can be relied on. Typically these others include key Christian leaders, writers, prophets and teachers, with the most common being the pastor of their church. The third authority that can be referred to in upholding the taken-for-granteds of the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic faith is an internalised authority built up from the teaching and practices of Christians from their previous experience. This third authority is effectively an internalized significant other. The fourth authority involves reference to a mystification process in which people claim authority from a dream, vision or prophecy.

Typically, however, it is a combination of these authorities which is employed with the Bible being the final arbiter of all decisions regarding what is true from their interpretation of the Bible. In this way they express a faith that is reliant on an unexamined authority. For the ‘Displaced Followers the journey out of the church

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331 Anne Marie was brought up in a Catholic church prior to choosing to join an ‘EPC’ church. This reference is to her previous Catholic church involvement where Mass attendance was considered important in the same way ‘EPC’ churches encourage participants to be regular attenders at church services.

332 What may be called within the ‘EPC’ churches a ‘witness of the Spirit’, which is an inner ‘feeling’, ‘intuition’ or ‘understanding’. The source of such an ‘inner witness’ is perceived by the person as being beyond their own ‘feelings’, ‘intuitions’ and ‘understandings’. Rather they see the source of this ‘understanding’ as being from the Holy Spirit.
has not seriously shaken the core aspects of the ‘EPC’ faith they received in the church. Whether based on scripture, reference to mystique or their own internal reference-point, it is an unexamined identification with this authority of what is right and wrong, good practice and bad practice for Christians. This use of the Bible as an arbiter is seen in the arguments given by Keith and Laura for what they saw happening in their church. It wasn’t that they personally didn’t like what the church was becoming, nor was it simply that they felt it was wrong. Rather it was their reading of the Bible which convinced them that the church was heading into some form of error. Because the foundations, the core beliefs and values of the Displaced Followers’ faith remain intact they therefore have a solid foundation of faith from which to speak and act.

6.4.4 A Bold Faith

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<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS OF FAITH</th>
<th>DISPLACED FOLLOWERS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basis of faith content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Locus of dependency</td>
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<td>Critical stance to faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense of personal faith conviction</td>
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As I got up to leave the interview with Keith and Laura I thanked them for their time and their willingness to talk with a total stranger about their lives. Keith reached over and suggested that they pray for me and my research before I left. We stopped by the dining room table and bowed our heads as he began to pray a long and fervent prayer that God would work through what I was doing and help to bring the church around to seeing its error. He prayed for the Spirit’s protection on me and my family as I did this work as there would be opposition and “the enemy” would be sure to want to interfere. After responding briefly in prayer for them I walked back out into the cold smoggy night somewhat dazed by their passion both for their faith and against the church.

For Keith and Laura and other Displaced Followers their Christian faith remained very important to them. The faith that they now hold to outside the church is the same faith they held to while members of the ‘EPC’ church. While their grumbles have led them to question the practice of their church or churches in general, it has not led them to question the core elements of the faith they received from the ‘EPC’ church. As Keith said to me - ‘See there was never any doubt as far as shipwrecking our relationship with the Lord Jesus. That was never an issue.’

Displaced Followers remain committed to their faith, often strongly so. A very long interview with another Displaced Follower traversed the details of a series of dreams he had received from the Lord guiding him in his own personal future and giving him insight into the future of the church. These dreams he shared with the leadership of the church, but found little acceptance there for his insights. The dreams and his commitment to them reflected both his reliance on a mystification process as a final authority for his faith and the strength of commitment and faith he had retained outside the church. The detail of the dreams and his confidence that these were from God is emphatic. In one case he described looking up over the place of his work and seeing a cloud shaped like a human hand with a thumb and four fingers, clear evidence to him that God had his hand over his workplace.

I have labelled this sense of commitment to faith as being ‘bold’. The Displaced Followers are sure, confident and bold in their explanation of both their faith and the decision to leave the church. They express a certainty in their decision and present understandings of faith not found in the leavers we will meet in the next chapter.

333 Here he was using a common word to imply the ‘devil’ or ‘Satan’.
334 (78.12).
335 For further discussion see Berger (1979:68) who uses the title “neo-orthodoxy” to cover those who reaffirm an external religious authority. He described such people saying “typically they are a very noisy lot.” By this he is implying that they are very confident and outspoken about their faith.
6.5 Looking to the Future

The ‘Hurt’ and ‘Angry’ Displaced Followers view their future relationship with the church differently. The hurts are far more open to returning to church in the future, although the risk of being hurt again often holds them back.

(Tracey) - I have been thinking I would love to go again, but, it’s back to being hurt again. Because it is a form of hurting. And I was quite happy in my four little walls thank you very much. I don’t know that I want to step out, and open myself up. But equally there is the yearning to go. My youngest daughter is very involved with, funnily enough, the Brethren church. We have been all over the place in our family. And she has sort of been at me and at me, and sort of saying ‘why don’t you go, why don’t you go’ and I’ve been, I went to her baptism a few weeks ago. But that service I couldn’t take it, it’s so dry (51.96).

The ‘Hurt’ leavers are more open to going back to the type of church that they left. In this sense they are not looking to move outside of the ‘EPC’ church, but finding one that would be more accepting and caring of the people within it. When I asked Tracey how she felt about returning to a Pentecostal church like the one she had left she replied - “Yea, I loved it. Yea, I like it. . .” Below are the comments of three of the ‘Hurt’ leavers regarding their future relationship with the church.

(Tracey) - I think so, it’s um, it’s (speaking of Pentecostal churches) a lot more open, you can actually enjoy it a lot more. You can really, it seems to me an awful lot more, I like the Anglican church, I’ve got nothing against the service and that there, but it is the same every week, and you know exactly what you are going to have each week, and you know what to expect, whereas the Pentecostal, you don’t know what you are going to expect (51.104).

(Grant) - There's a bit of hope on the horizon. But I said to Amanda (his wife) really when I look at church and the reason I would be very very skeptical about going back to church. I don't want that hurt. I don't ever want to expose myself in that way. Pouring myself out and having to face that hurt, that disappointment. I just couldn't do that. If anything keeps me out of church life you know. I'm not anti-God, I still believe in all the principles. I believe in the love of God. Take a lot of things now to get me back involved in church life. If I did I'd be very very really hanging back (6.60).

(Amanda) - I would be like Grant (her husband). Part of me would like to go back to church. But I don't think I would ever go back to like Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, mid week meetings, outreaches. I just couldn't get that involved again. I still believe (6.63).

The ‘Angry’ leavers, not surprisingly, tend to view their future involvement in a church with less optimism. For them the reason they left church was because they saw the church heading off in a ‘wrong direction’. The Angry leavers are therefore very reluctant about returning to an institutional church. As Keith says:

(Keith) - Yeah, I want to walk with Jesus. And to do the best that I can see, He (Jesus) spent 99% of His time outside the temple of the Pharisees. He did a bit of teaching in there. But most of his life was spent outside of there. Most of the disciples were outside there.

(Keith) - But also I can’t see anywhere in scripture, particularly from Matthew through Revelation whereby we have in scripture something that is some discernible biblically based outline of what we've currently got in the way of the institution. I can’t see that it bears any resemblance to it. For the life of me, I've tried. I've tried and tried and tried and said "Well, you know, what the institutions do, well where does it appear in here?" ‘And to that which can be proved to bear', I'm holding fast. That's what I'm desiring to do (78.272-273).

336 (51.102).
(Keith) - Because if you say who you really are, people are gone. They don’t know how to deal with it, there's no reality. Reality is the Hope of Glory. Reality equals truth. Truth is reality. You've got it, we've got a facade, a mask, and a belief that is an absolute offense. And the stench that would fill the Father's (God's) nostrils. And I'd go so far as to say that such is the cancer and mess that the institution is in, there is but one course left. Death and destruction (78.83).

Again the basis of Keith’s reluctance to rejoin the church is his understanding of the Bible and in this case the way the church as he knew it was functioning outside the intentions of his interpretation of the Bible. Other Displaced Followers are equally clear that what exists now in the form of the church is not something they wish to return to but will be guided by what God wants rather than their own view. As Laura’s brother Steve and his wife Gwyn express below, for many there is an expectation that God is in the process of starting something different and a new form of church will emerge in the future of which they will be a part.

(Gwyn) - I wait for direction from God. I'm not going out looking for anything. I am looking for Him to direct me for what He wants me to do. I want to know Him more deeply still. I want to go on. I've got to the point where I'll do anything that He asks me. You know, if He asks me to move out of this house, it's quite comfortable, then I will do it. Things that perhaps were not an issue before I'm looking at now and realizing that, I think, He's going to radically change our lives in the future. And I think that He will bring other Christians along across our path that we'll be joined up with. And he'll supernaturally do it (80.96).

(Steve) - For me, I personally can’t see myself going back into the church system as it exists now. And I firmly believe the church will not exist in its current form in years to come. The main reason being that it’s strayed from the baseline that God’s set. And the purposes that He's called Christians to, namely not for ourselves, but for our fellow human beings. The principles that God sets out, if they were adhered to, all the problems of society would ultimately disappear. You know that's my belief.

(Steve) - So like Gwyn (his wife) says, it would be a supernatural intervention of God to change the church, its current form. See even the word church can be so misunderstood because of its meaning of a body of people, not as buildings or institutions. It will come, I believe, it will come back to that. . . . It will be seen to be a body of people living and giving the life of God, as opposed to all these structures and institutions and things. And in doing that it will become that much more relevant to the secular world, as a natural consequence. Not what they're trying to do now, and try and become relevant in their own understanding, and resources. It will never work. It would have to be because it's God's church, it would have to be His character. Everything about Him has to be the church for it to be relevant. Yeah, that's where we see our future. Individually I'm believing we'll be a part of that, this new church of God (80.97-98).

(Steve) - So, I guess that's where we're at. I firmly believe in the future, and our relationship with God, and our involvement with what He's going to do.

(Gwyn) - Oh, I'm excited about it. It burns in me, I think "Yup, it'll happen." And I'm not going to do a thing about trying to make it happen. Nothing (80.112-113).

For Rodger, the church elder, and Christine his wife the location of their anger was with the dictatorial practices of the Senior Pastor of their church. This sense of disillusionment with their particular church did not lead to a generalised disillusionment with all churches. Because of this Rodger and Christine, though terribly hurt and very angry with the Senior Pastor, were able to look at other churches after a period of six
months of non-attendance. Initially they visited a number of churches, sat very much on the fringe and watched how the church operated. In the end they chose another church of the same denomination within their city and cautiously became involved again. The month I interviewed them they had decided to join this church and were considering becoming formal members. Because their disillusionment was localised to one pastor and was not extrapolated from that point to all other pastors or churches they were able to join another church while the other 17 Displaced Followers remained outside of any church.

6.6 Faith Operations

The faith operations expressed by the Displaced Followers are typical of what James Fowler refers to as the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith (stage 3). The dependent relationship on the ‘EPC’ community, the received and unexamined nature of their faith and the strong convictions are all indications of the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith.

Fowler’s analysis of this stage of faith includes the following illustration (see figure 6.2).

**Figure 6.2 Synthetic-Conventional Faith Stage Illustration**

In this illustration the central stick figure represents the person at that Synthetic-Conventional faith stage. Here the individual is surrounded by the values, beliefs and convictions of significant others from their community. They are, as Fowler has identified, “acutely attuned to the expectations and judgements of these significant others and as yet do not have a sure enough grasp of their own identity or faith in their own autonomous judgement to construct and maintain an independent perspective” (Fowler 1995:173). By the use of the term ‘conventional’ Fowler is indicating that the values and beliefs these people hold are derived from the group of significant others and for the most part are unexamined. The term ‘synthetic’ Hull describes by stating:

> It is synthetic in that it is held non-analytically. One believes in order to establish communality or relatedness, and in that sense the perspective of faith has a kind of global wholeness about the way it comes upon me. Values and truths are not probed in order to ascertain their truths one by one. They are not graded or relativised one in terms of the other. One does not imagine what the total system would look like if this or that bit was omitted (Hull 1985:189).

The faith operations at work here link strongly with the Displaced Followers who are holding to an unexamined faith which they received as a complete package from the ‘EPC’ church.

People at the Synthetic-Conventional Faith stage can be described as being loyal and committed workers to their church, who tend to hold deep convictions. However typically they are not innovative thinkers (Fowler 1987:88). The Displaced Followers exhibit these same qualities. Fowler goes on to describe the Synthetic-Conventional Faith stage as one in which people are looking for “a relationship with God and with the important persons of their lives in which they feel that they are living up to the expectations these important others have of them” (Fowler 1987,87). For these people there is a strong sense of the church as an extended family, even a romanticized family. It is this strong family image that may lead to such a deep sense of disillusionment in the Displaced Followers when church is found to be less than their image of what it should be.337

337 For further discussion see Fowler (1987:87-90).
This stage of faith is often expressed in dualistic understandings. Dualisms between ‘good’ and ‘bad’, ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’, ‘Christian’ and ‘non-Christian’ are used by people at this faith stage to make sense of their own position and those of others. This type of understanding is expressed in the following discussion:

(Murray) - My argument has always been if you go to church, who’s looking after the money? The accountant in the world? That is 100% wrong. Cos’ that accountant normally works the money in the world the way he’s been taught. The Lord’s way isn’t man’s way. And that goes for anything in the church (100.212).

Trying to clarify exactly what he means by this comment I asked “So you’re saying God’s got methods of doing things, and the world’s got methods of doing things and they’re not always the same?”

(Rebecca) - Well I would say they’re totally contrary.

(Interviewer) - Okay, they’re totally contrary and the church has tended to adopt the world’s methods in terms of running money, and teaching and structures and all that sort of thing.

(Murray) - That’s right.

(Rebecca) - Yeah I believe that, because when you look at some of the men of God that have come down through the ages well ‘Smith Wigglesworth’ for a start, a plumber, couldn’t read or write... (100.216-219)

Here a dualistic attitude between the things of the secular world and the ways of God is shown. The Christian way, for these people, involves the usage of totally different methods, spiritual methods, than that adopted within the ‘world’.

Although they have left the church the voices, teachings and practices of the internalised significant others remain deep within many of the Displaced Followers. Fowler describes this as a significant weakness of the Synthetic-Conventional Faith stage. As, Fowler states, “expectations and beliefs of others can be so deeply internalised that later autonomy of judgement and action can be jeopardized.” For a number of Displaced Followers the significant others from the past have been internalised and now control from within their own psyches. These are perhaps the most difficult to break away from. For this group the authority and benchmark of the Bible remains unquestioned as well.

Fowler describes the move to the next stage of faith as a two-part transition. The first part involves the emergence of a new sense of self that will take responsibility for its own actions, beliefs and values and will stand out against the significant others of the past. A number of the Displaced Followers were giving indications that they were beginning to emerge from the encircling influence of significant others and anticipate the first part of the faith stage transition described by Fowler. The second aspect is a new objectification and examination of the beliefs, values and expectations they have received.

6.7 Moving Beyond a Displaced Follower’s Faith

For some of the interviewees in this grouping there are indications of another set of grumbles beginning to emerge subsequent to their leaving the church. One interviewee who had been out of the church for 12 years commented that he is now less satisfied with the faith diet that he receives from sources that were originally inspiring and nurturing his faith.

338 This links with Forde et al’s., argument that functional autonomy is dependent on an individual’s ability to move beyond functional dependence on social structure through the use of role-distancing techniques (Forde et al, 1967:370-380). If the internalised significant other strongly reinforces the received faith package the individual may be unable to step outside of their faith package and critique it for themselves.
(Andrew) - And for years I’ve actually really enjoyed Derek Prince’s ministry and still listen to it, but if I’m listening to Radio Rhema there are times I just do not want to hear Jack Hayford, or do not want to hear Derek Prince, simply because I feel as if I’m coming under that: “you ought to be”, kind of thing. And there are times when maybe I’m visiting with my father-in-law, who’s a retired Pentecostal minister or I’m reading the Apostolic news or I’m reading some of the books that Dad reads and I feel the old kind of pressures and expectations to be doing this or to be doing that or listen to Trevor Yaxley or Bill Subristsky, or whatever on Radio Rhema. And I kind of think it’s just not where I’m at, and I just kind of turn off and it’s again a whole set of expectations that I’m expected to live up to and it’s just not where the Lord’s taken me (85.143).

Here there are indications of wanting to look beyond the “ought to be’s”, the previously accepted expectations of the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic faith. As another put it “I have a lot of questions and there are a lot of things that I have changed my thinking on. . . . I think I used to believe blindly what the preacher was saying. . . . I believed blindly what everyone was saying but I think I question more now” In these comments of some of the Displaced Followers there are indications of both aspects of the faith transition described by Fowler. A moving away from the previously encircling influence of significant others and a deeper examination of their faith - its beliefs, values and expectations. Here the comments of the interviewees reflect a dissatisfaction that is broader and less clearly articulated than those generally expressed by the Displaced Followers. Fowler comments in this regard.

Factors that contribute to the breakdown of stage three may include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes by officially sanctioned leaders, or policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unbreachable, or the encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one’s beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how relative they are to one’s particular group or background (Fowler 1983:188).

This sense of beginning to reflect on the ‘EPC’ faith more explicitly will be picked up in the next chapter.

6.8 Conclusion

The Displaced Followers form a significant segment (17.5% ) of those interviewees who had left the ‘EPC’ churches. Whether the critical factor is one of disappointment with the care and support offered by the church or a divergent view on the direction and leadership of the church these leavers form a distinct grouping because it is their specific grumbles related to their church (or extrapolated to churches in general) which pushes them out of the church community. They, like all leavers, feel this sense of expulsion very deeply. But due to their feeling that the church has failed them, it is in one sense a more painful leaving. These people feel angry, hurt and betrayed by the church they had committed so much of themselves to. However the faith they hold outside the church is a continuation of the faith they used to have in the church. This needs to be stressed. Often they express a strong personal commitment to their faith, although this is clearly stronger in the ‘Angry’ than the ‘Hurt’ leavers. The Displaced Followers remain dependent on the wider “EPC” community for fellowship, nourishment and teaching. They typically have not begun to examine the core beliefs, values and expectations of the faith they received when they entered the church, although there are indications that some are beginning to reflect on their faith in new ways.

339 Here the interviewee mentioned the name of the church his father was a pastor within. This has been changed to the more generic term ‘Pentecostal’ in order to protect the interviewee’s confidentiality.
340 (51.120-122).
Chapter Seven
Reflexive Exiles

The deeper we go into reality, the more numerous will be
the questions we cannot answer.\[341\]

Von Hügel

My dominant image of Jane (who we met in Chapter 5) is of a highly motivated and intelligent woman. Jane and her oldest daughter are now both studying full time at University. For Jane this final year of her Psychology degree has to be fitted in around a full time job in the Social Welfare Department, bringing up two children as a solo mum and her work with a voluntary medical association as well as the flower roster and cleaning roster at her local church. It is these rosters that remain her final link with the church. In fact she hasn’t been to a service for over two years and only went very infrequently the year before that. She only continues with the rosters because it is a very small traditional church, with a lot of elderly people, and if she didn’t do it she is not sure who would. It is a long way from her days as a pastor’s wife in a thriving Pentecostal church with over a thousand people at the main service.

Jane raises her hands to gesture the speech marks around the word “Christian” as she explains how she first became involved in the church. It was 1973 and Jane, then in her late teens, was invited to a Pentecostal church in her small rural Australian town by a friend.

(Jane) - I was at a bit of a crisis period. I came from a very dysfunctional family and the people were very friendly, very hospitable and I certainly could sense something there. There was a certain atmosphere or presence, and I think because I was quite needy at the time, I think it was sort of like a ready made answer. They had some solution for everything. I didn’t need to work anything out anymore. It was like a package deal and all the answers were there. No more questions about the meaning of life (65.22 &24).

Jane was from then on involved, as she puts it, “lock, stock and barrel” in all the activities of her church.\[342\]. The church undoubtedly helped her - “it gave me a sense of identity, and for the first few years it was really good for me, because it helped me sort out a lot of things from earlier that was a very positive experience.”\[343\] After a few years she moved to a big city, and a much bigger Pentecostal church where she married one of the key leaders from the church. Although he was not initially part of the paid pastoral staff, it was only a few years and a couple of moves to different cities and churches later before they were on the staff of one of the largest Pentecostal churches in New Zealand.

However for Jane the period of being “heavily” involved was beginning to come to an end. Despite her best efforts to remain actively part of the church she was finding it more and more difficult being there.

(Jane) - I tried to be (involved), I had a continual battle, I was starting to question a lot of the basic philosophies . . . . I don’t know where I am as far as believing in God, or who Jesus was and things like that. I’m not sure about that now, but I don’t sort of feel I have to know that. But I think there is a lot of wisdom in the Bible that stands on its own. It has a lot of good principles to live by (65.94).

It is this questioning of the basic philosophies of the ‘EPC’ faith that distinguishes Jane and others like her from the Displaced Followers discussed in the previous chapter. The leavers discussed in this chapter have

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\[341\] Von Hügel cited in Waite 1995:181
\[342\] (65.26)
\[343\] (65.26)
\[344\] The philosophical problems she was having become clearer later.
grumbles that question the foundations of the ‘EPC’ faith they received in their respective churches and para-
churces. To distinguish these grumbles from the specific grumbles of the Displaced Followers I will use the
term meta-grumbles.

7.1 Meta Grumbles
Meta-grumbles go to the core of the meta-narratives provided by the ‘EPC’ church. These are not grumbles
about specifics within the church but about the function, role and place of church itself. The meta-grumbles
are not questioning peripheral aspects of ‘EPC’ faith but the deep rooted foundations of the faith itself. As
such those described here are reflecting on and questioning the basis of the Christian faith they have received
from the ‘EPC’ church community. The comments below reflect the degree to which the core of faith is
analysed in this process.

(Rosemary) - It is really interesting reading this (consent form345) “maintaining your faith
outside of the institutional framework.” Well I don’t know whether we are actually the right
people for this because we are not really maintaining our faith. Our problem is not so much
with the church, but it is with God as well (84.95).

(Fiona) - It seems like things have come down to the basics of who am I and who is God and
I don’t know if I am anywhere near finding out. But it seems a lot more clear, in that the
church, all that stuff isn’t there. So that if God is going to speak to me, he will have to do it
in a way that is not sort of linked to anything. So there is sort of a freshness there in a way,
and a sense of not being bound to what we were used to (47.102; italics mine).

Some of these people’s questioning revolves around the same issues expressed by those in the previous
chapter - questions about the church’s structure and direction or the personal support and care offered by the
church. These specific grumbles often act as probes that encourage people to consider the underlying faith
assumptions that until this point have remained tacit. Hendricks (1993:223) quotes one of the leavers he
interviewed as saying “I trusted the church up until that moment. But then it stopped being there for me in
some way, and I said, ‘hey I’m not getting the support I need. And that opened me up to say, maybe this
whole thing is faulty! How do I know whether any of what I believed is true?” But added to these specific
questions are those of a quite different nature. I have sought to highlight the difference between these two
sets of questions by using the terms ‘specific grumbles’ and ‘meta-grumbles’. The term meta-grumbles is
drawn from Cohen and Taylor (1992:14) who describe meta-grumbles as attempts to escape Lyotard’s
concept of meta-narratives (“which lay claim to an overarching understanding of human nature, social
progress and cultural change [op.cit.:12]”). Meta-grumbles indicate a dissatisfaction with such meta-
narratives that form the ‘paramount reality’ in which we all live. When Jane says that she is starting to
question a lot of the basic philosophies, she is meaning the underlying or taken-for-granted beliefs, values
and expectations of the ‘EPC’ churches.

The word ‘meta’ also draws our attention to two key ingredients of the concept ‘meta-grumble’. Firstly
‘meta’ is part of the progression from micro to macro to meta. This therefore implies that ‘meta-grumbles’
form the largest and most fundamental of grumbles to do with someone’s faith. And secondly as George
states (1992:51) “the prefix ‘meta’ means ‘change’, as in metabolism, metamorphosis, metaphysical and in
the Greek word ‘metanoia’ -(to change one’s mind or ‘repent’346).” Therefore the term ‘meta-grumbles’
implies a fundamental change in the basis of one’s faith.

People like Jane, whom I have labelled the Reflexive Exiles are not leaving the church because it is not
functioning as it should, or because they have relational difficulties with the leaders or disapprove of the new

345 At this point the interviewee was reading the interviewee consent form given to all interviewees prior to an
interview. See the Methodological Appendix (Appendix 1) for more detail.
346 This change of faith is here linked to understandings of secularisation (discussed in Chapter 3) which
perceive secularisation as a process which changes the nature of faith rather than a process that leads to a
loss of faith.
vision or direction of the church but because of a more foundational questioning of their underlying faith. The ‘specific grumbles’ relating to church structure and leadership may all be factors in bringing people to the point of questioning the core beliefs and values of the ‘EPC’ community of which their church or para-church is a part. These core beliefs, values and expected behaviours are part of the taken-for-granted elements of the church community. To question these is to potentially undermine the core foundations of the community itself.

Figure 7.1 below indicates the process of reflection that is being entered into by the Reflexive Exiles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Given beliefs, values and customs of the evangelical Pentecostal charismatic community</th>
<th>Taken for granted</th>
<th>Problematic</th>
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In Figure 7.1 the taken-for-granted elements of the church are accepted until, for whatever reason, they become problematic. The journey to this point of beginning to question the core of their faith in new ways can be sparked and fueled by a variety of differing stimuli. Two groupings of such stimuli were identified in this research. These were personal crises and changes (including major health, employment and relational or marital status changes\(^{347}\)), specific-grumbles with their church structure or leadership and external exposure to alternative narratives (these included being exposed to alternative ideologies through personal study [e.g. feminist studies at university], a work environment, or significant friendships). In the accounts of many of the leavers it was a combination of a number of such ‘stimuli’ that nudged them to consider in new ways the basis and core of their faith. Whatever the specific factors that compel an individual to reflect on his/her faith in new ways may be, in each case the combination of factors gave the individual a reference point outside of the traditional authorities from which to reflect and question. Berger speaks of this process in ‘The Heretical Imperative’ (1979):

> When the external (that is, socially available) authority of tradition declines, individuals are forced to become more reflective, to ask themselves the question of what they really know and what they only imagined themselves to know in the old days when tradition was still strong. Such reflection, just about inevitably, will further compel individuals to turn to their own experience (Berger 1979:32).

\(^{347}\)This has been identified by Hadaway and Roof (1988:45) as significant. They state - “Those who have experienced significant social dislocations, marital problems, poor family relationships, lack of love as children, even those who have been beaten at some point, are all more likely to leave the church, even though it is one of the few places in society where hurting individuals should be able to expect solace and acceptance. The reasons for this ironic situation, however, are not clear. Such persons may tend to turn inward, or may feel shunned by the church, even when they have not been; or the church may appear to be a collection of the happy and healthy rather than a haven for those who hurt.” What is being implied in the analysis provided in this research is that these personal struggles provide the impetus to reflect on one’s faith and sense of belonging within the church in new and deeper ways.
At this point the taken-for-granteds are either accounted\textsuperscript{348} for by reference to an external or internalised other, to mystification or to the Bible as the Displaced Followers did, or these taken-for-granteds are held open for potential discreditation. Where the Displaced Follower accepts the authority of the taken-for-granted, the Reflexive Exile allows for the possibility that these foundational beliefs, values and expected behaviours may themselves be discredited and that they require further personal investigation. Where problematic faith issues are accounted for by reference to mystique or an assumed (but not personally tested) authority for the Displaced Followers the Reflexive Exiles are not satisfied by this type of basis for the meta-accounts of faith. The following interviewee comments indicate this.

(Margaret) - I started to feel that things weren’t right underneath. I had real doubts about things. I was really questioning in myself. And I think I felt, looking back now, that I was very much put into a box, with very high expectations put on me, and I started to thinking this isn’t right. When I started to see the things that were going on inside of me, that were real battles, I was looking for approval, and then I got very badly hurt by a pastor at (name of her church), and that was it (54.11).

(Kevin) - Well it came to the crux. I came to church one day when I, we have a system where people can get up and share, and still do really, it is pretty open and it’s good. So I sort of got up and said \textit{the pastor}\textsuperscript{349} talked about an altar call, to put their trust in God; rebuild their trust in God or something like that. I got up and said that is all very well but I couldn’t trust God. And said I think it is about time we started being honest. It was April 1994. I remember that really clearly. I just remembered saying you might feel that you want to pray for me, but please don’t. I remember I had said to one of the elders who had come over to me and said I want to pray for you and I had said no it is OK thanks. I had to qualify that, so I said I don’t particularly want you to pray for me because I don’t think it is going to work anyway. And I just wanted to say that. I was sick of things being said without a response from somebody who was having trouble with it. You know in the church setting it’s like well it’s going to be great. Come and God will answer all your needs. And sometimes God doesn’t appear to answer all your needs and nobody seems to address that issue (84.92).

(Angela) - Yeah, its so difficult to look at your own life and what you really do believe in the nitty gritty, when you’re constantly trying to ... I don’t know ... put forward a certain persona for other people. It’s very difficult to be honest sometimes in front of other people and yeah I sort of just got to a stage where I acknowledged that I wasn’t being an honest person. In a way I was still being me, but part of me was always sort of putting up a bit of a front and perhaps a bit of a barrier too saying well you know, because I felt unsure of what was happening inside spiritually I would then sort of back off a wee bit. I wasn’t confident to really perhaps open up as much as I could have to people. Yeah it’s been a really good opportunity to just say well what do I believe? And yeah doing a bit of extra reading, not just from the Bible, but looking at other. ... oh certainly not other religions ... but more just a general holistic look at life you know where do we fit into the scheme of things ... so it’s been really quite interesting\textsuperscript{350} ... Certainly looked at a lot of different areas ... you know just personal growth ... and healing and things like that and no we really have over this last year or so come across some interesting ... well some other things had been happening ... like last year my mother got really sick and that was a time that we were able to look at the meaning of life in a very deep way, reassess things. ... you just change your priorities and you take stock of things ... just need a bit of refreshment (90.72).

\textsuperscript{348} See Lyman & Scott (1970:124-143).
\textsuperscript{349} Here Kevin used the name of the pastor to whom he was referring. Here this name has been removed.
\textsuperscript{350} (90.67)
Margaret, Kevin and Angela’s comments reflect the desire to question and examine the core foundations of their faith. For these leavers this process of questioning begins while they are still part of the church and extends throughout the leaving process into their time outside of a church community. Although dealing with similar questions, doubts and issues Margaret, Kevin, Angela and Jane have related differently to their church as they worked through their questions. Margaret and Angela left the church relatively early on in this process. For Margaret this involved a major disagreement with the senior pastor of her church. For Angela it was a process of slowly withdrawing over 18 months and drifting out the door. Kevin, on the other hand, left his Pentecostal church for 6 months in the midst of his questioning but has subsequently returned, his questions and doubts not satisfied.

Kevin and his wife Rosemary believe that a loose connection with the church provides a better context for their questions than being completely removed from the church altogether. Their present relationship with the church can be understood with reference to Goffman’s (1961:73-133) notion of ‘role distancing’ where individuals both play the role and declare themselves to be more than the role with which they were currently encumbered. Kevin and Rosemary are trying, perhaps desperately trying, to stay part of the church while being honest about their doubts and questions. They are really struggling to remain involved even on a much reduced basis to what they were previously. At the end of my time with Kevin and Rosemary I was left wondering how long their tenuous attachment with the church would last.

Jane, on the other hand, remained tied to the church not by choice but through her husband’s involvement and his career as a pastor. For Jane it was to be ten years from the time these doubts and questions began to emerge and she found herself withdrawing mentally until she was finally able to leave completely.

(Jane) - I didn’t have the luxury of just being able to pull out in the way that people who wouldn’t have been on the pay roll would have. But I certainly disengaged mentally and I started to build support networks for myself outside of the church, tentatively (65.67).

For Jane these ten years were a very disturbing and difficult period in her life. She could see much of the good that the church was doing and yet felt that it was becoming constricting on who she wanted to be as a person. Her journey out has similarities with the Displaced Followers discussed in the previous chapter but differed sharply in the level of her questioning. For Jane and people like her the level of questioning moves to the point of questioning the very core beliefs, values and behaviours of the ‘EPC’ church. Hence Jane’s faith trajectory and others like her is somewhat different to that of the Displaced Followers. This is shown in Figure 7.2 below.
As indicated in the previous chapter some of the Displaced Followers move beyond their focus on specific grumbles and begin to question the core foundational base of the ‘EPC’ faith itself. A number of Displaced Followers who were interviewed gave indications that since leaving the church the focus of their questions and doubts was shifting in the direction of critically re-assessing the foundational beliefs, values and behaviours of the ‘EPC’ church community. That people can move from the faith position represented as Displaced Follower is postulated by the dotted line between Displaced Followers and Reflexive Exiles on Figure 7.2. One of the one hundred and eight people interviewed claimed that he had given up his faith completely. He claimed that his faith, at the time of the interview, was best described as ‘atheistic’. His journey of faith outside the church is represented in Figure 7.2 by an arrow leading to the heading - ‘lost Faith’.

### 7.2 Reflexive Faith

During our discussion Jane was quite clear that she hadn’t lost her faith. Generally the Reflexive Exiles seemed very keen to tell me they hadn’t lost their faith, but it was hard finding what Jane’s faith involved or how it affected her life now. In this research I found that the first thing a reflexive faith person would tell me was that they haven’t lost their faith. But the second thing that comes through is that they are not sure what their faith is any more. One of the criteria used here for establishing where a person fitted in the faith stances we are developing was the degree of confusion and the prevalence of ‘I don’t knows’ in their accounts of their faith. To gain a clear answer of what Jane’s faith comprised I found that I needed to probe her and other Reflexive Exiles quite strongly:

**Interviewer** - Would you characterize yourself as having a continued spirituality and faith?

**Jane** - Definitely *(said immediately and emphatically)*.\(^{351}\)

**Interviewer** - Would you characterize that as having a Christian flavour?

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\(^{351}\) *Italic comment added.*
(Jane) Um, probably, more from sort of habit and because I know a lot about Christianity and it’s really familiar territory for me. I’ve spent thousands of hours in Bible studies and stuff. So to a certain extent that is just a familiar groove. But for quite a few years I couldn’t think about it, couldn’t, I don’t read the Bible. But I know a lot of it. And it sort of comes to me from time to time in certain situations (65.95-98).

The same sort of responses came through in the interview with another woman:

(Interviewer) - so faith for you still has a Christian flavour.

(Melissa) - Um

(Interviewer) - Things like prayer and the Bible, churches like (name of their church) see as being very important in the development of faith. Do they have any place for you now.

(Melissa) - I would really like to say yes it does, and I would love to have something really that is a bit more tangible than what I’ve got, but like I said before, all that stuff still clouds my thinking and I just need to get rid of a lot of the crap that I was left with. But careful too that you don’t throw the baby out with the bath water. Because I still do believe in certain things. I guess it was the legalism, now I think I should pray - that is what it is, it’s a should. And I’d love to one day just maybe start afresh and without all the shit (57.172-175).

The label Reflexive Exiles is drawn from the dominant characterisation of such leavers. Their reflexive disposition towards the church they had belonged to, the faith they had received and their future faith direction. The term ‘exile’ must on first impression seem a curious label to be used of people who choose to leave the church. A strict definition of ‘exile’ implies a form of enforced banishment. However Veling (1996:78) draws on one of Jabès’s imaginary rabbis who writes ‘exile, too, is an option.’ About this notion of exile being an option Veling says:

In what way is exile an option, something chosen? Generally speaking, I think it is true that we are more inclined to stay close to all that has gone before us because it is not an easy thing to depart - to take leave of “all that to which we belong.” It is not easy to think a new thing; harder still to live in a condition of exile. Yet sometimes that is what it takes to escape the binding of a book (the term he uses for a tradition or religious belief and belonging) that no longer holds as it used to. Particularly in the face of dominant institutions and orderings of reality that cling to the safety of the same, there are times that urge us to depart, times when we feel we must take up the nomadic existence of an exiled wanderer, in order to enlarge and set free the home to which we belong - the place we never really leave (1996:78; italicised comment mine).

It is in the sense implied by Veling - that exile too is an option - that the term is used here to describe this grouping of ‘EPC’ church leavers. The use of the term also encapsulates the feelings of those who have left. The feeling of being an ‘outsider’ an ‘exile’ from one’s homeland, one’s place of belonging. Ward and Wild (1995:3) speak of this saying: “In the experience of many contemporary Christians there is a real sense of wilderness, a sense of having grown out of or away from, old belief systems and forms of worship. We experience the present as barren and bewildering. The old has died but the new is beyond our grasp.”

352 Throughout Veling’s work (1996) he draws on the writings of Jabès to introduce each chapter from his collection of comments from imaginary rabbis.
7.2.1 Counter-Dependency

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The Displaced Followers discussed in Chapter 6 had disengaged from active participation in a church community but remained dependent upon the wider ‘EPC’ church community through reading books and magazines written from this perspective, watching Christian TV shows, listening to radio preachers and music or attending seminars and workshops. The Displaced Followers had also continued in the personal faith practices of the ‘EPC’ church, such as personal times of prayer and Bible reading, financial giving and service to others as well as searching out fellowship with other like-minded people. In this sense, the faith of these leavers was still nurtured by and dependent upon the wider ‘EPC’ community and this community’s personal devotional practices. In some instances the external dependency had shifted to a dependency on an internalised significant other who acted as a sounding board for the on-going basis of their faith.

Unlike the Displaced Followers, Jane, and Reflexive Exiles like her, developed a counter-dependent attitude towards the whole ‘EPC’ community. Jane did not find her faith nurtured by listening to Christian radio shows, or watching Christian TV. She was not involved in reading Christian books or attending seminars. In fact if people like Jane talked about these media at all they talked about them as something which they would have nothing to do with. When I asked this category of leavers what nurtured their faith now, many answered ‘well it is certainly not...’ This answer exemplifies the counter-dependent relationship they have with the ‘EPC’ community. For a number of the Reflexive Exiles this opposition extended to a distinct dislike of anything that reminded them of the ‘EPC’ church community they had left.

This counter-dependency stage emerges as the person begins to question the taken-for-granted nature of the faith community’s beliefs, values and expected behaviours. Sharon Parks’ (1986) model of young adult faith development from which the term ‘counter dependency’ is drawn states:

A person’s feelings will continue to be shaped by this assumed authority until the day when there is the yearning (or absolute necessity) to explore and test oneself. This may occur in the midst of the utter shipwreck of the truth one has depended upon (in which case it may be accompanied by feelings of devastation, betrayal, bewilderment or the like), or it may emerge as a manifestation of just a restlessness arising as a sort of readiness for more being. In the latter instance, it is as though a strength has been established which can now ‘push away from the dock’ of what has been sure moorage, to move out into the deep waters of exploring for oneself what is true and trustworthy. Initially, however, this move is essentially another form of dependence, since this pushing away from the dock takes the form of counter-dependence... counter-dependence is the move in opposition to authority, that provides momentum for the passage into the unknown (Parks 1986,55).

As Veling says:

It is a strange paradox, yet one worth highlighting, that even when people attempt to break with tradition because of the alienation they experience, the tradition nevertheless retains an

353 The ‘counter-dependency’ concept is taken from Parks (1986:55).
354 For some interviewees this counter-dependency began while they were still involved in the church. In such situations while there may not have been a physical distancing and rejection of faith contents there had nevertheless been a self conscious distancing at least within their own minds. Typical of Goffman’s role distancing, this involves for the individual a “wedge between the individual and his role, between his doing and being” (Forde et al. 1967:Footnote 40).
What is at work here is Gadamer’s notion of ‘effective historical consciousness’ - the operative force of tradition in people’s lives, so that even in reacting against it they remain conditioned by it (1996:49).

For some of the leavers in the reflexive faith group there was a far more gradual and less traumatic move to counter-dependency than that expressed by Jane. Nevertheless people in this reflexive faith stance were pushing against anything that reminded them of the ‘EPC’ church or para-church within which they had previously been heavily involved. This counter-dependency often extended beyond the overt expressions of the ‘EPC’ community to Christian people as well.

As Lucy said:

(Lucy) - I’ve had a deliberate policy of de-churching myself. Where I consider I’ve been indoctrinated for so many years - that I really haven’t touched Christian books or tapes. I can’t stand anything like that. I really don’t want to be touched by anyone else’s view of God and what my relationship with God should be. You know so many years of reading that and listening to that. . . . I also have a physical aversion to them, you know or a spiritual or a psychological aversion to anything Christian. In fact I don’t even like being with Christians. I find a lot of their talk is just such trash. You know I’m being very harsh here but I’m trying to express how strongly I feel about a lot of Christianity (96.199-200).

When Jane said she no longer read the Bible she stated something which was indicative of the Reflexive Exiles. In the counter-dependence phase people push against the previous authority and basis of faith they have held to for so long. However they have not yet begun to create a new self-oriented basis for their faith and beliefs. For Reflexive Exiles from the ‘EPC’ churches this includes ‘pushing against’ the old ideas of reading the Bible and regular times of prayer. Some would read the Bible occasionally, and most would pray by means of a spontaneous internalised thought process, but not in the ways they experienced in the ‘EPC’ church. Regarding prayer Jane said:

(Jane) - I quite often pray spontaneously, automatically, without realizing that I’m doing it. And it’s not logical and things, it’s just out of habit. But I don’t sort of say my prayers every morning or night. In fact this place that I’ve been working at they have Karakia in the morning and sometimes they make me say it. And I hate it. So I don’t say dear God or dear Father, I couldn’t. I circumvent it a bit (65.111).

### 7.2.2 Deconstruction of Faith

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355 Within evangelical churches and para-church groups there is a high emphasis placed on regular personal reading of the Bible and prayer. Poloma & Pendleton (1989:421-422) found that 90% of their respondents in a survey of 1275 Assemblies of God adherents in North America reported praying daily or several times a week and some 86% reported reading the Bible at least weekly (with more than half of those reading the Bible daily), and three-fourths read religious literature at least weekly. This was consistent with a previous study by Stark and Bainbridge (1985:57). To stop these practices is to make a major shift from what would normally be expected and accepted by people who are part of the evangelical Pentecostal/charismatic church.

356 Maori for prayer.

357 There is a link between this deconstruction of faith and Freire’s notion of ‘conscientization’ - a decoding of “the historical reality which a people’s social location mediates to them as coded. The process of conscientization (developing a critical consciousness) is one by which people come to perceive their personal and social reality along with the contradictions in it, become more aware of their own perception of that reality, and therefore are able to deal with it in a more critical and transformative manner” (Veling 1996:119).
Shelly) It has taken a really long time for me to sift out what was the church stuff and what was my faith, and I’m only left with a really little bit which is a bit disconcerting really. Um and I think part of that is because I have no knowledge of any other church or religion - eastern stuff, because it was a really Pentecostal fundamentalist sort of church. I just thought that was the way they all were. And I mean as I found out that that wasn’t the case I became really angry and found it difficult to separate out anything that I actually gained for myself and stuff that was just imposed on me. And I mean over the last year I probably have. And I have been left with a small amount of faith and beliefs that I had. And they are not easy to define at all. And I think that is because the Pentecostal churches are so hot on rigid definitions and guidelines and black and white things that I think I’m still sort of reacting to that. And so I have a really sort of vague sort of definition to things now. And I still think it is maybe a kick back against that. You know maybe in a year’s time I will feel slightly differently.

(Interviewer) For you does it have a Christian flavour? I’m not after definitions.

(Shelly) long pause I guess; yea; probably as opposed to what?

(Interviewer) As opposed to atheistic, or eastern or a Buddhist

(Shelly) Yea probably if it had a flavour it would be a Christian flavour, but no more than a flavour (64.95-99).

When I asked Jane about the theological questions she was struggling with she replied - “all of it basically.” Shelly and Jane are typical of the Reflexive Exiles as they are in a process of deconstructing the faith they had received from their time within the ‘EPC’ church. This process of deconstruction works its way successively to the fundamental beliefs, practices and values of the ‘EPC’ church. These core expectations, beliefs and values were discussed in Chapter 3 (see Figure 3.1). In Figure 3.1 the beliefs, values and expected behaviours of the ‘EPC’ church community were arranged in a hierarchical form. This hierarchy represented the way the reflexive questioning of this group of leavers moves from more peripheral issues towards the very core elements of the faith. Those engaged in this process are deconstructing the faith they had received, accepted and acted within for so many years. To do so is personally a very destabilising process for them as their faith has been an important part of their world view, the foundation of important life decisions and an integral part of their sense of self-hood. While this process is destabilising for the individual it is also destabilising for those around them. This is because of the level of questioning of the Reflexive Exiles.

The Reflexive Exile’s questions are destabilising, even threatening, for those around them and especially for those in positions of leadership. To those in positions of leadership who feel that it is their responsibility to keep the church growing and vibrant such people can seem especially threatening and destructive.

### 7.2.3 Ongoing Reflection of Faith

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358 (65.93).
In the Heretical Imperative (1979) Berger discusses three reflective options, which he calls, the deductive, reductive and inductive options. The deductive option involves a “reassertion of an external authority in the face of modern secularity” (op.cit.:61). Here God is seen as speaking through the scripture, tradition or ecclesiological structure. This Berger calls ‘revivalism’, ‘neo-traditionalism’ or ‘neo-orthodoxy’. This option is consistent with the Displaced Followers described in the previous chapter. For the Displaced Followers life in general and the church-life in particular raised anomalies to their faith understanding. However such anomalies are silenced by renewed commitment to objective external authority.

The second of Berger’s options is the reductive option. Here faith is reinterpreted in terms of modern secularity. In effect the external authority of God, the Bible or mystique is replaced by the authority of rationalism. Berger states:

> It is, as it were, an exchange of authorities: the authority of modern thought, or consciousness is substituted for the authority of the tradition, the Deus dixit of old replaced by an equally insistent Homo modernus dixit. In other words, modern consciousness and its alleged categories becomes the only criteria of validity for religious reflection” (op.cit.:62).

The final option, the inductive option involves a move to personal experience as the ground of all religious affirmation. Those described here as Reflexive Exiles are moving in Berger’s terms in both reductionistic and inductive directions. That is, the old authority structures that propped up their faith are now relativised by an increasing focus on rationalistic thought (reductionist option) and personal experience (inductive option).

The deconstruction of their previously received faith leads people engaged in this process to successively examine the individual components of their faith. People engaged in the deconstruction of their faith remove each article of the belief and value system of their received faith and submit it to a process of ongoing reflection. This process involves a questioning and scrutinizing of the particular belief or value. The important aspect of this process is that each component of their faith is critiqued on the basis of whether the individual will appropriate it as part of their own personal belief or value system. Some faith components are not appropriated but rejected in part or entirely while others are placed in the ‘I don’t know basket’ and left for a period as ‘unknowns’. For many this involves a great deal of thought, discussion and philosophical and theological reflection. For others it is more clearly focused on taking control of their own faith decisions without subjecting their beliefs to a rigorous intellectual critique. For this second group the plausibility of the belief is determined by how it fits with their own experience and life. This process can be seen in pictorial form in Figure 7.3. Implicit in this process is the right of the individual to make choices about their faith.

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359 This is a process of demythologising.
360 Berger says “The term inductive is used here in its most commonsense - arguing from empirical evidence. This means two things: taking human experience as the starting point of religious reflection, and using the methods of the historian to uncover those human experiences that have been embodied in the various religious traditions” (Berger 1979:127).
The present tense used in the title ‘ongoing reflection’ is significant because at this point people are in the midst of the reflective process. This is a process of examination undertaken by the individual, where the arbiter of the process, deciding what is accepted or rejected, is the person themself. In this ‘ongoing reflection’ the individual must assume responsibility, and take ultimate authority for the questioning, critiquing and resolution of their examination.

The process of ongoing reflection evident in the Reflexive Exile’s interview scripts, moves successively from peripheral issues to increasingly more foundational faith beliefs and values. Where the examination process rejects or places a particular tenet of Christian faith in the ‘don’t know’ category it leaves room for a succeeding faith tenet to be raised for objectification and subsequent examination. It appears that this process is only stopped when one or two faith tenets are self-appropriated and accepted as part of the individual’s faith system. Once the faith statements have begun to be accepted it may stop the examination of successively more crucial tenets and provide a self-appropriated foundation for other faith tenets.

The ironic twist in the process of deconstruction and examination being undertaken by individuals at this point is that while still members of the church many of them were told that if they “had doubts they should examine their hearts.” Obviously what is implied here is that if they had doubts the problem was theirs and they had to sort themselves out. Ironically the doubts and questions of the Reflexive Exiles have led them to reflect on their faith rather than consider what is wrong within themselves. That is to reflect critically on the core beliefs, values and expected behaviours of the ‘EPC’ faith as a result of the anomalies they have found within their previous faith package rather than immediately considering they have failed in some way.

Many of the interviewees in this faith stance mention a new awareness and trust in their own feelings. For some this is a move contrary to what they were taught within the church where it was customary for
evangelicals to see feelings as untrustworthy and unreliable and to trust the tenets of the faith rather than their own feelings.

(Fiona) - But to find a structure that is flexible enough and also gets to the real issues rather than just 'here is the Bible study and what do we think about this?' But rather than opinions, we can talk about opinions but you can miss the real issues. Sometimes the real issues are - I am hurt in this area, and I am angry in this area, or I fear. And it may not have, if it doesn’t have an apparent spiritual meaning to it, then it’s often sort of written off because it just doesn’t fit into our frame of reference for what is religious or spiritual or Christian (47.59).

In the process of deconstructing and reflecting on their faith many of the Reflexive Exiles develop a new trust for their emotions and intuitions which they use as part of the judgement they bring to each segment of the faith they are re-evaluating. Although the predominant reflective faculty involved a rational reassessment of their faith many also mentioned a renewed trust in their own emotions and intuitions.

The outcome of this ongoing reflection of their faith leads them to one of three decisions. Either the statement of belief being examined is appropriated personally, or put in a ‘don’t know’ basket or discarded as something they no longer believe and perhaps wish they never had. Below are the comments of three Reflexive Exiles as they examine their faith.

(Lucy) - Yeah but I’m a lot more hesitant to do so now, because I don’t know what’s right and wrong any more if you know what I mean. I feel that I don’t know any answers any more. When I was in church and doing all the churchy things I felt I knew the answers to everything. There was always an answer and always a way of looking at things. Things were very black and white in those days. Now I feel that I don’t know the answers to anything. I know there’s a God but that’s about all I know.

(Lucy) - I don’t even know if there’s a Jesus Christ. I know He existed but I just don’t know about the whole Christian, you know Jesus-thing anymore. But I do know and my conversion shows me that, and lots of experiences since, show me without a doubt that there is a God. And that’s the God that I have a relationship with. That’s the only sure thing that I have in my faith, is God. All the others I’m just not sure about (96.216-217).

(Dave) - I don’t know; prayer, I’ve been through, the positive confession, you know demand your rights and all this sort of thing with God... Yea yea, you know if you confess it, it is going to be yours. You know scripture says it. Earlier on I went through all that. And everything I confessed or believed for never came. But um, I would like to think that there is just a simple communion with God. You know ideally I would just love to know the scripture where they spoke with God in the cool of the evening. In Genesis. I mean that is real nice, there is nothing hard about that. And the grace of God, you know God maybe is willing to have a bit of a chat to us at times (57.182-184).

(Robyn) - And I am still grappling with that. The Bible used to be the very word of God, the very direction of my daily being, my daily direction. But now I don’t see the Bible as the absolute word of God. It is an ancient book, I see it as a very respectable book, a book of very wise sayings, and really these people did meet Jesus Christ, these people did. But to me it was a heavenly book. Now it is an earthly book (62.127).

The ‘I don’t know’ does not indicate that the leavers are shrugging off their faith questions and concerns. Nor is it an ‘I don’t know’ that is void of ideas, thoughts and arguments regarding the faith issue at hand. Rather it is an ‘I don’t know’ that recognises that as of yet they have not resolved a profound dilemma. That is an ‘I don’t know’ that is no longer satisfied by simplistic solutions and is conscious, often very conscious, of realities which previous certainties failed to incorporate. It is, as Ward and Wild (1995:121) express it,
“an ‘I don’t know’ that is paradoxically full of knowledge.”

Hence the faith stance of the Reflexive Exiles is seen not as a rejection of their previous faith but a realisation of its inadequacy in the light of their wider experience. It is a pursuit of a more satisfying sense of ‘truth’ that does not seek to merely wallpaper over the cracks of its own incompleteness which the Reflexive Exiles perceive is often being done in the faith claims prominent within the ‘EPC’ churches. It is the move described by Von Hügel in the quote which opens this chapter - “The deeper we get into reality, the more numerous will be the questions we cannot answer.”

7.2.4 A Hesitant Faith

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(Heather) My current faith beliefs? I am not sure that I have many. I have all this stuff that I have done at College that I think offered a credible faith. I am not quite sure that I sit within it, but it is there if that makes sense. I think I have sort of put it into storage for a while really. You know 25 years of going to church every day on Sunday. Twice a day for a long time. Twenty five years of praying before you make decisions. Twenty five years of all these sorts of ways of doing things, that become not just. It is not just whether you have weetbix for breakfast sort of thing. It becomes part of your core - who you are as a person. And when that suddenly goes with sort of question marks - it is not something that you take off like a coat. So - but it is something that I find for me, I have put it in a drawer, and it is there, and maybe I will open it again sometime, but it is not at the moment (106.80).

Heather, like Jane, has put her faith questions into cold storage for a while. Jane said, “I don’t know where I am as far as believing in God, or who Jesus was and things like that. I’m not sure about that now, but I don’t sort of feel I have to know that.” For leavers like Jane and Heather part of the exiting process is a putting down of the faith issues. People in this ‘reflexive stage’ of faith do not have high degrees of internal motivation to pursue the answers to their faith questions. This lack of enthusiasm and energy for their faith is not surprising considering the lack of certainty and confidence a deconstructing and counter-dependent faith affords them.

7.3 Faith Operations

When Fowler discusses the transition from a Synthetic-Conventional Faith stage (stage 3) to the Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4) he is describing a major transition that is very disruptive, disorienting and often protracted. It involves a two step process in which the individual moves out of the influence of the encircling relationship of the key significant others in their lives and begins to take on a new quality of self-authorization. This process of independence often involves pushing against the encircling environment which has nurtured their faith for so long in order to create sufficient distance for them to own their own decisions and beliefs. This process of pushing against the encircling relationship of significant others is what Sharon Parks describes as a Counter-dependent relationship with the faith nurturing community from which the person was involved.

361 Ward and Wild (1995:121-122) speaking of their involvement with women leaving Christian churches in Great Britain state - “in the context of the struggle for meaning, for community and for integrity, two things keep recurring in conversations with other women and in our lives. They are the values of ‘silence’ and of ‘not knowing’. . . . “Silence is the language of ‘non-knowing’. It is also the ground in which both love and knowledge can grow and flourish.”
The change in the individual’s position is illustrated by Fowler in the following figure.

**Figure 7.5 Individuative-Reflective Faith Stage Illustration**

The individual at this stage of faith is represented by the stick-figure immediately above the two headed arrow. It is clear in the figure above that this individual has removed themselves from the encircling relationship of significant others (the now incomplete circle formed by stick figures to the left of the bold double lines) and is developing their own independent position in relation to previously significant groups. It is important for the self behind the personae of previous roles to begin to emerge. In the interviews with people I have described as characterised by a ‘reflexive faith stance’ there is a clear sense of self-authorization and a bringing of their own sense of self-hood to the surface while not allowing themselves to be shaped by any group. They are no longer prepared to conform to the expectations, beliefs and values of the ‘EPC’ faith group they have left. In this sense the transition from stage 3 to stage 4 is a move in the direction of non-conformity. The interviewees reflect this non-conformist attitude and emerging sense of self determination and strong self image.

(Warwick) - I was created as a human being with a tremendous amount of potential in many ways, and I just want to fulfill that potential. Freedom to make up my own mind, to make mistakes and to grow. I don’t need to be controlled, which is the way I used to see it in the past, you know the Holy Spirit would control me. I don’t need that anymore, because God has given me the ability to grow. At the moment I think he sometimes orders things to help me grow, and serendipitous happenings they just happen and um that happened at just the right time, maybe that is the faith I have at the moment (13.67).

(Rachel) - So I guess looking after myself has become a priority, especially being on my own it has given me the space to do it. Whereas before I wasn’t so good at it. Because I was in a marriage and you had to put everybody first. Which was really my problem (46.62).

The second step in the process of transitioning from Fowler’s stage 3 to stage 4 is a process of objectifying and critically choosing one’s beliefs, values and commitments. It is a stage where the person chooses their own beliefs for themselves. In this process the beliefs are seen in a new way and analysed to see if they are something that is important to the individual rather than accepting them as part of their group, or church identity. One of Fowler’s examples of an interviewee at this transitional stage said:

In the process of clarifying my belief I have had to examine some of the doctrines and myths of my religious tradition. I have learned that literalism or disbelief are not the only alternatives for dealing with the biblical story of creation or with the miracles of Jesus. The important thing is the meanings that are being conveyed in these stories from another cultural time. These meanings are valuable and indispensable. But they are separable, in some sense, from the outmoded, mythical world views that contain them in the Bible (Fowler 1984:63; italics as cited).

The person quoted above has obviously completed this stage transition and has found a coherent set of beliefs and understandings of the Bible for herself. The interviewees I have characterised as Reflexive Exiles are in the process of moving from their previous received un-examined faith towards a new self-ownership of their beliefs. This group of Reflexive Exiles is dismantling faith beliefs, objectifying them, seeing them in a new way and placing them under the scrutiny of their own self-judgement. People in this reflexive position
are involved in the deconstruction, objectification and analysis of their previous faith commitments and beliefs. As Fowler says people may reach a potentially long-lasting equilibrium in a transitional position between stages 3 and 4” (Fowler 1995:179). It is not until we meet the group discussed in the next chapter (Transitional Explorers) that we begin to see evidence of a new self-authorized and self-owned faith commitment.

The dominant impression gained from interviewing people in the ‘reflexive’ stage is one of confusion, doubt and hesitancy regarding their faith. These people, having found the major tenets of their faith system problematic, and while objectifying these beliefs for examination, are typically unsure of what they believe. At the same time they are quick to say that they haven’t lost their faith, rather they have put it down for a period so it can sit and they can look at it. Because of their critical stance towards their beliefs and faith the Reflexive Exiles exhibit a ‘hesitant’ commitment to their faith. These people are not acting out their faith commitments in the way that they would have previously because they are in the process of dismantling those commitments and deciding what they will continue to take with them into the future. Hence universally this group does not tithe \(^{363}\) or give money to Christian causes, and they are not involved in service activities within Christian organisations, even though they may have been heavily involved previously.

**7.4 A Way-point on the Journey or the End-point of the Journey?**

While for some of the Reflexive Exiles this can be seen as a temporary faith stance from which they will move on to build a new faith position, for a considerable number there are indications that this remains a static position for protracted periods of time. Thirty percent of those interviewed (n=32) were categorised as Reflexive Exiles. These people had been in the church for an average of 13.7 years and out of the church for an average of 4.0 years. Of all the groups of leavers this was the highest average period of time outside the church. Although the range of time these Reflexive Exiles have spent out of the church varies from 6 months to 14 years, nearly half of these people (44%) have been outside of a church community for five or more years. Those who have been out of the church for five or more years (n=14) and are still best characterised as deconstructing, questioning, and examining their faith in a confused, unsure way while giving little personal energy to these questions are perhaps best thought of as ‘stuck’ in this faith position. For these people the ‘reflexive’ stance has become a static position in which they have been ‘stuck’ for some time. Because of their desire to push against the ‘EPC’ faith package these people are unlikely to turn to faith groups, (especially ‘EPC’ faith groups and churches) for the external help which may have helped them to re-engage in their faith again. Those Reflexive Exiles here characterised as adopting a static faith position need to be seen as those who, while not denying their faith, nor choosing to dis-own it, have for all practical purposes disengaged at a personal and pragmatic level from all Christian faith practices.

The reflexive phase appears to be a difficult phase within which to navigate a positive faith journey on your own. Ironically at the very time people are feeling they want to push away from the church community their doing so is likely to alienate them from one source of external support resources that might help them navigate beyond their present faith position.

In the next chapter we will meet those who are moving beyond this phase of being a Reflexive Exile towards rebuilding an autonomous and integrated faith. This is the journey of some of the Reflexive Exiles, but not all. The Reflexive Exiles phase becomes for many a static place - a permanent place of exile. Those Reflexive Exiles who do move on towards an autonomous and integrated faith are joined in the next chapter by those who leave their church when they have substantially navigated the reflexive phase while still participating, however loosely, within their church community.

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\(^{363}\) Giving a ‘tithe’ is a common teaching within ‘EPC’ churches which encourages people involved in the church to give a tenth (10%) of their income to the work of God. This is normally considered to be via the church. Such practices are normally based on Old Testament passages like Malachi 3:10 - “I am the Lord All-Powerful, and I challenge you to put me to the test. Bring the entire ten percent into the storehouse, so there will be food in my house.”
Chapter Eight

Transitional Explorers

“On the tenth day of the first month the people went up from the Jordan and camped at Gilgal on the Eastern border of Jericho. And Joshua set up at Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken out of the Jordan. He said to the Israelites, ‘In the future when your descendants ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones mean?’ ‘Tell them, Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground’”.

8.1 Introduction

The turning point in Mark’s faith development came after he had been leading a church group supporting ex-psychiatric patients who were attempting to make their way into the community. For Mark this meant time dealing with severely depressed people, and people who were reacting badly to medication or who had withdrawn themselves from regular medication. Many of these people had been institutionalised for long periods and were now struggling with their journey into the wider society. At times Mark was involved in working with people who were threatening to take their own lives or were suffering from delusions of grandeur or evil. A formative part of this work was a friendship he built with a paranoid schizophrenic. Dealing with his friend and others in the group raised a lot of questions for Mark about his faith. “Does God heal schizophrenia? You know all those really good ones,” he says with a quizzical smile on his face. For Mark, as a result of his work in the group, this was not some academic or distant question, but one of a cluster of pressing personal issues confronting his faith.

Mark was also involved in other Christian groups. Since becoming a Christian at the age of 20 he had been very actively involved in two churches. The first one was a large Pentecostal church where he participated for three or four years. Speaking of his involvement in this church he describes it saying - “at that time pretty much full on commitment. You know you smoked it, breathed it, twice on Sundays, (I was) involved in the Youth group, leading or running the youth group, go to a home church. All that sort of stuff - right into it.”

Later because of leadership struggles in the church and a growing number of friends at another church he made the move to a large charismatic Baptist church. It was within this church that he became involved in the psychiatric group. But again this was only part of his involvements. Mark was an active member of one of the home groups, a number of church outreaches and a member of the church evangelism programme.

I was involved in trying to do evangelism in our area. . . . sort of a door to door thing. So we went around with these surveys, when I think of it now it was just a foot in the door. We were doing a survey, but really we wanted to talk about God (31.22).

Perhaps because of the faith questions being raised by his leadership of the psychiatric group more than any other single reason Mark enrolled to spend three years at a theological college studying towards a bachelors degree in theology. For Mark this was a stimulating faith environment.

(Mark) - Parts of it I thoroughly, absolutely enjoyed. I loved the contradiction. We did Biblical formal, source criticism, redaction criticism and all that stuff like that. And people were just about throwing their faith away, and I was just lapping it up - you know. Or this stuff makes sense, the whole idea of the different sources and having a different perspective, not being synthesized and all the jots and tittles weren’t exactly the same. But rather they were all from different points of view. Yea I liked the fact that all kinds of things were being knocked over and re-formed. Preconceptions, all of these amazing delicious new ideas. You know I love new ideas. So that part of it I really thoroughly enjoyed (31.33).


Redaction Criticism is one form of exegetical critique used by theologians in the process of hermeneutics.
He talked of doing one particular stage three essay on Christian ethics where, drawing on the writings of Joseph Fletcher, he concluded that there may be no absolutes of moral truth on which to base ethical decisions. Initially shaken by this deduction he spoke with one of the lecturers at the college who confirmed his views.

When Mark returned to his home church complete with his Bachelor of Theology he was struck by the question of what he would now do. The church seemed to have high expectations of him and so did he, but these were being radically undermined by a period of personal confusion and despair. As he says “as best as I can fathom, basically I think I got depressed... all the classic depression signs, waking up early in the morning, not sleeping, not enjoying anything...” Throughout this period he felt he was not meeting either his own or the church’s expectations of him.

(Mark) - But you build an amazing amount of self expectation after doing three years at Theological College. And even before that the whole Christian emphasis is on doing and being. Doing things for God and being a particular kind of person. When you don't meet up to your own expectations of what a Christian should do and be, a crisis takes place. And suddenly you almost feel powerless to do and be what you should do and be and you go to church. I went to church, and I would hear all these messages about what I should do and be. And the word should, I think is probably something that rings in my ears now. It is the word should. Something that characterises Church, is the word ‘should’.

This led to feelings of guilt and a sense of failure. At times Mark said he felt quite selfish and self-centred and was only dragging himself around. He tried to explain where he was at to one of the leaders of the church:

(Mark) - Yea I remember trying to tell a guy at church once how I was feeling. He just went sort of cold turkey. He couldn't deal with it. He was a guy who you would say was a mature person, but he just couldn't deal with it. Another day he asked me if he could pray with me and I told him no (ha ha). I thought you can't even listen to me, you haven't even earned the right. Maybe the word ‘earned’ is a bit harsh, but that was how I felt.

Over a period of months Mark drifted out of this church and had a period of six months completely outside of any church participation before tentatively joining a mainline liturgical church. He says now that he goes occasionally, sits at the back and is otherwise uninvolved. During the six month break from church he took a mild course of anti-depressants, went to counselling and joined a group of questioners like himself brought together by a Christian psychotherapist.

For Mark, the group, the decision to have a period of time outside the church and the insights he gained through his theological training together helped him to move through the ‘reflexive faith’ stage to where he is now at, what I have labelled a Transitional Explorer.

8.2 A Transitional Faith
The transitional faith interviewees displayed an emerging sense of ownership of their faith. This is shown in a confidence of faith, a clear decision to move from a deconstruction of the received faith to an appropriation

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367 This represents an approach to ethical dilemmas based on the work of Joseph Fletcher (1966) *Situation Ethics and Moral Responsibility*. Here ethical decisions were to be made not based on pre-fabricated rules but on the over riding and ultimate principle of love. Situation ethics proposes that free people be able to respond to each concrete ethical situation from the basis of love alone. Under situation ethics the only ‘sin’ is a knowing betrayal of love.

368 (31.38).

369 Here Mark mentions the name of a specific theological College which I have replaced with a more generic name.
of some elements of the old faith and giving energy to building a new self-owned faith. To varying degrees this faith incorporates elements of the previous church-based faith. However these elements of faith have now been tested and found to be valid and worthy of being retained to the level of satisfaction necessary for the individual involved. To use an analogy from the courtroom, the internal jury has reached a verdict on these faith elements and now sees them as being plausible, ‘beyond reasonable doubt’. What constitutes ‘reasonable doubt’ varies from person to person. As mentioned earlier, for some, the examination process involves rigorous theological and philosophical debate through reading and/or through interaction with others. While for others ‘reasonable doubt’ is based more on personal experience and what is plausible to them at an intuitive, ‘gut-level’.

The transitional faith stance indicates that the internal jury has begun to read its verdict on at least some of the elements of faith and is reporting a verdict of positive personal appropriation. The Transitional Explorers represented 18% of those interviewed (n=19). Some of these people had left church while their faith position could best be described as ‘reflexive’ and had since moved on into a transitional faith phase. Others had left the church during this transitional faith period. The structural factors that determine at what point people leave the church will be discussed later in this chapter.

As shown in Figure 8.1 the transitional phase is seen as a progression out of the ‘reflexive’ phase. Although some people move through this reflexive phase while still participating in a church they must nevertheless go through a reflexive phase before the beginnings of the transitional phase.
Those who stayed connected to their church during the reflexive phase spoke of moving to a more marginal involvement and a more detached perspective compared to their previous involvement and perspective (role distancing). The point is that the progression of faith understanding and practice that is being traced here is made up of a number of phases each of which must be passed through before the individual can enter a later phase. In line with this, my argument is that a person must develop a ‘reflexive faith stance’ before they are able to move to the transitional phase. In saying this we need to recognise that the ‘reflexive’ phase will be of varying lengths depending on each person’s circumstances.

The group under consideration in this chapter has been labelled explorers because the term captures the ways they are finding and rebuilding a faith for themselves. The word “explorer” comes from two Latin words ‘ex’ meaning ‘out’ and ‘plorare’ meaning to ‘shout’. The word therefore literally means to ‘cry out when one finds something new’. Using the faith journey motif we see the Transitional Explorer as one whose focus of attention is on ‘scouting out’ or ‘opening up’ a new journey. The focus of such leavers is not on what they have left, as it is for the Reflexive Exiles, but on beginning to find a new way forward. Roger Grainger (1993:48) writes of this transitional notion stating:

For the new situation to live the old one must die. Thus there is always a crucial point ‘between’, a point representing the condition after the old state of affairs has come to an end and before the new one has actually begun. This is the moment of real change, the pivotal moment that has no movement of itself, but permits movement to take place.

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370 The process by which people fulfill a certain role while at the level of the self-conscious create some distance between the role they are performing and their perception of themselves. See Cohen & Taylor 1992:57-59.
The transitional phase represents the time beyond this pivotal moment. It is distinct from the exile phase because the individual is now beginning to find a way forward. It is the move depicted in the opening quote to this chapter taken from Joshua 4:19-22 which records the crucial transition the nation of Israel took in the journey from exile in the wilderness to the promised land. The crossing of the Jordan represented the crucial ‘transitional point’ in the journey. Their journey had not ended with the crossing of the Jordan but it had entered a new phase. A crucial border had been crossed. The placing of the stones acted as a reminder that this transition had occurred. The people described here as Transitional Explorers have also crossed some crucial boundaries and this new category reflects this. This transitional move is one which Veling (1996:50) describes as a “move from critical distance to hermeneutical openness.” This exploring phase exhibits the rebuilding of their faith - a new path. During the exploratory phase the individual is finding and pioneering a new faith direction for themselves, a faith direction which, we shall later see, may have a number of similarities with the ‘EPC’ faith they have previously left.

8.2.1 Inner dependency

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Where the faith of the Reflexive Exiles was characterised by a counter-dependence on the ‘EPC’ community, its beliefs, expectations and values, the faith of the Transitional Explorers is characterised by a developing sense of inner-dependence for the validity and nurture of one’s faith. The term ‘inner-dependency’ is taken from Parks’ (1986) development of faith. Mark talks about the group he joined as being “really, really good” because it focused more on what was going on inside you.

(Mark) - . . . Probably one important thing that happened to (me) was I got involved in a group. . . which has a focus less on thinking and more on feeling. It was much more feeling oriented, so they tended to ask not why, but what, do you think; not why do you feel the way you do, but what do you feel. So . . . It was really good, really helpful, and that was to one degree or another the saving of my faith. These people who I did consider to be solid Christians; (if you want to put it that way) were actually able to cope with my questioning, didn't go cold turkey, didn't get sort of squeamish. They were able to cope, with my swearing or whatever. That was very re-assuring (31.48).

Mark saw this as being quite different to the approach he experienced within the church. His perception of the church was that it was focused on being pro-active and involved on what people “should” be doing as Christians.

(Mark) - So I think if I could say what the church could have done more, (it) would have been to focus less on what you should be and more on what you are. And just the whole accepting of what you are. Not the superficial ‘God accepts you for what you are’, but go into it in some depth. Sort of mull on it a bit and soak it in. Maybe some people would call it a bit depressing, but I think there would be a surprising number of people out there who would actually find it really good (31.45; Italics mine).

This is a shift in the focus of individual faith dependency from a dependency on the church environment or a counter-dependency on the church environment to a new quite different base - one of inner-dependency. 

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371 What Veling is implying here is an interpretative openness that is neither naive nor closed minded. His concept of hermeneutical openness will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 12.

372 Here Parks’ notion of ‘inner-dependency’ is connected with what Giddens (1991:80) calls Internal Referentiality in which “the key reference points are set ‘from the inside’, in terms of how the individual constructs/reconstructs his or her life history” (Italics mine).
Here the crucial issues are inner, self oriented issues relating to one’s emotions, intuitions and feelings. As Parks says here “a person begins to listen within, with a new respect and trust for the truth of his or her ‘own insides’. That is, the person begins to listen and be responsible to the self as a source of authority and as an object of care” (1986:58).

At this point Mark was quite clear that he was completely at a loss as to where he fitted in the traditional church structure, but within the group he had found a place where his questions, concerns and feelings were accepted. As he put it: - “Here was a place where I did fit - very much. Here my questions were not just tolerated, but also enjoyed. The process was more than accepted, it was enjoyed.” The people who went along to the group with Mark had similar questions and a similar concern to find a relevant inner faith that dealt adequately with the deeper concerns of their ‘inner selves.’

(Mark) - The whole emphasis on self giving has changed too. I recognize that it is a desirable state to be able to give. It can be a desirable state, as long as you are not co-dependent and all those complicated things. That self giving to me has another side to it that was never emphasized in church or wasn't thrashed around quite enough. I think people, if I just speak from experience here, you have to have a self to give in the first place. If you haven't got a strong self, to give whatever little you have, people would argue about this I'm sure, but my view, to deny what little self you have can at sometimes be almost impossible (31.38).

The sense of inner-dependency is very clear in the beliefs and actions of transitional people as well. Mark says:

(Mark) - I suppose at the one end God does everything, at the other we are the author of our own destiny. I probably am pretty much to the own destiny end now, whilst acknowledging that theology and all kinds of other things conspire to say that He does. And so I hold that quite loosely, and would like to talk about it more with various people. I don't quite understand what I do believe. I know that I believe God is up there supervising events in a global sense. I think He gives us a lot of responsibility for our own lives that we wouldn't wish to bear, but I think that is the fact of it. Many of the decisions that we make are our own as adult Christians and I think what I tend to believe in is some kind of a spirit-illuminated wisdom. But where God is very much a gentleman in the process. He very much allows us to trip and make stupid mistakes (31.68).

Like Mark, people in the transitional phase are developing a solidifying inner foundation and validity for their faith. For Parks this ‘inner-dependency’ does not equate with independence because “other sources of authority may still hold credible power, but now one can recognise and value also the authority of the self”(1986:57).

### 8.2.2. A Reconstruction of Faith

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373 (31.50).
374 Parks continues stating - “Carol Gilligan’s study (1982) suggests a corresponding motion in the dimension of care. People (especially women) who have previously tended to extend care almost exclusively to others to the neglect of the self (because only others had the authority to claim care) can now extend care also to the self (who now has the authority to claim care)” (Parks 1986:57-58).
Mark, and a number of the other members of the group he attends, are beginning to reconstruct a personal faith. The process of deconstructing faith has ceased, at least for now, and they have begun to personally accept the validity of some elements of faith. These personally appropriated faith elements are then fitted together and a new faith construction begins. For most of the members of this transitional group some of the faith elements that are being personally appropriated have strong similarities with those they had received from the ‘EPC’ church.

(Maree) - I still tithe regularly. I have carried that on over the years, but not to a church. I decided early on that I wasn’t going to tithe to buildings. So a lot goes through child sponsorship. It is ten percent and that is a principle that I won’t ever give up. I believe that God gives to us and that whole thing of the gift of life is really precious (24.56).

Almost inevitably some of the values, expectations and beliefs of this church community are rejected and other beliefs, expectations and values are incorporated in the reconstruction of their faith. For many of these transitional people there is a replacement of more confining ‘EPC’ faith statements with wider Christian interpretations. For example here interviewees generally expressed a wider understanding of salvation than would be part of the ‘EPC’ faith they had previously received. Many would now hold to quite different interpretations of Heaven and Hell and after life states. Coupled with this is a wider acceptance of practices that would normally be frowned upon in the ‘EPC’ community. For example, for some a preparedness to accept active homosexuality as an acceptable life-style had been embraced by many as part of their present faith understandings.

While for many the reconstruction of faith involves many of their previous beliefs, values and expectations it may also include a number of new elements. These new elements are wider in what they see as being acceptable than the more narrow beliefs, values and expectations held to within the ‘EPC’ community these people have left. Where the Reflexive Exiles were engaged in a process of deconstruction and subsequent examination of the components of their received faith, the Transitional Explorers have now examined a number of their faith components and found them useful for the new self constructed faith that they are building. Many Transitional Explorers are also incorporating other beliefs, values and ways of behaving which are not components within the ‘EPC’ faith package.

One reason transitional faith people continue to find that they don’t fit in the church community is the incorporation of these new faith components. It would seem reasonable to suppose that those who have incorporated a large number of different faith components will experience the greatest continued sense of mis-fit with the ‘EPC’ churches. John, for example stated:

(John) - I would say my faith has a Christian foundation and it is still predominantly Christian in the beliefs, philosophies, things which determine my life in the most part. I am aware that there are some aspects of my life, speaking very frankly, when my marriage broke up and got separated and divorced and eventually started dating again, I didn’t actually find it easy initially because, you have come from a fairly strict sort of Christian framework, and you try to put aside your ex-wife and start thinking dating again. It is another thing. I got into a couple of relationships over a period of time, and have actually quite shifted away from the marriage model. Which I think, I recognise (this) is not where evangelical Christians would come from. I am well aware of that. But in my personal faith, I now have a belief that, the key to personal integrity and spirituality about relationship is not one of whether you are legally married so to speak. It is whether you are in a relationship of commitment, of integrity, of intent with that person. But there have been two or three relationships over the last few years, including

375 There are also indications (that will be discussed later in chapter 12) that there is a parallel widening of understanding within evangelicalism itself as can be seen in a new genre of evangelical texts. For example ‘The Post-evangelical’ (Tomlinson 1995) and ‘The Post-evangelical Debate’ (Cray et al, 1997).
Dianne has also incorporated faith components from outside the ‘EPC’ package.

(Dianne) - I have a very, very dear homosexual friend, a man who has got incredible love for other people. They (the church) treated him like shit. But he went on loving. I really believe there are concepts of homosexual love. I didn’t see that as something as dirty or degrading, like the way the church put it. I’m not saying whether I personally believe it or not. For me it’s not what I want for my life, but I don’t actually think that Jesus actually cares too much. He was more interested in those bloody hypocritical Pharisees who went round preaching this and doing that and doing something else (30.200; italics mine).

For another 6% (n=7) of the Interviewees in the transitional faith category a large proportion of their re-constructed faith drew on elements outside of the ‘EPC’ belief system or even other expressions of Christian faith. Two of these people would now call themselves ‘new agers’ rather than Christians, while the other five as a result of deconstructing their faith, have rejected some, if not all, of the ‘EPC’ faith elements. They have continued to reject their previous faith to the point that they have accepted an agnostic faith stance. It has been useful in the present study to distinguish this group from the rest of the transitional explorers. For this reason I have categorised these people as ‘Transitioning to an Alternative Faith’. We will return to this group later in the chapter.

8.2.3 An Emerging Self-ownership of Faith

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Linked with the reconstruction of faith and the self-appropriation of a growing number of faith elements is the sense of an emerging self-ownership of faith. What Perry calls a ‘probing for commitment’.

(Stephen) - I’ve always believed in God. I had (a) really very powerful conversion. I have no doubt about it whatsoever. I have no doubt about it. Nothing could basically rock me from that faith. My concept of God perhaps has changed. In the fact in my marriage breaking up, praying to God, I mean I’ve spent that many days on my hands and knees on the floor sobbing my heart out, just crying out to God. Week after week and nothing happened, nothing and I ask why. But I’ve stopped all that now and stopped the questioning and just accept it. ‘Well it's in your hands it's out of my hands and that is OK.’ But it hasn’t changed my faith in God and who He is. But I haven't gone on in church. I just find I can't do that. I find I'm in this transition period I believe. I believe I will go back in time and I’ll go back there with different eyes, and not as naive as what I was before (33.108).

376 Quoted in Parks 1986:82
8.2.4 A Strengthening Faith

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<td>Sense of personal faith conviction</td>
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During the transitional phase people are prepared to give energy and time to their faith. This contrasts with the ‘putting down’ of faith often characteristic of the reflexive phase. The transitioners are engaging with their faith through attendance at courses, fringe involvement in churches, their own reading and study or through a group that has a Christian focus. As well as this re-engagement with their faith many of the transitional people mentioned a hope of being more involved in the church in the future. Mark, for example, expressed a desire to be actively involved in the church, but as an independent person who would be appreciated for who he was, and was able to challenge others when they were accepting things in a way that he felt were inappropriate.

8.3 Faith Operations

I want to argue that there is a clear link between the faith operations at work by people in this transitional group and those outlined by James Fowler in his stage 4 Individuative-Reflective Faith stage, and that these extend into some of the beginnings of his fifth stage - The Conjunctive Stage. Although some of the transitional interviewees give indications of faith operations characteristic of the fifth faith stage a discussion of these will be left until the next chapter where this stage will be discussed in depth.

Where the previous ‘reflexive faith’ stance is linked with the stage transition between Fowler’s third and fourth stages, the group of leavers that has been discussed in this chapter is more clearly indicative of the fourth stage. The two key aspects of this stage are the emergence of a new sense of self-hood, what Fowler (1984:62) calls the ‘executive ego’, and the objectification and choosing of one’s own faith beliefs and values. People in this transitional faith group are exhibiting both of these characteristics. Coupled with this is the tendency for people at this stage of faith operations to be what Fowler calls “self-starters, self-sufficient, self-motivating and self-repairing units” (Fowler 1987:91). This characteristic links closely with the inner-dependence characteristic of this group and the energy given to reconstructing a self-appropriated faith. Fowler states that people at this fourth stage are conscious of an internal panel of experts who reserve the right to choose and who are prepared to take responsibility for their choices (1995:179).

Fowler claims that those in the Individuative-Reflective Faith stage want to take responsibility for their beliefs, actions and decisions and to build relationships based on their personal autonomy and identity. What I have titled the ‘self-owned’ nature of their faith reflects something of this personal responsibility-taking, as well as their new tolerance and acceptance of others who hold differing beliefs. Many interviewees in this faith stance speak of being prepared to accept people of other religious backgrounds and talk with them.

Because of the self-owned nature of their faith, these people are typically more ready and able to speak with people about their beliefs and faith system. In this way they are beginning to express something of who they are at a deeper and more personal level than they were previously able to. A number of interviewees also indicated that in the process of finding their own faith they no longer felt a need to defend their faith before others, but came to see that ‘God was big enough to defend himself’.

The focus on an inner-dependence allows for individuals to develop a self-constructed faith which incorporates a number of new or re-adjusted faith elements to what they would have received from the ‘EPC’ community. Because people at this stage are oriented toward an inner jury they are more likely to accept
beliefs and practices that appear appropriate and rational at the level of their own judgements. Although plausible to them now their plausibility may be quite vigorously debated by those still within the ‘EPC’ community.

When these Transitional Explorers do begin to make connections back to the ‘EPC’ church they are typically looking for leadership structures which, as Fowler indicates, acknowledge and respect their personal positions and allow room for them to contribute to the decision making of the local church. The Transitional Explorer is more comfortable with criticism and debate and may even cherish the disagreement between divergent views. They are able to cope with seeming contradictions in greater depth and with less personal tension.

Where such people are part of a church there is an emphasis on an unspoken pragmatic individualism. Like Mark, they are often found on the edge of the church. They are on the edge because they are in the process of reconstructing their faith, and because there is typically still a degree of rawness from the issues that made them leave the church in the first place and a determination not to be connected at that level again.

People at this point are very impatient with the statements of others which indicate a commitment to a belief which has not been objectified and rationalised. Hence Mark’s comment that he would like to be accepted in a church community for who he is and to feel the freedom to challenge others where he saw their faith wasn’t solidified in some way that he thought needed challenging. In this way he reflects the preference of the Individuative-Reflective Faith for debate with differing opinions, criticism and conflict rather than acceptance of a harmony that is based on reductionist solutions.

8.4 Transition to an Alternative Faith

We need to reflect on the emergence of a number of interviewees who were moving into a self-owned and reconstructed faith which had incorporated such a large number of other faith elements to move them, in their own minds, outside of the Christian faith system. Seven interviewees placed themselves in this grouping. Two identified their faith as being more consistent with a ‘new-age’ philosophy and the remaining five saw themselves as holding no faith. I have therefore labelled this second group as ‘agnostics’.

Susan had been a staff member for a Christian mission organisation for 5 years before returning to her previous career and her rural hometown. Initially she was very involved in the local church and the youth group and outreaches to young people in the area, but as her own questions came to the surface her involvement in these areas dropped off. Struggling with her own childhood history of sexual abuse, a vague feeling that maybe she was gay and a church that was completely unsympathetic to the desperate questions she had, she moved out of the church and began to take on more of the ‘new age’ based beliefs of some of her workmates. In the process of moving out of the church and through the last few years that she has been outside the church she has put aside many of her received beliefs. When I interviewed her she said that she saw herself more as a “spiritual person than a Christian.”

Although she continues with some of her Christian belief system she has stripped this down to a small refined core and added a number of other beliefs, values and practices.

(Susan) - Well I see Jesus, I don't see him so much as the son of God but I see him more as someone who came to earth to teach us lessons and show us the right way to live. And that he is, I think he was a really special person, and he was one that cared about women and treated women as equals. And I respect him for that. But I think there have been other prophets that have come as well. But I think that Jesus is- because I kind of know more about Jesus and like what he stood for- I still retain him as part of my faith (35.124).

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(35.122).
Susan has rejected the rest of the ‘EPC’ faith package, including God, about whom she claims she had become a bit anti. Now she describes God as “good orderly direction” - “so I would rather see God as a good energy force.” To this residue of Christian faith she has added beliefs in re-birthing, trauma guides, reincarnation and an array of goddesses. She describes her new faith system “as so anti-Christian when I come to think about some of things I believe.”

Five other transitional people have systematically rejected each aspect of the ‘EPC’ faith in the process of deconstructing their faith to the point that they would choose to call themselves agnostics rather than Christian or adherents to any other faith. For them their faith has been replaced with more humanist and pragmatic beliefs. Bruce, an ex-minister who trained in a theological college for three years and then led a very prosperous charismatic church for seven years says:

- I now think the whole link between prayer and positive self-affirmation, self-belief and positive belief in things happening is very very close. And when I look back on what I used to define as spiritual prayer to God I now find happening in totally different areas when people are simply self affirming, and some visualising and seeing things happen. Equally strong results. So I now think that maybe they’re both describing the same thing and probably that’s where I’m up to in terms of . . . That’s what I was saying about a language problem, you know trips me up because I want to say they’re both the same but somehow the language doesn’t allow me to do that.

- So I can sit down and reflect and kind of say, “well this is what I want to achieve, and I’m going to see this happening.” And I think one of the things I’ve just worked through over the last few months is in my job. When I was a minister I used to stand and speak to people and believe that this was God’s word and it was important.
they heard it, and there was sort of a driving energy. Now I train people in business areas. If I’m actually convinced that it’s critical they get this thing sorted out to change there’s a whole energy in there that’s not in it if I’m just going to go through the routine. I kind of think, “now hang on where’s the difference?” I suspect it’s the same thing again and it’s just now got a different label (105.219-220).

Bruce’s wife Alison says they gave away praying and reading the Bible and nothing happened - life went on as it always had. She says, “I just think that faith and all that sort of prayer and faith and that sort of thing is valuable but not because, I mean for some people its valuable, but not because there is an external being answering it, but because of the sort of positive energy that is created or something.”381 It got to the point where when she looked at her faith she thought, “well what was that?”382 When I met Bruce and Alison they had left their church. For Bruce this meant not only leaving his church but his career as a minister. For a while they had moved to an evangelical church until they became uncomfortable there, so they moved to a more theologically liberal church. Today they are right outside the church with no intention of returning. As Alison said, “they have tried them all.” Although outside the institutional church they are a part of a group that meets to discuss significant issues.383 Many of the other group members have a similar faith history and are engaged in the deconstruction and reconstruction of their own faith understandings. This group includes some more specifically Christian practices including prayer and communion. Bruce and Alison tolerate this aspect for the sake of the friendships and discussion times in the group and the social justice side of the group which they particularly appreciate.

Bruce and Alison hope that their children don’t get caught up in some fundamentalist Christianity, and actively protect them from church involvement. They do however allow them to attend the odd Christian camp, explaining that one week a year will not be a great influence.384 The people who make up this group of ‘agnostics’ are most closely linked to the long term reflexive faith people who, in the process of deconstructing their faith, have placed each faith segment into the ‘I don’t know’ or ‘rejected piles’. This is shown in Figure 8.2

It appears that there are two significant factors that allow this relatively small group of people to reject the final core elements of their previous faith. The first of these is an absence of a clear personal experience of ‘God at work in their lives’ to which they can finally refer. It is the presence of such an experience which provides the final foundational legitimation of faith for many of the Reflexive Exiles who would claim they have not left their faith.

The second factor appears to be a degree of personal courage which allows these people to jettison the final residue of previous Christian beliefs. That this requires courage is not at all surprising considering the teachings prevalent in the ‘EPC’ church regarding the fate of those who reject their faith in God.

381 (105.223).
382 (105.87).
383 Most of which would be of a faith nature.
384 (105.151)
Such rejection is generally considered as tantamount to a “guaranteed one-way trip to Hell.” After years of accepting this kind of teaching and internalisation of such extreme ramifications for such a rejection of God it can hardly be surprising to hear that some people hang on to a faith confession long after such a confession has passed any personal use-by date.

In order to acknowledge the transitional move of this group of people towards an alternative faith system we need to incorporate them into the diagrammatic illustration of church leavers. This is shown in Figure 8.3. These alternative faith Transitional Explorers have begun journeying on a faith path which has clearly divergent beliefs, values and expected behaviours than that of the ‘EPC’ version of Christian faith or any other stream of the Christian faith.
8.5 How Church Structure Influences When People Leave

It seems reasonable to postulate that one ingredient determining when people leave the church is the degree of latitude given to them by the church structure. The more rigid the structure of the church typically the less room is allowed for people of deviant faith stage operations. Where the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance within a church are firmly set in place with little room for encouragement and modeling of other faith stage practices and operations people are made to feel either they ‘really fit here’ or they ‘no-longer fit here’.

In chapter 3 we discussed briefly the distinction between ‘sect’ and ‘church’ drawn by Weber, Troeltsch and others. In this chapter I will develop this distinction further through the analysis of Lewis Coser (1974). In Coser’s analysis the more ‘sect-like’ the religious group the tighter the structure and therefore the less tolerance for deviance. In contrast the more ‘church-like’ the religious group the more able it is to absorb and accommodate the deviant individual or group.

Coser defines ‘sects as “groups that bring together men and women who consider themselves to be among the ‘elect’ and who conceive of themselves as possessing a special type of esoteric knowledge or special personal qualities. Such sects demand and command the full commitment of their members”’ (Coser 1974:14). The sect is exclusive aiming at recruiting an elite of religiously qualified performers. The church,

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385 Coser defines ‘sect’ from the Latin where it “consists of people who have cut themselves off from the main body of society.” He goes on to explain the difference between a sect and a church in saying: “The religious sect - as distinct from the Church which contains within its fold both saints and sinners - consists of the visible community of pure saints; the political sect - as distinct from the political party which aims at encompassing a high proportion of the mass of citizens - consists of specifically qualified members... the party is inclusive, the sect is exclusive. The Church and the party aim at attracting all men of good will, the sect aims at recruiting an elite of religiously or politically qualified ‘performers’” (Coser 1974:103)
he says, is inclusive attracting all men (sic) of good will. Coser characterises sects in ideal type as groups which claim the total adherence of the whole person, leaving little room for divergent thought. The ‘sect’ he identifies as having strong leveling tendencies. As such it attempts to achieve uniformity and homogeneity through de-individualization. Not surprisingly sects tend to have strongly authoritarian leaders who often lead through their own charisma.

In church structures that are more ‘sect’-like in operation than ‘church’-like less space will be allowed for the questioning, and faith deconstructing person within their midst. What Coser is describing here are ideal types, but the dichotomy between the ‘sect’-type church and the ‘church’-type church is helpful in highlighting the structural factors that induce, and possibly force people to leave their church as they move through the self-examination and deconstruction phases of faith development. An environment that allows little freedom for questioning, doubting, and deconstruction for individuals is an environment that quickly alienates reflexive faith people. A more relaxed and accepting environment characterised more by Coser’s ‘church’ is one that will allow space and room for the examination processes at work within the reflexive faith person. For the ‘sect’ the reflective process we have been discussing here is heresy. Coser states:

Heresy derives from a Greek word meaning to choose or to take for oneself. The sect defines as heretics all those who propose alternatives where the group wants no alternatives to exist (Coser 1974:109).

Coser’s analysis goes further in postulating that the expulsion of such heretics, either implicitly or explicitly, is beneficial for the ongoing existence of the sect.

Where the church-type organisation strengthens its inner cohesion by allowing various conflicting tendencies to exist within its ranks, the political or religious sect must continuously expel dissenters to maintain or increase cohesion among the remaining ‘worthy’ participants. Those members who bear the burden of being scapegoats, through their sacrifice, cleanse the group of its failings, and in this way reestablish its solidarity; the loyal members are reassured that the group as a whole has not failed but only some traitors; moreover, they can reaffirm their righteousness by uniting in action against the "traitors" and thus overcome any feelings of personal inadequacy (op.cit.:110).

This ‘sect’-like mentality was especially evident in some of the Pentecostal churches from which people exited, particularly for those involved in the reflexive process during the late 1980’s. This would be true for some para-church groups during the same period as well. The scapegoat mechanism described by Coser begins to explain why some leavers spoke of a process of ‘mutual withdrawal’, to use Ebaugh’s concept (1984). Not only were they beginning to reflect on the church and its faith in new ways and therefore creating distance between themselves and the church, but the leaders of the church may also have been moving away from them as their questions and doubts were perceived as a threat to the group. In order to protect the group from this ‘heresy’ the individual was used as a scapegoat.

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have been introduced to the third category of ‘EPC’ church leavers, the Transitional Explorers. These leavers are characterised as having crossed a crucial transition point between doubt and an emerging sense of trust in their faith, between suspicion and openness, between faith deconstruction and faith reconstruction and between an ongoing reflectiveness and a new self ownership of their faith. It is a transition that is hard to clearly identify as it involves a new inner-dependency that motivates and sustains the journey of faith. Although difficult to quantify it is nevertheless a significant transition, one that marks the beginnings of a fundamental transformation in a person’s faith. For the majority of people identified as Transitional Explorers (n=19) this involved a transformation within their Christian faith. However for seven

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386 The terms ‘sect’ and ‘church’ are here in speech marks to differentiate them as specific terms in contrast to the more general use of the word church throughout the thesis.

people this transition led to the move to a new faith basis. For two of those interviewed a ‘new age’ faith was appropriated and for five others a move to an ‘agnostic’ faith stance occurred. The transition that is described between Fowler’s Synthetic-Conventional stage (stage 3) and Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4) is a difficult journey, especially for those located in churches best described as Synthetic-Conventional in their teaching, worship, patterns of governance and style of interaction. As Fowler states:

> Commonly those churches which have as their modal development level the Synthetic-Conventional and interpersonal stage have found it hard to make space and welcome for the Individuative types. By the same token, persons in transition to or already equilibrated in the Individuative stage often find life in Synthetic-Conventional communities stifling and dull. Clashes or antipathies between persons in these two stages represent one common form of ‘cross-stage static’ (1987:92).

Often churches characterised as Synthetic-Conventional in their modal development may also employ a more ‘sect-like’ organisational and leadership structure which only serves to sharpen the sense of discontinuity with those transitioning towards an Individuative-Reflective stage of faith (stage 4). The tighter, and more ‘sect-like’ the church the less space available for people in the midst of faith transitions within the church community, and therefore the more likely they are to leave during such transitions.

In the next chapter we will meet the final grouping of ‘EPC’ church leavers, the Integrated Way-finders, who represent those who have, in faith terms, moved beyond this transitional stage to a more fully integrated Christian faith.
Chapter Nine
Integrated Way-Finders

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know it for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate . . .

(T.S. Eliot)

9.1 Introduction
It was after being narrowly defeated as a candidate for Parliament that Rob began to re-think the basis of the 'EPC' faith he had championed for 14 years.

(Rob) - I almost ended up in parliament as a Christian MP with a perceived mandate to promote the Christian perspective. At that time all the politically active evangelicals were pretty right wing. The "Moral Majority" was making a big impact in the USA. We were full of righteous indignation and anger at the way society was turning from Christian morality under the influence of the humanistic left, and we were determined to stop it and turn it around. It was a modern day crusade.

I knew that the things I was standing for were clearly based on the "Word of God", but during my canvassing I began to perceive that our stance was lacking in compassion. I had been knocking on hundreds of doors and people kept asking questions like "Are you going to stop schools teaching evolution, and are you going to stamp out sex education, are you going to hang all the poofters?" We were looked at like neo-Nazis. I found that there were many, many good people out there who were just as concerned about social trends as I was, and they had very reasonable but non-biblical views of how to deal with the issues. As I tried to reason with them the bases of their views made an awful lot of sense to me.

I realised that my counsel always ultimately went back to the word of God. I'd say, "well, the Word of God says this, and that makes it right . . . But the more I argued the more I began to realise, rather uncomfortably, that while I was consistent with scripture, the arguments we had derived from it were shallow and simplistic, and often out of step with reality. I also saw that what we would have produced, if we'd had the opportunity to bring about a "Christianised" society, was going to be rather dour and loveless, puritanical, like an Islamic fundamentalist state, full of passion for imposing the "Laws of God", but indifferent to those who lived under them. What these people who had thrown out the Bible generations ago said was also internally consistent, and it actually made just as much sense, if not more, and was often more compassionate.

I felt in my self that what I was promoting was all wrong. It was scriptural, but it was wrong. When the election was over I felt very uncomfortable with my faith, with my church, and even with my friends. It caused me to really question the whole Christian perspective. Which was the right view? On the far right was the inflexible Dutch reformed, Calvinistic way of thinking; somewhere in the middle was the middle-class Bible-belt anti-

388 Eliot 1945:43.
intellectualism my own stream was propounding, and "out there" was the enemy; the totally humanistic position. They were all internally consistent. I had to know which was correct. I engaged myself thoroughly in that debate, reading prolifically on both sides of the issue for several years (95.393).

These questions led to other questions, including the whole creation - evolution debate. As an analytical chemist Rob read widely on the issue and concluded that the creationist arguments just didn't stand up. The end result was a sense of being required to support ideas that he couldn't accept as being truthful.' Serious examination of this tenet of his faith led him to look into other areas. He looked at Christian spirituality and mysticism, psychology and philosophy, which led on to readings about Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and Buddhism. Through these studies and his own reflection Rob began to seriously question the dogmatic confidence and exclusivism of evangelical Christians and their interpretation of the Bible. In his 'reflective' phase he examined how the Bible came together and came to the view that the way evangelicals used it was not the way it was intended to be used. The end result for Rob was a complete re-evaluation of his faith.

(Rob) - So I was having to rethink all of the stuff that I'd believed, right down to bedrock, and ask myself, well, what do I really believe now? (95.301).

It is therefore clear that Rob has travelled a similar faith questioning and re-examining journey as that discussed in the last two chapters. The point, however, is that Rob has come to a different place in his faith than that expressed by the Reflexive Exiles or the Transitional Explorers. Rob describes the process using a building analogy:

(Rob) - We look at the Holy Spirit’s ministry to us and He is like pouring in the concrete, the rules that could be expressed as the ethics of the New Testament or the rules of the Old Testament are simply the boxing. You know you pour concrete into boxing, the boxing is there to provide shape and restrain. And He pours it in and it sets, and you take the things (boxing) away, you throw them down, meaningless, they are simply there to do a brief job. What is important is what’s in the boxing. I feel that so much of our whole

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389 As Rob states - "One of the issues that was really important to me was one that I had struggled with for years. I'm involved in science. I have been all my working life. My church stream's orthodoxy obliged me to oppose evolution, largely because of what the moral majority guys in the States were saying, that we can't have godless evolution taught in Schools, we've got to get creationism taught. The more I read of creationism the more I realised it was the biggest bunch of hocus-pocus bunkum that I'd ever heard, and I was having to promote it! So I read lots of books on evolution, books by ardent evolutionists, some equally ardent against it, and plenty outside that debate who were just trying to explain how it works without trying to defend it. Some were theistic others atheist. And from a from a scientific point of view I had to conclude that this is the way the whole universe works. I can't get away from this, this is correct. I looked at the creationist's point of view and by comparison it was so closed minded. It's not science done to discover truth, whatever it may be, but to defend one doctrine and hammer another. Creationism is pseudo-science, prejudice expressed in scientific words, done solely to find a few bits of reason or evidence to support one view against all alternatives, while ignoring the whole edifice of scientific enquiry. The aim of creationism is basically to defend the literal interpretation of Genesis against attack, so that the evangelical faith can continue without needing to change its view of the role of scripture. (95.294-295).

390 (Rob) - "The literal text is not intended by God to be used in the way that modern-day evangelicals do. That is where it starts to fall apart for me. When I studied how the Old Testament canon came into being, how the text came into being, all of those sorts of issues, like the first few bits of Genesis, the occupation of Israel under Joshua, and saw the archaeological evidence being discussed openly by intelligent, believing people who said this didn't happen like this. That could not have happened, this is inconsistent with that, this is where the separate texts were stitched together. What I recognised is that in the text itself we have a set of documents, very ancient documents, giving us a real insight into the development of religious thought. But evangelicals have elevated the word to a fourth member of the Trinity, And this is what it has become for us, but it is also the source of evangelicalism's present weakness. I don't believe now that the word was ever intended to be used the way that we evangelicals use it. I think there is far too much exclusivism in Christianity than there should be" (95.300).
church ethos, is constantly into boxing, not letting the concrete set, not even getting the concrete in there in a lot of the cases, but the whole purpose of your church experience is to provide the boxing into which the Holy Spirit can run and become your personality (95.317; italics mine).

I have categorised people with faith stances such as Rob’s as Integrated Way-finders. This is illustrated in Figure 9.1. As Rob speaks of his faith, he leans forward in his chair and a spark of enthusiasm comes into his eyes. He exhibits a high degree of conviction towards his faith saying:

(rob) - I think my faith now is far more personally profound than it’s ever been... I have felt total confidence that I am closer to God now than I have ever been, even though I’ve pulled away from all the things I’m supposed to do. ... I’m reading the Bible and I feel comfortable in the Bible. I’m praying. I’m feeling more comfortable praying. I’m trying to develop the attitude of prayer, the practicing the presence of God type of prayer; you know Brother Lawrence. ... I know that my value for God is not what I can do for Him but all the value is what He can do for me. So I know that what I am becoming is important to Him, not the outward things. ... So what I understand now is that life is about becoming the kind of person that you could become and you have this degree of freedom to explore and delight God, almost surprise God, with what can be done with a life. I see this as being the aim of it. I don’t see Christian service as being the aim of life; it’s a by-product of spirituality (95.313, 314 & 321).

Figure 9.1 Journeys of Faith Outside of the ‘EPC’ Church - Trajectory 5

It is this conviction of faith that is now more clearly articulated which distinguishes this grouping of leavers from the transitional explorers. As we shall see shortly, in terms of their energy for and sense of commitment to their faith the Integrated Way-finders are closer to the Displaced Followers than to either of the other groupings of leavers. There are however two key differences that separate the Displaced Followers from the Integrated Way-finders. Firstly, when pushed, the Displaced Followers will eventually account for their faith
by reference to either an un-examined confidence in the Bible, mystification or an external source of authority. In contrast, the Integrated Way-finders may well ground their beliefs on the Bible or personal experience but it is a reliance on experience or scripture that has been critically examined and found to be plausible. The Integrated Way-finders will tell you about the questioning and evaluation processes that they employed as well as the strong convicational basis for their faith.

The second means of distinguishing the two groups is the degree of identification with and acceptance of other faith beliefs and philosophies as also embracing truth. The Displaced Followers remain comparatively narrow and rigid in their beliefs and values where the Integrated Way-finders have incorporated statements of truth, beliefs and values from wider faith backgrounds than the ‘EPC’ church. This impression is reinforced by the openness expressed by Integrated Way-finders towards people of other belief systems. These people are more accepting, less defensive and more willing to enter into open discussion than the Displaced Followers.

9.2 Integrated Way-finders

The label “Integrated” faith is drawn from the root word ‘integer’ which the Oxford English Dictionary (1973) defines as ‘a thing complete in itself’. The word ‘integrated’ is defined as ‘complete, combined into a whole’. The faith expressed by people at this phase exhibits a completeness not found in the previous faith phases. Where the Transitional Explorers are in the process of reconstructing their faith and developing an emerging self-ownership, the integrated faith people have to all intents and purposes completed this faith reconstruction work. While there is a sense in which the ‘integrated faith’ is also still open and being constantly redefined and adapted, the major faith examination is now complete.

The process could be likened to the building of a house out of timber from a previous home. The first part of the process involves moving out of the old home and carefully tearing it down. In the demolition phase the timber, window and door frames, roofing materials and fittings are assessed as to their usefulness as materials for the new house. This process is what I have called the ‘reflexive phase’. The next part of the process involves building the new house out of the materials retrieved from the old one and the incorporation of a number of new materials. This is the ‘transitional phase’, where much of the structural faith building is done. Finally the house is complete and liveable and the person is able to move in. This final phase may include minor on-going work to the house, rooms may still need to be painted, repairs made and at times modifications of various sizes undertaken. Although this work is ongoing, the basic structure of the home is complete and it now affords a safe place for the individual to live. This final phase in the faith journey is what I have called the ‘integrated faith’ phase, because here the structure of the faith is to all intents and purposes “complete” and the person is able to appropriate it as their own faith system. People at this final phase, like the builder of the home, may well be involved in ongoing questioning and occasional periods of faith re-evaluation (on some occasions involving quite substantial re-evaluations), but the major structural work is now done.

The term integrated is also descriptive of a second aspect of these people’s faith, in that they are seeking to integrate their faith into all aspects of their lives. Of these people, like no other grouping previously discussed, it can be said that there is a more fully orbed faith that seeks to integrate the physical, mental, emotional, sexual, relational and spiritual aspects of their selfhood in a way deeply connected with their faith. Hence people at this faith phase are very aware of the deeper personal issues that lurk within themselves.

The term ‘way-finder’ is at first somewhat curious. Its use is intended to signal that the people in this faith position have found something of a way forward in their faith. In this sense they are way-finders. I am also incorporating the journey motif that has been part of each of these faith positions to signal that the Integrated Way-finders may be able to point to ways forward for those best characterised as Reflexive Exiles or Transitional Explorers. The use of the term ‘way-finders’ to label those at the integrative phase will be further developed later.
I will now turn to the four aspects of this phase of faith in tension with what has been already discussed in previous chapters.

9.2.1 An Interdependent Faith

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During this phase the strong focused inner-dependency of faith begins to allow more room for the company of others who share similar or divergent faith positions. Here the person desires to connect with individuals and groups of people of like-faith and people of differing beliefs rather than be confined to one specific group. For Tim and Karen this meant a return to church. The church they joined was however quite different from the one they had left. The decision to become participants in a church again was the culmination of a number of factors. Firstly Tim and Karen’s children were entering their early teenage years and as parents they wanted to provide their children with the opportunity of joining a church youth group and so find their own faith. Secondly, the couple themselves were experiencing a desire to meet with others who shared their faith.

(Tim) - So we were thinking well what about the kids? The thought occurred to me that although the church are all wackos I still couldn't deny the fact that there were people in churches who were Christians, who I felt a lot more affinity for than those close friends I might have had at work who weren't Christians. And I realised I had an affinity with people who thought about Christ and considered themselves (Christians), or identified with them. . . And I started to feel the need in myself to be recognized by a group of people who recognized Christ. And I could be recognized again as a fellow believer. And I could sort of speak my faith, . . . in fellowship with a wider body. At a club (82.209; italics mine).\(^{391}\)

The final factor that helped Tim and Karen re-join a church after 2 years of not being part of one, was the way the minister and the church in general functioned. They found they were warmly welcomed without pressure and yet given opportunities to be involved, almost immediately, in areas that interested them. The main difference from their old church was the ‘sensible’ government practices of the church,\(^{392}\) where power was spread throughout the church community and people were free to disagree, to question and to argue about things without being shut down by the leadership. The church body also reflects a wide range of theological positions and is not dominated by evangelical or charismatic understandings and practices. Not all of the people I interviewed were able to find a church like Tim and Karen’s. Denis and his family were unable to find a church as accommodating but Denis has kept on going, albeit very much on the margins of the church. He and his wife wanted their two children to have a Christian faith background and so they continue to attend on Sundays.

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\(^{391}\) For Tim and Karen the church was likened to a club. Tim said that he realised that he was a cricketer and his work friends all played rugby and he wanted to meet with some cricketers again. So they joined a sensible cricket club. The way Tim and Karen approached this decision is indicative of this. They said that they sat down and worked out what the ‘fees’ would be (i.e. what they would need to contribute financially as participants) and decided that it was worth it and joined up.

\(^{392}\) The church Tim and Karen have joined can be described as an Evangelical Anglican church (this is how a leader within the church characterised it). The church is made up of people from a wide variety of theological streams including evangelicals, charismatics and liberals. The church does not try to cater exclusively to any one of these groups but attempts to include all of them. The sensible government was also expressed, in Tim’s mind, in the way anyone can disagree publically with a previous speaker (regardless of who that person is - including the minister).
(Denis) - I’m not interested. For quite a period of time, I found myself quite reactionary inside myself, to what was going on. It was just like the old scenarios being trotted out every Sunday. The old scenarios for the old guard and all that sort of stuff. And it just seemed so irrelevant to faith in real life. . . . Just none of the essence of what it means to be fully human, which seems to be catered to in that church setting. You must be nice!! (A friend) had a wonderful line - that Jesus was not a nice person.

Explaining why he no longer feels comfortable within church Denis says:

(Denis) - It just seems to be stuck in a time warp and it doesn’t move from where it actually is, and anything that does move through it and happens to move beyond it is then viewed with suspicion rather than the conception that you are actually on a journey of maturing faith and so forth. . . . So basically now I am not reactionary anymore, because I have got over that, and I just sit there and think about other things really.

Although Denis finds the church environment unhelpful and something he simply bears for the sake of his children and family stability he does connect with some groups of faith that help to nurture him. Denis is part of a Catholic spirituality prayer group of which he says - “I find that deeply nurturing.” He is an infrequent attender at another more theologically broadminded church which he finds ‘theologically stimulating’ and he and his wife are part of a small group of “dis-affected, post-institutional church people, (who) are very interested in authentic, fully human faith, and exploring issues”. This meets every two weeks “and we go every second week and we have found ourselves pretty comfortable there.”

Alongside this Denis has retained a strong inner-dependence for the nurture of his faith as he says - “for me at this stage of my faith pilgrimage, my faith is self-sustaining, by and large. I am still doing my own reading and I have my own practice of communing with God and all that sort of stuff. So I am quite self-sustaining in all that.”

The first characteristic of the integrative faith is therefore a new inter-dependence on both inner nurture for the life of faith and renewed connections with others who also provide the individual with nourishment and support in their faith. The new networks into which they connect represent a wider diversity of belief, values and expectations than the church they left previously. Making renewed connections with other groups of faith provides for the individual a context in which to contribute to other’s lives or the life of a community. The desire to contribute, support and give to others is a growing desire amongst the Integrated Way-finders.

9.2.2 An Integrated Faith

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393 Denis’ use of the word ‘reactionary’ should be read as something he reacted to within himself rather than as a personality characteristic.
394 Here Denis identifies the friend’s name which I have removed for the sake of confidentiality.
395 (122.64)
396 (122.64-67). In many ways the relationship between the Integrated Way-finders and the church is like that described in Thornton Wilder’s classic ‘Our Town’, where “the young wife Emily dies in childbirth. Given the right to return to some special day of her life, she goes back to a birthday she remembers as a child. When she returns she sees her familiar loved ones going about their ordinary routines, but they cannot see her nor do they see the terrible beauty visible to her from beyond the grave. She flees, glad to return where the pain is at least bearable.” Here Loren Mead comments that “Wilder has given us a portrayal of what it is like to have awakened into a new paradigm and how hard it is to communicate with those still living in the old one” (Quoted in Mead 1993:22).
397 (122.52)
The term ‘integrated’ as discussed earlier is useful in drawing our attention to the ‘completed, whole’ faith system held by people at this stage and also to indicate the fully orbed nature of their faith. The integrated people have found, or more correctly built up for themselves, an understanding of their faith which is not reductionist or simplistic but which provides a coherent faith system and therefore a strong basis for their world-view. In my interview with Denis he raised a number of issues critical to the basis of the ‘EPC’ faith that he had questioned, reflected upon and found he could no longer hold to. For example at one point he says:

(Denis) - Why have we got immune systems built into us genetically if before the fall\textsuperscript{398} there was no disease. Well God put them there because he knew it was going to happen. Well if God knew it was going to happen he is a damn macabre person. Why the hell did Jesus have to die? - Because God knew we were going to sin. - Oh so no! God didn’t know we were going to sin he made it perfectly, and then oh shit what can I do, excuse me Jesus can you pop down there and hop on the cross we have got to sort this blimmen thing out, I didn’t think of that one. It is just expediency it makes God thick or macabre, it doesn’t work (122.163).

For Denis this problem required a great deal of study and thought until he found some answers in some ancient Christian theology and a liberationist interpretation of the Old Testament book of Job. He describes the process:

(Denis) - And you can sit in church with reductionist answers, but your heart can’t be in them anymore so you have to find out, so you start going on this journey and there are answers. That is the wonderful thing. There are people out there who are thinking about it . . . this damn dude has written a book that is only that thick (holding his hands up to show the spine of a book\textsuperscript{399} less than a centimetre wide) but it kicks your heart like nothing. You can trust this stuff, it’s biblical, you can see it on the pages of the book. It is coherent. It is not all, these bloody dualistic, and it is utterly real in terms of your own heart -suffering- and the issues of the world and the struggles of the world. And it fires on all cylinders (122.178-179).

The building of a coherent faith system is one hallmark of those in this phase. Secondly, people here are building a fully orbed faith. By the use of this term I am drawing attention to a faith that incorporates and is relevant to all aspects of their lives. Helen, Rob’s wife, says:

(Helen) - If your heart’s right every single day people come across your path where you make a choice of either to make their day better by some act of yours, word or deed, or to have no impact on their life because you’re following your own agenda. And that happens every single day of your life. And I think, to me that’s being close to God. It’s not only how I speak to my husband and kids, how I live out my wifehood, motherhood, but how I speak to the person in the shop (95.226).

It is a faith that, as she says, has to be as relevant in the laundry as it is in the church. Rob chips in at this point again moving forward in his chair with the air of someone about to make an important point “I see so many Christians who talk about worshipping God but they are oblivious to the fact that they are ecologically

\textsuperscript{398} ‘The fall’ is here used as a label for the emergence of evil in the world as presented in Genesis (the first book of the Bible). In the Genesis account evil and sin enter the world through the choices of the man and the woman in the garden to eat the one fruit that God had told them not to eat. This incident is called ‘the fall’.

\textsuperscript{399} A commentary to the book of Job.
a cancer on the planet\textsuperscript{400} . . . And I say you can’t worship God on a Sunday morning and desecrate this planet all through the week. It is a total incongruity, it’s an inconsistency that the church is oblivious to.\textsuperscript{401} His reading in the area of ecology is for him “food for the soul.”\textsuperscript{402} Tim and Karen talk about a minister that Tim worked with who always spoke about the family having to come first, be the top priority in ministry but who never lived like that. For Tim and Karen this lack of an authentic faith is one aspect of what drove them to leave the church and seek to build a lifestyle that reflects their faith and a faith that reflects their lifestyle.

9.2.3 An Autonomous Faith

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<td>Self-examining</td>
<td>Emerging self ownership</td>
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The third characteristic of the integrated faith is the ‘Autonomous’ or ‘self-owned’ nature of people’s faith at this point. Talking to people in this group leaves the discerning listener in no doubt as to the personalised faith to which they hold. It is a faith that is ‘self-governed’. The level of commitment and functionality of this faith for these people is very high. Rob and Denis exemplify this personal ownership of faith in the following comments.

(Disen ) - . . . My commitment to Christian faith and my commitment to Christ is something that is prior to (everything else), in my experience and exists sort of independent of church, and it exists sort of independent of anything else in a lot of ways. . . . And so for me the integration of who I am . . . in my personhood, actually subsists in this whole way of looking at life and reality is Christ centered. That might sound a bit amorphous. But everybody has a metaphysic, everybody actually functions out of a metaphysic, a view of what reality is. That experience, whole person, whole mind, whole metaphysic. What I am trying to say is that it is so deeply integrated as to how I sense myself to be.

(Interviewer) - That you couldn’t walk away from?

(Disen) - No never! And not just because I did it so I have got to keep it up, because, hell’s teeth, what else is there? But I found immense fruitfulness in my own sense of personhood and my own capacity to relate societally around issues, my own capacity to relate to people. My own capacity to live moment by moment daily life, out of a Christ centred spirituality (122.133-136).

(Rob) - I think my faith now is far more personally profound than it’s ever been. I, I have faced doubts at the end, at the short end of a gun as it were, twice in the last few months. And I’ve done it with complete confidence and faith. I’ve been quite prepared to die with a good understanding of the character of God. And I’ve felt no fears of, “goodness what a bummer of a time to have a heart attack!” Just as you’ve left church you know . . . thrown away the winning ticket. . . . I have not felt like that. I have felt total confidence that I am closer to God now than I have ever been, even though I’ve pulled away from all the things I’m supposed to do (95.313).
Linked with this new ownership is the ability to make articulate and clear definitions of what they believe and how that may differ from the church environment within which they previously existed. Michelle and her husband Stuart went through some major health difficulties with their children which have been instrumental in a crisis of faith for Michelle. During this crisis, but also for a number of other reasons, they left the church they were very heavily involved in and formed a group to look at their faith and how it related to their real life issues. When I interviewed Michelle she summed up her faith in the following paragraph.

(Michelle) - What is my faith and who do I believe? (I) came down to the nuts and bolts and said I do believe. . . I believe him to be good and true and holy and pure and loving. . . at this stage like Job I had laid my hand on my mouth and (am) having nothing much to say. Because He's bigger than I thought he was I feel I need to get to know him in a much bigger way. Part of my journey now is to accept that I am here. And process my thoughts...usually telling him in my musings, thoughts and feelings. . . . (I) feel sobered in my spirit . . . might be grief. . . . I've been changed somehow (4.121; italics mine).

403 For example Denis, talking about his beliefs, said: I am still evangelical, the evangel, the gospel, personal commitment to Christ, death and resurrection, bodily resurrection and all the deity and humanity, trinity all the basic credal stuff I have no difficulty with. . . . in a Baptist setting, there is the conservative evangelical churches which are sort of, they are very blinkered. I am wanting to throw the blinkers off and spread it wider. But from the majority of Baptist church settings I'm liberal. (Laughs) It is all relative, but you can see what I'm getting at. I'm classed as a liberal. I am not fundamentalist and I'm not Pentecostal. But I am thoroughly evangelical, but I'm eclectic after that. On social justice, on personal spiritual pilgrimage married to an interface with issues and persons in the world, so the social justice and journey with people and evangelism comes out of them. You sense their heart beat and they sense yours and you. Then two beggars, one beggar tells another beggar where they found bread. Which is a very different model from the, “I have got it together and I know the truth, and Jesus is Lord and you need to repent, turn or burn” Which is basically where most people end up when you talk about evangelism in a Baptist setting (122.43).
9.2.4 A Strong Faith

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The faith of the Integrated Way-finders takes on the similar convictional strength as that expressed by the Displaced Followers. The central difference, however, is between the unquestioning boldness of the Displaced Followers and the quiet strength and confidence of the Integrated Way-finders. Here people are willing to use their time, energy, skills and resources in pursuit of their faith. In a number of cases I met people who were making very large decisions or personal sacrifices as part of an outworking of their faith and in support of the communities of faith to which they are attached. For example one couple were considering full-time work in a liturgical/mainline church denomination, and another was considering travelling overseas to be involved in a restorationist church in Europe. Others were committing large amounts of time and money in the outworking of their faith in the wider community, either through an extension of their normal work or with voluntary organisations.

A number were investing time and energy for spiritual direction or spirituality groups, reading and study or continued reflection and prayer. As Rob said he was throwing all his mental resources into the issue of the future of the church and Christian faith today. Rob did six units of theological study as well as working full-time the year prior to my interview with him. This occurred during a difficult personal year for him and his family. These units included two on other world religions. Each of these people in their own different way are engaging in their faith through their time, their study, their interaction with others and their support and care of others.

9.3 The Journey to an Integrated Faith

In the process of interviewing each of the people in this faith category I asked them to outline the key factors that enabled them to reach their present faith position. A number of important influences were highlighted by members of this group. The consistent factors included the support of a group or person who allowed them to express their concerns, doubts and feelings without trying to reprimand them, or attempt to prop up their faith. This mentoring role was the most significant factor mentioned by the group. The second factor was access to information like Fowler’s stages of faith or some other similar model that allowed the individual to normalise their present faith position. To extend this second factor further, generally a greater theological knowledge was considered helpful to people. The theological training had forced these people to interact with other Christian traditions and understandings outside of their own. Coupled with this was the ability to make a distinction between their Christian faith and the church, and realise that their faith was not dependent on an ongoing role in the church.

404 Knowledge of a faith development model helped to normalise people’s personal experience of faith transitions. Many of those identified as Integrated Way-finders mentioned some awareness of a faith developmental model, but so too did some Reflexive Exiles, Transitional Explorers and Displaced Followers. Equally a number of those characterised here as Integrated Way-finders did not mention knowledge of such faith frameworks.
9.4 Faith Operations

When I asked Denis what a mature faith would look like from his point of view, he replied by drawing on Fowler’s stages of faith which he had studied some years previously during his theological training.

(Denis) - What I take from it (Fowler’s stages of faith) in terms of what mature faith looks like is that it is something that you own personally, not just something that you do out of social expectation or peer pressure. It is something that is personal, it is something that is internalised. And for me, it is something that allows you to be fully human, so it releases who you are as opposed to suppressing or containing. It is not libertarian in the sense that you can just move beyond conscience and into indulgence. It has a moral gravity and we could fill all those terms up with Christian categories in truthfulness and faithfulness etc. etc.

(Denis) - (mature) faith exists in a broad context which is global which is dialogical, it can relate to others who are quite diametrically opposed without feeling threatened. It can appreciate where others stand and see from within their setting and yet bring its own setting to that and inter-relate and agree on what you can mutually agree on core values and truth and dignity etc. And (it) has the capacity to dialogue on disparate sort of points without falling into dichotomies and maintaining a common human interface. And so for me that is what I would call mature faith. It seeks to serve rather than be served. It (mature faith) exists for the world as against everything being there to nurture me, so it has that sort of sacrificial character (122.77-78; italics mine).

Here Denis highlights some of the core factors of Fowler’s fifth stage of faith, a stage of faith that would epitomize the faith expressed by Denis and the majority of those in the ‘integrated’ faith category. Some of this grouping\(^{405}\) gave indications of emerging into Fowler’s final stage, his sixth stage. In this chapter I will discuss both of these faith stages.

9.4.1 Stage 5. Conjunctive Stage of Faith

Figure 9.2 Conjunctive Faith Stage Illustration

As indicated in Chapter 4 Fowler states that there are four hallmarks to the Conjunctive stage of faith:
1. An awareness of the need to face and hold together several unmistakable polar tensions in one’s life.
2. A felt sense that truth is multi-form and complex. The Conjunctive faith comes to cherish paradox and the apparent contradictions of perspectives on truth as intrinsic to that truth.
3. The beginnings of a second naivete when approaching symbols, sacrament and myth.
4. A genuine openness to the truths of traditions and communities other than one’s own.\(^{406}\)

These factors are consistently represented in the faith of the integrated leavers discussed in this chapter. When I asked Denis what he felt was happening when he prayed, he replied in a way typical of those in the fifth stage of Fowler’s stages of faith.

(Denis) - I am a personalist. God isn’t just a force, so for me I am relating to and inter-relating with a personal God, who is creator sustainer, who is sustaining all history in

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\(^{405}\) This was particularly the case for one interviewee.

\(^{406}\) Points 1-4 summarised from Fowler 1984:65.
its journey and will bring it to its conclusion and all that stuff. So I actually think that stuff when I’m praying. So that is like the big broad brush strokes, that is the big transcendence stuff and the immanent stuff is Christ’s incarnation, and what is it. He has been tempted with all things that we have been tempted with. I relate to someone who knows all the twisting of my inner selfhood. I relate to someone who knows me and as Augustine said God is one who knows us better than we know ourselves.

(Denis) - So I am relating to a being who is absolutely transcendent but utterly immanent and that whole personal thing. I don’t have to say anything, he knows it, and just as you and I are sitting here it is as close as that, it’s closer. There is that old prayer, God is with me now closer than breathing, nearer than hands and feet, God is with me now. So I have that, I never lose that, that sense. I can feel really distraught and black and it can be really awful, but that sense of utter intimacy is part of me, so those dimensions are what, that’s what I am doing when I pray, I am relating in that breadth of terms (122.155-156).

The answer Denis gave reflects a paradoxical understanding of prayer that seeks to hold in creative tension the personal intimate character of prayer with the global interventionist view of God at work in the world. It reflects an understanding of a God who is both viewed as very human (like us) and yet transcendent (totally other).

One of the integrated interviewees gave indications that they were perhaps best described by Fowler’s sixth stage of faith. The sixth stage is one which Fowler titles ‘Universalising’. The result of Fowler’s own research indicated that only a small percentage of the population could be described as operating at this level. In fact his findings showed only 1.6% of those 61 years of age or over were operating at this sixth faith stage. Of all the interviewees under 61 years of age in Fowler’s study (n=297) no-one was identified as being in the sixth stage. My interviews revealed one woman who could be described as having reached the universalising stage on Fowler’s scale. Because I was not conducting faith staging interviews this must remain a supposition rather than something that could be claimed with a high degree of confidence. I was however reassured in my interpretation when another interviewee said that he saw this same individual as a definite sixth stage person. Because of the training and experience of the person making this comment I took his opinion of this woman who he knew very well seriously.

For the purposes of this discussion, whether or not this woman or any of the other interviewees would be staged at this universalising level, it rounds out our discussion of the link between Fowler’s stages of faith and the faith positions developed in this present study if we include a brief summary of this sixth stage.

9.4.2 Stage 6. Universalising Stage of Faith
Figure 9.3 Universalising Faith Stage Illustration

Two key transitions occur in the move to a universalising faith. Firstly there is the “decentration from self”. Here the self is moved from the centre or focus in the individual’s life. As illustrated by the diagram above,

407 Fowler 1995. Table B.3 page 318. The age range of these 297 interviewees was from under six years of age through to 60 years of age.
408 This was something this interviewee brought into the conversation for an illustrative purpose, without any prompting from the interviewer.
409 This person has a Ph.D in psychology and has used the staged faith theory in his own professional work.
the image of self is now completely removed. This is coupled with a continued widening of the circle of “those who count”. Here the individual is able to know the world through the eyes of the other in their experiences of persons, classes, nationalities, and faiths quite different from their own. Secondly, there is a move in the things an individual values and the sense of valuation they receive from them. As people have moved through the stages of faith there is a successive widening of the groups and individuals whose values become a matter of their concern as well. This process reaches a kind of completion in Universalising faith, for there a person decentres in the valuing process to such an extent that he/she participates in the valuing of the Creator and values other beings - and being - from a standpoint more nearly identified with the love of Creator for creatures than from the standpoint of a vulnerable, defensive, anxious creature” (Fowler 1984:69).

The woman who I consider may be functioning in her faith operations at the universalising stage said:

(Jenny) - Underpinning all of this is, from my brethren background, a sense of God in my life and of doors opening at significant times, and of career options and choices that I have made in life, that I have a sense of God’s goodness and providence in. There have been times in my life where it is convenient not to believe there is a God. It has been easier to box along, and shut that out without struggling, trying to get a handle on it. And I don’t live very comfortably putting it so far on the back burner. It has to percolate for me all the time. And in dialogue with other people who have doubts and dilemmas, and a big belief that there is a God, a creator God who is at work in the universe and at work through his people in ministry and mission, and we can discover that (55.35).

Figure 9.4 below seeks to bring together in diagrammatical form the connections between the faith positions that have been discussed and Fowler’s stages of faith. The dotted lines represent the range that any one faith stage could be seen to be operative as compared to the faith positions of the leavers.
9.5 Future Involvement of the Integrated Way-finders

Rob talked of how the ‘EPC’ church is inherently flawed. In doing so he drew my attention to the analogy in the New Testament of the world being like a harvest field that is ripe and ready for the picking. Rob suggests that in the evangelical church we have a reaping-centred Christianity but we don’t know what to do with people as they mature in their Christian faith. He is therefore suggesting that ‘EPC’ type churches are strong on evangelism but comparatively weak in their emphasis on faith maturation. To use Fowler’s analogy of the dance of faith (1991:94), they have an overly focused concern on one step of the dance - conversion, which neglects the other movement of the dance - spiritual development and maturation.

(Rob) - We know how to cut them down (the ripe harvests) but we don’t know how to stack them into sheaves and take the sheaves into the haystack. And we don’t know what to do with the stuff then. We don’t know how to get the ears of wheat off it and turn it into bread. . . . . all they are able to do is mow the harvest. . . so the whole experience of church growth is
one of someone goes out with a message and ultimately they do not bring anyone beyond their own experience and they just dilute the church to death. They’ve put themselves in the centre of a collection of perennial spiritual babies. The role and the whole thrust of the church is to prepare gallons of spiritual milk just to keep those people coming back week after week. They never expect to take them beyond that childhood stage where the people are independent of the leaders (95.222-224).

For the ‘reflexive’ faith person this kind of church environment causes an almost intolerable sense of confinement, where their concerns, questions, doubts and growing edges are not acknowledged or often even tolerated. In a confused, sometimes angry state they leave this kind of church as their world-view which had been based on their faith comes into disarray. Transitional people, on the other hand, are beginning to identify some faith struts that they can rely on as foundational pieces in a new faith system.

When Fowler (1984:67) is describing the Conjunctive faith (stage 5) people he comments that “they are not likely to be true believers, in the sense of undialectical, single-minded, uncritical devotion to a cause or ideology”. This point is true of the group of Integrated Way-finders, who struggle to fit into many ‘EPC’ contexts. For people at this point there is a continued rejection of reductionistic answers and slavish adherence to programmes of church growth or church life. These people find it difficult to be part of an environment which is selective in the issues that it discusses or the manner in which issues are discussed and in which there is a perceived required way of acting and speaking on those who participate. When Denis said that Jesus wasn’t ‘nice’ he was highlighting a difference between the presentation of Jesus Christ in the ‘EPC’ church community and an alternative interpretation of the biblical record of Jesus’ own life and experience.

For a number of the integrated faith people the structures of the ‘EPC’ churches are also difficult to co-exist easily within. According to their depiction, the focus of these churches on evangelism rather than spiritual development, on exuberent rather than reflective forms of worship, on prayer which is demanding or coercive in its approach rather than a meditative listening to God, and on hierarchical structures of leadership and control rather than more open inclusive forms of decision-making may all serve to alienate the integrated faith person.

There are also factors in the Conjunctive faith stage that alienate the individual from participating actively in a church community. Like all Fowler’s faith stages the Conjunctive stage (stage 5) has its own weaknesses. Fowler describes these as being where people develop a deep sense of aloneness or ‘homelessness’. Here he is pointing to those who fail to connect with others of like faith and find a place to belong. Secondly Fowler points to the dark side of the Conjunctive faith’s appreciation of the revelation of God in concealment and non-availability as well as in disclosure and discourse. Thirdly because there is a new appreciation of the truth embodied in other faiths, religions and ideologies. There can often be a corresponding reluctance to be involved in evangelism. Finally Fowler comments on the “dark side of their awareness of being enmeshed in vast and complex systems” which can result in “a sense of paralysis and a retreat into a private world of spirituality” (Fowler 1987:94-95).

Each of these weaknesses of the conjunctive stage also helps to alienate the individual from greater connection with the established church. Despite this each of the integrated faith people interviewed had made some connections with people, groups or churches that hold to similar beliefs and a similar faith. The degree to which they will build ongoing strong connections with these people, groups and churches will be dependent on the openness of these communities to people like themselves and the degree to which these shadow sides of the conjunctive faith manifest themselves in the individual.

What some of the ancient Jews labelled the time when God hides his face as illustrated in Psalm 13:1 -” How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me?. . “
9.6 A Dynamic Process

In the development of the argument that sees leavers journeying through a particular faith changing process, I have isolated four key points along the way. The reader could be forgiven for seeing these as neat boxes into which specific individuals fit. However in reality what is described here by the use of four distinct categories is actually a dynamic process. When Fowler introduces the stages of faith he states that the “descriptions of stages are “still shots” and as such constitute interruptions of a complex and dynamic process”. Hence the process of ‘staging’ a person should not be approached with a “cubbyhole mentality” (Fowler 1985:37-38). The same dynamic process needs to be reflected in the faith positions described in the four categories I have developed.

Individual interview scripts often included a variety of faith phase comments. One comment from an interviewee may have been indicative of a ‘reflexive faith’ phase while other comments by the same person may have been better categorised as ‘transitional’. Consistent with the Faith development theory of James Fowler I have sought to find the average of any particular interviewee’s comments. The spread of comments in a particular interview script often indicated that a person was beginning to anticipate the next phase or that they had more recently moved into a new faith understanding and practice. The methods used to resolve these issues is discussed in further detail in Appendix 7. If we ignore for the moment the methodological issues involved in categorising particular interview scripts, we can focus on the important point that this is a dynamic and fluid process from which I have artificially exposed four static positions. For the interviewees involved the process is anything but a neat jumping from “box to box”. It is, as one person described it, like being ‘adrift on the sea’. Tossed by the ocean waves, blown by the changing winds and pulled by the hidden currents the person moves this way and that perhaps more aware of an overall turbulence than any clear directional path. It is often in hindsight that interviewees discern the trajectory they have travelled and are able to make sense of both their journey and their faith.

9.7 Conclusion

Before moving to the third and final section of this thesis let me summarise the argument that has been presented up to this point. Chapter 1 introduced the general decline in church attendance and Christian faith in Western societies. In so doing it indicated the reverse trend among Pentecostal and charismatic churches both in Western countries like New Zealand and across the world. Having shown that the Pentecostal/charismatic stream of the church is growing, it needs also to be acknowledged that this stream of the Christian church also has many people leaving. While this is consistent with other periods of the churches history there are also indications that the number of leavers from ‘EPC’ churches is increasing.

Having shown that ‘EPC’ churches are both growing and losing significant numbers of people we are then faced with the task of identifying the leavers. Previous research in the area of religious disaffiliation would lead us to conclude that the leavers are young, fringe people who have not been involved in the church for very long. In this study however leavers are shown to be middle-aged, generally well educated, employed and involved in the church for significant periods of time (average of 15.8 years) and who had held core leadership positions during their time within ‘EPC’ churches. However the key difference between those interviewed in this study and previous research was the distinction being made by the majority of leavers themselves that while they were leaving the church they were not leaving the Christian faith. Hence these people were both disengaging and disaffiliating but were not moving to a position of apostasy. They were not de-converting.

The second section of Chapter 2 introduced two recent texts that have focused on ‘EPC’ church leavers and identified points of commonality and difference between their findings and the research conducted within this study.

In Chapter 3 the ‘EPC’ church was introduced. Specifically the historic processes that lay behind the ‘EPC’ churches that people are presently leaving. To achieve this we considered the influence of evangelicalism, the Pentecostal movement, the charismatic movement, the Jesus movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s,
Chapter 4 introduced the concept of ‘faith’ and its development using the staged faith theory of James Fowler. Fowler’s stages were then considered in relation to both individuals and groups of individuals and churches. In Chapter 5 the role of the secularisation process was considered as a causal factor in people’s decision to leave ‘EPC’ churches. The work of neo-secularisation theorists on the privatisation of religious beliefs toward the formation of individual faith ‘cocktails’ was found to be useful in understanding the way interviewees expressed the changes, re-evaluations and critical reflection on their faith in the process of leaving their ‘EPC’ church. Where secularisation was perceived as a process of declining faith or a move to apostasy it was found to be of little informative value in this present study. As Wright (1996:1) said “religion is not disappearing but mutating”. It was this ‘mutation’ of faith that was being expressed by leavers rather than a process of de-conversion and apostasy. This chapter canvassed the reasons for leaving offered by church leaders interviewed within this study. The discussion showed a diversity of opinion between church leaders and church leavers as to why the leavers left. Finally the chapter considered the leaving process outlined by Helen Ebaugh and its usefulness as a descriptive tool in the leaving process. It was found that Ebaugh’s leaving process had a high correlation with the processes of leaving described by interviewees.

Chapters 6 through 9 introduced the four major groups of leavers identified in this research. The Displaced Followers left the church because of specific grumbles with the church leadership, its structure and practices. Whether part of the ‘Angry’ or ‘Hurt’ sub-categories of Displaced Followers these people left because of specific identifiable issues. In contrast the Reflexive Exiles, Transitional Explorers and Integrated Wayfinders left their respective ‘EPC’ churches because of what was here labelled ‘meta-grumbles’. These were issues that focused less on specific events, decisions and structures of the church and far more on the core elements and foundations of the ‘EPC’ faith itself. Meta-grumbles indicate a dissatisfaction with the meta-narratives implicit within the ‘paramount realities’ of the ‘EPC’ faith.

The faith of the Displaced Followers was characterised as being a received, dependent, unexamined and yet bold faith which linked with Fowler’s Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith (stage 3). The faith of the Reflexive Exiles differed in every respect from that of the Displaced Followers. Where the Displaced Followers continued to accept the received faith of the ‘EPC’ churches the Reflexive Exiles were seen to be deconstructing their faith, in fact pulling it to bits layer by layer. Where the Displaced Followers continued to be dependent on the wider ‘EPC’ community and the personal spiritual disciplines espoused within ‘EPC’ churches the Reflexive Exiles rejected both the resources of the wider ‘EPC’ community and the personal faith disciplines so integrally linked with evangelicalism. While the Displaced Followers held to a tacit faith the Reflexive Exiles were engaged in a process of reflective evaluation of their faith. And while the Displaced Followers could be described as holding to a ‘bold’ faith the Reflexive Exiles were very hesitant, confused and unsure about their faith. Thus the Displaced Followers discussed in Chapter 6 and the Reflexive Exiles of Chapter 7 were seen as diametrically opposed to each other. While some Displaced Followers gave indications of moving towards the Reflexive Exile faith stance the vast majority appeared settled as Displaced Followers. The same could be said of the Reflexive Exiles for whom nearly half (n=14, 44%) had been outside the church for five or more years. This indicated that these leavers had been in the process of faith deconstruction, examination, confusion and faith hesitancy for five or more years and had not moved out of this ‘wilderness’ or ‘exile’ experience of faith. From this it was postulated that many leavers whose faith is best characterised as that of Reflexive Exiles become stuck at this point on the faith journey and are unable, unwilling or prevented in some way from moving to a transitional point in which they explore faith in new ways.

The Transitional Explorers of Chapter 8 represent those who have moved beyond the deconstructive phase of their faith to a reconstructive period, from a counter-dependency on everything ‘EPC’ to a focus on an inner-dependency and from a reflective critique of their faith to a new sense of emerging self-ownership of faith. The transitional period is crucial in the faith journey, indicating a move to rebuilding and reconnecting with the faith of the past and the adding of new faith ingredients for a more personalised faith package. The
Transitional Explorers were also identified as explorers, people who were finding their own way, their own path to a personally appropriated and meaningful faith. For many Transitional Explorers the faith package they were appropriating was best defined as Christian in nature. This was both their definition and the view of the researcher. However for a minority of Transitional Explorers the faith transition involved a move to an alternative faith. For some (n=2) this was a move to a ‘new age’ faith and for others an ‘agnostic belief’ (n=5). In this chapter we also considered the relationship between the rigidity of the church structures and the timing of people’s leaving. Where the church was characterised as acting more in a ‘sect-like’ manner people were expected to leave earlier in the personal faith transition process being described than where the church functioned in a more ‘church-like’ capacity.

The Integrated Way-finders were the last faith grouping to be considered in this present chapter. These people reflected a greater acceptance and autonomy of their faith, the world in which they lived and of themselves. They had moved to a position of a quiet strength of faith characterised by autonomy, interdependency and integration. The faith of each of the four groups of interviewees was compared to the faith development model proposed by James Fowler which was used as a ‘scaffolding for understanding’ of the faith transitions of ‘EPC’ church leavers. While the interviewees were ‘pigeon holed’ into these four groupings the four categorisations were nevertheless seen as interlinked in a dynamic process of faith transition, a process which needs to be considered as both dynamic and fluid. People can and do move along the process in both directions, become stuck at particular points and travel at different speeds to others.

In the third and final section of this thesis the focus of our attention must shift from the faith journey of individual leavers to the groups of leavers that emerge in this process. This will be considered in the next chapter. Having done this the thesis then moves to consider the influence of the societal milieu on people’s individual and group faith decisions. The final two chapters consider the implications of what has been identified in this research for the future of both the ‘EPC’ churches and the post-church groups that have emerged among leavers.

Movement back to a previous faith stage is here seen as problematic. Because having seen God, the world, faith and themselves from a new perspective and lived within that perspective it is difficult for a person to ignore that experience and settle for less complete ways of knowing and living.
Chapter Ten

Collective Leave Taking and Faith Transitions

For only whoever stands outside his boundary
in some sense knows that he stands within,
that is, knows it as a boundary
Georg Simmel

10.1 Introduction

At the same time that Stuart and Michelle (whom we met in Chapter 2) were distancing themselves from the faith content and practices of their church they met up with two other couples who were in a similar situation. In a short time these couples started meeting together regularly to discuss the sources of their dissatisfaction and what they could look at doing to overcome them. The end result of these discussions was the formation of a group of like minded people which met in a group member’s home every second Sunday morning over a four and a half year period. As Michelle said:

(Michelle) - So we thought what could we do, how could we do it differently, and having spent a year doing that talking, we got to the point where we actually felt we had to put feet to it. For me it just kind of evolved, it grew and I suddenly found I wanted to do something about my life and make a choice and my choice was that I didn't want to be where I was. I couldn't see anything anywhere else that I wanted to be anymore (4.11).

When I first interviewed Michelle the group had been operating for three years. Describing this time she said:

(Michelle) - Three years have been an oasis, very challenging. I feel as if I have moved into a level of intimacy with people which I had only at times touched with particular individuals in my life but never as a corporate group, as a unit of people. I feel I share things which are very costly for me to share, which make me very vulnerable and I feel that I am known all the more deeply for it. I really feel accepted and I feel I can ask my really tough questions even though I seldom get answers as they are a group who don't give pat answers. I really find it a very affirming place to be and I don't feel now that I am split, that I am here six days a week and expected to be someone else on Sundays. Now some of that may be my own interpretation of what I was expected to be. I am not saying that the church necessarily did that to me but that was how I perceived it (4.12).

Describing their initial hopes for the group Stuart talked of their desire for a place of “theological depth” which was “informal in its structure”, “had a high priority on openness and honesty,” and focused “on making Christianity relevant in the twentieth century.” It needed to be somewhere that “allowed for educated people who didn’t want to go back to the traditional churches.”

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413 For Michelle this means “throwing away the masks and telling it like it really is. A place where you could say what you really think”.
414 When I took this introduction to the chapter back to Stuart and Michelle to read they gave a priority order to the four hopes listed here. Their top priority was for a place of openness and honesty, secondly on making Christianity relevant. By relevant they indicated that church seemed to have relatively little to do with their daily life and work. The focus of the church was on ‘spiritual issues’. Their third priority was for an informally structured interactive environment and their fourth priority was for a place of theological depth.
For many of those interviewed, groups like this one that Stuart and Michelle had begun were an important part of their journey out of the church and towards their post-church faith. The majority of leavers (n=70, 65%) were involved in small groups outside the normal structure of the church. These groups had been influential in their respective faith journeying. The role of these groups varies considerably. Some function as gatherings of the discontented in the process of leaving, others as discussion groups primarily focused on the concerns of Reflexive Exiles, while others are attempts to ‘be church’ for those who have left institutional churches. As Ebaugh suggests “in a very real sense, exes from a specific social role constitute a marginal group and frequently develop a ‘marginal culture’” (Ebaugh 1988:6).

A minority of leavers had not been involved in any groups either while leaving or subsequently, while others had either successively or concurrently been involved in a number of groups. Not surprisingly belonging to such a group had a significant influence on the faith journeying and provided a sense of connection for those who were part of them. In this chapter it is therefore important to consider the types, roles and the influence of these groups on leavers. Later in the chapter I will characterise such groups as marginal or liminal. By “marginal” I am referring to the way such groups define themselves in relation to the church faith and structures they have left. By “liminal” I am referring to some groups that could be called threshold groups, groups focused on new faith constructions and ways of operating. As we consider the different types of groups that emerge among leavers we also need to compare the journeys of those involved in groups and those who remain isolates. In considering those not involved in structured groups we need to recognise the role of informal networks within which some of these leavers are connected.

Although the leavers have left the institutional ‘EPC’ church the majority are keen to meet with others who are travelling a similar journey. Sixty five percent (n=70) of interviewees talked of being part of a group after leaving their church or when they were in the process of considering leaving. These seventy people were associated with 26 different groups. The percentage of people involved and the range of groups identified is an indication of the importance these people place on meeting with others in a similar faith position. A further nine people talked of informal networks which were very important to them.

### 10.2 The Influence of Groups on the Faith Trajectory of Leavers

The significant influence of these groups can be seen when the faith positions of the interviewees is compared with data on group membership. Table 10.1 shows the relative involvement in groups of individuals exhibiting the various faith positions at the time of being interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement in Groups</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displaced Followers (n=19)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive Exiles (n=32)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Explorers (n=26)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Way-finders (n=30)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (n=107)</strong></td>
<td><strong>70</strong></td>
<td><strong>65%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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415 It is important to distinguish between groups that form part of the structure and practice of an institutionalised church or para-church group and the groups that emerge outside of institutional structures for and by those disillusioned with church practices (this disillusionment would often include disillusionment with church small groups) or those who have left churches. All the groups discussed in this chapter were formed outside of the structure of the church and were not part of the small groups offered or advertised under the respective church (or para-church) umbrellas. The way such post-church groups differ from the church-based groups will be discussed later in the chapter.

416 Ward & Wild 1995:2-3

417 Total included here is 107. One interviewee who claimed to be an ‘atheist’ was not included, he was not involved in any group or informal networks subsequent to his decision to leave the church and the faith.
When the Displaced Followers, and the Reflexive Exiles are compared to the interviewees categorised as Transitional Explorers or Integrated Way-Finders their respective group involvements are startling. Fifty two percent (n=26) of the Displaced Followers and Reflexive Exiles were not participants in small groups compared to just 3.5% (n=2) of the Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders. These figures could indicate one of two relationships. Firstly, that either the choice to belong to a group or the influence of being part of such a group has a significant impact on the faith trajectories of those interviewed. Or, secondly, that those in the later faith positions (Transitional Explorers & Integrated Way-finders) are more likely to want to associate with others of like-faith in small groups. Whichever way the relationship is viewed there is an obvious link between belonging to a group and the later faith positions.

When we consider those involved in informal networks a similar pattern emerges with 14% (n=8) of the Integrated and Transitional interviewees being involved in informal networks compared to only 2% (n=1) of the Reflexive Exiles and Displaced Followers. From these figures we can speculate that those involved in groups while leaving the church or after leaving are disproportionately represented in the later faith positions (Transitional or Integrated). It appears that those who do not meet with others in the process of leaving or after leaving are less likely to move on from their faith position at the time of leaving the church. Confirming the role of such groups is the fact that all those who have remained un-connected to a church in the ‘Transitional Explorers’ and ‘Integrated Way-finders’ categorisations are members of small groups. It is therefore important to consider the role and influence such groups have. This indicates the importance that meeting with others of like faith is for the Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders. Melanie describes something of the importance of a group she belongs to by saying:

(Melanie) - When we started ‘The group’ that was partly where it came from, that we were all feeling these tensions, but we really didn’t want to lose, we didn’t feel that it was helpful to struggle as individuals with these things. We realised there was a bigger pattern, not just what we were feeling as individuals (118.93).

The interviewees identified a total of 26 different groups with which they were involved. It was not possible to include all 26 groups mentioned by the interviewees within the research. I did however gain sufficient

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418 The figures given above included all one hundred and eight interviewees. This total figure includes 10 interviewees who were categorised as on the ‘edge’ of the church rather than as leavers. That is, they were marginally involved in their respective churches. Of these 10 people 7 were categorised as Integrated Way-finders (6 had been or were currently group members, one had never been a member of such a group), one Transitional Explorer (who had been a group member) and two Reflexive Exiles (neither of whom had been group members).

419 The opinion expressed here is that to belong within a group which provides an environment to deal with faith questions, doubts and transitions is significant in helping people to make the faith stage transitions inherent in the later faith positions. From the data obtained in the interviews it is recognised that the relationship can however be argued both ways.

420 Fourteen of the Transitional Explorers (n=26) and Integrated Way-finders (n=30) were at the time of the interview in some way connected to a church. Some (n=6) of these interviewees have returned to some involvement within a church and others (n=8) were at the time they were interviewed on the “edge” of church involvement and considering leaving.

421 Here Melanie gives the name of the group which is introduced later in the chapter.

422 Three of the groups mentioned by leavers were not relevant to this research. One was a goddess’s group attended by one interviewee who described herself as a ‘new ager’, the two others were part of the small groups attached to a church. These were groups that people on the “edge” of the church had joined or remained a part of. For nine of the groups mentioned I was only able to obtain information about the group from one interviewee. The groups that are analysed here included only those where information from the group came from two or more interviewees, or where participant observation by the researcher could be set alongside the perspective of one or more interviewees. In a number of cases I was able to interview considerably more group members and/or observe the group in operation. By these means I was able to use a triangulation method. This reduced the total number of groups from 26 to 14. Two other groups were included where the researcher was able to gain accurate information both as a participant observer, through casual conversation with group members and through his role as a pastor within an ‘EPC’ church from which these groups emerged. The implications of the researcher’s role as both pastor and researcher will be
information for 16 of the groups. The following analysis is taken from the information gained from these 16 groups.

10.2.1. Joining a Group

As indicated earlier people attach themselves to groups in differing stages of the leaving process, at the point of leaving, or some time after ceasing to be involved in a church. Joining while leaving appears to have a significant influence on individuals’ faith positions at the time of the interview. Table 10.2 shows the number of people from each faith category involved in a group during the process of becoming disillusioned and leaving the church compared with those who became group members after leaving the church. Because some individuals were involved in a group during the process of leaving their church and since leaving the church the total group involvements are higher than those expressed in Table 10.1.423

423 Table 10.1 records the number of interviewees involved in either a group while leaving or since leaving their church. In some cases people were involved in groups in both phases. This is differentiated in Table 10.2 discussed in detail in the methodological appendix (Appendix 1), however for now it is sufficient to note that these mixed roles enabled the researcher not only to gain information as a participant observer within the group but also as a participant observer within the church leadership when the existence of these groups was discussed.
Table 10.2 The Timing of Group Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Joined a Group in the process of leaving.</th>
<th>Joined a group after leaving the church.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displaced Followers (n = 19)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8 (42%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive Exiles (n = 32)</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
<td>14 (45%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Explorers (n = 26\textsuperscript{425})</td>
<td>8 (31%)</td>
<td>13 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Way-finders (n = 30)</td>
<td>20 (66%)</td>
<td>14 (47%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the percentage of leavers in each faith category remains relatively constant in terms of joining groups after leaving the church, there seems to be a strong linkage between group involvement during the process of leaving and a person’s faith position at the time of being interviewed. Those in the later faith positions (Transitional and Integrated) are considerably more likely to have been involved in a group during the leaving process. These figures highlight a relationship between group involvement during the process of leaving and the content and operations of Christian faith held by the leavers.

Alongside those involved in groups some interviewees indicated that although they had no involvement in a structured group they were involved in an ‘informal network’ of leavers. We will now consider the influence of informal networks and isolation on the faith trajectories of church leavers.

10.3 Informal Networks

For nine of the interviewees there had been no formal group affiliation but an informal network had provided some of the same validation, sense of identity and forum for discussion and questions for these people. The interviewees differentiated between a ‘group’ and informal networks on the basis that groups met at set regular intervals (typically once every two weeks), met for the purpose of discussing faith and church issues or engaging in faith practices.\textsuperscript{426} For such groups to effectively function required some organisational structure to their programmes. The informal networks on the other hand were less structured, irregular and more multi-focused than the groups.\textsuperscript{427}

(Jocelyn) - Not an organized one - group - but we have got numbers of friends who are Christians and we do talk about those things from time to time. Not every time we see them, some of them we do. But just in a kind of unstructured sort of thing. But that is kind of where we are fortunate that we have \textit{(them)} (32.52; italics mine).

(John) - There are a lot of ex-church Christians who do things socially, meet for coffee, movies, breakfast. Do we set up structures etc.? No, but informally yes (117.131).

(John) - No just casually meeting, anything from one to three of us at a time. Coffee at somebody’s place or round at the movies and sit down after that with a beer. As I got involved with those people I became aware, or as I perceive it now, after some time out of the church, I actually think there are vastly more Christians with a reasonably active faith outside of the church than there are inside the church (117.36).

(Maree) - Yes it’s those friendships that keep me going really, and also in a strange way my faith, although my faith has changed, although it has been stripped. You have got to have that sounding board, you have got to talk with people. And I think it’s their experiences that shed light on my own. I’ve got a couple of friends who I would call quite good thinkers,

\textsuperscript{424} Again one interviewee is not represented on this table. The one “atheist” who had left all belief in God and the supernatural and was not involved in a group at any time in the leaving process or since leaving.

\textsuperscript{425} Here Transitional Explorers includes those in the process of Transitioning to an Alternative Faith.

\textsuperscript{426} For example prayer, communion, meditation, biblical study etc.

\textsuperscript{427} Typically the informal networks were among a group of friends who socialised together and in the process of such socialisation discussed similar interests of which one was their previous church experience and current faith journey.
people who are searching out things, and getting the feedback has been tremendously invaluable. In a way even though you find things being stripped away, you also find that foundation of faith there. We are getting together because these things are precious to us. It’s not something that people do lightly. You don’t just leave the church lightly (24.47).

Clearly these informal networks are to a greater or lesser degree providing the functions of the groups formed by leavers. The specific functions such networks can provide are a validation of an individual’s questions, meta-grumbles and doubts, as well as providing opportunities for people to discuss, re-evaluate, deconstruct and reconstruct the basis of their faith. However the less regular gathering of such groups reduces the sense of belonging they afford the individual leaver.

10.4 Isolates
While 74% of those interviewed were either a part of a group or an informal network during the process of leaving the church or after leaving 26% were never part of such groups. It is important to consider the effect of being an isolate in this process. The definition of a Christian church, developed in Chapter 3, placed a high priority on the communal role of the church as the ‘laos theou’ (the people of God). The Christian faith throughout history has seen little room for isolates within the faith, and from very early times the role of meeting with others has been emphasised. As one church leader said it is a ‘relational faith’. The twenty eight people who had no group or informal network involvement have been categorised into faith positions in Table 10.3

Table 10.3 Faith Positions of Those not Involved in a Group or Informal Network of Leavers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faith Position</th>
<th>Number not involved in a group or informal network</th>
<th>Percentage of those in each faith category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Displaced Followers (n=19)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflexive Exiles (n=32)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitional Explorers (n=26)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated Way-finders (n=30)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (n=107)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 10.3 there is a clear connection between those who have others with which to discuss faith issues and those who remain isolated after leaving the church. The inherent counter-dependence operative in the Reflexive Exiles is seen here as a significant factor in their decision to maintain distance from other faith oriented groups.

Parks (1986:63-67) suggests a four staged move in relation to communal identification during faith transition. This transition is illustrated below.

Conventional → Diffuse → Self-selected → Open to Others

class or group

Here Parks suggests that in the faith transition from a Synthetic-Conventional faith (stage 3) to an Individuative-Reflective faith (stage 4) people typically move out of involvement in “conventional” groups of people ‘like us’ through a time “when unjustified relativism prevails and the sustaining of any particular relationship becomes problematic” (op.cit.:65). This is the period she labels as “diffuse”. This lasts until the time when the individual will typically have involvement in a “self-selected class or group”. The final shift involves a move from the “self-selected class or group” to “a yearning for community (not just association) with those who are profoundly other than oneself” (op.cit.:68). This process, here described by Parks, gives

428 Here Transitional Explorers includes those transitioning to an alternative faith.
429 The total here is 107. One of the interviewees who claimed to be an ‘atheist’ was not included. He was not involved in any group or informal network subsequent to his decision to leave the church and the faith.
some insight from which to make sense of the increasing involvement in groups in the transitional and integrated faith phases.

Because the Displaced Followers are typically very angry or hurt they are seen as less likely to pursue relationships with others. The Displaced Followers are also typically receiving support for their faith through the wider ‘EPC’ environment, whether it be Christian television programmes, books, radio programmes or sporadic involvement in Christian seminars and special events.

The evidence of the leavers interviewed in this research suggests that the majority of leavers see an ongoing role for meeting with others within the formulation, development and maintenance of their faith. While these groups do not come with many of the structural trappings associated with church the priority of so many leavers to remain connected with others of a like-faith and faith experience is indicative of a strong motivation to remain communally linked and connected with others within the same faith. The desire for such links is seen not just as a need for others with which to process faith issues and to continue faith practices, but also as a group of people to belong to. The leavers consistently commented on the loss of a sense of community and place of belonging in the decision to leave the church.  

10.5 The Role and Function of Groups

All of the sixteen groups had one common feature. They had all been formed, at least in part, to provide a forum to discuss topics and issues that are not normally considered part of the acceptable discourse of ‘EPC’ churches. Within these groups it was possible to admit doubt about faith, failure in faith practice, anger or disappointment at the church or at God and ask essential questions that went to the foundational core of the ‘EPC’ theology, practice, beliefs and world view. These were the very questions, emotions and doubts that leavers perceived as being ‘out of court’ within the ‘EPC’ church structures and church-operated small groups.

(Melanie) - And we were saying at that camp that a lot of these people had been at that church together, but this was the first time that they had actually talked about how they felt about prayer. Because in that other context (church) you don’t. You are not going to go up to your Vicar and say I just don’t find prayer relevant. There are all these games that are played. The truth sets you free, not pretense. . . (118.140; italics mine).

(Fiona) - There are so many issues, there are so many issues, How do you forgive somebody? You know things like that. Issues of authority for women that has come as an issue for them. What is the role of authority in a church? So many issues. What makes you a Christian? Do you have to pray to be a Christian? These issues even to bring up in a house-group (church based house group), people would look at you in a strange way.

(Interviewer) Because it is threatening, or because they don’t understand?”

(Fiona) - Well it’s threatening for the leadership that is for sure. This is one of the basic principles surely. . . . Because you are getting away from the so called objectivity of the Bible, into experience and experience may lead you into all these ‘New Age’ things, that may be too much. But the fact is that most people don’t know how to handle feelings (47.109-111; italics mine).

430 For a number of interviewees involvement in a group also provided a legitimating function for other family or friends. Although they had left the church and were therefore considered as leaving the faith (backsliding) by some family and friends, they could point to their group involvement to show they were not in fact leaving the Christian faith.

431 This group of church leavers had a weekend away together. It is this weekend to which Melanie is referring.
Participants within the groups felt a freedom to express a belief or lack of belief that would not, or they perceived would not, be tolerated in church based groups.

(Mark) - One person got to tell their story, you know life, love and the universe as they saw it, and it was just sort of accepted this was their view, we were not trying to convert them into any particular way of thinking, but we would offer advice, but we were just interested. So that just happened over a number of weeks. It was fascinating (31.51).

(Robyn) - The group was just to have some other people who would just hear your story out and validate you, who knew where you are at. We had ground rules like what you agreed to this week, you didn’t have to agree to it next week. And what your opinion is this week no-one would hold it to you next week (62.101).

This freedom to talk about where they were actually at with their faith and express doubts and questions was a crucial factor common to all the groups. Beyond this common feature the groups can be divided into the differing roles and functions of ‘discussion group’ and ‘quasi-church’ as shown in Table 10.4. The role of the discussion groups is to provide a forum within which leavers can discuss their dissatisfactions, questions, doubts, emotions and intuitions. Quasi-churches go further than being forums for discussion and take on many of the traditional functions and roles of a Christian ‘church’. Here I have labelled these groups as ‘quasi-churches’ in order to differentiate them from the churches the interviewees have chosen to leave. The word ‘quasi’ is defined as meaning “as if”, “almost” and it is in this sense that the term is used. These groups have taken on many of the functions of church, but are not ‘church’ in the sense of being synonymous with the churches people chose to leave. Although they perform similar functions they are not merely smaller copies. In a number of substantial ways they operate in ways contrary to ‘EPC’ churches.

Table 10.4 The Roles and Functions of ‘Discussion Groups’ and ‘Quasi-Churches’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Groups (n=9)</th>
<th>Quasi-Church Groups (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Meet for discussion not to engage in the church functions of prayer, worship, teaching and sacraments.</td>
<td>1. Perform church functions including prayer, worship, teaching and sacraments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are not seen as ‘church’ by those who participate within them.</td>
<td>2. Collect and distribute financial giving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Do not collect or distribute money.</td>
<td>3. Participants view the group as their ‘church’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Protect the right of entry to the group.</td>
<td>4. The group is open to others who may want to join. This openness includes people from different experiences (i.e. not disillusioned with church) and at different faith positions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from this table the ‘Quasi-churches’ are to all intents and purposes attempting to replace the functions of the church within their own activities.

\(^{432}\) The Oxford English Dictionary (1973) defines ‘quasi’ as “in a limiting sense . . . used parenthetically ‘as it were’, ‘almost’, ‘virtually’ . . . ‘kind of, resembling or simulating, but not really the same as that properly so termed’.”

\(^{433}\) These groups will not allow others to join the group or place strict criteria on those they do allow. One interviewee explained to me why this was the case for their group. He said “we couldn’t allow someone into the group now. It means too much for the people in it. I had invited someone along and they didn’t fit. They believed that God really spoke to them about what they had to do each day, and that was untenable for the group members. They were attacked. To solve the problem they had to dissolve the whole group and then re-start again. (F/N-7/2/95)”
Of the 16 groups identified in the research nine fit under the category ‘Discussion groups’ and seven as ‘Quasi-churches’. Three of the ‘Quasi-churches’ were originally set up to perform the church functions listed above, while the other four emerged from what were originally discussion groups. One group moved in the opposite direction. It was begun with the hope and intention of becoming a quasi-church that would be open to other people and perform the traditional functions of church but became more of a discussion group.

Of the nine ‘discussion groups’ six were made up of and led by those disillusioned with church while three were led by trained counsellors with the intention of supporting and helping disillusioned church goers and leavers. This categorisation of the differing types of ‘discussion groups’ and ‘quasi-churches’ is shown in Table 10.5. In order to gain further understanding of these differing groups we will now consider a typical discussion group and a quasi-church example.

Table 10.5 The Categorisation of Groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion Groups</th>
<th>Quasi-Church Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Led by Leavers</td>
<td>Emerged from previously operating Discussion Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led by Others for Leavers</td>
<td>Set up as Quasi-churches from inception.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.5.1 Discussion Groups
The ‘Um’ group is made up of eight ‘educated intellectual people’ who came together a number of years previously, through a group of friends becoming aware that they shared many of the same doubts and questions regarding traditional church life and theology. Two group members had already stopped attending mainline Protestant churches, although the others continued active membership for a number of years before they too left.

The title of the group, the ‘Um group’, is an interesting reflection on the faith understandings, maturity and position of the people who make it up. The title was intended to reflect their lack of certainty on many issues, their preparedness to hold these issues open for critique without necessarily solving them and their ability to look at the difficult ‘grey’ issues while not needing to retreat to clear ‘black and white’ answers. This reflects the priority given to ‘not knowing’ for many of the church leavers. This is what Ward and Wild called the “values of silence and of not knowing, the ‘I don’t know’ that is paradoxically full of knowledge” (Ward & Wild, 1995:121). The title ‘Um group’ reflects both the ethos of the group and this essence of the paradoxical ‘I don’t know’ which is itself full of knowledge.

At the time of interviewing four of the group members, the group had been meeting fortnightly for seven years and had in this time discussed issues like prayer, what it means for the Bible to be inspired and ‘Is the human race regenerating or degenerating?’ The focus of this group like each of the nine discussion groups is on talking together about the issues of faith that concern them rather than attempting to do ‘church’ together.

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434 This process will be discussed in further detail by illustration of one group’s change in focus.
435 This process will be discussed in detail later in the chapter. The group is here called ‘Sunday at 9’ (this is a fictitious name).
436 The counsellors became involved in leading these groups in unique ways. One was working in her counselling practice with a number of women who had recently left churches and saw a valuable role in bringing these individuals together to share experiences and talk together. This group lasted only a few months while the Counsellor was able to give time to it. The second group emerged after a counsellor who had worked professionally with a number of people struggling with their faith decided to begin a group for such people. This is an ongoing group which has subsequently split into two groups due to the numbers of people attending.
437 Quoted from the description of the group by one of the group members.
(Melanie) - We don’t do worship there. We start by going round and saying what is happening in our lives . . . since we last met. We talk about that, and then we have one person, decided ahead of time, who takes the role of leader for that particular evening. This person prepares some input, so this part is more like a study group except that we have never ever done any Bible study. . . . It is not a worship or prayer group. We have talked about prayer, and what it means for the Bible to be inspired, but it is not “worship”, we don’t sing and pray together (118.145).

The group functions in an open fashion typical of both the ‘discussion groups’ and the ‘Quasi-churches’. The group began with a “pact of being able to say anything”, where they could “express any degree of doubts or skepticism.” Typical of these groups it has developed an ethos of being non judgmental which gives the group members “tremendous freedom to range far and wide” in their discussion and explore “all manner of issues,” for example “dreams, politics and sexuality.”

While the ‘Um’ group has been made up of highly educated people, other discussion groups have included people from a greater variety of educational and socio-economic backgrounds. The ‘Monday group’ for instance is a group that meets at eight o’clock every second Monday, although as the group members explain, the last person often doesn’t arrive until about nine o’clock. For the first half of the evening they drink tea and coffee and chat until somebody will say ‘. . . “well!” and the discussion will begin.’ These meetings are not pre-planned and the discussions generally emerge out of the issues they want to discuss that night. On some evenings they have included some meditation together as a group or someone has brought something along that they have read and want to share with the group. It is a “quiet and laid back” group, in which they enjoy each other’s company and discussions. The group is very important to the participants and they tend to place a high priority on being at group nights.

(Daphne) - It has been very important for me to have this group where we meet together and we all acknowledge that we believe something, well believe the same thing that God is. And all this sort of thing. And that we have had experience of the church. But what we want to know is what is our spirituality really? (56.100).

(Pam) - It has been a good group to talk about Christian things, about spirituality and about lots of . . . perhaps all of us are in states of flux, trying to find some direction, still identifying as Christian but not being - you know- not finding a church structure we are able to be comfortable with and identify with (23.29).

Although the majority of leavers join groups not everybody finds them so helpful. Melissa looked at joining the ‘Monday Group’ but in the end decided against it. She says:

(Melissa) - Yea, why didn't I like it? I guess I couldn't be bothered listening to people's new definitions or critical of the old definitions. I just, I guess I wasn't ready for anything like that. They are seeking I guess and a number of them, a couple of them, are my friends. I'm just tired spiritually and it doesn't interest me really. I couldn't find it by myself and I certainly can't be bothered trying to find it with anybody else (57.196).

Melissa’s comment reflects one of the significant roles of discussion groups as places where the faith and spiritual questions and issues are kept on the agenda. One of the key features of the ‘Reflexive Exiles’ was their tendency to ‘put their faith down’ and have little energy for the pursuit of faith questions and seeking to make sense of the ‘meta-grumbles’ they feel toward the ‘EPC’ church and its beliefs, values and expected

438 (118.94)
439 (118.94); An appraisal of the orientation of these groups will be provided in Chapter 12.
440 A fictitious name
441 (41.140)
behaviours. Being a member of a group provides an external source of energy for such thought, faith deconstruction, examination and reconstruction. It is therefore not surprising that ongoing group members are motivated and are provided a forum for their faith examination process through the groups to which they belong. Some of the discussion groups served to function as places where alternative ways of operating could be considered and discussed prior to individuals deciding to leave the church. Three of the nine discussion groups analysed acted in this way. These discussion groups were formed by disillusioned church members while they were still participating within their respective churches. In each case the groups emerged sometime before the participants left and acted as places where individual’s ‘meta-grumbles’ were validated through the common thoughts, discussions and feelings of others. These groups serve to provide an environment where individuals can talk about their dissatisfactions with faith and church and discuss the possibility of leaving the church and what that could lead to. Such groups perform a significant role in Ebaugh’s ‘Role Exit Theory’. They may function as validators of either specific or more generalised dissatisfaction and an environment where the cost-benefit analysis (seeking and weighing alternatives) of what church offers a person can be considered.

Two of the discussion groups researched were initiated not by the disillusioned or by church leavers but by counsellors or psychotherapists. In both cases a trained counsellor (or psychotherapist) who has been working with a number of ex-church clients saw the need for a group where these people could talk and relate together. In both cases the counsellors held a Christian faith themselves and were concerned about the pain of those leaving the church. The key focus of these groups is to provide a safe place for people to deal with their grief, loss and anger after or in the process of leaving the church. It is also a place where they (the leavers) could see ‘where their own developmental experiences and in some cases developmental arrests, had actually impinged on their spiritual development.’ One of these groups subsequently grew so large that the group members decided to split into two smaller groups in order to allow a conducive environment for discussion. This split formed two new groups giving a total of three groups in this sub-section.

In conclusion the ‘discussion groups’ function as validators of an individual’s dissatisfactions with the ‘EPC’ church and its beliefs, values and expected behaviours and provide an environment in which the individual can consider alternative courses of action to continued church participation. Discussion groups also function as environments within which to discuss, question, examine and re-evaluate one’s faith. In this second role they also serve to provide energy for faith discussion, questioning and pondering that is often not available to those who leave the church on their own. In this way being a member of a group acts as a stimulus for ongoing reflection and the construction of both a personal and a group faith.

Three of the discussion groups analysed moved beyond being discussion groups and began to take on many of the functions of a church. It is to this second type of group that we will now turn.

10.5.2 Quasi-church Groups

As Table 10.4 indicated quasi-church groups are distinct from the ‘discussion groups’ in that they take on the roles and functions normally connected with church. These functions included prayer, worship, teaching, communion, collecting and distributing the financial giving of those involved, and being open to those from a variety of faith positions and stages. Seven of the sixteen groups researched could be best described as “quasi-churches”. Three of these seven began as discussion groups which were to later incorporate functions of the ‘quasi-church’. Three began with the original intention of fulfilling the roles of a church while one other began with the intention of becoming a ‘quasi-church’ but functioned principally during its four years of operation as a ‘discussion group’,

One other group could be considered under this heading. This is a group that performed many of the roles and functions of church but did so at a time when the majority of the group participants were beginning to disengage from their churches. This last group became increasingly significant to a number of its members as they found their church of less and less significance and found

\[442\] Quoted from an interview with a counsellor who began one of these groups.

\[443\] I interviewed nine members of the group including those who began the group. These interviews were conducted over a two year period, the period through which the group slowly came to a close. Through these interviews I was able to monitor the closing of the group relatively closely.
themselves beginning to move out of the church. Internal dynamics, and the net effect of some key group members being moved to other cities with their employment lead this quasi-church group to close prior to interviewing any of the group’s members.

The Perry’s quasi-church grew out of what had been a discussion group. The group had grown to about 25 people including children, when the group members began to say they wanted to become more church-like. As the Perry’s said “they (the group members) were saying we’ll have a church and this couple (the Perry’s) should lead it.” Phil Perry however didn’t want to lead another church. While the Perry’s group operated as a quasi-church they would meet together on a Sunday morning, have a meal together, a time of singing and prayer and some form of Bible study or teaching. The group collected money for worthy causes by running a trust account with 5 of the group members acting as trustees. Anyone in the group could deposit anonymously into this account. The trustees of the account would meet occasionally and suggest worthy causes to which the money could be given. Phil and Sheryl Perry explained that some people became Christians through the group which was an indication of the openness of the group to people holding different faith understandings and beliefs. The group ran for a total of two and a half years. During the first 18 months it appeared to operate with high degrees of enthusiasm and was seen very positively by the group members. This however was not to continue as more and more leadership and group expectations were foisted on to Phil and Sheryl. In the end they realised they were carrying the group and that they didn’t really want to start up another church and be the leaders. Because of their feelings and the unwillingness of others to pick up key roles within the group it began to drift for twelve months until Phil saw the inherent weaknesses of their quasi-church and brought it to a close.

(Phil) - There was an inherent problem in what we formulated and where the people had come from that I didn’t perceive immediately. But I kind of had a few bells because of the experiences I suppose I’ve had. They were sort of saying “Hey we want a church.” And some of them were looking at me like I didn’t want to be looked at. I was saying “Hey let’s all grow, let’s all minister”. That was my thinking at that stage although I suppose I consider myself or I was considered to be the leader, I always wanted to back away from that because I got this overreaction to the autocracy that I’d come out of and I was saying “Hey you bring something, you bring the word” (73.48).

(Phil) - The group grew but we knew. . . . I think if we’d have had a real vision and a calling to set up and really get something spearheaded we could have done it. But we didn’t feel ‘called’ to do that. We physically didn’t have time. We had the time to get together with a group of friends but we didn’t have the time to take on and front and really run something. You know! actually setting something up and running properly and getting it moving and getting underway. And I think probably that’s where it fell down. . . . If we’d done it, it would have been because other people wanted us to do it not because we felt it was right for us to go ahead like that. So I think that’s really why it all wound up in the end. We weren’t sorry for it to do so. We looked on it as something to do for the interim to carry us through (73.70).

10.6 Marginal and Liminal Groups

The discussion and quasi-church groups can be further categorised as “marginal” and “liminal” as in Table 10.6. The marginal discussion groups and quasi-churches being focused on the ‘EPC’ church that they have left. Hence the focus of their attention is the faith, beliefs, values, and expected ways of behaviour of the ‘EPC’ church. This focus may be exhibited through a continued acceptance and dependence upon the ‘EPC’ faith practices as in the case of the Displaced Followers, or it may involve a counter-dependence upon the ‘EPC’ church, its faith, structure and practices as in the case of the Reflexive Exiles.

444 (Italics mine). Phil Perry (fictitious name) had been a pastor for eight years and was therefore an obvious choice for a leader.
Table 10.6 A Marginal/Liminal Typology of Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Discussion Groups</th>
<th>Quasi-churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marginal Groups</td>
<td>4 groups</td>
<td>2 groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liminal Groups</td>
<td>5 groups</td>
<td>5 groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ward and Wild (1995) state that “to define oneself as marginal is to define one’s self in relation to someone else’s centre; it is to accept another’s definition of how things are. In that sense, it may be quite disempowering and itself alienating. To have one’s base and focus on the margins is to have a view of the present and the past, but what of the future.”445 The position of the Reflexive Exiles and Displaced Followers is therefore very much a marginal position in relation to the church. The marginality of their position links with their hesitancy and sense of alienation from the church. By way of contrast some of the ‘Transitional Explorers’ and many of the ‘Integrated Way-finders’ do not fit the title marginal since these are people who are not characterised by alienation, being disempowered, focused on the present and past or defining themselves relative to the centre of the ‘EPC’ church structure and faith. Such people and groups also lack the ‘counter-dependency’ and anger towards the ‘EPC’ church evident among the Reflexive Exiles. To distinguish such individuals and the groups they form446 from ‘marginal’ groups Ward and Wild use the image of ‘threshold’ saying that threshold implies future. “To be between here and there is to live in the faith that there is a future. To choose to be between here and there is to live in the faith that it will be a better future” (Ward & Wild, 1995:30). In so doing they draw on the work of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960:11) who first used the word ‘liminal’, from the Latin word limen (meaning ‘threshold’) to describe rites of passage, such as an initiation rite at puberty. The ‘liminal’ signifies the ‘in-between time’, the threshold which is the most sacred and intense moment.447 Arnold van Gennep described the liminal as like the ‘neutral zone’ that often existed between nations in antiquity. These zones he described as often being deserts, marshes or virgin forest where everyone had full rights to travel and hunt (op.cit.:17-19). The liminal therefore represents this ‘neutral zone’ between states. “Liminality can be described as an ambiguous, sacred, social state in which a person or group of persons is separated for a time from the normal structure of society.”448 Another central feature of the liminal is “that of communitas, that is, close-knit, spontaneous, non-hierarchical community.”449 Ward and Wild state that “in our experience, the stronger and more self-confident the individual or group beginning to define themselves in terms of threshold rather than margin the more conscious they will be of the need for committed community-building” (1995:119).

Ward and Wild’s argument is that liminal people and groups are characterised by ‘dis-order, chaos, a state that is at once both creative and dangerous. And hence liminal people and groups are at once both powerful and dangerous. They pose a threat to order and “highlight the fact that the lines of demarcation between one state and another, one thing and another, are not as clear and simple as we would like” (Ward & Wild 1995:27). The groups considered to this point have been marginal in their orientation. In the next section I will illustrate the liminal nature of both discussion groups and quasi-churches.

10.6.1 A Liminal Quasi-church

The ‘Bread & Breakfast’ group meet fortnightly on Sunday mornings. They meet around nine o’clock in one of the group member’s homes beginning with an informal breakfast and an opportunity for general social ‘chat’. After breakfast the group has the “service part,”450 which lasts about an hour. After the ‘service’ people can either move off home or stay for coffee and more discussion. What happens in the ‘service’ part depends on the themes that have been planned for the day. However one constant appears to be communion which is nearly always part of the gatherings. Members of the group have written their own liturgy for communion which they are constantly changing and updating. Meeting around the Bread & Breakfast

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445 Ward & Wild 1995:30
446 The groups were not homogenous in those they attracted. As will be discussed later having a range of faith positions represented in any particular group typically caused some tension in the group.
449 Quoted in Ward and Wild (1995:118)
450 (118.124)
group’s main Sunday gathering are a number of sub groups. There is a men’s discussion group that meets in one of the local pubs for an evening every “fortnight or three weeks” and a planning group\footnote{This planning group is open to anyone who comes along to the ‘Bread & Breakfast’ Sunday gatherings.} that comes together every couple of months. A number of the members of this group are also members of a discussion group\footnote{This is the ‘Um’ group discussed above. Although there is not a complete overlap of members between the two groups the majority of the ‘Um’ group are also involved in the ‘Bread & Breakfast’ group. The combination of these two groups is important to many who participate in both.}. Everybody is invited to the planning meetings to evaluate where the group is going and what might be considered in the future. For the members of ‘Bread & Breakfast’ this is their church:

(Tony) - We are in fact back in church. ‘Bread & Breakfast’ is a church, but it is a very different model . . .

(Melanie) - What it does is it enables us to self reflect in a totally honest and open way . . .

(Melanie) - I stood there and counted up twenty adults and about twenty kids and I thought ‘wow’ what a privilege of being here. I mean I just felt so energised by being in this group, and at last my hopes about not fighting irrelevant stuff, all that has come to be. The things I put my time into now in terms of this group are just things I just positively love and think are worthwhile. And if I had, I haven’t actually done this yet, but I would be very comfortable about bringing a non-Christian friend to this group. Not that we are the ultimate Christian group. We have had some people come, like a friend who I was having lunch with today and her husband now come and they have been going for about 6 months and she has really; I was talking to her today about her spiritual journey and she has really found something, she has the Eucharist and there is something blossoming in there for her, and she would never ever go near a church. She is really a very intelligent vivacious leader sort of type of person. I just would never ever take someone like that into a normal church. I mean I just would be too embarrassed .\footnote{Mike Riddell was at the time a lecturer at the Carey Baptist Theological College in Auckland. He is also a well known Christian and fictional writer.}

(Melanie) - Some of us feel quite strongly that we are not wanting to create a ‘new agey’ wishy washy faithless group of friends, like we want to be meeting God and servants of Jesus basically. That is what, not everyone sees it like that, but that tends to be the feeling of those who come to the planning meetings.

(Interviewer) - It has a distinctly Christian flavour?

(Melanie) - Yes and that is what we want to encourage in people. And as Tony said there are a lot of people who are feeling quite fragile and I’m sure that in terms of their faith. But they obviously find something there because they are still coming. Mike Riddell\footnote{A fictitious name. I interviewed six members of this group including two married couples and two single people.} has this wonderful phrase about being committed at the core and open at the edges. That kind of model is something that we latched on to and that really makes sense for us .\footnote{A second ‘quasi church’ was the ‘Motueka St’ group. This group’s origins were quite different from other groups researched as it began while the majority of the group members were still attending a church and had not, at least at that point, experienced a growing sense of dissatisfaction with their respective churches.} (118-142-144).

A second ‘quasi church’ was the ‘Motueka St’\footnote{A fictitious name. I interviewed six members of this group including two married couples and two single people.} group. This group’s origins were quite different from other groups researched as it began while the majority of the group members were still attending a church and had not, at least at that point, experienced a growing sense of dissatisfaction with their respective churches.

(Jenny) - And I was also living at that time in the inner city, in a neighbourhood where there was I think a Christian community. Where there were about 5 households of young married and single professional people and we had a house group, where we met together weekly, we
had a lot of shared meals, we socialized together, and so I phased out of parish life, and that
neighbourhood community became my primary Christian group. Most of them went to
church, I think I would have been the only one who didn’t. And church was an added extra,
and it wasn’t meeting needs, although that seems a selfish reason to be going to church
(55.12).

The initial intention of the group members was to bring together Christians who all lived in the same street,
to share their lives and faith together and pray for the community in which they lived. The group ran for eight
years and at its peak included 20 people. Pam described the group saying:

(Pam) - that was more like the new testament church - you know- people living in the same
location who got together out of a sense of care, out of a sense of wanting to share their faith
and wanting to make it relevant to their local community and to me that is the ideal really. I
just think it was kind of sad that the pressures of life just kind of overwhelmed us (23.71).

As Pam indicates the group did come to an end, through a number of unrelated factors. Principal among
these was a reduced amount of involvement of one of the key leaders. But while it was functioning it had
something, call it the liminal factor, that enabled the group members to deconstruct and reconstruct their
faith in a more conducive environment than that provided by ‘EPC' churches.

(Jenny) - we were doing a lot of exploring and growing, and again they were people who had
come from a fundamentalist framework who were moving through some of the party lines
they had subscribed to (55.12).

10.6.2 A Liminal Discussion Group

The ‘Sunday at 9’ group that Stuart and Michelle began with two other couples could also be
characterised as liminal.

(Raewyn) - At that stage we were really teetering at the door, but we hadn't officially done
anything. Fortunately, happily for us this group came up that started out very nobly with
thoughts we would be this new group. It was a discussion group for a long time where we
discussed our Christianity and where we were at, with the view at the end we would start this
(group) and people who didn’t want to go to church would want to come to this group
because we had interesting things, It would all be very OK. We would just be there, and be
Christian without defining a party line (28.54).

This group ran for four and a half years, meeting every second Sunday morning at one of the group
member’s homes. Like the ‘Bread & Breakfast’ group ‘Sunday at 9’ began with breakfast together and
then moved into a more clearly defined discussion. When Stuart and Michelle began the group they and the
other initiators had hoped it would become an alternative way of being church that would attract people who
were struggling with their continued involvement in ‘EPC' churches and people who had never been part of a
church environment. They had hoped to include times of singing, prayer and communion like the ‘Bread &
Breakfast’ group. However the wide variety of faith positions represented within the group meant that group

455 Again this is a fictitious group name.
456 Stuart and Michelle’s role in this group raises the degree to which such groups are dependent on key
leaders or initiators to get them going and keep them going. Although many groups had central figures all
were clearly non-hierarchical and attempted to involve all group members in the planning and leading of group
discussions and activities.
457 Name changed here to protect the identity of the group.
458 During the research phase of this study I interviewed nine members of this group, three married couples,
and three single people.
times were dominated by discussions about Christian faith rather than engaging in the faith practices like prayer and communion. As Raewyn says:

(Raewyn) - But it never really eventuated into a group that grew in that way. Like it didn’t attract many people. It became our group that people came and went from (28.54).

Although the group functioned as a liminal discussion group, discussing new ways of looking at and understanding their faith, it closed after four and a half years. The principal reason for the group’s closure was the diverse faith positions of those who made it up. Some of the group wanted to move in the direction of becoming a ‘quasi-church’ while others had rejected their Christian faith or were best described as Reflexive Exiles who did not want to be involved in group prayer, communion and Bible study.

Although both the ‘Motueka St.’ group and ‘Sundays at 9’ are no longer operating this is not seen by those within the groups as an indication of failure. Amongst these group’s members there was not a desire to set up a new institution - an ongoing group. Rather they saw that while this particular group had run its course there were other groups that they could move to and be a part of. Russell, a member of ‘Sunday at 9’ and Pam, a member of the ‘Motueka St.’ group reflect this.

(Russell) - What does the future hold? lots of groups where different aspects of my needs are met. I can’t imagine the sort of thing we had in church, the sort of conformity thing (15.81).

(Pam) - And I suppose that is where you could argue that if it is informally based it will maybe not last the distance. But for me then something else comes up instead. It’s not something that is perpetuated out of a sense we must have something. It is out of a sense of relevance and what is on top for people. So that is why this other group has happened (23.72).

Could it be that it is in these liminal groups glimpses can be seen of new ways of constructing the Christian faith and meeting together as ‘church’ that fit more neatly into modern Western society? Ward and Wild suggest so:

People who reside on boundaries effect change beyond the particular changes they themselves are involved in. This means that they represent a threat to those concerned with social or group order and the definition of whatever or whoever is written within the boundary on which they dwell. Those who live on the boundaries of the institutional churches are therefore particularly instigators of change and renewal. Paradoxically the boundary will not be the creative place of change for them or for the institution unless they can leave behind or let go of what has become dead or oppressive for them. This is the movement from the margin to the threshold, from victim to prophet (Ward & Wild 1995:87).

Some of the liminal groups that have let go of the ‘dead’ faith, practices and structures of the ‘EPC’ churches that have to them become oppressive and destructive to their faith development may be indications of new ways of ‘doing church’. If so such liminal groups are prophetic in their existence and may give windows through which to perceive ways of structuring church and Christian faith in the future.

10.7 Looking to history

In suggesting that ‘liminal’ groups of leavers may provide models for new ways of structuring church in a postmodernist society we need to be aware that paradigm shifts in theological understanding and church structure and practice have been part of the history of the church from its inception. This is a history that may give perspective on present societal and church transitions. Küng (1984:25; 1987:157) divides

Quoted from Bosch 1993:186.
Christian history into six major ‘paradigms’. Drawing on Thomas Kuhn’s theory of paradigm shifts in the physical sciences he suggests that similar paradigm shifts have occurred in the theological understanding of the church and its practice. Kuhn’s theory, put simply, suggests that for change to occur within a community, whether it be a community of scientists or a particular congregation or church there must first be a period of anomaly. This is the time when growing numbers of people in the community realise that ‘business as usual’ isn’t working any more. For Kuhn this is the principal ingredient, the right climate, for change. This sense of dis-ease creates the climate for a search for new models which will make sense of the anomalies. Kuhn calls this period the period of ‘extraordinary science’ - the period where new paradigms begin to emerge. As these new paradigms attract more and more of the commitment of the community (scientists or church members) a revolution occurs - a revolution which generally involves struggle. Bosch describes this period of struggle:

It is understandable, says Kuhn, that to abandon one paradigm and embrace another is not simply a matter of taking a rational, “scientific” step. Since there is no such thing as totally objective knowledge, the person of the scholar is deeply involved in this shift from one framework to another. Kuhn even uses religious language to describe what happens to the scientist who relinquishes one paradigm for another. It is a case of “scales falling from the eyes”, of responding to “flashes of intuition”, indeed of “conversion” (1970:122, 123, 151; cf Capra 1987:520). This explains why defenders of the old order and champions of the new frequently argue at cross purposes. Protagonists of the old paradigm, in particular, tend to immunize themselves against the arguments of the new. They resist its challenges with deep emotional reactions, since those challenges threaten to destroy their very perception and experience of reality, indeed their entire world (Hiebert, 1985b:12). In Einstein’s words (cf Küng 1984:59), “It is more difficult to smash prejudices than atoms” (Bosch 1993:185).

The emergence of new ‘paradigms’ of theological understanding and church practice are part of the biblical record of the community of faith as well. Walter Brueggemann (1991) points out that when people in the Christian community are asked about the model of the faith community in Old Testament times they tend to refer to the faith community based on the monarchy and the temple in Jerusalem (dating from 1000BC to 587BC). He states that contrary to popular belief this was not the only model but was in fact preceded by the exilic model which began with Moses and lead up to the time of David (1250BC-1000BC) and followed by yet another model after the collapse of temple hegemony and the exile of Israel under the Babylonians (587BC). Picking up on the later exilic model he points to facets of its existence which may have much in common with present transitions.

The facets he identifies are: firstly, the way in which the post-exilic community of faith had to live in a context where it exercised little influence over public policy. Secondly, it had to live with temptations to cultural syncretism and finally in the “face of political irrelevance and social syncretism, a main task of the community was to work very hard and intentionally at the cultural-linguistic infrastructure of the community” (op.cit.:134). This entailed the formulation of strategies of survival. This focus on survival involved “the recovery of memory and rootage and connectedness” primarily through genealogy which “connect the threatened present generation with the horizon of reference points from the past” (op.cit.:134). Secondly the survival strategy required the intense practice of hope. “The third strategy of survival worth noting is that the post-exilic community became an intensely textual community. It was busy formulating the text; so it is widely believed that the period around the exile is precisely the period of canonization, the making of normative literature. It was also busy interpreting the text. This is the period of the emergence of the synagogue, which is the place of the text, the formation of the Beth Midrash, “house of study”, and eventually, the appearance of the rabbis who are teachers of the tradition. Textual study focused on the

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460 The six major ‘paradigms’ he describes are: (1). The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive Christianity; (2). The Hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period; (3). The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm; (4). The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm; (5). The modern Enlightenment paradigm; (6). The emerging ecumenical paradigm.

461 Kuhn defines a paradigm as “the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community” (1970:175).
imaginative construal of a normative text. This imaginative construal of the text, which so characterises Judaism, did not drive toward theological settlement or moral consensus, but believed that the act of construal of this text itself is a quintessential Jewish act. Such an act in the midst of marginality did not need a controlled outcome” (Brueggemann 1991:135; italics as cited).

Links may be made between the three tasks of the post-exilic community and the present post-church community. Again those on the margins have little influence, are faced with temptations to cultural syncretism, and need to work hard to maintain a sense of community and belonging in order to survive. Again the survival strategy required may need to be based on the intense practice of hope. And again new interpretations, readings and understandings of the classic texts (The Bible and other traditional writings) of the faith may be required which are able to move beyond the limited readings, interpretations and understandings of the ‘EPC’ churches.

In summary Brueggemann says of that period and of our own that “we are in a moment of like cultural geopolitical upheaval that undoes us personally and institutionally” and we are in a time when we too must reflect on alternative models (op.cit.:131). Speaking of the post-exilic period he says “that this was ‘essentially’ a ‘new church start’ Post-exilic Judaism is a vibrant act of generativity, not enslaved to its oldest memories, and not immobilised by its recent memory of established power. . . . A new church start means reformulating the faith in radical ways in the midst of a community that has to begin again” (op.cit.:137; italics as cited).

Could the liminal groups of leavers discussed in this chapter be part of a new group of people who in their dissatisfaction with the ‘business as usual’ model of ‘EPC’ church faith and practice provide the tendrils of a new paradigm? Certainly it has been groups such as these which have provided new models and understandings of Christian faith which have lead to major paradigm shifts in the church itself. This is a theme to which we will return in Chapters 12 and 13. In the interim we need to consider the role of the wider societal milieu in which the present group of leavers chose to leave the ‘EPC’ churches.
Chapter Eleven

The Societal Milieu

For the simplicity on this side of complexity,
I would not give you a fig.
But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity,
for that I would give you anything I have.  

Oliver Wendell Holmes

11.1 Introduction

Having looked at the faith trajectories of ‘EPC’ church leavers and the emergence of groups catering for such leavers we must now consider the broader context of this study. Throughout the relatively brief history of ‘EPC’ churches there has always been a degree of leave-taking, as has been the case for all streams of the Christian church from its inception. However in the present environment there is a growing awareness of and interest in those who leave such churches. The crucial question that has to be addressed is why there is an increasing exodus of previously very committed long term ‘EPC’ church people. The material presented to this point suggests that the principal reason for leave-taking is connected with changing faith contents and operations consistent with faith stage transitions. If this is indeed the case, then we could surely expect that individuals would move through these faith transitions in all generations and therefore that there would be a constant and consistent flow out of churches which operate at specific modal development levels. But this explanation can only take us so far since it fails to answer the key question - Why has there been an increasing number of leavers in recent years? and why has there been a relatively sudden interest among church leaders regarding the incidence of leave-taking? That is, why is there now increasing concern regarding ‘the hole in the bucket syndrome.’

In an effort to answer these questions we must consider the inter-relatedness of the individual’s faith journey with the groups and churches to which they belong, but also set this in the context of the wider society in which they and their churches are immersed. To do this we need to consider an extension of the faith stage model suggested by James Fowler.

11.2 Using Modal Development Levels

In addressing how groups of people can set in place patterns and structures that both encourage faith operations to a certain stage and discourage faith operations beyond that stage Fowler uses the concept of ‘modal development levels.’ Fowler suggests that as an individual can be described as ‘operating’ at a particular faith stage so too can a group of people, a family, a workplace community or a church or para-church group.

As has already been stated, it is clear that Fowler considers that churches, as one grouping of people, can be characterised as operating at particular developmental levels and that these levels are attractive for people who are looking for faith answers at the same stage or are in the process of transitioning into that stage. We need to remember that churches, even ‘EPC’ churches, do not simply operate at one faith level but involve aspects of a number of levels, and so attract people within a variety of faith stages. Having said this each church, like any grouping of people, does tend to have a predominant mode of faith level operation. This

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462 Oliver Wendell Holmes, quoted in Fowler 1996:177
463 ‘The Hole in the Bucket’ is a heading used by Bolitho to describe leave-taking in the New Zealand Baptist churches, (NZ Baptist June 1997:7).
464 This was discussed in detail in Chapter 4. “The modal development level is the average expectable level of development for adults in a given community. In faith terms it refers to the conscious or unconscious image of adult faith toward which the educational practices, religious celebrations and patterns of governance in a community all aim” (Fowler 1995:294).
predominant modal development level sets an ethos which encourages people to make faith transitions towards its stage level but also effectively sets in place an ‘invisible ceiling’ discouraging faith stage transitions beyond the predominant modal development level at work in the church.

I would like to suggest that the ‘EPC’ churches which have formed the basis of this study can best be characterised as operating at the Synthetic-Conventional faith stage (stage 3), in terms of their patterns of teaching, worship and church governance. These churches therefore serve to draw people who are looking for faith answers at this level and are beginning to move into this third stage of Fowler’s faith stage theory. We have found that there is evidence supporting this from within this study as we analysed the reasons interviewees gave for joining these churches and the kind of faith answers they sought. The majority of those who were interviewed in this research joined their ‘EPC’ church during their late teens or early twenties and came either: (1) from a ‘chaotic or crisis stage’ within their own lives to which they were looking for clear answers; or (2) emerged out of mainline traditional churches in search of a clearer theology,465 more vibrant worship and a more informal church style. These desires found fulfillment in the charismatic and Pentecostal churches of the 1970s and early 1980s. In many cases the sense of personal crisis or chaos linked with a desire for some ‘certainties’ in life was part of the societal turbulence these predominantly younger people had been associated with in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s. It was during this period that the majority of interviewees joined their respective ‘EPC’ churches. As they entered the ‘EPC’ churches they found that their hunger for a God who knows them and accepts them was being met through the teaching, worshipping styles and emphasis of the ‘EPC’ churches. Here they often found charismatic leadership figures who were able to provide clear and authoritative advice for them to follow in their own lives. The theology taught in such churches was clear and straightforward, providing answers for life’s questions, providing a feeling of certainty, giving them a faith to believe in which gave high degrees of meaning to their lives coupled with a sense of purpose and future.

Such church environments operated in a warm and informal manner in which the new people were made to feel welcome and accepted. These churches predominantly ran with a close extended family atmosphere and little outward sign of strife, disagreement and conflict. For many of those interviewed, the church provided a supportive and caring family environment that they considered they were lacking in their own natural families.

Not surprisingly the ‘EPC’ churches that functioned in this way drew in large numbers of people in search of a faith that gave meaning and direction to their lives, while providing a clear way to live and a community of close interpersonal relationships. These people became increasingly involved in and committed to their churches and para-church groups. For some however, this was not to last. The question we must now ponder is why this has occurred, and continues to occur in churches and para-church groups up and down the country and across the Western world.

11.3. A Macro-societal Use of Fowler’s Theory of Faith Development

In his later writings466 Fowler increasingly makes links between his faith stage descriptions and the faith consciousness at work in the wider society. Such connections are similar to those made by Peter Berger (1979) and Berger, Berger and Kellner (1973) in their discussion of ‘modern consciousness’ and modernity.467 Here Berger et al. are identifying the role of the wider societal consciousness in providing an environment that encourages and nurtures faith to a certain modal development level. Hence in stark terms the argument that will be presented here is that a societal transition is setting in place a new faith

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465 A number of interviewees were brought up in mainline churches influenced by liberal theology. These churches tend to give less concise and definitive answers to theological and life questions than the ‘EPC’ churches.

466 See Fowler 1991 & 1996

467 Berger says “modern consciousness is part and parcel of the situation in which the contemporary individual finds himself” (1979:7). Later he links this with the premodern period stating: “If the typical condition of premodern man is one of religious certainty, it follows that that of modern man is one of religious doubt” (op.cit.:27).
consciousness within the wider society which is providing an environment that is nurturing and promoting individual faith transitions in ways not seen in a previous societal epoch. In the multi-tiered relationship of internal individual faith transitions, group or church modal development levels and the wider societal milieu’s influence, it is the latter which now requires analytical attention. This changing faith consciousness in the wider society is encouraging increasing numbers of individuals and groups within society to function at faith stage levels beyond those nurtured in previous societal periods.

It is not going to be argued here that the modal development level operative in ‘EPC’ churches is changing. Although in this study I have recognised that a routinisation process has been operative within the Pentecostal and charismatic churches, the fundamental theology, worship styles, teaching and patterns of governance have not been seen to have substantially changed since the time the leavers joined them. Indeed this is part of the confusion of leaders within these churches. From their perspective they are doing what they have always done but what they have always done is not having the same impact as previously. Nor is it argued here that there are internal changes within individuals that are causing them to consider faith transitions in greater numbers and earlier in life than those who have been part of similar religious groups in previous generations. In effect this study is suggesting that it is the faith consciousness operative in the emergent postmodern society (which is significantly different to that operative within modernity) in tension with the faith consciousness operative within ‘EPC’ churches that encourages people to consider leaving the church. It is this change in societal faith consciousness which is serving to promote and encourage faith stage transitions within individuals who are exposed to its influence.

To develop this argument further we must turn to the links Fowler makes between societal periods and faith stages. To do this we must trace Fowler’s work on the emergence of the Enlightenment and the societal faith consciousness that it brought forward. He says that “using these stage descriptions, we will try to model and contrast the forms of consciousness and practice that emerged as normative during the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, and those that may be emerging as normative in our time” (Fowler 1996:145). In so doing he poses the question - “Does the transition from the Synthetic-Conventional stage (stage 3) of faith to the Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4) in individual lives offer a model for better understanding the transition in cultural consciousness that we call the Enlightenment?” (op.cit.:147).

At this point I will present Fowler’s thesis and consider later in this chapter a critical reflection drawn from the work of post-structuralist and postmodernist theorists.

11.4 The Enlightenment Brings Forward a New Societal Faith Consciousness

Fowler draws on the work of historian Craine Brinton (1967) who outlines three major components to the Enlightenment: “(1) a passionate commitment to reason as the instrument of knowledge and emancipation; (2) a turn toward nature and the natural (including human nature) as the central object of scientific study and as the source of true insight and norms; and (3) a confidence in progress, from the achievement of peace through international law, to the reform of religion and the conquest of disease in human societies.”

The Enlightenment’s focus on reason replaced the medieval mythological worldviews with their constant reference to the transcendent. Fowler states:

> Through reason, through the disciplined and confident use of rational methods, Enlightenment thinkers anticipated the emancipation of persons and culture from their embeddedness in superstition and unexamined traditions. They intended their liberation from docile obedience to unaccountable forms of governance. . . (Fowler, 1996:149).

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468 Fowler (1985:36) states that his faith development theory in line with Piaget and Kohlberg views faith development as the result of an individual’s interaction with his or her environment. This Fowler sees in contrast with ‘social learning theories’ where growth is largely a function of the environment’s influence on a passive or neutral person and theories derived from psychoanalytic sources where development is seen as resulting from biological maturation. Rather “Piaget and Kohlberg stress the interplay between an active, structuring self and an equally dynamic environment”(Footnote, op.cit.:36).

469 Quoted in Fowler (1996:148; italics as cited)
In this regard Fowler quotes Immanuel Kant from his 1784 essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’

Enlightenment is Man’s leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the capacity to use one’s intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one’s intelligence without being guided by another. *Sapere Aude!* Have the courage to use your own intelligence! is therefore the motto of the enlightenment.\(^{470}\)

There are direct links here to the new found reliance on reason\(^{471}\) in the transition from Synthetic-Conventional to Individuative-Reflective stages of faith. The Individuative-Reflective stage is signified by a critical examination of beliefs, values and commitments, where what were once tacit faith understandings are carefully evaluated and examined. To quote Fowler:

We see here an effort to describe the awakening of analytic reasoning and the effort to focus it reflectively upon the previously implicit body of opinions, beliefs, and values that have constituted and oriented self. It marks the beginning of a process of assessing the validity of the assumptive foundations and elements of one’s worldview in the critical light of one’s reflected-upon experience. Structurally this move shows parallels with the Enlightenment’s critical dismantling of received systems in theology, philosophy and cosmology. Like the Enlightenment, the Individuative-Reflective stage is paralleled by a second movement in which the knowing subject makes the self, its capacities and constitution, the object of critical inquiry and reflection (Fowler 1996:153).

This new reliance on the self, links with the third of Brinton’s key movements of the Enlightenment towards a confidence in progress and humanity’s ability to overcome whatever presently ails society or the individual. In the transition from the Synthetic-Conventional to the Individuative-Reflective faith stage the individual must take upon themselves much of the authority and decision-making power they had previously invested in others. This process of personal responsibility taking is as crucial to the Enlightenment as it is for the individual moving from a Synthetic-Conventional to an Individuative-Reflective stage of faith operations.

The Enlightenment therefore acted as a sponsoring agent in Fowler’s modal development terms. Through the changes brought on by the Enlightenment Western society moved from the age of Pre-enlightenment Christendom to modernism. During the pre-enlightenment era the sense of societal consciousness fitted well with the staged faith consciousness Fowler describes as Mythical Literal (stage 2) and Synthetic-Conventional (stage 3). But with the Enlightenment a new societal faith consciousness was slowly brought forward that had greater connection with Fowler’s Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4). Fowler says:

\(^{470}\) Quoted in Fowler (1996:148) from (Friedrich 1949:132)

\(^{471}\) Fowler states: - “The Enlightenment represented a movement in cultural evolution where inherited symbols, beliefs, and traditions were subjected to the scrutiny and evaluation of critical reasoning. Similarly, the development of the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith involves the critical examination and exercise of choice regarding a person or community's previous faith perspectives. In many respects this is a "demythologizing" stage” (Fowler 1987:70). Fowler goes on to state: - The Enlightenment - “beginning with an intellectual elite affirmed the sovereignty of untrammeled reason. It confirmed the individual rights and dignity of each person: It turned the eye of critical reason upon traditions and myths. It challenged the authority of monarchies and attacked institutions of ecclesial power. Enlightenment thinkers completed the severance of physics and cosmology from theology and initiated the scientific study of psychology and sociology. In religion, thinkers of the Enlightenment turned the tools of analytic reason onto the record of biblical faith. Neither doctrinal traditions nor priestly hierarchies, nor the Bible itself, could withstand the relativising impact of critical historical study. The Enlightenment produced a variety of social contract theories that provided legitimation for new governments. In economic philosophy it gave rise to what has been called “possessive individualism” (Fowler 1991:22) .
The hard-won structures of rational autonomous consciousness, shaped and claimed on behalf of all humans for the first time in the Enlightenment, still must be constructed and claimed by persons in contemporary societies. Though there now exist cultural models and templates and educational supports for developing post-conventional, critical consciousness, this revolution still requires of individuals something of the courage and determination of which Kant spoke. And it may also require more sponsorship and support than he acknowledged (op.cit.:152).

This connection between societal consciousness and individual consciousness and in particular individual faith consciousness is similar to the use that Weber (1968:90-92) made of the term elective affinity to explain the reciprocity between institutional processes and processes on the level of individual consciousness. Berger et al. (1973:102) speak of Weber’s “elective affinity” saying “both institutional processes and processes on the level of consciousness are capable of developing autonomously, sometimes for considerable periods of time, while on other occasions, in terms of the concept of ‘elective affinity’, they may be viewed as ‘seeking each other out.’”

Here I am proposing that in this way the wider society acted as a facilitating environment that encouraged individual faith development towards the Individuative-Reflective stage. For those individuals who were part of churches whose modal development level could be best characterised as operating at the Synthetic-Conventional stage this could involve one of two differing journeys. The first is the move to classical secularisation where the transcendent (God and the authority of scripture and religious traditions) was no longer required by many people to make sense of their world or as a point of reference for everyday life. Thus for many people brought up within evangelical backgrounds the personal faith transition beyond the Synthetic-Conventional stage involved a moving away from Christian faith to secular understandings of life that did not require reference to the transcendent. The second move sponsored by the modernist society was the move within the Christian faith towards ‘liberalism’.

Liberalism with its focus on reason, acceptance of scientific knowledge over biblical literalism and its acceptance of modernist biblical criticism can be seen as a Christian accommodation to the dominant beliefs, values and world view of the Enlightenment period which was focused on reason, the natural sciences and the positive image of human progress. Such a move has operative and content links to the priorities of the Individuative-Reflective faith stage.

Both the classical secularist, and the Christian liberal positions suffer many of the weaknesses of the Individuative-Reflective faith stage. These are what Fowler calls the “massive overconfidence and blind undersides of the Enlightenment” (Fowler 1996:155). These he describes as follows:

In its exhilaration at the emancipatory and critically clarifying power of reason, it failed to anticipate the consequences of enthroning reason without bringing forward the forming and

472 Giddens (1971:131) says that Weber employed the concept of ‘elective affinity’ “to indicate the contingent nature of the connections between the symbolic content of beliefs which individuals ‘elect’ to follow, and the consequences which adherence to those beliefs entails for social action. Vice versa, the mode of life of a given social class or status group can generate an affinity to accept certain sorts of religious ethic, without ‘determining’ the nature of the beliefs involved.”

473 I have used the term classical secularisation to distinguish the classical understanding of secularisation theory from the neo-secularisation theories discussed in Chapter 4. By ‘classical secularisation I am referring to the three fold move in religious beliefs and practices involving firstly, a disenchantment with the teachings and practices of the church (both for individuals and for society in general). Secondly, a trend to disengagement with Christian churches or institutionalised faith, and finally, a transposition from religious explanations for events in individual’s lives and the lives of others around them to secular explanations and beliefs. Where secularisation has been perceived as involving this three phase process of disenchantment, disengagement and transposition it has in effect been taken to mean the immanent decline and extinction of religion.

474 Appendix 6 gives a comparison of the beliefs of liberal and fundamentalist Christians.
constraining influences of human wisdom in religious and cultural traditions. ... it remained blissfully ignorant of both the social and the psychic unconscious. In its overconfidence in its hard-won self-consciousness and rational clarity, it could not measure the degree to which the human soul resents its finitude and strives to ground and defend itself in myopic and self-serving ideologies (op.cit.:155-156).

In the modernist period the wider society acted as a sponsor for individuals open to a faith consciousness transition beyond the Synthetic-Conventional stage. These individuals were therefore open to a faith operations transition which lent itself to a higher degree of fit with a theologically liberal expression of Christian faith or a secularised expression (agnosticism or atheism). This is Berger’s ‘reductive option’ outlined in ‘The Heretical Imperative’ (1979). Such a move, argues Berger, reduces the cognitive dissonance for the individual but also tends to dissolve a person’s religious faith (op.cit.:62).

Another option presented by Berger was what he called the ‘inductive option’. This is the option that tries to carve a middle road between traditional religious authority and modern secular thought, between the mystic and the modern rationalist. This is an approach which takes human experience as its starting point of religious reflection. Berger says the inductive option “is a position of compromise, a vulnerable position, often a transitory one. Very often the theologian who begins with an inductive approach ends up with formulations that are hard to distinguish from reductionism (op.cit.:140). As such the move is typical of that encapsulated in Fowler’s Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4) which many evangelicals followed to a liberal conclusion under the conditions of modernity.

Postmodern consciousness differs from this modern consciousness in two ways. First, the postmodern faith consciousness, indicated in the Conjunctive stage of faith (stage 5), is able to hold the polar tensions inherent in the pursuit of faith and truth. It does not seek to collapse the tension either to the right (religious authority) or to the left (critical reasoning), nor does it allow a compromise at an intermediate position but holds rather to the validity of the left, the right and the centre in tension with each other. The second difference between a postmodern faith consciousness and a modern faith consciousness lies in the former’s acceptance of less rationalistic ‘ways’ of knowing. The postmodern consciousness is open to drawing on truth emanating from one’s emotions, intuitions and in this way it transcends the rationalistic focus of the modern consciousness.

Therefore the argument of this present thesis is that during the modernist regime individuals who were being internally compelled towards a faith transition out of the Synthetic-Conventional stage and were at the same time influenced by the dominant faith-consciousness of the wider society were most likely to move towards either a liberal expression of their faith, or a secularised belief system and world view. Fowler states:

> I am certain that “business as usual” in the old paradigms for churches will continue to draw and involve significant numbers of people. However, there are growing numbers of people who long ago left their churches and have substituted for that involvement active engagement in other kinds of “helping” institutions or movements, or have simply claimed Sunday and other time that would have been invested in church for leisure and other

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475 Berger said this move is, “as it were, an exchange of authorities: the authority of modern thought or consciousness is substituted for the authority of the tradition, the Deus dixit of old replaced by an equally insistent Homo modernus dixit. In other words, modern consciousness and its alleged categories become the only criteria of validity for religious reflection” (1979:62).

476 Berger (1979:154; italics mine) “Against the right (reliance on religious authority), this position means a reassertion of the human as the only possible starting point for theological reflection and a rejection of any external authority (be it scriptural, ecclesiastical or traditional) that would impose itself on such reflection. Against the left (reliance on critical reasoning), the position means a reassertion of the supernatural and sacred character of religious experience, and a rejection of the particularly oppressive authority of modern secular consciousness.”

477 Fowler (1985:81) states this form of knowing “resists forced syntheses or reductionist interpretations and is prepared to live with ambiguity, mystery, wonder, and apparent irrationalities.”
activities. There are many others who “hang in” our congregations with half a lung and half a heart, who hope for new life and new paradigms of church life (Fowler 1991:196).

As the last sentence of this quote indicates, and this present study would support, many people remain part of the church while reflecting a disillusioned attitude to both the structures, programmes and agendas of their ‘EPC’ church and its underlying faith beliefs, values and expected behaviours. There are many inducements to remaining part of a church long after the internal desire to do so has been undermined. The interviews conducted in this research highlighted that the fear of losing one’s faith completely was a significant influence for many to stay, others stay for family reasons (typically for the sake of their children’s Christian education), because of employment contracts with Christian employers (here I refer especially to those lecturing in theological colleges, or leading mission agencies), to maintain important relationships, or simply out of a long term habit and loyalty.478

If it were the case that under a modernist regime individuals transitioning to faith stage operations not conducive to the modal development level espoused in ‘EPC’ churches moved to either liberal Christian positions or moved to more secularised belief systems then we would expect that leaders of such churches would be aware of such moves. Interviews with church leaders in this study support this. The interview data drawn from the fifty four interviews with church ministers, pastors and informed insiders within the ‘EPC’ churches reflect an understanding that to leave the ‘EPC’ church or to question the ‘taken-for-granteds of the ‘EPC’ faith is to move either to a secularist or liberal faith position. Indeed ‘EPC’ churches, their leaders and the general teaching within ‘EPC’ environments has built up an understanding that to leave evangelical theology and expressions of church is either to move to the ‘slippery slope’ of theological liberalism or lose one’s faith altogether (classical secularisation theory).

In proposing this argument we need to bear in mind that not all adults move through the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith to the Individuative-Reflective stage. Fowler (1991:21) states “evidence suggests that the majority of adults in our society arrest or equilibrate in either the Mythic-Literal (stage 2) or the Synthetic-Conventional stage (stage 3). A smaller number construct the Individuative-Reflective (stage 4) style of consciousness, and an even smaller number evolve forms of consciousness described by the Conjunctive stage (stage 5).”479 Fowler’s empirical research outlined in his initial set of interviews with Americans to determine their faith stages (1981) showed that 33% of men and 42% of women are best described as exhibiting a stage three (Synthetic-Conventional) faith between the ages of 31-40. Although these figures dropped to 12% of men and 37% of women over 61 years of age they nevertheless indicate that for significant numbers of adults a considerable proportion of their adult faith consciousness is best described as Synthetic-Conventional (stage 3).480 This indicates that the faith consciousness at work in a society and that of many adults within that society may not be the same for many people. On the contrary the faith transitions that individuals move through are brought into effect through a complicated inter-related process of internal personal influences and external community, group and societal influences. Fowler says: “A person can equilibrate or arrest in a stage or a transition between stages, either for long periods of time or permanently. The sponsorship of traditions, group membership, and the critical relations and experiences arising from interaction in life all affect the rate and extent of a person’s development through the stages. Certain groups sponsor persons to particular stages but may also ‘seal’ or ‘cap’ their development to further stages” (Fowler 1991:17). Therefore the relationship between the faith consciousness of the wider society can be seen as providing a nurturing environment for faith transitions up to its own faith level and providing a ‘ceiling’ for faith stage development beyond the level expressed within the society. Individuals although affected by the nurturing environment of the wider society can be either insulated from that faith-nurturing environment by their immersion in sub-cultural groups that reflect a differing faith stage, or be encouraged to move beyond a societal faith stage ‘ceiling’. This can be due to either internal forces and/or through

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478 This loyalty was especially evident in the interviews with some marginal church participants over 45 years of age.

479 Italics mine.

480 See Appendix 6 for a copy of Fowler’s table of empirical interview results for faith staging of individuals - (Table B.6 -Fowler 1995).
immersion in a sub-cultural group which encourages and nurtures a faith stage consciousness further along Fowler’s faith stage continuum than that expressed in the wider society.

Adult faith stage equilibration can therefore be seen as being determined by a complex matrix of internal forces, life experiences, (Fowler [1985:81 & 1987:93] writes of the influence of personal suffering, failure and experiences of life on faith stage development), family, relational and group modal development levels that serve to either nurture ongoing faith transitions or provide a ‘cap’ to such faith operation changes and wider societal influences mediated through the media and the dominant values and ethics at work in the society and the ‘religious’ culture at work within the society.

To summarise, the argument to this point has identified a matrix of internal and external influences that when combined at the right time in the life of an individual may encourage stage faith transitions, and has identified the way in which the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith tends to struggle with much of the ‘EPC’ belief propositions, values and expected ways of behaviour. The thesis has also shown that in the past the faith trajectories of people wishing to move beyond the modal development level of ‘EPC’ churches have traditionally moved to more liberal Christian churches or groups or moved outside of the Christian faith to an agnostic or atheistic position. In contrast to this, however this study indicates that another set of faith trajectories is increasingly being followed by numbers of ‘EPC’ church leavers who are not leaving Christian faith to follow the journey of increased secularisation, nor are they necessarily moving to liberal Christian churches or beliefs. It is to these changes in society that have brought about alternative faith trajectories that we must now move.

11.5 The Influence of a Changing Societal Faith Consciousness

Fowler (1996) presents the thesis “that we are, at the end of the twentieth century, engaged in another evolutionary shifting of the forms of consciousness and faith, every bit as far-reaching as that of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. But now it is happening far more rapidly, and on a global basis” (Fowler 1996:15). He identifies the large cultural shifts that are going on in Western society at the present time by drawing on the discussions of postmodernity. In defining the postmodern period in which we now find ourselves he speaks of three broad meanings:

1. It is used as a term - somewhat apocalyptic in tone - to designate the transitional time in history and culture in which we presently live. (2) It is used as an aesthetic descriptor, suggesting a type of contemporary art and representation that is permeated with material interest, commercial distortion, and self-conscious intent to reshape perceptions. (3) The term refers to a broad development in contemporary thought that engages in deep-going criticism of the Enlightenment with its trust in the possibility of a universal reason and its focus on meta-narratives such as belief in human progress and universal grounding for ethical principles or standards (Fowler 1996:13-14).

Fowler argues that “whether people have a theory of postmodern experience or not . . . we all are living in the midst of postmodern experience” (op.cit.:161). Fowler then makes links between the emergent consciousness of postmodernity and his fifth faith stage - the Conjunctive stage of faith (op.cit.:157). He is pointing out that the focus of the postmodernist debate has centred on the “deconstruction of concepts and patterns of thought that have characterised modernity.” Veling (1996:77) says “it (postmodernity) is an age that leads us into a profound sense of alienation and suspicion toward our traditions of belonging and our confident hopes of progress and freedom.” Veling quotes Jean-Francois Lyotard who describes “the postmodern condition as an incredulity toward the ‘grand narratives’ of Western history - all those appeals

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481 It needs to be recognised that individuals were moving to this fifth faith stage for generations before the emergence of a postmodern society. The faith stage an individual equilibrates at as an adult is not determined by the faith consciousness of the wider society but is nevertheless influenced by it. Therefore we can expect that numbers of individuals will move beyond any societal modal development level while others will happily hold to faith beliefs and practices that represent an earlier faith stage position.

482 Italics mine.
that are made in the name of some metadiscourse or first principle, be it God, the Idea, the Self and so on” (Veling 1996:86).

Fowler says that he is “aware of few efforts to characterise the emerging shape of postmodern modes of thought and understanding as forms of practical thought and consciousness” (op.cit.:174; italics as cited). Although this is not a new assertion by Fowler it is not until his later texts (1991 and 1996) that the links between the faith consciousness expressed in the Conjunctive stage of faith and the postmodern consciousness are linked. He states: “Postmodern consciousness, explicitly and implicitly, is a consciousness populated with systems and systems awareness. I am suggesting that structurally postmodern consciousness parallels the Conjunctive pattern of faith consciousness” (op.cit.:174; italics as cited).

In Postmodern faith consciousness there is a recognition that there are no “naked” facts, truths, or events. All knowing involves interpretation; interpretations contrast and overlap due to the differing perspectives of those who construct meanings from different vantage points in a system or systems. Multiple perspectives must be taken into account and coordinated - including paradoxical or opposing perspectives - if anything deserving the complex name “truth” is to be modeled and understood. (op.cit.:175)

The postmodern consciousness provides a renewed openness and acceptance of knowledge and “truth” from differing sources including intuitions, emotions, the unconscious, the mythical and the supernatural. “Recognising that myths and symbols from the classic traditions often “hold” and bring into view this sort of truthful richness, postmodern consciousness in faith manifests a second or willed naiveté” (op.cit.:175; italics as cited). Ricoeur, from whom Fowler draws the concept of second naiveté, explains the concept as the ability to hold a paradoxical tension between religious truth and rationalistic critical thought. Ricoeur explains this in contrast to ‘first’ or primitive naiveté saying:

Does this mean that we could go back to a primitive naiveté? Not at all. In every way something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second naiveté in and through criticism. In short, it is by interpreting that we can hear again. Thus it is in hermeneutics that the symbols gifts of meaning and the endeavour to understand by deciphering are knotted together. (1967:351)

Here there is a renewed appreciation of ritual, mythology and classical traditions and writings. Those at the Conjunctive stage of faith therefore approach ‘truth’ in different ways. Bernard Meland argues that ‘rational ways of knowing have tended to neglect deeper, intuitive ways of knowing, what he calls an ‘appreciative consciousness’ or a felt ‘wisdom of the body’ ‘feeling’ the sense of life’s ‘unsayableness’ has given way to the rationalist’s quest for what is distinctly clear and ‘sayable’. Yet ‘we live more deeply than we think’. If we are to be faithful to lived experience, this ‘more deeply’ should be reflected in our ways of knowing.’ Hence there is a dichotomy between knowing truth (reflected in the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith) and truthful knowing (perhaps better apprehended at the Conjunctive stage of faith). As Veling comments:

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483 Fowler states - “Here I want to make a bold hypothesis: I believe that we are experiencing in our time the emergence of a new cultural paradigm that has the power to address many of the anomalies of our present patterns of living. . . . The new paradigm I would point to shares many of the structural features of the Conjunctive stage of faith consciousness, just as the paradigm of the Enlightenment shares many of the structures of the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith consciousness (Fowler 1991:21).

484 He explains the term conjunctive saying: “the term conjunctive derives from Carl Jung’s appropriation of Nicholas Cusa’s concept of the coincidentia oppositorum, the conjunction, the holding together in one frame, of opposites. In the case of postmodern consciousness there is the juxtaposition - the holding in one complex range of models - of multiple systems and, indeed, of systems of systems” (Fowler 1996:174; italics as cited).

485 Quoted in Veling 1996:51

To know truth is to enter into the life of that which we know and to allow it to enter into ours. It is not about manufacturing a world, or manipulating it, or keeping it at a distance, or trying to control it. Rather, ‘truth’ involves entering a relationship with someone or something genuinely other than us, but with whom we are intimately bound. Truth is not so much something “over which” we stand, rather it is something “under which” we stand. We “understand” truth to the extent that we “stand-under” its spell.\[487\]

The links between such an acceptance of ‘truth’ claims that do not fall within the realm of logical reason and science are widely evident in our present society. The increased interest in ‘new age’ spirituality being but one prominent example. The Conjunctive stage recognises and is able to hold the validity of these differing truth claims.

In the transition to Conjunctive faith one begins to make peace with the tension arising from the fact that truth must be approached from a number of different directions and angles of vision . . . Faith begins to come to terms with . . . apparent paradoxes; God is both immanent and transcendent; God is both an omnipotent and a self-limiting God; God is the sovereign of history while being the incarnate and crucified One. . . The Conjunctive stage marks a movement beyond the demythologizing strategy of the Individuating stage. Where the latter followed the Enlightenment's tendency to reduce the symbolic and metaphoric to conceptual translations, this new stage reverses the flow of initiative. Acknowledging the . . . [richness] and density of symbols and myth, persons of the Conjunctive stage learn . . . to submit to their initiative and mediating power: Instead of “reading” and analyzing the symbols and metaphors, they learn to submit to the "reading" and illumination of their situations which these and other elements of tradition offer (Fowler 1991:23).

Fowler sees that conjunctive faith and practical postmodern approaches call for the simplicity on the other side of complexity. Here he is referring to the comment by an American Jurist Oliver Wendell Holmes who said that “For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I would not give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have.”\[488\] This quote summarizes the essence of a move to a conjunctive faith stance. A move that recognises and holds the paradoxical understanding of ‘simple’ truth, but truth that has been ‘tested’ in the rigors of personal struggles and the rationality of modern life. It is truth that has passed through ‘complexity’ and yet has been found to be valid. It is truth appropriated by personal conviction, experience and rationality rather than by the authoritative claims of others.

David Tomlinson, in his book “The Post-evangelical” (1995) writes about church leavers from evangelical churches within Great Britain. In the opening page of the book he states “At the time of writing the term ‘post-evangelical’ has no formal definition, there is no body of theology behind it, no published agenda and certainly no organization, and yet it is surprising how many people on hearing the word for the first time immediately understand its significance” (op.cit.:1). In introducing a new concept and potential stream within the Christian faith, the book has generated large amounts of interest.\[489\]

“My thesis is simple: says Tomlinson. It is that post-evangelicals tend to be people who identify culturally more with postmodernity than with modernity and that this has a significant bearing on the way that they approach and understand the Christian faith” (op.cit.:76; italics mine). Post-evangelicals he says “are people who relate more naturally to the world of postmodernity, and consequently this is the cultural environment which influences the way they think about and experience their faith; and this is the context in which the integrity and credibility of their faith must be tested” (op.cit.:8-9). Whatever post-evangelicalism is,

\[487\] Quoted in Veling 1996:52; italics mine.
\[488\] Oliver Wendell Holmes, quoted in Fowler (1996:177; italics as cited)
\[489\] Since Tomlinson published ‘The Post-Evangelical’ (1996) a subsequent text has been printed titled ‘The Post-Evangelical Debate’ (Cray. et al. 1997). In this subsequent text six leading theologians and evangelical church leaders respond to Tomlinson’s original book.
Tomlinson (1995:60) is at pains to point out that it does not mean liberal. He outlines two reasons why the movement of people he calls post-evangelicals within Britain are unlikely to move to liberalism. Firstly because their background is strongly evangelical and this background still counts a lot to them, and secondly because they also accept (perhaps critically) that the Christ-event is based on historical realities, and they have no real difficulty with the supernatural nature of the gospel and the possibility of miracles. But he says “there is arguably a better reason, however, why neither evangelicalism as it is commonly experienced nor liberalism offers an ideal way forward, and that they actually have something in common: they both find their natural cultural roots in modernity” (op.cit.:72). The comments of two of the Informed Insiders I interviewed in Australia may help to flesh out the significance of Tomlinson’s thesis:

(Inside Informer #1) - Whether you agree with his (Tomlinson’s) directions etc for the future or not, certainly his analysis is good. You could write a book like this about Australia, and change some of the names, and organisations and denominations and it can be about Australia. There is this sense, this real growing, I hope growing, dissatisfaction with the evangelical model, and that is going to be increasingly an issue. And what it is tending to do, on the negative side, is that it polarises the whole situation. So you end up with people who leave the church at one end or become extremely focused on social justice, liberal minded, and who have very wishy washy convictions to evangelism and to the gospel, and then it polarises the other end, and it makes the other churches become even more fundamentalist and right wing and so on (113.24; italics mine).

(Inside Informer #2) - Yeah I think it has been quite widely read here, and I think it resonates with a lot of people. I think it actually describes very well how many have moved from . . . (I am part of this). . . . they don’t actually want to abandon the word evangelical, but it is actually such a layered complex word now to what it means, that Tomlinson’s dimension of post evangelical which says this is my tradition and I still resonate with personal conversion and a number of its bells . . . . but I don’t actually resonate with keeping women out of ministry, saying that Christians aren’t interested in land rights (111.32).

To reach this faith transition individuals must operate for a period at the Individuative-Reflective (stage 4) faith stage. As indicated in the trajectories of faith of the church leavers the journey to an integrated faith must pass through the deconstruction, self-examination, critique and reconstruction phases before the development of an integrated faith is possible. As Fowler says the stages are invariant and hierarchical.\footnote{\text{By Invariant Fowler means “each stage building on the previous one so that none can be skipped,” and by hierarchical he states that “each successive stage is carrying forward in a modified and augmented form the operations of the previous stage” (Fowler 1985:26).}} That is an individual cannot by-pass a stage. What is significant though is that in the modernist period the faith consciousness that predominated in the society was consistent with the Individuative-Reflective stage (stage 4) and so the societal faith consciousness provided a ‘ceiling’ to further faith transitions; it did not promote faith transitions beyond the Individuative-Reflective stage. In this way individuals were encouraged by the wider modernist society to equilibrate at the Individuative-Reflective faith stage. In a postmodernist society the societal faith consciousness nurtures and promotes faith transitions beyond the Individuative-Reflective stage into the Conjunctive stage (stage 5). This means that individuals immersed in a postmodernist environment are being actively nurtured to faith transitions beyond the Individuative-Reflective faith stage. Therefore the Individuative-Reflective stage with its focus on reason, the complexities of life and faith, its trust in human reason, science, scholarship, technology and progress is not seen as the final equilibrium point but a transition stage from which many can move on to the conjunctive faith stage. Such transitions offer new hopes and threats to the ‘EPC’ churches and other ‘EPC’ faith environments. It is these that we will consider soon. However before we move in this direction it is important to consider the public faces of these two staged expressions of Christian faith; bearing in mind that a critique of this argument will be considered later.
Orthodox and Progressive Tempers

For much of the latter half of this century the Christian church in Western societies has been divided between two groups, those who fit neatly into the ‘EPC’ faith and its churches and those who fit more clearly into what can be labelled as a more theologically liberal faith and church. These two groupings are what Fowler, drawing on the work of James Davidson Hunter, calls the Orthodox and Progressive tempers. The orthodox view represent those operating at a Synthetic-Conventional faith stage and the progressive at the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith operations. Those of the orthodox temper place their confidence in “sources of authority that are external to self,” (Fowler 1996:162). For them authority is fixed and from it claims can be made that are universally binding.

Within this category of the orthodox Fowler includes those from fundamentalist and some evangelical Christian backgrounds. He sees a link between the longed for society of the orthodox and Ferdinand Toennies ‘Gemeinschaftlich’ society where “deeply shared values and beliefs make for consensual unity, where there is congruence between all members’ personal and private lives, and where social conflict is avoided through the leadership of a morally aristocratic leadership class. In such a society there are clearly defined roles for men, women, and children” (Fowler, 1996:167).

Figure 11.1 The Orthodox and Progressive Tempers

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<td>Blurring line between public and private lives</td>
<td>Clear line between public and private lives.</td>
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Those Fowler labels as ‘progressive’ operate from an entirely different temper. Unlike the orthodox “They tend to place authority for making choices on matters of personal and political concern upon the experience, reflective judgement, and personal conscience of individuals presumably rational individuals” (Fowler, 1996:162).

491 “We may use the term ‘temper’ to describe the combination of emotional, moral, and ideological dispositions that constitute the unifying characteristics of members of each of these two orientations. We can speak of the orthodox temper and the progressive temper. These tempers are faith orientations, both in content and in process, they adhere to deeply differing convictions about the locus of authority in morality and religion; they espouse contrasting ‘myths of origin’ and interpretations regarding the normative story of the nation’s founding and its meanings; they each claim ownership of the ideals of justice and freedom, but they nuance the meanings of these terms in virtually mutually exclusive ways” (Fowler 1996:162; italics as cited).

492 “Orthodox adherents, however, likely do not have a critically reflective, conceptual grasp on the worldview they espouse taken as a whole. Emotion-laden images and symbols provide cues for reactions and judgements that have the power of instincts or the voice of conscience within. Authority for the formulation and defense of this largely tacit value system is left, for the orthodox, to the recognised leaders of religious or political groups, interpreters of sacred scriptures or tradition, or political leaders certified as being congruent with the canons of their orthodox group or tradition. Authority therefore, is located external to the person, and is located in sacred texts, in the group, in the tradition, or in the group’s authorised representatives. . . . For those persons and groups of the orthodox temper who are explicitly religious the locus of authority most likely rests in concrete and literal readings of sacred scriptures, the indisputable teachings of tradition, and the dictums of authorised interpreters” (Fowler, 1996:165-166).

493 “One can readily see how the temperaments of fundamentalist and some evangelical Christians can find mutual respect with some orthodox Jews and conservative catholic groups, not to mention both orthodox Muslims and members of the Nation of Islam” (Fowler, 1996:163).

Such progressive individuals are best characterised as operating at the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith. “In terms of faith consciousness, progressives employ critical and reflective procedures for analyzing and making explicit the contents of ideological perspectives or particular theological positions” (op.cit.:169). The progressives may have regard for external authority sources but only in as much as these are verified by their own examination and experience. Progressives tend to encourage open debate and discussion and place their trust in the emergent truth of such debates. However the progressives reflect the same underlying weaknesses of modernism discussed earlier by being over confident in their own rational conscious.

Fowler (1996:171) says “this particular form of self-deception often gives progressives a tone of self-righteousness and moral superiority.” In the United States of America Fowler sees these two tempers taking opposing sides on a variety of issues: the “issue of abortion (‘pro-life’ vs ‘pro-choice’); the struggle over distinguishing between art and pornography; the cultural neutrality of the public schools versus (Christian) prayer as a part of classroom routines; and conflicting views about the rights guaranteed to homosexual men and women” (op.cit.:161). To these could be added the euthanasia debate, the inclusion of creation accounts of the beginnings of the universe, capital punishment, the legalisation of prostitution and the issue of Indigenous land rights. Fowler says “the polarised alignments of these two oppositional groups cut across the lines of traditional religious and political boundaries. Defining pluralism in terms of the differences between Protestants, Catholics and Jews is no longer descriptive of where the real battles are occurring in the culture wars in United States society” (op.cit.:162).

This division within the Christian church can be seen on the issue of homosexuality and the ordination of practising homosexuals within New Zealand’s Christian churches. The dividing lines in this debate do not cut between denominations and churches but within them. In both the Presbyterian and Methodist churches of New Zealand recent debates on the issue have divided members of the same churches. Between these two groups there is a high degree of what Fowler has previously called ‘cross stage static’. This concept is used to refer to the inability of those at differing faith stages (especially where a major transition has occurred between the faith contents and operations of those in the respective stages) to be able to enter into meaningful dialogue with each other where each other’s point of view can be heard and respected.

As has already been discussed in Chapter 2 the fundamentalist and evangelical sectors of the Christian church developed and maintained much of their vigor in their definitional opposition to theological liberalism. So too the progressive and orthodox groupings have defined themselves in opposition to each other thereby providing much of the fueling energy for their positions.

Fowler suggests that part of the ‘growing impasse’ between those of the orthodox and progressive tempers results “in significant measure from the partially recognised loss of resonance and power those who embrace both of these tempers feel in the face of the everyday experiences I have summed up under the rubric of postmodern conditions” (op.cit.:177). Ironically as Tomlinson has pointed out both the evangelical and liberal streams of the Christian church are built on the core emphasis of modernity. Both defer to rationalistic approaches to faith, as can be seen in the debates between the proponents of ‘evolution’ and ‘creationist science’. In both cases the retort is to science and logical reason which in many cases, at least within the United States of America, is finally adjudicated by the courts and legal systems.

As society moves towards the postmodern, the loss of power and relevance is being increasingly felt by both the representatives of ‘EPC’ faith (whether they be leaders within churches or para-church groups) and the representatives of the liberal streams of the Christian church. The response to this loss of societal relevance,
power and connectedness to the issues can be movements in one of two directions. For some ‘EPC’ churches and groups the threat of a society they no longer ‘belong within’ is leading to an increased isolation and retreat to the safe enclosures of an ‘EPC’ sub-culture. While for others attempts are being made to engage the Christian gospel and church with the wider postmodern society in new ways. To quote Tomlinson:

I would suggest that the cultural shift surfaces within religious communities in two ways. First there is the tendency to seek refuge in the old certainties. At its most extreme, this route is expressed in hard and fast fundamentalism. And second, it surfaces in the tendency to interact positively with the new cultural situation and to reinterpret faith in the light of that cultural situation (1995:30).

Fowler concurs saying, “times of cultural revolution in consciousness are un-nerving and frightening as well as exhilarating. It seems clear that in the face of the complexity and newness of the ways we are being called to think and be, many groups from all over the globe are retreating toward the hope of authoritative grounding in the resurgence of pre-Enlightenment religious commitments or the heedlessness of hedonist ideologies” (Ibid.:158-159).

At this point some take heart from the advance of evangelical charismatic and evangelical Pentecostal church growth in Asia, Africa and South America suggesting that the way forward for the West is to adopt the methods, theology and faith practices of these growing streams of the church. While there are undoubtedly lessons that can be learned from these environments it is not to the predominantly pre-modern continents of the world that the postmodern world can turn for answers.

To date the ‘EPC’ churches within New Zealand have continued to be propelled by the combined influences of conservative evangelical theology (strongly based on the external authority of an uncritical reading of the Bible), charismatic worship and church governance patterns and church growth techniques. In an increasingly postmodernist regime such direction heightens the sense of disjunction between church and society felt by individuals who seek to be involved in both ‘worlds’.

The ‘EPC’ church world shaped by conservative evangelical theology, charismatic worship and church governance patterns and church growth techniques is becoming increasingly isolated from the faith consciousness of the wider society. Let us consider some crucial ways in which this manifests itself. Firstly, as a result of the charismatic renewal focus on the individual and his or her experience of God and the Church growth movement’s desire to grow bigger churches by meeting the needs of new people ‘EPC’ churches are becoming increasingly consumer driven. The desire to meet the needs of those who could be attracted to the church, in order to increase the number of people attending, leads to churches offering greater professionalism in their Sunday services and an increased array of recreational, sporting, family and counselling services which seek to meet the ‘needs’ of individuals. Thus the church becomes consumer driven similar to that of other businesses. In a consumer culture the consumer is sovereign. This is increasingly so in many ‘EPC’ churches. As there is little product or brand loyalty in consumer culture so too there is decreasing loyalty to particular churches, leaders or denominations. Loyalty is reserved not for the institution but for self. The reigning attitude becomes if my ‘needs’ aren’t met I’ll look somewhere else’. For churches to continue to grow in such a consumer driven market they are encouraged to offer a wider range of services and better standards of service to entice new people. But this only feeds the underlying ethos that the individual is sovereign and his or her needs paramount and thereby increases the array of services that churches will need to offer in order to keep their self-oriented customers and potential customers satisfied.

Secondly, the ‘truth’ claims of the ‘EPC’ churches (based on the external authority of an uncritical reading of the Bible) and their more ‘orthodox’ stance on ethical and moral issues have little connection with the approaches to ‘truth’ or the ethical and moral bases to decisions in postmodernist society. The ‘EPC’ churches continued pronouncement of its truth and ethics leads to an increasingly isolationist role for the church under conditions of postmodernity.
Thirdly, and finally, the ‘EPC’ churches desire to grow larger and thereby offer more and more services for its participants creates a growing religious cocoon from the wider society. For many people however their work, study, family or other relationships means that they must ‘live’ in and be influenced by the wider society as well as the church. This is much less the case for the leaders of ‘EPC’ churches who because of the enormous demands of running a church can ‘live’ more completely within the church enclave. It is these leaders, those who are perhaps least influenced by the wider society and its emerging postmodern faith consciousness who have the most influence on the structures of the ‘EPC’ churches. Therefore the key leaders are amongst those least likely to be aware of the endemic changes brought in the wake of postmodernity and therefore least likely to be able to engage such a society.

At the time of writing the future direction of ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups seems to be confused between church leaders whose proposals effectively advocate the formation of a subcultural enclave and those who wish to engage the postmodern culture. Could the emergence of increasing numbers of Christians operating from a conjunctive faith stage offer hope for radical engagement of the postmodernist world, a meeting place for evangelical Christians and those who have left the church or who find a sense of belonging within a postmodernist value, belief and truth system? At the same time could it provide a meeting place for post-evangelicals and post-liberals? Before considering a response to this suggestion we need to consider a post-structuralist critique of the argument that has been presented.

11.6 Considering a Post-structuralist Critique

The intention of this chapter has been to use faith developmental theory as a scaffolding for insight. Having presented this scaffold Goffman (1959:224) would remind us that once the scaffolding has served its purpose it is dismantled. Here the scaffold of the faith development model brings us to awareness of connections between individual faith stages and societal consciousness. As a scaffolding it provides a series of ideal types: four faith positions (Displaced Followers, Reflexive Exiles, Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders) and two categories of groups of leavers (marginal & liminal). Such ideal types provide static images that give insight into what is a dynamic, complex and multi-directional process.

The argument presented here is therefore structuralist in its reference to faith development theory as a narrative for understanding the interrelationship between societal consciousness and individual faith stages. It is, however, postmodernist in holding such a narrative as a scaffold for insight while pointing

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497 In this regard it is interesting to note the reaction within at least one ‘EPC’ community to Tomlinson’s book, a book which many would perceive as ‘dangerous’. At the time of interviewing one Australian theological lecturer, he mentioned that when he wanted to buy the book he went to a Christian book store and looked for it under both the title and the author’s surname on the shelves. When he couldn’t find it he approached the women behind the counter “I had to ask the lady where is Tomlinson’s book and she said we are not allowed to sell it on the shelves, but I will get you a copy and she goes under the counter and gets me one. And I said is it wrapped in cellophane?.” While for some Tomlinson’s book raises questions too threatening to contemplate, I was also aware in the course of this study of two groups of theologians and church people who met to read and discuss the implications of the book. This can be linked to a genre of evangelical writers trying to engage the issues of postmodernist society and present the Christian message into this environment. There is a corresponding move among some sections of the liberal Christian stream to what has been called post-liberalism. Post-liberalism is distinct from Liberalism in that where Liberalism sought to reduce the gospel to the axioms and assumptions of enlightenment thought, post-liberalism seeks to do the opposite. A movement to a post liberalist position has been discussed since the early 1980s. See Philips and Okholm, (1996).

498 The faith development model being built on the work of Piaget, Kohlberg and Erikson has a structuralist heritage (see Fowler, 1976:173-174). Twenty years on Fowler (1996:157) notes this himself saying - The conception of faith with which faith development theory works is both made necessary by the Enlightenment and is part of the fruit of the Enlightenment’s effort to ‘reform’ religion. This theory and research makes an Enlightenment move when it seeks to provide formal definitions of faith and formal characterisations of ‘structuralist’ stages. Not until the Enlightenment did this kind of separation of the ‘structuring’ and the ‘content’ of ideological perspectives come into play. Though less confident than the Enlightenment about the establishment of rational and ethical bases from which all particular religious traditions can be evaluated, faith development theory does provide a criteriology for assessing the adequacy of a given person’s or group’s
beyond this scaffolding to a reality which is fluid, complex and dynamic and thus relativises the narrative’s claims. It is modernist in using faith development theory as an Archimedian standpoint from which to observe wider societal transitions. It is postmodernist in holding such a standpoint as but one standpoint among many. It is modernist in its presentation of faith positions and postmodernist in pointing to the reality of diverse and contradictory faith contents, beliefs and practices at each position it describes. This study reflects the variety of faith beliefs both Christian and alternative faiths appropriated by the ‘EPC’ church leavers. It is modernist in allowing for individuals to move in linear fashion through a series of invariant, hierarchical and universal stages while being postmodernist in pointing to the way individuals move in both directions through the faith stages, travel at differing speeds or remain static for long periods of time on their own faith trajectory. It is modernist in referring to a narrative that unifies individual faith journeys but postmodernist in its priority to the local and situated accounts of individual ‘EPC’ church leavers.

Postmodern and post-structuralist theorists would perceive in this argument a linear meta-narrative that reduces a multiplicity of situated and diverse faith journeys within the one master discourse. While an over emphasis of this theoretical scaffolding would lead to this view, a continued reminder that what is here presented is an image for understanding alone helps us to move beyond such criticism. Foucault, a leading postmodern theorist, objected to social theories that aimed to grasp the essential structure and meaning of a society or an historical epoch. He nevertheless did not discount the utility of general theories. Foucault’s suspicion of these theories was steeped in his perception that such theories become reductionistic and exclusionary. The theoretical scaffold presented here helps us to perceive what may not be otherwise observable and what is presented is done so cautiously fully aware that it is only a scaffold in order to ensure it does not lead to reductionist agendas.

Although post-structuralism identifies significant weaknesses in the meta-narratives of structuralist theories it too can be critiqued for failing to move beyond its own deconstructive and critical faculties to articulate a positive programme of social reconstruction. The argument identified here seeks to move beyond critique in offering this scaffold as another alternative. As Seidman (1994:277-278) states there need to be alternatives to a deconstructionist critique:

> The alternative to the Enlightenment is not chaos and nihilism but living with uncertainty and a tolerance of ambiguity. For example, abandoning the appeal to secure foundations of knowledge does not mean surrendering all claims to knowledge. Asserting the value- and interest-based condition of knowledge excludes objective, universal knowledge, but it makes partial and perspectival knowledge possible. . . . A post-Enlightenment culture is suspicious of all claims to knowledge, truth, values, and political legitimacy; it assumes that all discourses are involved in the making of selves and societies. It therefore urges that we approach discourses, including its own, as permanently contestable, as containing values, social interests, and a will to shape human history.

In this sense the argument presented here is seen as one perspective, a perspective gained through careful listening to the stories of church leavers and respectful integration of their accounts in a wider theoretical debate. It is but one perspective among many other valid and necessary perspectives and needs to be held in tension with the post-structuralist critique. But it does nevertheless provide understanding and in its conjunctive stage points beyond deconstructionism to a second yet wary attachment to meta narratives.

appropriation of its religious content tradition, and the adequacy of the tradition itself. In contrast to the Enlightenment, however, and in ways that show its indebtedness to post-Enlightenment hermeneutics, faith development theory knows that the structural features of faith are at best half the picture and that any adequate study of lived religious faith must balance the initiative of the interpreter and inquirer with the hermeneutic initiatives of classic traditions. Moreover, faith development theory seeks to acknowledge and systematically account for the important shaping role of the emotions and of the unconscious-personal and social-in the life of faith.”
Finally this argument is postmodernist in following the directions of Bauman (1992:42) who suggests that “the postmodern sociologist aims at ‘giving voice’ to cultures which without help would remain numb or stay inaudible to the partner in communication. Here the intent has been to ‘give voice’ to a marginalised and inaudible voice; that of a particular segment of ‘EPC’ church leavers. In so doing it has focused on what Seidman identifies as the value of postmodern sociology.

The value of postmodern sociology is in rendering social differences less threatening, fostering tolerance for diversity, making unfamiliar, familiar, and giving voice to the submerged or marginal experiences and communities (1994:301).

In the next chapter we will consider a dialogue in which the ‘voiceless’ marginalised leavers could converse with the leaders at the centre of ‘EPC’ churches. In so doing I am postulating a conversation which in its multiple perspectives and voices a way forward may be found for both the post-church groups and the ‘EPC’ churches.

11.7 Where to Next?
The extension of the argument presented in this chapter is to suggest that ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups will see increasing numbers of leavers as modernity increasingly gives way to postmodernity. At the time of writing and in the immediate future we stand in a period of transition as the modernist era becomes of decreasing significance and postmodernity increases in prominence and influence. If the argument of this study is realised then it would be expected that as this transition gains momentum, increasing numbers of people will become dissatisfied with the faith contents, structures, values and world view presented in groups operating at the modal development level best described as Synthetic-Conventional. Of course such groups will always have their followers, people who are also operating at this faith level or at an earlier level; but the wider societal milieu is likely to encourage and promote increasing numbers of people to move beyond this faith stage and in so doing will undermine such people’s sense of fit within churches and groups that operate at a “stage three” level. The prognosis, from this study is that increasing numbers of committed Christian people will find the structures, faith operations and faith contents presented in ‘EPC’ churches unhelpful and disconnected from the rest of their lives in a postmodernist society. The prognosis must therefore be one of increasing numbers of leavers and more statements of dissatisfaction within the ‘EPC’ churches. Such moves will undoubtedly be viewed as threatening for churches and para-church groups that operate in this way.

While increasing numbers of people may, in a postmodernist societal milieu, be encouraged to move outside of faith environments characterised by the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith this does not imply that they will move in any predictable or particular ways. Some in this research have moved to hold ‘new faiths’ which they characterise as Christian, others have moved to an ‘agnostic’ position or a ‘new age’ faith, one to an atheistic view of the world. Hence while this thesis predicts that a postmodernist society will encourage more people to move outside of the ‘EPC’ church, it does not pretend to limit the faith directions such leavers will take. However from a Christian perspective this research indicates that at least some leavers will continue in a more broadly defined Christian faith. As the neo-secularisationists, discussed in Chapter 3, have indicated, faith is not being lost rather it is mutating.

However the prognosis of this research can also bring good news to the Christian church. What the research has found is that there are individual leavers and groups of leavers from ‘EPC’ churches who are building Christian faiths and new groups that nurture such faith at another faith stage consciousness and in culturally appropriate ways that connect well with the postmodernist culture. It is these individuals and groups that offer hope for the engagement of Christian faith and postmodernist society. This side of the study’s prognosis offers hope for a journey of transition that could be embarked upon by ‘EPC’ church organisations.

In the next chapter we will consider how those leavers who have continued in a Christian faith, albeit a marginalised faith from the perspective of those at the centre of ‘EPC’ churches can both speak to, and be spoken to by, the ‘EPC’ church.
Chapter Twelve

‘In Search of Turangawaewae’

“They drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout -
But love and I had the wit to win
We drew a circle that took them in.”

12.1 Introduction

Ward and Wild (1995:98-99) tell the following story which is divided into two scenes within the same churchyard. In telling the story they ask the reader to imagine an older church (complete with porch and lynchgate).

The first: the church is full of rather tense and tired women, some looking constantly towards the building, others gathered firmly around the porch, looking longingly to the hills beyond the lynchgate. Some wish they could be happily inside singing their favourite hymns, just as they were a year or two ago. Others long to be free of it all, to leave it behind, but somehow they just do not seem to manage it. Is it the worship that stops them, or the community they have belonged to for so long, or is it just habit? Who knows? Most of the women, however, are more aware of what has been important to them rather than what is important now, or how it might all be in the future.

The second scenario: the churchyard (which is a big one!) resembles a camp site. There are women everywhere, looking as though they are having a good time. Some sing together, others chat around the fire. One group is looking rather earnest as they eat a late breakfast together. There is laughter here, and there are tears; there is the buzz of conversation and waves of silence. Every now and then a woman wanders up to one of the church windows to see what is going on inside and who is there today. As the congregation comes out, some stay and talk and swell the numbers for lunch. (Some of course including the current vicar, look utterly disapprovingly at the camp site; they cannot understand how the bishop came to lose the case over the eviction.) The lunch party grows still further as small groups of women come to join them out of the hills. As Sunday afternoon rolls by the debates and the laughter get louder.

In the preceding chapters I have told the accounts of leavers from ‘EPC’ churches who fit into both of the scenarios in Ward and Wild’s story, those who are ‘marginal’ and whose focus is on what they have left and those who are ‘liminal’, (the second scenario), with a more futuristic gaze. In the last chapter I discussed the role of the wider postmodern society in setting an environment for change which is bringing forward a faith consciousness which is promoting an increasing number of adults to consider their faith in new ways. These are ways that both deviate from many of the post-‘EPC’-church journeys of leavers in the modernist period and offer new possibilities and threats to ‘EPC’ churches and structures.

I have outlined the tendency for ‘EPC’ church structures to entrench from rather than engage postmodernist values, ways of understanding and formulating belief systems and preferred ways of structuring and

499 Turangawaewae is a Maori word meaning “domicile”, “home”, or “home turf” (The Reed Dictionary of Modern Maori). The Williams Dictionary of New Zealand Language (1844) defines the root word ‘tūranga’ as ‘A standing Place’. Colloquially the word has come to mean ‘a place to stand’, ‘a spiritual home’ ‘a place or people to belong to.’

500 Poem by Edward Markham
It is now important to look forward and suggest what the faith contents and operations of the leavers who have been interviewed and the ‘liminal’ groups they have helped to mould offer in terms of models for church life and faith in a postmodernist society. Ward and Wild’s book ‘Guarding the Chaos’ (1995) describes the leave-taking of women from Christian churches in Great Britain and the faith groups that they have set up. In so doing they perceive the leavers as people who are finding new ways of Christian faith and being church. These are ways that the institutional church can learn from. Like them it is the perception of this research that:

. . . Christians who tend to express their faith outside or on the fringes of the institutional churches are not necessarily a bunch of unfaithful doubters whom the churches should tolerate or regard as a pastoral problem. Rather they are Christians called into the wilderness to find new ways of being church, forming faith communities with their own theological and liturgical life and with much to offer the ‘mainstream’ churches (Ward & Wild 1995:3).

12.2 Those at the ‘Margins’ Critique Those at the ‘Centre’

The interviews with ‘EPC’ church leavers identified a strong critique of the churches and para-church groups they had left. Here I intend to summarise the key critiques of the leavers in terms of what their new found faith and groups have to say to ‘EPC’ churches like those they left. To do this I have integrated the main comments of leavers under seven major headings. This is therefore a critique from those on the margins (predominantly the perspective of the Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders and those in liminal groups) directed towards those who lead ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups.

12.2.1 Those on the ‘Margins’ Have an Inherent Connection with the Emerging Postmodern Culture

The Integrated Way-finders are those who have come to realise as Bruggemann says “the truth is that there is no answer in the back of the book to which there is assent, no final arbiter who will finally adjudicate rival claims, not in this life anyway.” In so doing they are aware of the greater societal rejection of the meta narrative approach to life. They are aware that attempts to gain an objective stance from which to judge the legitimacy of faith is futile. They either consciously or intuitively realise that truth is multi-dimensional, paradoxical and connected both to historical and emerging representations of truth. These individuals and groups have a recognition of the truth claims of scriptures, religious traditions, science, reason and human philosophies. They are comfortable with the aspects of truth they have apprehended and conscious of both

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502 Ward and Wild (1995:38) speak of Jesus being called into the wilderness by the Spirit of God. They say: “The Spirit who drives Jesus into the desert is the same spirit who brought him the conviction of being called to do great things. . . . The wilderness is of God . . . to feel isolated is part of our training in God’s service. Our task is to accept the wilderness for what it is, resist the temptation to denigrate or despair and accept the wilderness as ours.”

503 The quote continues - “creating new ways of being church is necessary because of the need we all have of a container for our religious faith and its expression.” To which I would want to add the need for community and the essential aspect of the church as the ‘Laos Theou’, the people (community) of God.

504 Quoted in Tomlinson 1995:19
their truth system’s points of solidity and inherent voids. They reject the notion of an overarching meta-narrative that provides certainty, coherence and completeness. In their search for ‘truth-to-live-by’ they have broadened their understandings to leave room for the claims of others from divergent faith stances. In this way they are aware of the journey nature of the road to truth and the need for dialogue with others who are on similar journeys. In so doing they fit well with Bruggemann’s notion of constructing faith through funding the postmodern imagination.

Intentional Christian communities are engaged in what Walter Brueggemann calls the task of funding the postmodern imagination: “to provide the pieces, materials and resources out of which a new world can be imagined.” The struggling efforts of these communities . . . have little to do with forging a new ‘grand scheme or coherent systems, but the voicing of a lot of little pieces out of which people can put life together in fresh configurations” (Veling 1996:103).

Bruggemann says we should see the Bible as:

A resource book which “funds” our imagination with basic bits and pieces and offers us many different models. The result is plurality without a necessary collapse into pluralism and relativity, without sinking into the ‘anything goes’ of relativism.  

These leavers are ‘at home’ in the joining of the little pieces to form fresh faith configurations. In stating this I am aware of the cries of relativism that will be levelled at this line of argument. The ‘Integrated Way-finders’ and liminal groups have not rejected scripture’s or religious tradition’s basis to knowledge, but rather incorporated such knowledge on a convivial and personal basis rather than from propositional and external authoritative claims. Coupled with this is a preparedness to hold open the faith understandings of their ‘EPC’ faith to the questions of a new age. In this way they are open to McFague and Tracey’s notion that - “theological reflection must attend to the questions of our contemporary horizon, and this means paying attention to our experience, to our cultural symbols, to our political and economic social systems, to contemporary thinkers, writers, and artists, to all that shapes our horizon of understanding in both its positive and negative realities” (Veling, 1996:57).

Therefore the Integrated Way-finders and the liminal groups they form have a greater connection to the faith construction methods of a postmodernist era and a greater openness to the issues and questions of such a society. In this way they are aware of the need to form Christian faith understandings conducive to a new cultural milieu. As McFague states, “In order to do theology one must in each age do it differently. To refuse this task is to settle for a theology appropriate for some other time than one’s own”.  

12.2.2 Those on the ‘Margins’ Have Given Priority to the Questions of a New Age

Integrated Way-finders are personally aware of the way experience has tainted the certitudes of a previous ‘EPC’ faith understanding. Whether it be the personal struggles and suffering of life, the intellectual questioning of the bases of the ‘EPC’ faith, the realisation of the discriminative practices of such churches (especially towards women) or the seeming irrelevance of the church concerns with the concerns of a wider society, these leavers are aware that the old certainties they once held to no longer ‘fit’. Gadamer claims “experience is a process of disillusionment or disinvestiture that leaves us standing before the world without

505 Quoted in Tomlinson 1995:82
506 A number of the groups here characterised as liminal included people who had read widely in postmodernist literature, especially such literature written from a Christian perspective. Some groups had invited speakers to their sessions who spoke on the postmodernist theme and its effect on the church.
507 Quoted in Veling 1996:57
508 As Lineham (1994a:106-108) says in an article titled ‘Words to Would-be drop-outs’ - “The crucial question is to enable people to develop a faith that makes sense in the world. It is when people lack this that the real dropping out occurs”. 
the protection of familiar concepts." It is experience which “places us in the realm of the question which exposes us to the aporia of undecidability, the quandary that results when assurances and certainties no longer hold the way they used to. Yet hidden in a question’s indeterminacy is its power to place things in the open, to break the fixity of dominant opinions, to keep things fluid and open to new possibilities. . . . It is not so much we who raise questions, rather, questions arise or present themselves to us” (Veling 1996:42). As such these leavers are aware of the priority of the question. The unceasing question can be brought to the fore by personal suffering, and experience. This is the question that takes priority over the sure and quick answer. It is an awareness that fits with Gadamer’s hermeneutical priority to the question. An awareness which “allows the subject matter to orient the conversation rather than predetermined answers that push too hastily toward closure.”

Veling states that:

The liminal thinking of marginal thinkers . . . asks errant questions and suggests responses that often seem erratic or even erroneous. Since their reflection wanders, roams, and strays from the “proper” course, it tends to deviate from well-established ways . . . within the ambiguous space of liminality, hierarchies crumble and boundaries dissolve (Veling 1996:143).

In their critique of the ‘EPC’ church and faith the leavers place a priority on the question that needs to be ‘felt’ and honoured in all its complexity and intensity prior to and throughout the process of seeking ‘answers’. Their perception of the ‘EPC’ churches are of places that jumped too quickly and too surely to the certainties of its own answers without giving due cognisance to the question.

12.2.3. Those on the ‘Margins’ Have Learned From the Journey of Exile

The Integrated Way-finders have through personal experience come to the point that Paul Ricoeur talked of, the point “beyond the desert of criticism, where, we wish to be called again” (Ricoeur 1967:349). That is the place that seeks to reconstruct a faith out of the pieces of the past and the new understandings drawn from the personal journey into exile. For the Integrated Way-finders this faith has a distinctly Christian focus. Such groups and individuals tend to have the perspective that has learnt that there are other places beyond that of the modernist priority of objective detachment. As Veling states such a “disengaged (modernist) identity has created vast distortions in the modern age with its mindset of mastery and control over the world through a technological and disengaged thinking.” But it is the realisation that we cannot live solely in the deconstructive phase but must move to constructing again. As David Hoy states, “deconstruction may serve as a ‘useful antidote’ to the danger of totalising narratives, it can also become a ‘poison’ when it obliterates the vital ‘sense-making’ activity that hermeneutics performs.”

The Integrated Way-finders have realised the poisoning nature of a perpetual deconstruction of their previous faith, a poisoning that is even more dangerous in its linkage to a counter dependent orientation to everything ‘EPC’. In realising the personal damage to themselves that such a prolonged deconstruction and counter dependency brings they have moved on to build new faith understandings and a new interconnectedness with others of like and differing faith. A significant number of those who were interviewed had to all intents

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509 Quoted in Veling 1996:41
510 Quoted in Veling 1996:42
511 Veling 1996:190; italics mine.
512 Quoted in Veling 1996:145
513 M. Scott Peck (1990:199-200) comments “one of the greatest challenges, in fact, facing the church is how to facilitate the conversion of its members from stage II (corresponding to Fowlers stage 3 -Synthetic-Conventional) to stage IV (corresponding to Fowlers stage 5 -Conjunctive stage) without them having to spend a whole adult lifetime in stage III (corresponding to Fowler’s stages 4 - Individuative-Reflective stage). It is a challenge that the church has historically avoided rather than begun to face. As far as I am concerned, one of the two greatest sins of our sinful Christian church has been its discouragement through the ages of doubt. In so doing it has consistently driven growing people out of its potential community, often fixating them thereby in a perpetual resistance to spiritual insights. Conversely, the church is not going to meet this challenge until doubt is properly considered a Christian virtue - indeed a Christian responsibility. We neither can nor should skip over questioning in our development”. I have suggested that under the conditions of
and purpose become stuck in the poisoning round-about of deconstruction, counter-dependency and critique. The Integrated Way-finders have much to say to these leavers as well as those who deny the place of any deconstruction of the faith within the ‘EPC’ churches. “In other words, although there are times when we need to lose our way in order to be brought to a place of lostness, where the question can emerge, it is not this lostness itself that sustains us; rather, it serves to point us in a new direction, to find another way” (Veling 1996:145).

The point that needs to be made to the leaders within the ‘EPC’ churches is that there is valid, Christian faith on the ‘other side’ of the journey of the exiled which does not mean recapitulation to the faith contents and practices of the ‘EPC’ churches. And that, as Fowler says, space needs to be made within ‘EPC’ churches for people’s questions, doubts and experiences of life that do not fit neatly into ‘EPC’ faith doctrines. Many interviewees said it would have helped them if their church had allowed space for their questions and doubts. As Fowler says:

> Communities that call persons to ongoing adult development in faith will not fear the intimacy of conflict nor the inevitable presence in growing faith of doubt and struggle. Provision will be made for adults to bring their struggles with faith to word. Before prescriptions are offered, and without condemnation or accusation, they will be given the help of active listening in order to tell their present stories and visions of faith and to hear those of others. Such a community, by its regular celebrations and sharing of the major stories of its faith, will provide models by which adults can construct or reconstruct the faith truth in their lives for this period (Fowler 1995:296; italics as cited).

Fowler too found Christian faith in some of those he interviewed who exhibited faith operations consistent with the later stages of faith development. He says:

> While unable to speak for others, I am convinced that the normative image of adulthood envisioned in Christian faith leads toward Universalising Faith (stage 6). That is to say, discipleship to Christ, if radically followed to full maturity, would bring persons to a way of spending and being spent in their lives that would express loyalty to the rule of God and in covenant relations with a commonwealth of being (Fowler 1995:295; italics mine).

### 12.2.4 Those on the ‘Margins’ Indicate Other Ways of Structuring Christian Community than that Typically Employed by ‘EPC’ Churches

The liminal groups that I observed and those the interviewees described in this research have much in common with the emergent faith groups that Riddell (1998) writes about in his models of an emerging church in what he calls the ‘Post Christian West’. The structural emphasis that he identifies includes a ‘high priority for relationships’, a focus on what is ‘honest and real’ a desire for ‘minimal structures’, rented rather than owned buildings and maintaining a relatively small size of group. Riddell says “they are wary of growing to a size where the relationships which they value so much may be inhibited.514 The emergence of such groups with values that contradict so clearly the church growth values espoused by many ‘EPC’ churches needs to be considered.

Leonardo Boff calls our age one of ‘general anonymity’. Where individuals are “swallowed up in the massive structures of macro-organisations and bureaucracies.” Veling says:

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514 Riddell 1998:170. These groups are linked to what Veling calls Intentional Christian Communities which will be discussed later in this chapter.
yet Boff sees signs of renewed hope in the growing phenomenon of small Christian communities springing up around the world, communities that are characterized by their desire to reclaim a strong commitment to mutual relationships, inclusive participation, and honest dialogue among equals. This relational character of intentional Christian communities represents a significant counter-movement to the sense of isolation and estrangement typical of twentieth-century life (Veling 1996:120).

The focus on whole-of-life relationships is evident within the groups that I observed in this research. In this way they typically differ from church based groups that focus on segmented aspects of people’s lives typically the ‘spiritual’. The liminal groups in contrast had a more wholistic focus on the wider lives of the participants. They were as the story of the church scenes at the beginning of this chapter indicate places of laughter and tears. A second aspect of their structure was the place of eating together. This was a universal feature of the groups I observed. Generally this implied more than coffee and supper and included meals together, in what could perhaps be best described as a ‘natural family atmosphere’ rather than a ‘hospitality situation.

Such an emphasis raises questions regarding the most applicable structuring of Christian communities in an increasingly postmodern society. Does the postmodernist society indicate that smaller, less clearly structured groups with a high priority on relationships, honesty, integrity and reality have greater connection with the emerging society. If this is the case what does it imply for the agendas of the meta-church models so much in vogue at the time of writing? As Tomlinson says:

> People see in the church just more of what they see and reject in the outside world: hierarchies, bureaucracies, and power struggles. And as Drane says, ‘They know that this is not what will bring them personal spiritual fulfillment.’ This is not a time for churches to be working towards ‘bigger’, ‘better’ and ‘more powerful’; it is a time for the church to follow the example of its Lord and divest itself of its power, with all the personality jostling, political maneuverings and empire-building that goes with it- the postmodern world is not impressed! (1995:144-145).

Tentative considerations to the questions raised here regarding the future of ‘EPC’ churches and post-church groups will be discussed further in the following chapter.

12.2.5 Those on the ‘Margins’ Have an Openness to People who Think Differently

A dominant theme among the interviewees from three of the four faith categories used in this study (Reflexive Exiles, Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders) was their openness to those of differing faith and ideological viewpoints. This was commonly expressed in two areas. The first was an openness towards those of differing sexual orientations, principally homosexuals The interviewees in these three faith categories tended to move away from a typical ‘EPC’ stance of calling such sexual behaviour ‘sin’ to a more accepting stance. The second area involved who would finally be acceptable in ‘heaven’. Those interviewed from these three faith categories tended to be inclusive of people from other religions and those of no religion. Again this would be in direct contradiction to the dominant beliefs held within ‘EPC’ churches on ‘salvation’. As Stuart said:

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515 Often this laughter includes subjects that are typically off limits within ‘EPC’ church groups. An example would be an inclusion of sexual jokes that would normally be considered suspect in ‘EPC’ church circles (cf Tomlinson, 1995:42).

516 What is implied here is that such groups met and ate together in ways consistent with extended family gatherings. These were often informal, loosely or spontaneously organised conversationally rich eating occasions.

517 Italics as cited.

518 This is a topic picked up on in the genre of recent writings from evangelicals questioning some of the traditional evangelical positions. Nigel Wright (1996) for example dedicates one chapter to the topic ‘A Kinder, Gentler Damnation?’. Here again there are links to the faith consciousness that Fowler sees emerging in modern society:
We should therefore at least understand that doctrines can never be more than an approximation to the transcendent truth. This should encourage openness to other traditions.\textsuperscript{519}

The openness expressed by Integrated Way-finders is not an outright acceptance of anything and everything. It is not simply a move to relativism, but an openness enabled through deep personal conviction. As Walter Lowe states:

Openness is a second-level virtue. Often we speak of openness as though it were a primary virtue like faith, hope, love, prudence, or courage. But it is not; it is derivative. When you have only openness you don’t have much. A window stuck open is as useless as a window stuck shut. In either case you have lost the use of the window. . . . Openness is possible for persons or communities who know who they are. When the spine of identity is well established, it is possible to risk relating in depth to those who are different from the self.\textsuperscript{520}

12.2.6 Those on the ‘Margins’ Have a Broad Eclectic Approach to Liturgy and Worship

The groups that are emerging display a willingness to draw liturgical prayer and worship patterns from a wide variety of sources. They tend to cross old theological and denominational boundaries within this search. Examples of the material that is used include liturgical approaches of mainline churches, writings from historical Catholic origins or the production of their own liturgical forms as in the case of the ‘Bread & Breakfast’ quasi-church group. Often there is a new emphasis on symbolism and more contemplative forms of worship. Added to these a number of groups included in their spiritual quest the use of material from outside the church. Examples of these would include the use of psycho-drama, courses like the Enneagram, and feminist approaches and understandings. Some also spoke of a greater connection between the ‘everyday’ aspects of their lives and their faith. Scott Malcolm (a New Zealand Baptist pastor) summed up this more inclusive attitude in saying:

So rugby is connected to resurrection and sex to salvation, playing is connected to praying and business to baptism. It is important to welcome all life’s experiences into worship, and to welcome all of worship into our life’s experiences.\textsuperscript{521}

12.2.7 Those on the ‘Margins’ Point to a Difficult Journey for the ‘EPC’ Church

Perhaps one of the greatest lessons that the leavers have to offer the ‘EPC’ churches and their leadership is their knowledge of the difficult journey they individually travelled from the centre of an ‘EPC’ church to the formation of an integrated and communal Christian faith. In so doing they may allay forlorn hopes within the institutional structures that the ‘EPC’ churches can continue into a postmodern society in ‘a-business-as-usual’ mode. The journeys of the individual leavers tend to indicate that this will not be possible. The long journey of exile from their faith understandings, values, and expected behaviours through periods of deconstruction, examination of the ‘taken-for-granteds’ and eventual reconstruction of the faith components that survived their scrutiny and experience into a new faith construct cannot be bypassed by either individuals, groups or churches. ‘EPC’ church leaders need a realisation of the extent of dismantling and rebuilding necessary to move the present ‘EPC’ faith and church structures to a place of connection with a

“In this emerging postmodern era, the churches are called to move from perceiving themselves as gatekeepers of heaven to being leaders in establishing God’s commonwealth of justice and love on earth. We are called to lead the movement in public life from concentration on saving faith to the unifying and empowering possibilities of ‘ordering’ faith” (Fowler 1996:178).

\textsuperscript{519} Field notes 19/12/97  
\textsuperscript{520} Quoted in Fowler 1991:156; italics as cited.  
\textsuperscript{521} Paper presented by Scott Malcolm to the NZ Baptist Pastors Mission Forum September 1996.
post-Christian and postmodern society. The degree of fundamental change should not be underestimated. As the head Youth Pastor at Willow Creek (one of the exemplars of the present church growth models) says:

Willow Creek was the last gasp of an enlightenment based approach to church. An approach that has been happening for quite a while, but this is the last gasp of it. We have taken an old church approach (Willow Creek) and we’ve added creative elements to it, drama, contemporary music and this and that. But it is a lot like what we’ve done for a hundred plus years. That’s modernity, that will end with this generation - the ‘Buster’ generation. . . . I think we have to figure out a whole new approach based on a new mindset.

If the disjunction between the faith, the journeys and the structures of ‘church’ held to by leavers and their previous church based faith and the structures they were then part of can be seen for what they are - a huge disjunction! - then the substantial nature of the change that is facing the ‘EPC’ churches in order to be ‘relevant’ in a postmodern world can at least be begun to be grasped. Because of the enormity of such structural and foundational societal change it is not surprising that many leaders in such churches call for ‘business-as-usual’. There is however a sense in which Fowler’s notion of providing models and templates may alleviate some journeying to dead-ends and help provide a ‘map’ of both what must be left behind and what the terrain and endpoint of the journey may be. A ‘map’ such as this is what many of the leavers interviewed would have appreciated through their own wanderings outside the church. It is such a ‘map’ that to some extent has been provided through this present study in chapters six through nine.

12.3 Those at the ‘Centre’ Critique those at the Margins

If the critique of the leavers raises a number of questions for the ‘EPC’ churches then the perspective of those within such churches towards the leavers pose questions of similar magnitude. It is to these questions, the questions of those within ‘EPC’ churches that we will now turn. As the leaders within the ‘EPC’ churches look at the faith of the leavers and the ‘liminal’ groups that are emerging they too have critical issues to raise.

12.3.1 Those at the ‘Centre’ Perceive a Priority to Mission

The ‘EPC’ churches have in their own communities and through connections with world mission agencies been heavily involved in mission. As already stated the ‘EPC’ churches are growing rapidly across the globe, especially in the two-thirds world. This is due to the concentrated effort of such churches toward world and local mission.

In chapter two we looked at the essence of the church as being two fold, the ‘Laos Theou’ doing the ‘Missio Dei’. This second aspect, the mission of the church, is something that was not as clearly evident in the vast majority of the groups of leavers. The focus of such groups tended to be the faith concerns they were experiencing and there was little emphasis on ‘mission’ to those who were not part of their group. Neave (1996:14) under the heading doing justice suggests to Intentional Christian Communities “if we are a white middle class group, lets keep asking what is our role in bringing about the reign of God and ushering in the new creation. Alongside building community in our group, how can we shift resources and work for justice?” These are important considerations for many of the post-church groups. Their neglect of the mission priority is consistent with one of the weaknesses of the later stages of faith as outlined by Fowler. This lack of a priority to mission was a concern of one leader in a world mission organisation. When he heard of another group of leavers who were moving out of an ‘EPC’ church he said:

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522 A term used to indicate ‘Generation X’ or those born after 1964.
523 Audio Tape of presentation by Dieter Zander (‘Teaching Pastor’ Willow Creek) Willow Creek 1996 Leadership Conference. What is implied in this statement is that Busters will not tolerate the modernist approaches to faith. Zander goes on to advocate that in the present transition time between modernity and postmodernity, a time in which modernity’s influence is declining as postmodernity is increasing, there may need to be two forms of church, one that ‘ministers’ to the older generations and a new church for the Busters and those influenced by postmodernist culture. Here Zander clearly sees Willow Creek’s style of church as modernist in orientation. Willow Creek as an exemplar of the church growth movement is built on management, marketing and quantitative research methods consistent with modernity. See Pritchard 1996.
(Mission Leader) - Well that’s another group which is lost to the cause of overseas development in mission (16.77).

This was not true of all the groups that I was to study. At least one had a high priority to local mission particularly to refugees who were moving into their city. This was considered an important ingredient for those who made up the group.

In part the move away from giving energy to mission may be a reflection of the leaver’s attitude to the ‘activism’ characteristic of ‘EPC’ churches. As Bebbington stated activism is one of the special marks of evangelical religion.\(^{524}\) In moving away from their church involvement many of the leavers, in keeping with the transitions of faith they are involved in and the more reflective nature of society, are adopting a greater degree of reflectiveness particularly towards their faith.

**12.3.2 Those at the ‘Centre’ Perceive a Priority for Evangelism and Conversion**

Linked to the priority of mission, is a priority for one sub-category of mission, that of evangelism. Not surprisingly in leaving the ‘EPC’ churches, leavers have stood back from this core priority of the evangelical movement. Alongside of this is a suspicion of the role of evangelism and ‘conversion’ in favour of the more gradual process of faith development and maturity. Whilst there can be little doubt that the evangelical movement has focused on evangelism and conversion at the expense of a similar focus on spiritual development\(^ {525}\) and the journeys of faith development the reverse priority can be seen in the groups of leavers analysed in this study.\(^ {526}\) This is one of the weaknesses of the conjunctive faith discussed by Fowler who says people at this stage can have a “Subdued sense of the imperative to share and commend the Christian story in evangelisation” (Fowler 1987:95).

Fowler’s work on faith development discusses what he calls the dual movements of conversion and development as being both separate and necessary ingredients of the dance of faith (Fowler 1987:94). Here the leavers, the groups they form and the ‘EPC’ churches can act as a necessary counterbalance of each other’s priorities.

**12.3.3 Those at the ‘Centre’ Perceive the Need for Investment in the Faith of the Next Generation**

The mission leader quoted above also commented on the groups of leavers he had met which had little energy for supporting the faith of those younger than themselves.

(Mission Leader) - . . . the biggest danger area of people dropping out of faith is (they leave) before they hit that stage of feeling responsible for the next generation. So that is in the thirty to forty age group where our individualism is still there enough for them to say ‘the church is not meeting my needs’. They haven’t grown into the maturity to see that they’ve got to put something back into it so they drop out. Drop out permanently (16.103).

Here the mission leader quoted highlights a weakness of many of the groups set up by leavers. Such groups are geared to cater for people grappling with the same issues regarding church and engaged in similar faith transitions. In so doing these groups are unaware of the degree to which they alienate people from differing faith stages. This would also be true of the children of many of those interviewed. Such groups focus on the issues at one point of the faith journey which has led to a neglect for and potential lack of energy given to the faith development, education and nurture of their own children’s faith as well as that of other people with whom they are in contact.

\(^{524}\) Discussed in Chapter 3.

\(^{525}\) Alister McGrath for example states: “My concern is that evangelicals have not paid anything like the necessary attention to this major theme (spiritual development) of Christian life and thought. As a result, evangelicalism has become impoverished” (McGrath 1994:125; italics mine).

\(^{526}\) This is not true of all the groups. The Perry’s quasi-church group for example talked of people joining the groups and beginning to find their own faith and ‘becoming Christian.’
Coupled with this there is a tendency for people involved in difficult faith transitions to foist their questions and difficulties into contexts in which they only serve to destabilise the faith of others who are not themselves facing similar issues. Those within ‘EPC’ churches may be right in asserting that such groups will not attract many teenagers, young adults and those outside of Christian faith, at least if they continue in their present form.

12.3.4 Those at the ‘Centre’ Perceive a Need of Somewhere to Belong

I titled this chapter ‘In Search of Turangawaewae’ in order to highlight the need of leavers to find again a place of spiritual community and belonging. Turangawaewae is a Maori word used to describe a person’s place of belonging. The exilic experience is essentially an experience of ‘homelessness’, a homelessness which links with the disturbing absence of meaning and sense of our own lostness which is prevalent in the modern age. Berger et al. pointed to this feature of modern society in 1973 saying:

The pluralisation of social life-worlds has a very important effect in the area of religion. Through most of empirically available human history, religion has played a vital role in providing the overarching canopy of symbols for the meaningful integration of society. The various meanings, values and beliefs operative in a society were ultimately ‘held together’ in a comprehensive interpretation of reality that related human life to the cosmos as a whole. Indeed, from a sociological and social-psychological point of view, religion can be defined as a cognitive and normative structure that makes it possible for men (sic) to feel ‘at home’ in the universe. This age old function of religion is seriously threatened by pluralisation (1973:79-80).

Berger et al. argue that through pluralisation of meanings and meaning systems, science and modern technology “the modern rationalisation of consciousness” and secularisation “modern man (sic) has suffered from a deepening condition of homelessness” (1973:80). This sense of ‘homelessness’ has only deepened since Berger et al. wrote. While ‘homelessness’ is one aspect of modern and postmodern society it connects with the sense of ‘homelessness’ associated with faith transitions. Parks (1986:64) who looks at the form of community associated with the transition from Synthetic-Conventional faith (stage 3) to Individuative-Reflective faith (stage 4) talks of people in the midst of this faith transition desiring a more ‘diffuse community’. This is the result of the connection between unqualified relativism and the problematic nature of any particular relationship. Parks says: “In the initial relinquishing of the assumed norms of relationship and the expanding of the boundaries of the social horizon, the form of community may become diffuse. An expansive, exploratory, experimental, and tentative character may predominate, for when any one truth or perspective is as good as another, there is some corresponding sense that any sort of relationship may be as good as any other” (1986:64).

There is a sense in which to really belong to a tradition one must leave that same tradition and stand outside of it. Simmel speaks of the need to stand outside of a community in order to really enter it. However many of the leavers are effectively becoming perpetually even quintessentially homeless. That is, there is a

527 Veling draws on the life of the Jewish poet Edmond Jabès in illustration of this leaving in order to really belong. He says “There was a time in Jabe’s life when his Jewishness was no more than a cultural given, until he was forced from his homeland by the very fact of his Jewishness. Suddenly, he was starkly confronted with his own Jewish identity, and he spent the rest of his life grappling, in one way or another, with the question: what does it mean to be Jewish? Or rather, what does it mean to be an exiled Jew. A Jew who only becomes aware of belonging to the Jewish people and tradition through the experience of nonbelonging? This may seem paradoxical, writes Jabès, “but it is precisely in that break - in that non-belonging in search of its belonging that I am without doubt most Jewish” (1996: 17 ;italics as cited).

528 Simmel - “For only whoever stands outside his boundary in some sense knows that he stands within. That is knows it as a boundary” (Quoted in Cohen and Taylor 1992:64).
trend toward a privatization of their faith. Fowler sees a potential weakness of the conjunctive stage where people “can develop a deep sense of cosmic aloneness or homelessness” (Fowler 1987:94). This privatization of faith stands in sharp contrast to the essence of Christian faith described as the “Laos Theou” - the people of God. The Christian faith has throughout history endorsed the communal nature of faith. The Greek word for church used in the New Testament is the word ‘Ekklesia’ which means the assembly or the assembly of the called out ones.

Those within the ‘EPC’ churches can critique the leaver’s acquiescence to the modern western thought with its inherent privatisation of faith and point the leavers to the need for continued ‘communitas’. What is needed is a sense of what the Maori people call ‘turangawaewae’, a place or a people with which to belong.

12.3.5 Those at the ‘Centre’ Have a Preparedness to Learn from the Classics of the Faith

Many of the post-church groups that were observed as part of this study allow little space for the classic writings of the Christian faith, perhaps especially the scriptures. In the exile phase people characteristically turn away from the classic writings as sources of knowledge and faith and tend to turn to other sources, whether they be psychological, scientific, rational, or other ideologies and beliefs. The groups developed amongst leavers can tend to continue this reluctance in terms of the Christian tradition, scriptures and classics. These groups can instead give large amounts of time to discussion with little reference to these classics of the faith. Because such groups tend to involve a number of people who may be at different places in their own faith transitions there is a tendency for the programme of the groups to be swayed by those reluctant to incorporate scripture and Christian tradition.

12.3.6 Those at the ‘Centre’ Perceive the Need to Maintain Connections with Other Larger Conglomerations of People

Part of the strength of the evangelical spectrum of the church has been its ability to cross denominational boundaries in order to bring together resources for the sake of larger projects. In New Zealand such projects have included the building of establishments like ‘The Bible College of New Zealand’ and Radio Rhema. A prominent recent example is the rapid growth of the ‘Promise Keepers’ movement. The separating out of the leavers into smaller, isolated and group focused gatherings has the potential to undermine the influence that the ‘EPC’ churches have been able to have through larger combined operations and structures. For this to be overcome there needs to be greater resourcing given to the networking of groups and churches in areas of mutual interest.

Within the New Zealand context the WRC National Newsletter (which is particularly focused on resourcing women’s groups) and the Futures Group of the Methodist Church may offer the beginnings of networks of post-church groups. The ‘Futures Group’ has recently employed a Resource Consultant who has been tasked with identifying and meeting with faith communities throughout New Zealand in order to consider ongoing resourcing of such groups and the potential for networking. Part of this has been the formation of a homepage on the internet where groups can share resources and list their interest in being part of the network.

529 “Veling quotes David Tracey as saying - “It is this experience of homelessness that is our most fundamental question today, provoking a ‘not-at-homeness which is one, perhaps the most familiar, kind of experience in our situation.’ As Richard Bernstein suggests, this is not simply an intellectual question. Rather, it is a question that goes to the heart of “our everyday moral, social and political experiences” (quoted in Veling 1996:87).

530 Drawing on the previous work of Tracey and Gadamer Fowler defines a ‘classic’ “in any literature as an expression of the human spirit, born of a particular context and time. The classic opens up and focuses some dimension of experience with such engaging power and depth that persons from other times and contexts find themselves addressed, expanded, and informed by it. Classics evoke, in Paul Ricoeur’s words, a ‘surplus of meanings’. They give rise to conflicts of interpretation” (Fowler 1996:185).

531 The Bible College of New Zealand (a theological training school) and Radio Rhema (a Christian radio station in New Zealand) have been able to cross denominational and church boundaries while still working through these structures to raise financial support, clientele and skilled workers.

532 The homepage is sited at: http://www.futuresgroup.org.nz
12.3.7 Those at the ‘Centre’ Perceive the Need for Energy and Risk Taking in the Name of Faith

Fowler writes of the weaknesses of the conjunctive stage of faith saying there “can be a sense of paralysis and retreat into a private world of spirituality”. This sense of immobility can “if prolonged- lead to a cutting of the call to partnership with God” (Fowler 1987:95). By the term partnership with God, Fowler is referring to the involvement in the praxis of God in the world.

The critiques directed towards these groups on the margins reflect their ‘liminal’ character and are effectively asking where these groups are leading the leavers. Are these liminal groups preliminary groups from which new forms of church will emerge or are they merely marginal groupings on the edge of the ‘EPC’ churches? It is the question that Neave (1996:14) asks in her report on emerging faith communities: “will we continue to think of ourselves as ‘alternative’ or ‘experimental’? While this is helpful in recognising that we are in process, and not institutionalised, I think it is important for us to begin to be more intentional in claiming that ‘we are church’ and that the work these groups are engaged in is part of the ‘real thing’”.

12.4 Hope of an Ongoing Dialogue

Having discussed some specific areas in which the liminal groups (developed by ‘EPC’ church leavers) have valid criticisms of the ‘EPC’ church they have left as well as the equally valid criticisms of those at the centre of the ‘EPC’ churches of the leavers, I now want to postulate one way forward - the place of an ongoing dialogue. In the next chapter I will consider alternative directions both for the ‘EPC’ churches and the post-church groups. Here I will suggest the possibility of an ongoing dialogue between the margins and the centre. A dialogue that respects and acknowledges the validity of the stance of the other. By acknowledging the stance of the other I am suggesting that those within the ‘EPC’ church leadership need to acknowledge the validity of Christian faith outside of their doors too. They need to recognise the legitimacy of these people’s faith journey. Conversely many of those who have left the church need to remember that others may choose to remain part of the church community and do not need to leave simply to be acceptable in their eyes. For both those in the church and outside of it this implies the acknowledgement of each other’s belonging to the faith and a preparedness to listen to each other.533

Tracey states that “it is important to Gadamer (and Heidegger) that the German term for ‘belonging’ (gohören) contains the root hören, which means ‘to listen to.’”534

Belonging to tradition is like participating in a conversation, and central to the art of conversation is the process of listening: listening not just to each other, but a deeper listening that listens “to that to which we belong” in the to and fro of conversation. . . . We are no longer trying to dominate or control the conversation; rather, we willingly join with our conversation partner in a mutually participative process that brings out the nature of the subject matter guiding us. We are listening for that which is emerging between us as a new, unthought possibility.535

This thesis suggests that there is room for an ongoing conversation between those on the margins and those at the centre of the ‘EPC’ church structures. Not only that there is room for such dialogue, but that the possibilities of fruitful engagement with an increasingly postmodern society demand such dialogue.536 Those

533 In discussion with the members of one post-church group I was aware that the Anglican Bishop of that region had approached the group to begin discussions with them regarding what the Anglican church could learn from them as a group. In the interview with these group members they indicated that the Bishop was planning to attend one of their meetings.
534 Quoted in Fowler 1996:40
535 Quoted in Veling 1996:87
536 The dialogue called for here is similar to that proposed between missiologies by Escobar. Escobar (1991) distinguishes three distinct missiologies within evangelicalism which he suggests “the cause of mission could benefit greatly from if the three could find ways to interact” (1991:9). The three groups he identifies are the 1. Post-imperial missiology which emanates in Great Britain and Europe (‘what characterizes this missiology is that the traditional evangelical missionary zeal is matched with a disposition to take courageously the lessons
of history and to explore God’s Word using the best tools of Biblical scholarship” op.cit.:10-11) and is evident in agencies such as Tear Fund, the South American Missionary Society and Overseas Missionary Fellowship. 2. Managerial Missiology (which has “historically used statistical analysis as a way of measuring the effect of missionary action in an effort to reduce the lack of clarity that surrounded it, to offer objective criteria to define and evaluate mission success. This evaluative methodology was at the service of a narrowly defined concept of mission as numerical growth of the church” op.cit.:11) and is evident in groups like AD 2000. 3. A Critical Missiology from the periphery (which brings the perspective of the third world indigenous peoples. “The question for this missiology is not how much missionary action is required today but what kind of missionary action is necessary” op.cit.:12) and is evident in the writings of people like Rene Padilla and Orlando Costas. Escobar says the “the time for dialogue and construction is short” (op.cit.:13) and calls the three groups to open dialogue together.

Veling states: - “I also employ the term marginal Christian community to designate those intentional communities that have adopted a critical distance from mainstream church life. Generally speaking I am referring to small, intentional communities (approximately twelve to twenty adults, along with children), who gather on a regular basis (at least biweekly) to seek genuine ways of being together as Christian communities: committed to mutuality and inclusiveness, attuned to the sacred texts and rituals of their tradition, and engaged in the world as communities of public presence in culture and society. I am also using the word intentional to distinguish the life of small communities in the relatively affluent, middle-class cultures of Western societies from the life of those communities situated in Third World contexts and generally referred to as basic or base communities. Intentional means “deliberate”, “attentive” or “actively pursued”, small community life does not come naturally for members of Western, individualistic cultures. It is something we must consciously choose and consistently work at” (Veling 1996:3; italics as cited).

The relevant works of Habermas, Gadamer and Derrida are referenced in Veling 1996.
12.5 A Hermeneutical Model for an Ongoing Conversation

Veling (1996) suggests that the model of hermeneutics provides an opportunity for just such an ongoing dialogue. He says:

I suggest that hermeneutics provides an alternative way of looking at marginality; the space of the margins is the site of vital creativity, a creativity that is generated in the ongoing interplay between belonging and nonbelonging, attachment and alienation, tradition and innovation. Rather than seeing marginal space as a typically narrow, withdrawn, alienated space, we need to allow the margins to breathe, to be the very life and breath of the book - to make wide the margin I believe intentional communities can purposefully claim this marginal space as their own and in this way become intentionally marginal rather than peripherally marginal (Veling 1996:2).

Needless to say such an ongoing dialogue would require the acceptance and validation of both the marginal (who I would prefer to call the liminal) and those at the centre of the ‘EPC’ churches. It would entail an awareness of those at the centre of the ‘EPC’ churches. Walter Bruggemann says “we are not always called to the centre; rather we are also called to heed voices of marginality in the tradition that are away from the centre.” There needs to be an acknowledgement that such marginal groups can provide, as David Power suggests, “a creative critique of the established ecclesiastical order, supported by a living proposal of alternative models.” As such these groups can provide what Edward Schillebeeckx calls a ‘loyal opposition’ or a ‘provisional illegality.’ In this hermeneutical model Veling is proposing that “the institution needs to respect and value intentional Christian communities as a vital and dynamic force for renewal in the church and to rediscover its own ‘meaning and responsibility in the creation, support and nurture of the communities.’ But he continues by saying that “for their part, intentional communities need to understand their need for institution: for the maintenance of their continuity, for preservation of their identity, and for the possibilities of networking over against the threat of fragmentation” (Veling 1996:13).

As he goes on to say there are real dangers for marginal groups in cutting themselves off from the mainstream of the tradition:

The critical distance adopted by marginal communities can all too easily lead to being cut off, in which case their prophetic critique loses its power to truly function as a reforming/transforming voice. Such communities are no longer suspicious but rebellious, no longer risking a trust in tradition, but denying tradition’s claims, no longer marginal and prophetic but hardened and cynical. A key educative task for marginal communities is to find ways that can lead them back into a vital and vigorous conversation with (tradition). Such communities are typically very good at exercising critique, but they are often worn down by it. They need to learn how to transform their distancing, wary, critical sensibilities into open, conversational, questioning sensibilities (Veling 1996:55).

Separatism, while it may appear the more radical stance, only serves the needs of the institutional order, demanding that communities either stay or leave on its terms.

Needless to say, the creation of such a model of ongoing acceptance, validation and dialogue between the margins and the centre would not be easily achieved. There are inherent suspicions, misunderstandings, bad previous experiences, and theological difficulties that would need to be overcome. However for the sake of

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539 Quoted in Veling 1996:10
540 Quoted in Veling 1996:11
541 Quoted in Veling 1996:11
542 Quoted in Veling, 1996:14
543 One group I tracked during the course of this study wanted to remain a part of the church they had been heavily involved in but were told they were beyond the ‘diversity parameter’ of that church. Speaking with group members, it quickly became clear that they felt excluded, isolated, and stigmatised by such comments. For meaningful dialogue to be achieved greater degrees of acceptance will be required. In many instances for
a legitimate and viable Christian presence in our increasingly postmodern age it may not be easily ignored. Evelyn Whitehead drawing on the work of Richard Schoenherr sees:

... the two poles of community and institution in a dialectical tension with each other rather than in contradiction to each other. Religious groups require both centralizing and decentralizing movements. ... it seems that 'community' and 'institution' - margin and center - will always live with some tensional suspicion of each other. No religious group can be sustainable over time without the ongoing interplay between these two renewing and centralizing activities of the Spirit. 544

Veling draws on the work of the hermeneutical theorists in his development of his argument. He speaks of the Christian tradition as a book, “a book that encompasses the whole effective tradition of Christianity” (op.cit.:17). The book he says “represents our radical belonging to the tradition; absence and exile represent our alienation from the book, and the margins of the book represent the place where a new interpretation and the writing of tradition occur” (op.cit.:17). For Veling:

... intentional Christian communities are living in this gap, this marginal space, along the edges of Christian tradition, a tradition in which they feel themselves both radically immersed and disturbingly alienated. They live both inside and outside of a religious tradition that both provokes their existence as possibility and haunts their existence as non-possibility. They recognise the value of belonging - they recognise the provoking claim this tradition makes on their lives, both in its disclosive ability (telling us something about who we are) and its transformative potential (telling us something about who we might become), such that it demands our interpretative attention. Yet they also experience a keen sense of nonbelonging. They recognise that the Christian tradition also contains many distortions, that it can tend to exclude and repress, that it has as much to do with power and domination as it does with truth and disclosure, and, as such, that it demands both critique and suspicion (op.cit.:18; italics as cited).

He then proposes, drawing on the dialogical model of Gadamer, a conversation between margin and centre a “to-and-fro dialogue in which neither partner in the conversation assumes dominance” (op.cit.:19). What is needed in this conversation is the critical edge on behalf of the marginal communities rather than a divisive wedge.

One way to redeem rebellion is to lead marginal communities out of a paralyzing critical mode into the hermeneutical openness of the question, from the driving wedge of constant criticism into the cutting edge of ongoing questioning. ... Gadamer’s preference is for giving a priority to the mode of open questioning over against the dominance of a critical thinking that too often distances the interpreter from the subject matter at hand (op.cit.:54; italics mine).

Quoting Gallagher, he reminds the critical (marginal) communities that to question a tradition requires an active participation in the hermeneutical process of tradition, rather than a ‘pretentious disconnection’ from the process” (op.cit.:53).

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544 Quoted in Veling 1996:13
Secondly, Veling draws on Habermas’s critical theory and the notion of a ‘hermeneutic of suspicion’, that is a hermeneutic from the position of an exile. Habermas says “we cannot simply trust ourselves to the conversation of tradition. Rather, he believes that the emancipatory interest of critical reflection does not enable us to gain a critical perspective from which to evaluate tradition in order to move beyond its constraints” (op.cit.:85).

A hermeneutics of suspicion - perhaps this phrase throws some light on that strange remark made by one of Jabès’s imaginary rabbis: “exile, too, is an option”. Can we break with our past - with all that comes down to us - to find a place from which to critique that to which we belong? This is where the metaphor of “exile” becomes important; it brings to mind the haunting proximity of home. The experience of finding ourselves exiled from the book’s pages is the experience of living in a strange, foreign land, that nevertheless calls out to the land of our belonging (op.cit.:78).

The third perspective that Veling draws on is the deconstructionist (or poststructuralist) perspective of Jacques Derrida. Derrida like Gadamer but unlike Habermas believes that we are always ‘inside the text’, and that there is nothing outside of the text. He is concerned “that we never cease questioning ‘the status of what we take to be our centre, our native home, our arche” (op.cit.:90).”

Deconstruction represents an ethical-political openness to the claim of the other and the different, the “rebellious” and the “absent”. Derrida’s deconstructive work has the quality of an “exile bearing witness” to all those who have been excluded and banished from the mainstream discourses of Western tradition (op.cit.:91).

The deconstructionist approaches show how ideas, practices and structures are the effects of larger discourses, what Lyotard calls ‘meta-narratives’. The deconstructionist task therefore becomes one of “‘destroying’ the authority of meta-narratives by giving them the status of ‘relativised narratives’ and standing in critical opposition to dominant orderings” (op.cit.:115). The example that Veling uses is that of feminist theologians who he sees as having “engaged a profound hermeneutic of suspicion, uncovering oppression, alienation and discrimination against women and other oppressed groups caught in the network of patriarchal hierarchies and dualisms” (op.cit.:105). Drawing on the work of Gadamer, Habermas and Derrida, Veling comes to the conclusion that:

Perhaps it is a false division to speak of “inside the book” and “outside the book”, as if the two are opposed to each other. Marginal hermeneutics is at one and the same time both inside and outside the book - the same book only able to be read “twice” (with trust and suspicion) because the ways of belonging and nonbelonging live off each other’s approaches to the book . . . marginal hermeneutics is this “being both”. It is the site of the “between” such that it resists being pinned down (unlike the book’s center, where the pages are firmly stapled), just as much as it resists being lost or forced off the page (but rather, claims the

545 Habermas critiques the dialogical hermeneutics of Gadamer, claiming that Gadamer allows us no freedom to leave the book in order to gain a critical perspective on the ways of our belonging. Whereas Gadamer highlights the way all interpretation is held by the process of tradition, Habermas believes that the hold of tradition can be loosened or set free by critical reflection. Whereas Gadamer is concerned with ‘understanding’ and allowing the book to ‘disclose’ itself, Habermas is concerned with ‘emancipation’ and freeing ourselves from all that is ‘distorted’ within the book (op.cit.:79)

546 Deconstruction cautions us against trying to save ourselves through our constructions. The temptation is to seek security, in a vast number of complex ways, against the abyss, the chaos, the different, the other, the unknown - whatever threatens us. By seeking security through our own constructions, we refuse to step outside the houses of language we have erected to protect us from the emptiness and terror we cannot control. Our safe havens, called dogmas and orthodoxy, become absolutes, giving the illusion of being certain, being ‘on the inside’, having the truth” (Sally McFague quoted in Veling 1996:138).
margins as the “breathing spaces” of the book). Marginal hermeneutics is what happens when the twin events of belonging and nonbelonging, faith and doubt, trust and suspicion, the written and the unwritten, presence and absence - when these ‘unresolved two’ burst into life in the thin, interpretative edge that both joins and separates them (op.cit.:135-136).  

Such marginal hermeneutics includes the voices of the exiled, the liminal (or marginal) and the centre in the ongoing conversation of faith in a changing society. As the ‘EPC’ church rises in prominence it needs to remain open to the divergent voices within its own tradition that speak on behalf of the marginalised. These are the victims, prophets, poets, artists, visionaries, musicians and academics whose questions, suffering, experiences and self constructed faith demand space in the margins from which to interpret again Christian faith in a postmodern world. It is the argument of this thesis that the future of the ‘EPC’ churches depends on the fruits of just such a conversation. Without such dialogue the present prominence of the ‘EPC’ churches may well move into a substantial decline as their faith understandings, values, and ways of operating have less and less points of connection with a wider society that is being increasingly influenced by postmodernism. Many of the leavers who have been interviewed in this study are those influenced by a postmodern faith consciousness whose own faith operations have been nurtured to new modes of operation that simply do not fit the structures, practices and faith contents of the ‘EPC’ churches. As such these people are seen as the fore-runners of a massive societal shift, a shift that will rival the changes brought by the Enlightenment itself. However unlike the societal transition brought in the wake of the Enlightenment the new changes are happening at a much greater speed (due to world communication, economic, political, media and cultural networks) and across the entire globe. The ‘EPC’ churches must come to terms with the challenges of this new society or else face a continued exodus of its most thoughtful, creative, energetic and well connected members to the emerging culture. At the same time ‘EPC’ churches will be finding their theology, structures and practices are increasingly marginalised by a society that thinks about God, faith and life in radically divergent ways. Historically the church has failed to engage major cultural shifts to its peril.

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547 “If we are to approach a text,” writes Derrida, “it must have an edge.” On the side of the ‘written’ appears what is stable, familiar, privileged, reverberating and enduring. On the side of the ‘unwritten’ appears what is wandering, strange, excluded, secret, and haunting. Between the two, in the margins, there is ‘writing’; interpretation that listens to the written and the unwritten, interpretation that continually shifts and oscillates in and out of the book, moving between what is and what is not to explore possibilities of what could be” (quoted in Veling 1996;137).
Chapter Thirteen

People of The Way

Our greatest truths are but half-truths. Think not to settle down forever in any truth, but use it as a tent in which to pass a summer’s night, but build no house for it or it will become your tomb. When you first become aware of its insufficiency, and discern some counter truth looming up in the distance, then weep not, but rejoice: it is the voice of Christ saying, “Take up your bed and walk.”

George Trevelyan

13.1 Four Years On

Four years after initially interviewing Stuart and Michelle I was knocking on their front door again. Over the previous years I had interviewed and spoken informally with hundreds of church leavers like Stuart and Michelle, but was now returning to see what had happened to these two, the first people I had interviewed, in the ensuing years. For Michelle and Stuart a broader Christian faith has continued to be nurtured. Stuart describes how his faith has changed saying:

(Stuart) - I feel really excited and delighted and passionate about the things that have happened. I feel really de-institutionalised from church. I feel like I have got a new freedom to relate to people. . . .church was prefaced on the base that we are going to heaven and you’re going to hell, we are in the light and you’re in the dark, we’re the righteous and you’re unrighteous “wicked.” Profoundly disconnecting, actually, it emphasised the difference all the time between Christians and non-Christians. What I have rediscovered is the commonality which I now see as much greater than the things that are different.

(Stuart) - And in terms of inside me I feel much more freedom and much, much more relaxed about relating with non Christian people. I feel like I can really connect with them from my heart, not obviously everybody, but just in general terms, and I feel much more able, the friendship evangelism that whole sort of thing, to me although there is not much happening in that regard in terms of people getting saved or whatever, my own inner ability to relate to people, relate to non Christians is much greater.

(Stuart) - The other main thing is being out of church and getting rid of the props has put me right back on my haunches in terms of my relationship with God. Given me room and space to be far more honest with God about where I am at and for a number of years, probably about 4 or 5 years, I felt I still had my passion, longing for God. But that God was far away and in that process there was a lot of pulling down of old belief systems - the idea of sort of friendship with God which was so strong in Pentecostal circles and I saw a lot of it as ‘hash’. It was just false. It became a way of talking, a way of constructing the world and there wasn’t much substance or reality to it. And when I was honest with myself about that, . . . when I had room to explore that, I realised that actually to put all this time into praying, quiet times, doing all the right things in times gone by and really the reward wasn’t there in terms of friendship and intimacy with God. It was no greater really than there had been some years ago and in fact often less was happening, in terms of God speaking to me in times past. But there was a wonderful conclusion to that, and for me it has centred around a whole new awareness and discovery of the immanence of God. And when I start talking about it people start saying you have to be careful about being pantheistic and all the rest of it (4/2.30-32).

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548 George Trevelyan (1977) quoted in Parks 1986:71
While faith continues for Stuart and Michelle they still hold a concern for their own children’s faith. The children are part of private schools with a Christian tradition, here they receive religious teaching which Stuart and Michelle have confidence in. This they see reinforces the example they give the children and hope they will come to a Christian faith of their own. When I asked Stuart how he would feel if his children joined a church youth group in the future he replied ‘delighted’. Asking whether he saw much possibility of them joining a church or youth group he said:

(Stuart) - Well that’s my anxiety, I really hope so. And I trust and doubt that they will. It is very much a bit of both. I hope that God will do something to help that happen. And I am not quite sure how much that depends on me and how much on him (4/2.83).

Over the last four years Stuart and Michelle had continued to nurture their faith through small groups, counselling, attending Celtic services, prayer and some Bible reading. The group they had been involved in for four and a half years had by this time been closed nearly two years. Since then they have begun another group with two other couples who have also left ‘EPC’ churches, but want to continue in Christian faith. Unlike their previous group this one incorporates times of prayer and worship, Bible study and communion. Stuart says:

(Stuart) - We have met about every three weeks. Probably nearly every three. We sit down and have coffee or a glass of wine or something and talk. And then we have had some Bible studies, we did a series of a few on finding the presence of God in your work. And we have had times of prayer and singing as well for worship. In a limited way. And that has been quite good when we have done that even though there are only six, it actually worked. And meditation and we’ve experimented a bit with lighting candles as an expression of prayer, a bit like part of Celtic spirituality. Catholics do it, that sort of thing. So there has been a sort of a mix and match with some of those things. We have watched one video. And we have had other times which have been straight relating where we are at, at the moment, sorts of things. We’ve had communion a few times which has been good. That has been part of the supper that we have had, or part of a shared meal together (4/2.9).

Although their new group is more inclusive of prayer, worship, Bible study, communion and general discussion that seeks to nurture faith it is, for Stuart and Michelle, less satisfying than their previous group. This new group lacks for them the spark and energy of the discussion group they had been a part of. In this sense their second group is a ‘move on’ from the previous one, despite that it is less personally satisfying for them. Both Michelle and Stuart see that this second group may soon come to a close. For Michelle, who is already involved in a number of other spiritual groups, the idea of this group’s imminent end is not too disturbing. However for Stuart, who is less involved in other group settings, the demise of the group would signal, at least for him, the need to find or create something else. When I asked him what he would do if the group were to close he replied, “I’d be looking for the next step but I don’t know what that would be.” He has already been in discussion with another couple who are ready to look at beginning another group. Is this a clue as to the future for many leavers from ‘EPC’ churches who find they do not want to return to either another ‘EPC’ church or to one of the more traditional mainline churches? Could such people, who want to continue to find a communal expression and nurture for their faith, move through a series of non-church based groups? This is a possibility considered by Neave (1996:13) who sees the closure of groups as failure only where success is measured in terms of longevity. Neave encourages the development of many different groups saying:

In the postmodern world ‘the many’ is celebrated - there is not one way, one grand narrative, rather there is diversity, plurality, solutions emerging from local contexts. In the context of the uncertainty that this view of the world generates, there is often pressure to return to ‘the one’ and to limit creativity and questioning. These emerging communities and networks
largely reflect the postmodern reality - they are ‘the many’, each has arisen from its own context, and has its own character (Neave 1996:8).

For Stuart his connection with other Christians through a group such as the one they are presently part of is very important. But this isn’t his only connection with Christian faith. He now attends a monthly Celtic service and will occasionally go to a local Anglican church with the family especially for Easter and Christmas. Michelle places less significance on her involvement in her group because she is already involved in a number of other groups. When I interviewed her she mentioned a course she was doing on becoming spiritually aware, a counselling course, a psychodrama group and a parenting skills group. Three of these courses were being run by Christian organisations and had, at least some level of a Christian ethos, one included Christian practices of prayer and worship. Michelle also occasionally attends the local Anglican church or a Celtic service.

Stuart and Michelle’s faith journey represents but one trajectory of those who leave ‘EPC’ churches. Although there are a variety of other faith journeys outside of the church, reflected here in the Reflexive Exiles, Transitional Explorers, those transitioning to alternative faiths and Displaced Followers, Stuart and Michelle’s journey indicates the possibility of Christian faith outside of the ‘EPC’ church tied to communal links with established churches and new groups.

13.2 What have We Found?

In opening this study I drew on a comment from C. Wright Mills who described the sociological imagination as “the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self - and to see the relations between the two” (C. Wright Mills 1959:7). Using the faith development theory of Fowler as a scaffold for insight I was able to build a processual model of faith transition that described the journey of those ‘EPC’ church leavers interviewed in this research. These stories, were represented in the four faith positions, while the interviewees were quoted throughout the development of the argument and presented in the vignettes of real lives that encapsulate “the most intimate features of the human self.”

But this thesis has not sought to focus on these alone. Rather it seeks to consider the wider societal milieu in its “impersonal and remote transformations” as well. These transformations are here described through the sociological constructs of ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’. And to these we add the theological and structural features of ‘EPC’ churches. The thesis does not seek to consider these “most intimate features of the human self” and “the impersonal and remote transformations” in isolation but, as C. Wright Mills suggests, to range between these and show the relationships between the two. In seeking to answer the question from which this research began - why do people leave the Christian church? - the answer that is postulated here is that three different but interrelated factors contribute to the decisions of individuals. These factors are personal faith stage transitions, ‘EPC’ church theology and structures and the wider societal shift from a predominantly modernist societal milieu to an increasingly postmodernist period. The thesis which is presented here is that in the inter-relationship of individual, church and society it is the changing nature of Western society in tension with the structure of ‘EPC’ churches which acts as sponsor or mentor in the faith transitions discussed.

Chapter 11 identified connections between societal epochs, especially their respective faith consciousness, and individual faith stages. The argument that is presented is that the influence of an increasingly postmodern society encourages those who are impacted by the wider societal shifts to reconsider, question, reflect upon and individualise their faith in new ways. A key factor that is changing in this inter-relationship of individual, church and society is perceived as the society. Although the complexity of the inter-relationship is recognised, this thesis postulates that the changing nature of Western society in tension with the structure of ‘EPC’ churches is encouraging people to consider faith in new ways, which for some leads to a sense of disillusionment with their faith package and the ‘EPC’ church that was previously very important to them. The thesis postulates that ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups will see increasing numbers of leavers as modernity gives way to postmodernity. The prognosis from this study is that increasing numbers
of committed Christian people will find the structures, faith operations, and faith contents presented in ‘EPC’ churches unhelpful and disconnected from the rest of their lives in an increasingly postmodern society. Such a prognosis therefore anticipates increasing numbers of leavers and more statements of dissatisfaction within ‘EPC’ churches. Leave-taking can only increase, this study argues, as ‘EPC’ churches continue to focus on a narrow interpretation of evangelical theology, charismatic worship and church governance patterns and modernist church growth techniques.

Chapter 12 considered one possible way forward for leavers and ‘EPC’ churches alike. It proposed a conversation between the centre (leadership) of ‘EPC’ churches and the margins (groups of leavers). This is a conversation that to date has not begun in earnest in the New Zealand context. It is a conversation in which the strengths of each are highlighted and from which an open dialogue between centre and margin, church leader and leaver could be developed. Such a conversation could lead to ‘EPC’ churches that are more open to the concerns of leavers in an increasingly postmodern society as well as groups on the margins with greater connections to the established churches and with each other. It postulates a conversation based on current hermeneutical theory, the historical reality of precedents within the Catholic church which have allowed for dialogue between its central structures and new orders and the inherent strengths of the Conjunctive stage of faith (stage 5). Whether such a conversation between centre and margin is viable depends on the degree of commitment to it from both ‘EPC’ church leaders and leavers. Whether theory can become reality is yet to be seen.

In drawing this argument to a conclusion I wish to reiterate the importance of such an open dialogue between centre and margin and consider some of the inherent difficulties that mitigate against it occurring. At the time of writing I had just recently returned from observing the annual conference of one group of ‘EPC’ churches in New Zealand. There the divide between the centre and the margins was marked in the formal discussions, the informal groupings of delegates, and the divergent reactions of margin and centre to the ‘future directions’ of this group of churches. Observation of this gathering reinforced my view that there are considerable difficulties to such an open ongoing dialogue.

Seidman (1994) speaking to sociologists suggests that some sociologists make a grave mistake in ignoring the societal move to postmodernity. He states: “as sociology is needed less by the state and its role as a cultural arbiter diminishes, it will become obsolete if it does not refashion its premises and aims. The appeal to knowledge for knowledge’s sake to justify a scientific sociology sounds increasingly hollow and implausible in a postmodern culture. Sociology ignores postmodernity at the risk of its own social relevance, if not survival” (1994:300). Seidman’s comments regarding the role of sociology in a postmodernist society are equally true for other social institutions including the ‘EPC’ churches. The ‘EPC’ churches too need to consider their own social relevance, if not their very survival in an increasingly postmodern context. In Chapter 11 I stated that for some ‘EPC’ churches and groups the threat of a society they no longer ‘belong within’ is leading to increased isolation and retreat to the safe enclaves of an ‘EPC’ subculture. Loreen Mead (1993:5-6) writing of the church in the United States suggests that as we enter a postmodern world three kinds of responses within churches and denominational groups are likely: First, “A Frantic effort to recapture the initiative, . . . develop a new programme . . . I [Mead] see regional and national leaders, particularly, making more and more aggressive promises, holding up grander visions, calling their flocks to larger hopes. In almost every case the result is that the clock is not turned back, the resources continue to decline - with occasional hiccup of growth” . . . this he describes as being “like fibrillation, in which a heart under stress, pumping more and more rapidly, but without co-ordination, actually begins to work against itself, pumping less and less blood to the body.” Second, “holding steady and hoping for the best, and finally moving ahead into a new paradigm of mission, rebuilding and reinventing the churches as we go” (1993:5-6).

The third of Mead’s options links with what was proposed in Chapter 12 in the open dialogue between centre and margins. It is a dialogue that offers much but may itself be problematic. Here I will consider three reasons for suggesting why such a move is problematic.

550 The conference was held in November 1997.
13.2.1 Cross Stage Static

‘EPC’ churches are, in this study, characterised as predominantly operating at the Synthetic-Conventional faith stage (stage 3). That is, the ethos and corporate patterns of teaching, worship, and church governance are consistent with the faith operational level of the Synthetic-Conventional stage of faith. This study has shown that most leavers from ‘EPC’ churches leave in the process of personal faith stage transitions beyond the Synthetic-Conventional. Those leavers who are here described as Reflexive Exiles, Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders are perceived as moving beyond the faith operations of the Synthetic-Conventional stage. As already indicated, Fowler uses the concept of cross-stage static to indicate the misunderstandings and problems that occur when a person or group operating at one faith stage confronts a person or group operating at a different stage. Drawing on the work of M. Scott Peck I suggested that stage three people are threatened by individuals operating at the fourth stage. They find such people’s deconstruction of faith, questions of the taken-for-granted, their doubts regarding their faith and their openness to truth from multiple sources threatening. But if they (Synthetic-Conventional) are threatened by the questioning of the Individuative-Reflective they are even more uncertain about those operating at the Conjunctive stage or beyond (stages 5 and 6). The Synthetic-Conventional are aware that such people “seem to believe in the same sorts of things they do but believe in them with a freedom they find absolutely terrifying.”

A number of the church leaders I interviewed were obviously functioning at faith levels beyond the Synthetic-Conventional (stage 3). Their interview scripts indicated this. But while they may personally have appropriated faith operations beyond the Synthetic-Conventional the modal development level operative within the churches they lead had not moved as far as they had personally. Originally intrigued by this I came to see that the corporate modal development level operative within a church is much harder to change than that of the individual. While individuals may be threatened, confused, even scared by their personal process of the faith transition from the Synthetic-Conventional (stage 3) to the Individuative-Reflective (stage 4) and beyond it is much more difficult for groups to make similar journeys. Groups, including churches, are inevitably anchored by the legitimate desire not to upset people’s solidity of faith. Thus even with open discussion between leavers and church leaders operating at the later faith stages, the corporate modal development level of the church may inhibit the ‘fruits’ of such discussion leading to structural change within ‘EPC’ churches. This is further complicated because as Fowler says, “in many ways religious institutions ‘work best’ if they are people with a majority of committed folk best described by Stage 3” (Fowler 1995:164).

13.2.2 For ‘EPC’ Churches to Become More Relevant in Postmodernist Society Requires a Major Transformation

In the dialogue between centre and margins discussed in the previous Chapter One of the strengths of the leavers that was considered was their knowledge of the difficult journey from the centre of an ‘EPC’ church to the formation of an integrated and communal Christian faith - a journey that indicates how forlorn are hopes within the institutional structures that ‘EPC’ churches can continue into an engagement with postmodern society in a ‘business-as-usual’ mode. On the contrary the individual journeys of leavers indicate that a prolonged and difficult faith journey involving a deconstruction of previously held beliefs, values and behavioural norms, periods of uncertainty and confusion followed by a gradual examination of their faith contents and the rebuilding of a personalised faith is necessary.

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551 See Chapter 4
552 Peck 1990:195
553 In general discussion with leaders in ‘EPC’ churches I found many were trained in the critical methods of biblical exegesis yet felt unable (because of pressure by people in their churches) or unwilling (didn’t want to disrupt people’s faith) to use such critical methods in their preaching. For example individual leaders would happily discuss variant views of ‘eternity’ with me yet in their preaching would stick to a clear cut, even literalistic Heaven and Hell. Some held personal opinions about abortion, homosexuality and other ethical issues but within the church context stuck to definitive positions.
It is expected that churches will shy from such a journey and opt for processes of window dressing the old rather than genuine engagements with postmodernist culture. Maggie Dawn (1997) picks up this concern, stating of the evangelical church in Britain:

In dealing with cultural interpretations of Christianity, it is important to distinguish between being fashionable and being relevant. There are two ways of looking at cultural interaction with church, . . . one is to take what we understand as ‘the Gospel’, and then to dress it up in the clothes of our culture. Thus what makes a ‘youth service’ different is simply a matter of style. Culture is not so much engaged with as made use of - it’s the spoonful of sugar that makes the medicine go down. But genuine cultural engagement affects your whole way of life and thought, so the message can’t be separated from the medium. . . . Fashion is often used in an attempt to make church more attractive to young people (although the problem then crops up that we can’t integrate these people into ‘real’ church). But to be fashionable is entirely an optional extra: it has little or nothing to do with being relevant (Dawn 1997:44-45).

While the influence of postmodern society will encourage some ‘EPC’ church participants to consider leaving their church it will also lead others in a postmodern society towards ‘EPC’ churches. As Bauman (1997) says fundamentalism too will thrive under conditions of postmodernity. In fact Bauman suggests that in the wake of postmodernity the allure of fundamentalism will have a growing constituency:

The allure of fundamentalism stems from its promise to emancipate the converted from the agonies of choice, here one finds, finally, the indubitably supreme authority to end all other authorities. One knows where to look when life-decisions are to be made, in matters big and small, and one knows that looking there one does the right thing and so is spared the dread of risk-taking. Fundamentalism is a radical remedy against that bane of postmodernity/risk-contaminated freedom (a remedy that heals the infection by amputating the infected organ - abolishing freedom as such, in as far as there is no freedom free of risks) (Bauman 1997:184; italics as cited).

In a world experienced as overwhelmingly uncertain, uncontrollable and frightening many will find the security, certainty and controllable enclaves of fundamentalism (including ‘EPC’ churches) safe and predictable. This, Bauman states, is not a retreat to pre-modernism. That is, fundamentalism (including religious fundamentalism) is not a “form of escape back into the pre-modern past. Fundamentalism is a thoroughly contemporary, postmodern phenomenon. . . .One may conclude that religious fundamentalism is a legitimate child of postmodernity, born of its joys and torments, and heir to its achievements and worries alike”( Bauman 1977:182-184).

Let us consider for a moment in what ways religious fundamentalism is a ‘legitimate child of postmodernity’. First, Bauman argues that fundamentalism attracts ‘flawed consumers’ those attracted to the goodies on offer in a consumer society but unable to gain access to them, but perhaps more significantly it attracts those searching for certainty in the increasingly ‘risky’ postmodernist society. That is a society in which risky choices are part of the very composition of the societal milieu. In these contexts fundamentalism, perhaps especially religious fundamentalism, offers certainty and removal of the feelings of overwhelming individual weakness. Bauman states:

The bitter experience in question is the experience of freedom: of the misery of life composed of risky choices, which always mean taking some chances while forfeiting others, or incurable uncertainty built into every choice, of the unbearable, because unshared, responsibility for the unknown consequences of every choice, of the constant fear of foreclosing the future and yet unforeseen possibilities, of the dread of personal inadequacy, of experiencing less and not as strongly as others perhaps do, of the nightmare of being not up to the new and improved formulae of life which the notoriously capricious future may
bring. And the message arising from that experience is: no, the human individual is not self-sufficient and cannot be self-reliant. One cannot go by one’s own judgement; one needs to be guided, and directed, and told what to do. This is a message of insufficiency; but unlike the message carried by premodern religion, it is not the message of the weakness of the human species - but of the irreparable weakness of the human individual, compared to the human species’ omnipotence (op.cit.:183-4; italics as cited).

Because of the attraction of fundamentalist theologies and therefore a continued supply of new people to ‘EPC’ churches and the difficulty of a genuine engagement by such churches in postmodernist society, it is here postulated, that the leaders of these churches will opt for ‘business-as-usual’. While such churches will have people seeking to join them, there will also be growing numbers of leavers. Among the leavers are those prompted by the uncertainty of the postmodern society in which they live who will seek to embrace a faith which allows for greater personal freedom, judgement, experience and reflection rather than being guided, directed and told what to do through the faith packages of such churches.

13.2.3. The Predominant Exemplars of ‘EPC’ Churches are Drawn from an Old Paradigm

In the New Zealand context, at least, the predominant ‘EPC’ church exemplars are drawn from the same paradigm: conservative evangelical, charismatic in worship, governance and ethos and saturated by church growth techniques. The Willow Creek Association with its focus on Seeker Services is very popular and is seen by many as the great hope for the ‘EPC’ churches. Other models, also from the same paradigm are drawn from Singapore and Korea in what is called the ‘Cell Church’. Both Willow Creek and the Cell Church models draw heavily on the principles of church growth, their exemplars being mega-churches within the United States, Singapore and Korea. Although these models are very popular among ‘EPC’ churches and their leaders, they are at best re-dressed versions of what is described here as ‘EPC’. They will not encourage genuine engagement with postmodernist culture. In their continued adherence to ‘old’ models these exemplars often see the postmodern as merely critical of modernity and ultimately of little social consequence. Bauman is critical of such a perspective, stating:

I suggest . . . that the phenomena described collectively as ‘postmodernity’ are not symptoms of systematic deficiency or disease; neither are they a temporary aberration with a life-span limited by the time required to rebuild the structure of cultural authority. I suggest instead that postmodernity . . . is an aspect of a fully fledged, viable social system which has come to replace the ‘classical’ modern, capitalist society and thus needs to be theorised according to its own logic (1992:52).

13.2.4 Is a ‘Centre’- ‘Margin’ Dialogue Likely?

For the reasons cited above the open dialogue between margin and centre of the ‘EPC’ churches postulated here will probably only be followed by the very few. The combined inertia created by the obstacles discussed is extensive. In brief the reasons cited above were: the difficulty of cross stage static, the enormous cultural shift required for ‘EPC’ churches to be genuinely relevant and engaged in a postmodernist society and the influence of the models encouraging continued dependence on conservative evangelical theology, charismatic worship styles and patterns of church governance and church growth techniques. If open dialogue is not possible then an increasing number of post-church groups can be expected to develop, groups that will be isolated from the ‘EPC’ churches they were once heavily committed to. Such leavers will, like Stuart and Michelle, continue to be involved in a number of groups, Christian courses and loosely connected with churches offering Celtic, alternative worship, Taizé and reflective or liturgical services. These groups

Other church models do exist which seek to engage the church and Christian faith within a postmodernist society. Two such models would be: 1. that set forth in the writings of Leslie Newbigin (1989 & 1991) and the ‘Gospel and Cultures Trust’; and 2. the model of ‘Public Church’ which is discussed by Fowler (1991:148-197). Neither of these models have captured the attention of the leadership in the ‘EPC’ churches of New Zealand like those discussed above which are drawn from the old paradigm.
will provide a sense of community and belonging for those outside the church. They will be a place of faith nurturance for a period of time and then later be replaced by other courses, services or groups.

This second alternative is a vision of the Christian faith as fragmented, personalised and diffuse, although for some time to come, it seems, these groups will develop in the shadow of the institutional ‘EPC’ churches. It is an alternative which, regrettably, sees little genuine connection between the structured and the diffuse, the centre and the margins and considers both to be inevitably weakened by such isolation. Eventually however the offshoots of the ‘EPC’ churches may provide the beginnings of a new way of being church. The liminal groups and the faith of the Integrated Way-finders give some indications of what this ‘new way’ might be. Both the ‘EPC’ churches and post-church groups are therefore in a dilemma, a dilemma consistent with Postmodernist society, that of identity formation.

Castells (1997) looks at the development of identity and meaning in what he calls a ‘Network Society’. He describes three forms of identity building. Legitimizing Identity which is “introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalise their domination vis à vis social actors.” Resistance identity, “generated by those actors that are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatised by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society” (op.cit.:8). The third, Project identity, involves social actors building a “new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seeks the transformation of overall social structure” (op.cit.:8). In illustrating Project identity he uses the transition among some feminists as they have “moved out from the trenches of resistance of women’s identity and women’s rights, to challenge patriarchalism, thus the patriarchal family, thus the entire structure of production, reproduction, sexuality, and personality on which societies have been based” (op.cit.:8). The second type of identity building, identity for resistance, builds communes or communities in reaction to the changing and threatening nature of society. He illustrates such communal resistance by reference to religious fundamentalism, nationalism and ethnic or national territorialism. One of the examples of this process which he refers to is Christian fundamentalism within the United States.555 He also suggests that “it is possible that from such entrenched communities, new subjects - that is collective agents of social transformation - may emerge, thus constructing new meaning around project identity. Indeed, I would argue that, given the structural crisis of civil society and the nation-state, this may be the main potential source of social change in the network society” (op.cit.:67).

Using Castells’ identity formation model helps us to set this present study in the wider literature involving identity formation and social change within postmodernist society. But it also enables us to consider the way in which, under conditions of postmodernity, ‘EPC’ churches may continue to be attractive to many people (through a move to resistance identity - the safety of the enclave). At the same time it allows us to see that leave-taking driven by personal faith transitions may have corresponding links with leave-taking from other social enclaves through project identity formation (a move from within the enclave to a self appropriated project identity in an engagement with the wider society). Using Castells’ insight suggests that as postmodernity increases people will seek religious forms of fundamentalism -like the ‘EPC’ churches- as social enclaves providing security, certainty and community in an increasingly fragmented, pluralistic and individualised society. But it also suggests that from within these enclaves others will re-engage with the wider society forming ‘project identities’ that are potential sources of change within the society. Thus if communication between margin and centre is not possible, two independent sets of Christian identity formation may ensue under conditions of postmodernity. These are a resistance identity focused on immersion in a social enclave that protects the individual from the wider society and a project identity’ in

555 Castells includes in his definition of fundamentalism the core beliefs of conservative evangelicalism. His analysis would include churches labelled in this study as ‘EPC’. Castells draws on Lienesch (1993) who focuses on ‘conversionism’ as the centre of Christian conservatism. Castells writes that ‘through this personal experience of being born again, the whole personality is reconstructed, and becomes “the starting place for constructing a sense not only of autonomy and identity, but also of social order and political purpose” (op.cit.:22).
which the individual moves out of its enclave to engage and seek to shape the society through social movements.

As Bauman has signalled Postmodernity is not a “temporary aberration” but “a fully fledged, viable social system.” It is a social system that the Christian faith must engage with rather than shrink from. As an inherently incarnational phenomenon the Christian faith needs the courage to incarnate in a new social context every bit as dangerous and enticing as the promised land described in the Old Testament. It may however be the case that ‘EPC’ churches will follow the path of the Israelites of old saying isn’t it better to go back to Egypt than enter the promised land with all its inherent risks and dangers. Again another generation of the people of faith may tarry in the wilderness rather than engage with a new cultural situation. To do otherwise will require determination and courage in the face of the cries of the crowd who seek safety, certainty and security. The ‘EPC’ churches with their orientation to meeting the needs of their attenders may lack the determination and courage to act. If this is indeed the case it may be other streams of the Christian church and ‘EPC’ church leavers who pick up the challenge to engage a new societal context, that is to incarnate the gospel in a new ‘land’. Loren Mead states:

If we are, as I am convinced, in a time in which paradigms are changing, a cosmetic approach to change, the kind that deals with surface appearances, is inadequate. Organisational specialists distinguish between ‘transitional’ and ‘transformational’ change. By transitional change they mean the adaptations and shifts brought on by temporary dislocations and discomforts, moving to a new stability. By transformational change they mean the shattering of the foundations and the reconstitution of a new entity.

Churches that tinker with program and marketing are barely beginning to be on the edge of transitional change, but the building of the future church requires transformation at its core. We are not looking for cosmetic changes or the kind of ‘fixes’ that come in annual program cycles; we are looking for several generations of struggle with our identity as people of God, with how we live together, with what our environment really is (Mead 1993:70).

Having taken the argument of this study as far as I am able we must now consider how future research could both critique and develop this work.

13. 3 For Further Consideration

While the research was able to locate a framework for understanding the situation of leavers and postulating a way forward it also leaves open a number of areas for future study. The following specific areas need to be considered.

- The snowball sampling methods used in this study identified networks of predominantly long term ‘EPC’ church ex-leaders. Although attempts were made to broaden the net of those included in the study the use of a snowball sampling technique repeatedly turned up such people. The relational links within the networks were formed either through people’s prior church involvement (in which long term ex-leaders were more easily remembered than those on the fringe of the church) or their subsequent post-church group involvement. Therefore the snowball sampling technique may have been prejudiced toward ex-leaders and people who were involved in their respective churches for long periods of time and those who placed sufficient ongoing importance on their faith to join faith oriented groups after leaving the church. This research could therefore be complemented by specific studies identifying young leavers and those who were involved in ‘EPC’ churches for shorter periods of time.

- This study by virtue of the snowball sampling methods used concentrated on leavers from one stream of the church - the ‘EPC’ churches. Comparative studies of leavers from other streams of the church

556 Quoted above - Bauman 1992:52.
557 Numbers 13 and 14.
558 See Methodological appendix (Appendix 1).
(Protestant mainline non-charismatic, liberal and Catholic) could be used to extrapolate the use of findings in this research or conversely indicate the isolated relevance of these findings. Cross faith research would also be useful. Questions which need to be considered further include: Do the same faith transitions occur within those located in other faiths? Are the faith categories devised in this study useful in understanding leavers from the Islamic faith or the Mormon church under the influence of postmodern society?

- This study considered the faith transitions of ‘EPC’ church leavers. This focus could be complemented by research into the faith transitions of those who remain actively involved in their churches. While this study identified that the predominant reason people leave ‘EPC’ churches was connected to personal faith transitions, it does not consider that only leavers undergo such faith transitions. The faith transitions of those who stay involved in churches also needs to be considered. To a limited degree the study considered this in interviewing ten people who at the time of the interview were on the margins of their respective ‘EPC’ church.

- This study identified a number of faith groups that were started by or for church leavers. Such groups form one subset of what Veling calls ‘Intentional Christian Communities’. Comparative studies of other intentional Christian communities would be useful in broadening an understanding of Christian groups emerging in postmodern society. Neave (1996) identifies the following subsets of emerging communities:
  - basic Christian communities
  - Christian action groups
  - women-church
  - contemplative worship groups
  - Celtic worship groups
  - creation spirituality groups
  - religious communities
  - youth networks
  - gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender affirming groups
  - workplace groups
  - sea of faith networks
  - reading and reflection groups

- Research into both the points of commonality and divergence within such emerging groups may provide a greater understanding of the role and operations of emerging Christian groups in postmodern society. Such a study may also indicate existing or potential networks with established churches and between such emerging groups. Any conversation between the central leadership of Christian churches and its margins will not only include post-church groups but also representatives of the intentional Christian communities listed above.

- This study focused on the faith journeys of ninety eight ‘EPC’ church leavers and ten marginal ‘EPC’ church attenders. The study identified the faith journeys these people had traversed up to and including the date of the interview. This research could be most valuably assisted by longitudinal research which interviewed people on multiple occasions rather than simply one. This chapter began with detail obtained from a second interview with Stuart and Michelle four years after I first interviewed them. Invaluable information on the faith trajectories of leavers could be obtained by interviewing people at such intervals. I would suggest that a five year gap between interviews would produce insightful information.

- Finally this research could be supplemented by similar research in other Western countries. From international comparisons more conclusive prognoses could be made regarding the future of the ‘EPC’ churches in a postmodern society.
13.4 Conclusion

In this study I have sought to show that some people are leaving the ‘EPC’ churches due to a changing faith consciousness within what is becoming an increasingly postmodernist Western society that is serving to encourage increasing numbers of individuals to transition to new faith stage levels. It has always been the case that a significant minority of adults operated at these later faith stages, but where individuals are influenced by the postmodernist faith consciousness, this societal consciousness provides a nurturing and prompting environment which serves to encourage such individuals to transition to these later faith stages. It is therefore predicted that as postmodernist values, attitudes to beliefs and meta-narratives and world views increase in prominence, the connection with ‘EPC’ churches as they are presently structured will decrease. Put bluntly this research predicts that postmodern society will encourage a societal faith consciousness that sponsors people influenced by such a society to make personal faith transitions toward the later stages of Fowler’s faith staged model. This means that there will be a decreasing connection between those operating at Fowler’s stages 4, 5 and 6 faith levels and those who make up ‘EPC’ churches. This is especially so as the ‘EPC’ churches driven by conservative evangelical theology, charismatic worship styles and church governance patterns and church growth technologies are establishing religious enclaves from the wider society, the net result of which can only be an undermining of the ‘EPC’ church belief system, structures and ways of operating.

But it is also the argument of this thesis that the news for ‘EPC’ churches is not all bad. Significant numbers of the leavers are not losing their Christian faith or moving to liberalist theological interpretations. In fact in the case of what I have here called the Transitional Explorers and Integrated Way-finders there are indications of strong commitments to Christian faith and practice. These however tend not to mesh directly with the ‘EPC’ faith and practice. The line of argument that is used here indicates that such moves offer exemplars that the ‘EPC’ churches can learn from. I have here titled the integrated leavers as ‘way-finders’. Veling (1996:178) states that “being on the way does not mean we are left in a vague state of directionless wandering. Rather, it represents ‘a state in which something is always called for in the way of decision and action’ . . . to be on the way is to be in a continual state of discerning, deciding, choosing.” Veling, drawing on the work of Gadamer, suggests a way of ‘knowing’ that provides a way forward. He suggests that ‘phronesis’ is an interpretational practical wisdom that knows the rules of the past but also sees visions of the future. Such knowledge has a communal concern, what he calls ‘sensus communis’, which exhibits the practical wisdom of interpretative communities who know their way around and whose judgement has been sharpened by making decisions in the concrete. Such people are way-finders because they as individuals are constructing personalised ‘cocktails’ of Christian faith and practice and as groups of leavers may offer indications of a way forward for the ‘EPC’ churches and Christian faith into an increasingly postmodern society. The Christian faith has from its inception been proud to claim the title ‘people of the way’. This stems from Jesus’ claim that he is the ‘way, the truth and the life’. As Kung (1967:X-XI) claims:

The church is the pilgrim community of believers, not of those who already see and know. The church must ever and again wander through the desert, through the darkness of sin and error. For the church can also err and for this reason must always be prepared to orientate itself anew, to renew itself. It must always be prepared to seek out a new path, a way that might be just as difficult to find as a desert track, or a path through darkness.

In a postmodern society it is time to search again for what it means to be followers of the ‘Way’. As the story goes:

There once was a tribe of people caught in a weird situation. They were following a cloud, or a pillar of fire through a desert. The trouble with following a cloud is that it either moves or it doesn’t. So when it doesn’t they would take the children out of their camel seats, set up the tents, unpack the bags, start cooking and make themselves as comfortable as they could be. Of course the cloud might stay in one place for a day, or an hour, or five days and nothing disrupts an all night poker game as much as being told - “pack everything back on those camels, we’re off again.” Oases were popular places to stop. Some people longed to
drop out of the ‘camel race’. So there was a small tent industry in predicting the movement of the cloud. If only they could find a formula for it. Then life would be so much more predictable and comfortable. Unfortunately the weather men of the time conformed to the meteorology of current times and seldom got it right.

The trouble was, in the end, if they wanted to follow the cloud, when the cloud moved, they had to move as well. The same is true now.\textsuperscript{559}

\textsuperscript{559} Story taken from a posting from the Postmodern worship internet discussion group -1993, (Postmodern-christian@mailbox.ac.uk)
Methodological Appendix

To probe the real reason for the church’s malaise one needs first to promote discussion at some depth in a relaxed atmosphere where people feel free to be entirely open and honest... There is one group of people whose views could be particularly fruitful: those who have dis-engaged themselves from church activities with great reluctance. They have great respect for the Christian cultural heritage at its best. They acknowledge their own personal need for continuing spiritual nourishment and stimulation. But far too little of what they hoped for was actually received and finally they could not tolerate the disappointment and the agony any longer.560

Lloyd Geering

1. Introduction

In the preceding quote Lloyd Geering points to the important insights church leavers can provide on the church’s present ‘malaise’. Although many church leaders and participants point to such a church malaise - lack of growth, in some cases reductions in church attendance and membership figures, a lack of vitality and a sense of discontinuity with the wider society - it seems few consider talking with those who have left. It is an issue within Pentecostal/charismatic churches that generates much ‘heat’ but often little ‘light’. This research was carried out so that more ‘light’ could be shed on the issue by including the perspective of those who have left. The intention was to find, interview and understand both what caused these people to leave ‘EPC’ churches and what has subsequently happened to their faith.

The following methodological account of the research is divided into four major sections. The first looks at how I came to be involved in the research (and the ‘Pilot Project’ which lead to a bigger study). In this section I will consider the context of the research, the choice of research methods and my position as researcher. The second section considers the research phase itself, including the ethical issues that had to be considered, and the research method of face-to-face interviewing. The third section looks at the methods used to widen the context of the research and the research sample itself, drawing on the ‘Constant Comparative Method’ of Glaser and Strauss (1967). The fourth and final section covers the analysis and presentation phases of the research.

2. Phase One: the Background to the Research

M Scott Peck talks of “a great principle of psychiatry that says all symptoms are overdetermined” (1997:9). By this he is implying that physical and psychological symptoms have multiple inter-related causes. In so doing he is referring to the way physical and psychological symptoms are the result of multiple causes. In this research I have sought to show that the reasons people leave ‘EPC’ churches are also multiple and yet interconnected. It is also true that this research itself was overdetermined. A number of contributory factors lead to my decision to spend four years on this endeavour. In this first section I wish to outline what led to this research.

Having completed a post-graduate degree in theology in 1991 I wanted to pursue further study particularly in the area of Christian faith and its connection with modern Western society. Discussing this with a friend lead me to enroll in an Honours Sociology programme,561 a programme which included a compulsory methods course. Part of the assessment for this methods course involved doing a pilot research project. What would I look at? During recent months a number of key friends had moved out of the church within which I was working. These were either long term committed leaders, previous lay leaders562 pastors or missionaries.

560 Geering 1987:87
561 A number of years previously I had completed a Bachelor of Education degree with a Sociology minor. This allowed me direct entry to honours level study in Sociology.
562 Lay leadership as distinct from professional or ministerial leadership indicates that the person involved was not a professional religious person, but was involved in a non clerically (theologically) trained manner.
within this particular church. And it wasn’t one or two who were leaving but a dozen or more. I was also at this time feeling torn between these friends leaving, my role as a leader in the church and my own growing dissatisfaction with church and faith. These factors coupled with hearing a pastor who spoke at a Sunday morning service on why people leave the church led me to consider this as a research project for my Sociology Methods class in 1993.

Having decided, however tentatively, to look at ‘why people leave the church’ I quickly became aware of the paucity of relevant research in this area. As already stated, the focus of previous research had been on large surveys, denominational adherence figures as measured by census figures, or qualitative studies in the area of sects, cults and small religious groups principally from within the United States. Within the research the dominant sociological explanation for ‘apostasy’ ‘disaffiliation’ and ‘leave taking’ centred around the theory of secularisation. Intuitively a gut feeling told me this wasn’t the complete answer for the leavers I knew. These people were not walking away from their faith, however much that faith was being re-evaluated, but they were definitely walking away from the ‘EPC’ churches they had previously been heavily aligned with. Sociologically intuition has to be validated, however, and while I had a ‘gut’ feeling that the secularisation theory didn’t make sense of what I was myself both experiencing and observing I had nothing else with which to replace it.

Discussions with my supervisor for the research project lead to the listing of as many causative explanations as possible and then using these potential explanations as ‘sensitising concepts’ to form an interview schedule for use in interviews with a small group of informed insiders. In so doing I was drawing on Denzin’s (1978) method of ‘theoretical triangulation’, which involves “approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind.”

Four informed insiders who had all worked as pastors with ‘EPC’ churches were selected. These interviews lead to the drafting of an interview schedule to be used when interviewing church leavers that left open all possible explanations and reasons for leaving, concentrating on hearing the story of the leaver themselves. The initial interview schedule covered issues to do with individuals, their faith and life cycle, church structural and leadership issues, relational issues within churches and generational and wider societal influences.

The second phase of the ‘Pilot Project’ involved interviewing a small sample of church leavers. Although the informed insiders were an invaluable source of information they were not able to act as sponsors in finding people to interview. As I was determined to speak with people who knew me only as a research student and

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563 I was not personally present at the service where this message was given but heard of it and obtained a taped copy of the message.
564 An issue raised by McNamara in the Presidential Address to the Association for the Sociology of Religion, 1984. McNamara said “To my knowledge, we have practically no ethnographic studies of Christian conservatives.” He does however go on to mention a few notable studies including one by Margaret Poloma (1983) on the Charismatics. Outside of these and especially in the area of churchgoers in mainstream Christian denominations - specifically the Catholics for whom numerous quantitative research studies have been done - he asked “where is the ‘insider’s portrait’ based on face to face interviews . . . the pages of Review of Religious research brim with survey findings and other macro-level research on various denominational bodies. But few indeed are ‘insider’ studies which give church members a chance to reveal to us deeper levels of meaning and of behaviour which survey research seriously risks passing by because a questionnaire cannot pick up the smiles, the frowns, the hesitations, the earnestness, the sense of bewilderment and frustration, or of deep contentedness and satisfaction” (1985:95).
565 Blumer describes such concepts as suggesting “directions along which to look” (1970:109). Hammersley and Atkinson state “sensitising concepts are an important starting point, they are the germ of the emerging theory, and they provide the focus for further data collection” (1983:180).
567 One had left the pastorate to study, one had become a theological lecturer, the third had remained in pastoral work and had at that point been in his present pastoral role for 26 years. The last informed insider was a pastor for seven years but had more recently left the pastorate and the church and was himself a ‘church leaver’.
not in my role as the pastor of a church it was initially difficult to find people. For a short period I was thrown by not having contact with sponsors who could facilitate access for me to potential interviewees. I was later to find that the best sponsors were those on the margins of the church themselves. Pastors and those in the central hub of church leadership either didn’t know such leavers or preferred not to indicate potential interviewees. I was to find this a common problem in the area of disaffiliation studies.

The five people I did interview were not previously known to me. In each case they had left the church but not their Christian faith. In fact all were adamant that they were continuing in the faith, albeit somewhat differently than in their church days.

The research project identified the key role that a ‘changing’ faith had in people’s decision to leave as opposed to a ‘giving away’ of Christian faith. The pilot study concluded with the following comments.

The pilot study has shown that further research in the substantive topic area is needed. It indicates that there is a definite lack of understanding about why people leave the Pentecostal and charismatic churches and how they maintain a churchless faith from that point on. The methodological approach adopted in the pilot study is a feasible method for continuing the project. . . . The sensitising concepts developed to this stage show promise for making sense of the phenomenon, perhaps particularly the stage of faith theory of the individual as compared with the institution. Finally this is a piece of research that I would be interested in pursuing in the near future (Jamieson, 1993:17).

When writing the conclusion to this pilot study and indicating an interest in taking the research further I was not intending to enroll to do a thesis. The decision to do so was again overdetermined. Four weeks away living in a slum community in Manila City, gave space to think and evaluate both the potential of such research, and my own position within the church. This was coupled with a personal desire to do a Ph.D. It was a desire that had lurked for some years which now had an opportunity to rise to the surface. These factors were bolstered by the advice of a number of close friends who all encouraged me to consider taking the research further. Another significant factor was the influence I drew from the writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who wrote in the early 1940’s of a ‘Religionless Christianity’. Although each of these were significant, two key factors were to finally ‘clinch it.’ The first of these was the availability and interest of Dr Bob Hall in the project. I knew that if I was ever to do a Ph.D then there was no-one better under whom to study than Bob. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly the stories of those I had interviewed in the pilot project and others I had informally spoken to subsequently who had also left the church made me realise that these people’s story needed to be told. It is a story that is silenced in the ‘EPC’ churches, perhaps because its message is too threatening and challenging to the status quo. But it is also a story of the marginalised which those at the centre must hear. To ensure that this story, was heard it had to be told well. A Ph.D thesis would provide a vehicle for ensuring that the story was told accurately, credibly and persuasively.

Having outlined the background to this study I will now discuss three key decisions that were made in framing up the parameters of the research. First, this is a study of the faith of those who leave evangelical

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568 Although this was what I initially found I was later to meet a few pastors who were aware of leavers. There was one pastor, discussed later, who knew of a large number of leavers and was willing to pass me on to a number of these potential interviewees. There are a number of reasons why pastors were reluctant to pass on names. Primary among these was protection of the confidentiality of individuals. Secondly, many pastors had lost contact with previous leavers from their church. Some may also have been reluctant because they didn’t want the reasons relating to someone leaving to become known.

569 Fanstone in publishing his survey of church leavers in Britain indicated that finding people was the most difficult of his tasks. - “My first task, of course, was to find out why some people who used to go to church no longer go. With as many as 1000 people a week leaving English churches I assumed it would not be too hard to track down a number of them. I was wrong! Locating former church-goers proved a long, arduous task” (1993:22).

Pentecostal/charismatic churches. There are many other streams of churches - non charismatic Protestant or Catholic churches for example. Why then did I choose ‘EPC’ churches and not others? Secondly the methods of study need to be discussed. Why was an ethnographic face-to-face interview method selected? And finally the role of the researcher and my position as both a minister and a researcher during a part of the research. We need to consider both how this aided the research and how it influenced its outcomes.

2.1 Why Focus on ‘EPC’ Churches?

This research has been limited to those who have left churches characterised by an evangelical theology and a charismatic or Pentecostal style of worship and church governance. Of course there are many other churches within New Zealand that do not fit this categorisation - non evangelically based mainline churches, Catholic churches, many Brethren, Quaker and Reformed churches for example. The research began with a focus on why people leave Christian churches and was to be approached through the use of ethnographic research methods, principally face-to-face interviews. A snowballing technique was employed in order to find interview respondents. I began with a small group of potential interviewees whose names had been given to me by people on the margins of ‘EPC’ churches. The snowballing technique (which is discussed later) then led to more and more church leavers from this particular stream of the church. After completing the initial set of 25 interviews I reviewed what common characteristics (of leavers) the snowballing technique was producing. This review revealed that the sample was potentially skewed. The interviewees referred to me were predominantly leavers from ‘EPC’ churches. The snowballing technique was not leading to people who had left Quaker churches, Catholic churches or non-charismatic Protestant churches.

Initially somewhat puzzled by this and seeking to add leavers from these other streams of the church I slowly came to realise that there were a number of significant reasons why such leavers were not being located via the snowballing method. These reasons fit into two major categories. First the ‘EPC’ church leavers were not, either as church participants or subsequently, part of networks with people in these other streams of the church. The common link in the networks I was tapping was either their previous church or other members of post-church groups. A second reason that can be postulated is that leavers from non-evangelical or non-charismatic/Pentecostal churches leave for different reasons or at different points in their faith development. It is here postulated that the mainline churches because of their more ‘church-like’ structure, historical liturgy, inclusive theology, and stronger denominational structures are less likely to provide the confining faith environment that is discussed in this thesis. While as yet this second reason is untested, such work would provide a useful extension of the present study.

Being aware that the snowballing technique was not turning up people from a greater spread of church backgrounds I was conscious of watching out for any such people in subsequent discussions. However no-

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571 In this original set of 25 interviewees were two people whose primary church involvement was within a non-charismatic Brethren church. This couple did however spend two years in a Pentecostal church after leaving their Brethren church. While the Brethren church would be non-charismatic it was nevertheless strongly evangelical in theology and practice. I was later to interview one other person from a similar background. In this third case the person had been involved in non-charismatic Brethren churches for over twenty years, including a number of years as a missionary, but had subsequently moved into a charismatic Anglican church before leaving the church.

572 These groups, discussed in Chapter 10, were made up of people grappling with similar faith and church structural issues, the nature of such faith concerns being distinct to those involved in ‘EPC’ churches and para-church groups.

573 Those from ‘EPC’ churches were more easily identifiable. Because such churches function in ways that are more ‘sect’ like than ‘church’ like their boundaries are more clearly delineated. The church leavers from such churches knew they had left. This is less clear in the case of those who leave more ‘church’ like congregations. For many Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists and others it is less clearly defined as to when someone is a part of the church and when they have left. A number of people I spoke with informally during the course of the study indicated my own query - when is a Catholic not a Catholic? For many church attendance and participation does not provide a dividing line in the same way as it does for those in ‘EPC’ churches.

574 To this list could be added the greater theological breadth and depth of training typically required of ministers and leaders within mainline churches compared to many ‘EPC’ churches.
one whose primary church background could not be characterised as ‘EPC’ was discovered in future interviews.

Three other issues consolidated the final decision to focus the study on the ‘EPC’ churches. First these churches are among the consistently fastest growing churches both here in New Zealand and world-wide. Such churches are the one positive light in the otherwise declining statistics of the Christian churches in New Zealand (discussed in Chapter 1). Second, those in ‘EPC’ churches can all too easily point to the decline of other churches and their own growth rates both within New Zealand and overseas and assume that leave-taking does not affect them. In fact this is not true. Third from the vantage point of those at the centre of ‘EPC’ churches the leavers they are aware of can be explained away through reference to their cooling of faith or loss of faith. After all Jesus said that some seed would fall on thorny ground where “they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature.” However many of the people I interviewed couldn’t be so easily written off as ‘backsliding’.

For these three reasons the focus of this research fell on the ‘EPC’ churches. This was, to use M. Scott Peck’s phrase, overdetermined by factors of design, methodology and the simple reality of those found in using a snowballing technique. Of course added to this was the influence of McNamara’s plea for ‘insider’ studies using ethnographic methods in sociological religious research. If I was to do an insider study then it needed to be in the stream of the church in which I was located.

2.2 Why Ethnographically?
As already indicated in the introduction to the thesis, previous research in the area of disaffiliation has been based on large quantitative studies drawn from census or survey data or has used ethnographic research to focus on religious sects and cults principally within the United States. This previous research provided a window of opportunity for me to focus on a stream of the church whose disaffiliation rates had not been heavily researched using a qualitative research technique which focused on understanding the phenomenon in all its complexity rather than merely indicating quantitatively that it existed.

Realising that the underlying reasons people become disenchanted with the church are multiple and complex I employed an ethnographic research model. This method of study is intended to reveal deeper levels of meaning and of behaviour than more quantitative methods are equipped to probe. The face-to-face interviewing allowed me to pick up on the hesitations, gestures, emotions, anger, frustration and bewilderment of the people concerned and to explore these with them during the interview in greater depth.

Face-to-face interviewing is a powerful method of eliciting information. The powerfullness of this method can be further enhanced when a personal and relaxed style is employed. Of all the overt methods of gaining information from leavers the face-to-face interview is the most revealing. As I wanted the fine detail regarding both why people leave church and the faith they subsequently developed I chose to use this method of data gathering.

2.3 The Position of the Researcher
In undertaking this research I was impressed by a comment from Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The nature of the church can be understood only from within, ‘cum ir a et studio’, and not from an indifferent standpoint. Only by taking the claim of the church seriously, without relativising it alongside other claims or alongside one’s own reason, but understanding it on the basis of the gospel, can we hope to see it in its essential nature (Bonhoeffer, 1963:20).

575 Luke 8:14. As one senior pastor I interviewed said “Come back to the parable of the sower and the seed, the cares of this world choke it out. The stony hearts. They receive it first gladly and then the sun comes up, and so Jesus identifies that sort of a problem. Some people look like they are really going great and something will knock them out. And Jesus explained it was not good soil, it was thin soil or something else competed for that ground. There are some answers there” (125:70).
Bonhoeffer’s comment related well to my multi-faceted roles as already indicated, during 1994-1996 I was simultaneously involved in a number of different roles during the course of this research. These included minister within an ‘EPC’ church, sociological research student, ‘EPC’ church attender and my own personal experience of a transitioning faith that involved both the dissolution of a previous level of faith and the building of a new level of faith. As Fetterman (1989) states many interesting areas of study are “value laden and rife with vested interests.” This was to be no exception. However recognising the potential for contamination of roles therefore prepared me to put in place strategies to limit such contamination of the data and the data analysis.

Over the last twenty years I have been involved in ‘EPC’ contexts within the Anglican church, a large Pentecostal church and a Baptist Charismatic church. For eight years (three of them while doing this research) I was employed as a minister in one of the biggest Charismatic churches in New Zealand. This was then a church with a weekly attendance in excess of 1,500 people and membership of more than 850 people. I have therefore gained an understanding of the ‘EPC’ church from within, ‘cum ir a et studio’ as Bonhoeffer advocates. Such roles aided the study. As Coser states - “A formal sociological analysis cannot do justice to ideological contents. To understand the sectarian fully one must place oneself in his position, one must, so to speak, temporarily ‘become a sectarian’. This will be easier for those of us who, at one time or another, have actually been sectarians” (Coser, 1974:113).

Because of my role as a minister within an ‘EPC’ church, especially the church to which I was attached, I was able to gain interview access to senior pastors, ministers, theological lecturers and Christian counsellors who might otherwise have been resistant to such research or been considerably more guarded in the material they revealed. On a number of occasions, while interviewing pastors I was able to engage them in conversation as a peer. This allowed them to relax considerably and ensured a more frank and open conversation.

Secondly my role as a pastor also enabled me to attend pastor’s conferences and gatherings both formal and informal and thereby flesh out the data gained through interviews with that obtained as a participant observer on such occasions.

Thirdly my role as pastor gave me privileged access to information about church leavers and groups of leavers to which any independent researcher would simply have not been able to gain access. Because I worked as a pastor in one of the largest ‘EPC’ churches in New Zealand I was privileged to many of the “backstage” workings and conversations used within such churches. For example in the course of the study a group of leavers emerged from within the church with which I was involved. As a member of the pastoral staff I was able to observe both the development of the group, the leadership discussions about the group from within the church and the trajectory of this group as a “dissident” group within the church through to the stage of it being formally disassociated from the church. As a member of the staff I was present at meetings between the governing body of the church and the leadership of the group set up to discuss the ongoing position of the group within the church. Because I observed this as a pastor the detail is not included in this thesis. But also because I was able to observe both the group and the reaction to the group from within the heart of the church I could compare that process with the processes described to me in formal interviews of other church leavers. Thus my inside knowledge and privileged position acted as a sounding board from which to compare and understand the information obtained in formal interviews.

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576 This church has continued to grow, and at the time of writing is somewhat larger than it was while I was on the pastoral staff.
577 The material gained through my role is not specifically used in the research and does not appear in any form in the thesis itself. Being located inside the church leadership throughout such discussions produced many ethical dilemmas for me. There was no informed consent to my presence as a researcher and the material could not therefore be used. I did however consider that, if needed, such knowledge could be gained retrospectively by formally interviewing church leaders involved in this particular situation. I subsequently decided this was unnecessary. I had more than sufficient similar information from groups in other churches already gained through formal interviews. However because I was privileged to be an observer in such discussions this acted as a means to validate the impressions gained by leavers I had interviewed.
If my role as a pastor aided me in terms of gaining access to church ministers and leaders, it also assisted me in interviewing the leavers. I understood the dynamics operating within the churches from which they had come, but more significantly I was often perceived as trustworthy, empathetic and able to comment on the phenomenon in a way that church leaders would accept - that is as an insider.

Like Helen Ebaugh, who herself as a nun researched nuns leaving the convent, I was advantaged through my role as an insider. But also like Ebaugh I analysed the information as an outsider. Prior to the final year of the thesis work I resigned my position as a pastor and worked full-time on analysing and writing up the thesis. Hence as Merton said of Ebaugh:

She found herself collecting data as an insider and analysing it as an outsider. The role of insider gave her sympathetic understanding and privileged access to basic field and documentary data about religious orders; the role of outsider helped provide her with a degree of interpretative distance and detachment.\(^{578}\)

In this way the negative influences of overidentification\(^{579}\) were minimalised.

Finally my personal role of being both heavily involved in the church and personally going through the process of leaving ‘EPC' church involvement and a typical ‘EPC' faith gave me a great deal of understanding that could be obtained in no other way. To quote Ebaugh

What is clear is that I gained enormous insight into the process of exiting from my own experience. In fact, there are nuances and depths of meaning that probably cannot be learned any other way (Ebaugh 1988:xvi).

While I have been able to identify a number of ways in which my mixture of roles enhanced the research there were also inevitably considerable difficulties in the juggling and disclosure of my own mixed roles. Although I had been careful to ensure the people I interviewed were unknown to me, a number nevertheless were aware of my role as a pastor within a church. I was concerned that this would bias the responses that I received. In retrospect I’m not sure that this did happen. In fact my role within the church was to help in gaining access to not only church leaders but also to some leavers. As I became aware that my identity was known I assured them that I was wearing a different hat and that I was confident that the two roles could be kept separate. As the research progressed through 1995 and 1996 I became increasingly aware of the advantageous position I was in as both a sociological student engaged in research and as a pastor in a very large ‘EPC' church. As Hammersley and Atkinson state: “different roles within a setting can be exploited in order to get access to different kinds of data, as well as to acquire some sense of the various kinds of bias characteristic of each” (1983:97). While the researcher’s position will be discussed in greater detail later in this appendix, these remarks serve to indicate something of the mixed roles I needed to juggle.

The extent to which my role as an insider negatively affected the research is a moot point. In reply to such criticism I can only make two points. Firstly many of the leavers I interviewed did not know of my roles as either a church attender or pastor. However these people’s stories and the honesty with which they told them was in no way different to those who knew a little more about my position. I say ‘a little’ more because although some people were aware of my role as a pastor, only three knew of me personally. And secondly I can say that in all research the position of the researcher is influential both in what is studied and from what stance it is studied. I was conscious of this fact and sought to balance this by positioning myself as the stranger (anthropologically) whenever possible. That is I sought to hear and see the perspective of those both in the church and those outside.

In this research I make no overblown claim to objectivity. What I do claim is a constant awareness of the mixture of roles and a continual checking and re-checking to ensure all data was viewed from as many angles

\(^{578}\) Robert K. Merton in his Foreword to Ebaugh (1988.ix).

\(^{579}\) See Bogden and Taylor 1975:51-53.
as possible. The mixture of roles held during the study made me, as Hammersley and Atkinson say, “acquire some sense of various kinds of bias characteristic of each” (quoted above).

3. Phase Two: the Research Phase

This section looks at the research process itself and the issues encountered there both ethically and methodologically.

As already mentioned the first obstacle to the research was finding people to interview. Having found that pastors and leaders in churches were not a good source of names of people to interview I had a genuine concern that the feasibility of the research might be in jeopardy. The heart of the research demanded that sufficient people be found to interview. At the point of enrolling to begin the thesis I knew of less than ten people that I could contact for interviews. This was not going to be enough. Would enough be found? During each interview I always included as the last question one which asked if the interviewee knew of anyone else who had also been a part of a church that I could go and speak to. Very early on I came to realise that there were networks of leavers and that most leavers knew of others. These networks were not formally organised but functioned informally where either shared past involvement, or present group connections form a point of association. One of the first people I interviewed said that he didn’t have any other names that I could follow up, but he would talk to his wife and see if she knew who would be worth talking to. About ten days later, quite late one Sunday night in April 1995, I received a phone call from this man’s wife. Although I had never spoken with her previously she indicated that she was very interested in what I was doing and would be happy for me to interview her and then proceeded to list ten other people (and their phone numbers) that I could contact. I was underway. And I knew I was underway!

I was later to find that most of those I interviewed knew of two or three others who had also left church, and were more than happy to pass on names. I am sure that the point at which I asked for contacts (at the end of the interview) was crucial to them feeling at ease in recommending their friends. By then we had talked for some time and the person was aware both of the legitimacy, professional and empathetic nature of the interview and open endedness of it. It seems that at that point they were sufficiently comfortable with me and the research to pass on other names. On some occasions those more wary indicated that they would ring their contacts themselves and ask if they were happy for me to contact them.

On a number of occasions interviewees would work their way through an old church phone list or address book and indicate people they thought had left the church for me to contact. On four occasions people heard of my study, either through friends or acquaintances or one of the ex-church groups and rang me offering their own names or the names of friends they had.

The list of potential interviewees was also supplemented through a few pastors or leaders in churches who were in contact with leavers. Ironically an interview with a pastor in Dunedin lead to interviews with a number of church leavers in Auckland. The pastor concerned, seeing the research as important, offered to contact a number of people he knew in Auckland giving them my name and address so they could make themselves available for interviews should they want to.

Six months after enrolling I knew that finding people was not going to be a problem. In fact, from the early stages there were considerably more people whom I could interview than the research would require. At this point the problem shifted from finding enough people to finding people from a diverse range of backgrounds.

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580 Having gone to bed long before the call came, I had to frantically hop around the bedroom scrambling for a pen and something to write on. In the end an old birthday card from the bedside cabinet served the purpose. Kneeling, phone in hand while I wrote down this list of names and listened to this women’s potted history of each of the people, I knew then that I was going to find my interviewees. The birthday card still sits in my ‘contacts’ phone book as both a book mark and memento of that crucial phone call.

581 The structuring of the interviews will be discussed later.

582 When they did this I attempted to guide them as to how to introduce me and the research.

583 This pastor had previously lived in Auckland and had maintained contacts with a number of church leavers.
3.1 The Ethical Issues

A number of ethical issues were considered in the planning stages of the research. These revolved around gaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, protecting interviewees from any harm as a result of taking part in the study and ensuring reciprocity. I will discuss each of these in succession.

In choosing to use face-to-face, informal interviews as the major research tool I was aware of the potential for harm to the interviewees of having someone prying into their understanding of life, their personal commitments and relationships. In order to limit this potential a number of safe guards were set in place, one of which was an intention to gain 'informed consent'. The Sociological Association of Aotearoa’s code of ethics states that “wherever appropriate, informed consent should be sought from those individuals directly involved in research. Thus, researchers should: inform participants about the purpose and nature of the research and its possible implications for them, make it clear that all have the freedom of choice to participate or not and make it clear to research participants from whom formal consent has been obtained that they may withdraw that consent at any time.”

Originally I wanted to gain informed consent from the interviewees orally. This was because research had shown that written consent sometimes puts potential interviewees off participating. Singer (1977), for example, indicated a slight “chilling effect on participants” where written consent was required and “a reduced willingness to be interviewed when they were asked to sign a consent form.” However when the research proposal for this study was submitted to the Ethics Committee of Canterbury University in March 1995 it was rejected because consent was not intended to be gained in written form. Initially I was discouraged by such a decision suspecting that the same ‘chilling off’ and ‘reluctance’ might occur in this study. Reluctantly a written Information Sheet about the research and Consent Form was developed meeting the guidelines of the Ethics Committee. Copies of the Research Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix 8). This did not prove to be as troublesome during interviews, however, as I had thought.

The second issue to be confronted was that of confidentiality. This was formally given to the interviewees in written form as part of the Research Information Sheet. The appropriate section of the sheet states “you may be assured of complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. The identity of participants will not be made public. Anonymity is guaranteed.” To achieve such levels of confidentiality all interviewees were identified throughout the research phase by a number rather than by name. A master file linking interviewee numbers to their names was kept under a password on the researcher’s computer and in a locked office. Other than this linking document, all interview scripts and interview tapes were catalogued by an interview number. In the writing up of the thesis interview numbers were exchanged for pseudonyms for individuals, groups and churches. To further protect interviewee’s identities, biographical material was in a number of instances changed. Details that were changed included locations, city names, and occupations. The age and gender of interviewees was retained in correct form. Where changes to a person’s location, city or occupation were made they were made in such a way as to not radically change the impression of the interviewee provided in the thesis. In the case of a few interviewees whose biographical detail was more explicit or who acted as central characters within the thesis, consent to include written detail about them in the thesis was gained prior to submission of the thesis.

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585 Bower states - “Singer (1977) reports on a National Opinion Research Centre sample interviewing study in which she varied the amount of information provided to the respondents, the assurance or lack of assurance of confidentiality, and the requirement of signatures on the consent forms. The results indicated that signatures had a slight chilling effect and reduced the willingness of people to be interviewed and that the assurance of confidentiality produced better response to sensitive questions about respondents behaviour” (1978:38).
586 There were also gains for the research by offering confidentiality. Bower (1978:23) states, for example, “where anonymity is assured it is generally accepted that respondents will tell a truer tale and act with less inhibition.”
Protection of interviewees from harm as a result of the prying nature of the interview was carefully considered in the planning stages of the thesis. Being involved in the interview would for many raise painful and personal details and these needed to be sensitively handled. For this reason confidentiality and informed consent, plus the knowledge that one could withdraw any material at a later date were important safe guards. The Ethics Committee also indicated concern in this regard suggesting that the research was asking personal questions about one’s faith and that the position of the interviewees needed to be protected. In retrospect most interviewees saw the interview as an opportunity to talk with somebody about things that were very important to them but were not normally discussed in other forums. They saw this as a positive experience. In a few interviews painful experiences were discussed, but in such situations the researcher was always careful to remind the interviewees that they shouldn’t feel obligated to answer questions and that either a break could be taken from the interview or it could be terminated if they preferred. On no occasion did anyone choose to terminate an interview and in only one case did an interviewee ask for material to be removed from an interview script after the interview. During a number of interviews people asked for the tape to be turned off for a while when specific people or delicate church situations were being discussed. Sometimes this was in order to see how such material would be handled in further publications and they then returned to the detail with the tape running. In other cases the interviewee preferred to explain certain details to me for background knowledge and understanding but not on tape and therefore not as part of the interview script.

These specific incidents aside the overwhelming impression of the interviewees regarding the interview was very positive. Most commented either that it was ‘easier than they had anticipated’ or ‘it was good to talk to somebody about it’. One interviewee for instance commented:

(Russell) - I had sort of an agenda, in mind when I decided to do this, this would be the first time since I have left the church, . . . it is the first time; I’ve talked to someone who can actually hear my story. That in itself I think is outstanding really. I’ve gone through all these things, huge painful experiences and still living with the sense of powerlessness. A legacy from the particular choices I made, but the church has nothing to offer me. I put myself in the place of a minister and it’s not their problem. The system is unable to cope with the problem. I feel really sad and hurt. Hurt? Yes hurt that I’ve had to go through all this, . . . and I was deeply involved and well known. Because of that sense of judgment. But not only had I presumably lost my faith, in their minds, but I had done the worst thing - get a divorce, so for all those things I felt quite abandoned. I never had a chance to tell them why I left. So I’ve had to carry all these things, apart from the friends I have for support, the system has not been of any support (15.70).

The final issue to be considered was that of reciprocity. For a number of interviewees like Russell there was a clear sense of personal gain in being part of the study. For others the interview itself acted in a therapeutic fashion and they chose to comment as such, either at the end of the interview or at a later meeting. Despite these positive personal outcomes from the interview all the interviewees, both those who had left the church and the informed insiders, were given an undertaking by the researcher that they would receive a summary of the research after its completion and that copies of the thesis in total would be available for them to read if they were interested.

3.2 Interviewing

Moving from a name and a telephone number to a completed interview script was not without its problems. Interviewees had to be telephoned in order to make initial contact, their interest and willingness to be involved secured and a time set to meet with them. Calling people cold and seeking to get their cooperation

587 This one interviewee asked for a copy of the interview script and met with me for a second interview in which he indicated a few sentences that he wanted removed from his script.

588 In each case people were told that a ten or twelve page summary would be sent to them and the total thesis made available for those interested in reading it. I intend sending such a summary out to the interviewees after the thesis has been accepted by the examiners.
in the research was one aspect of the research I found myself continually trying to put off until tomorrow. For me this proved the most nerve-racking phase of the research. Particularly at the beginning I felt every contact had to lead to an interview. I therefore couldn’t afford to have any of my precious list of contacts turn me down.

During six months of 1995 and a further seven months of 1996 I would set aside an evening each month to ring through the list and secure ten interviews in the next calendar month and then set another date in my diary to do the same next month. Although I would set one evening aside it inevitably involved a number of calls to get some people at home. Once talking to the person, I would briefly introduce myself by name and as a research student in the Sociology Department at Canterbury University and then indicate the title of my research, explaining to them that Mr X or Ms Y had given me their name. Having got this far, I would try and relax the pace of the conversation asking if I could meet with them and hear their story of involvement in a church and their journey since leaving.

In order to secure an interview I always indicated that I would be happy to meet with them any time and anywhere. The objective of this phone call was to ensure that a time was set to meet with them face to face. In the course of the research I only had two refusals. I had expected a much higher refusal rate. That so many potential interviewees were prepared to meet for an interview indicates the degree of interest leavers have in telling their story.

Having secured interview appointments I could then sleep easily again, at least for another month. Ironically I seldom became overly nervous prior to a face-to-face interview. Setting up interviews meant working around people’s busy schedules, and on a number of occasions interview times had to be set weeks in advance. Because of these delays it was necessary to keep making new contacts to ensure a steady flow of interviews.

Although indicating that I would be happy to meet with people at any time my preference was to meet with people in their home, where they would be relaxed, and within an open ended time frame. In nine cases this was not possible. Six interviews were conducted at the person’s place of work. In two of these cases the atmosphere was private, relaxed, informal and open ended time-wise. However this was not the case for four of the interviews which although private were conducted in the person’s office, typically across their office desk. The most difficult aspect of such interviews was the intrusion of a fixed time schedule, although interruptions and phone calls also affected the flow of the interview. Two other interviews were conducted in cafes, and one in a wine bar. Such situations were less private but did provide a more relaxed and open ended atmosphere.

589 In each case I spoke to the provider of names to ask if I was able to use their name as the source of the contact. This was never refused.

590 One gentleman heard it was research and simply said ‘no thanks’ as he hung up. The call lasted less than a minute. The second person was very nervous about seeing me, saying she wasn’t sure, she was too busy at the moment and there were a number of things going on in her life right then that made it emotionally difficult to sit down and talk with somebody about such things. After talking with this person for a few minutes I realised that while a little gentle encouragement would have elicited an interview it may have been more helpful for her to be left alone. This was complicated by the fact that I was only in this city for a brief period of time, which was by then rapidly running out. In the case of all out of town interviews I would arrange to meet with the person prior to arriving in the city. In this particular case I had rung the woman two weeks previously and arranged to contact her on arrival in her city to set a definite time. It was during the second phone call that she indicated her hesitancy about being involved.

591 As Furushima said of the location of his faith interviews - “In this study, the setting and location of interviews were dependent upon availability and accessibility. Most of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants. Speaking in a familiar environment was a desirable feature of the home interview. . . Choice of setting is not a trivial feature of the interview set up but a critical feature of the interview itself” (Furushima 1985:419)

592 One interviewee had her desk facing the wall and we conducted the interview across a small coffee table.

593 Such environments proved difficult for taping, due to background noise. The transcribing of these tapes often took considerably longer.
After my first ‘office’ interview, I always tried to meet future interviewees in a more relaxed environment. However this was not always what the person wanted to do, and accommodations had to be made.

The interviews with informed insiders were almost exclusively conducted at their place of work. Such interviews were normally part of their work schedule and therefore limited in length. Wherever possible I would indicate that I needed 40 minutes to an hour with the person. Meeting the informed insiders at work did not pose the same constraints as it did in the interviews with leavers, these interviews being of a far less personal nature, considerably more focused, and less open-ended than those with leavers. Ironically gaining access to the informed insiders was often more problematic than gaining access to the leavers. Again a sponsor was used wherever possible. Here my involvement and links with ‘EPC’ churches enabled me to gain the support of a few well respected senior ministers whose influence helped in gaining access for interviews.

Each interview with church leavers followed a similar format. Although informal and relaxed from the viewpoint of the interviewee, a mental checklist was in place on each occasion. The interviewees needed to be relaxed, comfortable, and wherever possible ‘at home’. The purpose of the interview needed to be carefully explained. This involved both talking through and giving them a copy of the Research Information Sheet. Having discussed the research in broad terms and having outlined that their identity and everything they said would be held in strict confidence, we were ready to begin. My introduction to the interview pointed out that I would be leaving them a copy of the Research Information Sheet and Consent Form, but required them to sign another copy for me to keep prior to me leaving.

Having introduced the study, and having dealt with the Information Sheet and Consent Form I would then move to get the interview under way. On a number of occasions interviewees asked questions prior to the beginning of the interview which required me to either indicate what I was finding in the research or indicate my own position vis à vis the church. In both cases I would politely suggest that we leave those discussions until after the interview as I needed to be careful that what I said didn’t influence them in any way. The interviewees were very understanding at this point.

Moving to tape the interview required keeping people at ease. In each case a small battery powered tape-recorder was used that could be placed on a coffee table, the floor or on the couch in an unintrusive manner. Reaching inside my bag for the recorder I would explain that to gain an accurate record of what they were saying and in order to save time it was easier to tape our conversation. Although, some were initially nervous, the presence of a tape recorder did not cause anyone to reconsider their involvement. All the interviewees indicated that they were comfortable having the interview taped.

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594 In one case the lack of privacy may have been a factor influencing the degree of detail discussed by the interviewee.
595 My field notes after this interview said “meeting with interviewee at their place of work, especially a corporate professional place where it is over the desk and formal is not as conducive to gathering information as sitting at home with a cup of coffee. Be careful in the future where I conduct interviews.” (Field notes-Jan 95)
596 On a number of occasions I was offered less than 40 minutes or other delays getting started and interruptions meant that the interviews were in fact less than 40 minutes. There were others however who had set aside considerably more than an hour to speak with me and were happy to continue the conversation over coffee, lunch or a drink.
597 Introducing the need for written consent in this way ensured a relaxed discussion rather than have the person run off and find a pen and sign before the interview got under way.
598 Dijkstra’s study (1987:327) of participant responses in which half the people interviewed were given information about the researcher’s bias and half were not, showed the alleged interviewer opinion strongly affected the respondent’s stated opinion. Respondents typically sought to conform with the interviewer’s views.
599 This is consistent with Dijkstra (1987) who states of his own study that “All the interviews were conducted in the respondents’ homes and were audiotaped. No respondents objected to the use of a tape recorder; actually, they seemed to have forgotten its presence after some five minutes. Previous research has indicated
The interviews were conducted as open-ended conversations that covered the joining process involved for each interviewee as they became a part of an ‘EPC’ church. It then moved to a discussion of the ways they were involved, the process and reasons for their leaving and the nature of their faith since leaving. A copy of the Interview Schedule is provided at Appendix 9. An informal conversational style was adopted, with the researcher interrupting for points of clarification or to probe specific areas. Towards the end of the interview I would work through the Interview Schedule ensuring that each topic area had been covered.

The majority of interviews were with only one person, however in a number of cases involving married couples were interviewed together. Interviewing couples together raised questions of the degree of honesty each was prepared to give in the company of the other. It was decided that this was offset by the added comfort they felt in both being present and the way in which the majority of couples sparked off each other adding details and correcting each other’s account of their story.

A consideration needs to be given to the quality of information gained in face-to-face interviewing. In many cases I was aware that I was receiving only one side of a story. The leaders of the churches respondents had left probably would have differing interpretations of the events that lead a particular person to leave. While their perspective may not have been verifiable as what ‘actually happened’ it was as Ebaugh quoting Thomas and Znaniecki claims “real in its consequences.”

“If men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” This means in essence, that the way an individual perceives an event or situation impacts his or her behaviour. In order to understand behaviour, it is necessary to take such subjective definitions into account..... objectivity of a recalled event is less important than its subjective meaning for the person recalling it.601

The interviews with leavers were between one and two hours. However the total time spent with them was rarely less that two to two and a half hours. This meant that I would try to schedule interview times for evenings. After the interview had ended, and I had asked about other potential interviewees, I would endeavour to broadly answer any questions they had about the research or my position vis à vis the church.

Periodically interviewees mentioned important information after the tape recorder was turned off which necessitated either asking permission to turn it on again or keeping a mental note of what was said. Having left the home I would normally drive a block or two down the street and then write up some interview notes. These notes included comments about the interviewee, the interviewee setting, my own gut feelings during the interview and comments made by the interviewee before the tape recorder was turned on or after it was turned off. Towards the end of the research I would speak these notes directly into the tape recorder as I drove away from the interview.

Having ‘got’ the interview taped the next phase involved transcribing the interview and writing up the field notes. These were then filed by interview and paragraph numbers. Most interviews with the leavers were between one and two hours duration, however five to six hours was required to type up each interview transcript. Each paragraph of these would later be catalogued according to the major subject areas discussed within.

that the presence of a tape recorder hardly affects the respondent’s answers (e.g. Bradburn and Sudman, 1979; Loosveldt, 1985 - referenced in Dijkstra, 1987:314).

600 One and a half hour tapes were used which gave 45 minutes on each side before the tapes needed to be turned over. Again this ensured a minimum of focus on the recorder. For a brief period of time during the interview phase I had trouble with the recorder. The tape recorder didn’t click off at the end of each side of the tape and this kept me on the recorder to ensure it was turned over at the right point. Interviews with the informed insiders were on one hour tapes, as these were typically shorter.

4. Phase Three: Widening the Net

The Constant Comparative Method of Glaser and Strauss (1967) states that theory generated from just one kind of data never fits or works as well as theory generated from diverse slices of data from the same category. In order to utilise this constant comparative method the net of information collection was extended in five ways: (1) to include those in the process of leaving as well as those who had left, (2) those who having left an ‘EPC’ church were subsequently to return to a church, (3) a move from one geographical region to a number of new geographical locations, (4) from individual leavers to groups of leavers and (5) from interviews with informed insiders to increased participant observation at a number of church services and formal and informal gatherings of ‘EPC’ pastors.

As the following table indicates ten of those interviewed were marginally involved in an ‘EPC’ church at the time of the interview. Two of this group of ten had left their church for a period of six months but had recently returned when I interviewed them. This group of ‘marginal’ church attenders had not left the church but were considering leaving their church at the time of the interview. The inclusion of these people enabled me to compare the impressions of those who had previously left the church with those who were in the process of leaving.

Table 1 - Interviewee’s Involvement in Any Church at the Time of the Interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Number (n )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Churchless Faith:</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had left the ‘EPC’ church they were previously involved in and had no present involvement in a church.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returned to Church:</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had left the ‘EPC’ church they were previously involved in, been uninvolved in any church for a minimum of six months and have since subsequently re-joined a church.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginal:</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considering leaving their ‘EPC’ church at the time of the interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>108</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A second set of people were also interviewed who had previously left an ‘EPC’ church and had subsequently made connections back into a Christian church (not necessarily an ‘EPC’ church). The perspective of these people as previous leavers now in the process of forming new connections with the church provided a second slice of data that could be compared and contrasted with the main group of leaver’s transcript information.

The interview process involved 85 interviewees from the Christchurch area. These were later added to by 6 from the Nelson region, 10 from Auckland, 3 from Dunedin and 4 from other centres within New Zealand. This gave a total of 108 interviews with church leavers or those considering leaving. The broadening of the geographical location of interviewees also ensured that this was not a geographically isolated phenomenon. These interviews with leavers were added to through the interviewing of a number of informed insiders in New Zealand and Melbourne (see Table 2.).

Although I was unable to interview leavers directly while in Melbourne I was able to interview a number of people who were very close to large groups of ‘EPC’ church leavers there.

Interviews from ‘EPC’ church leavers within Christchurch could in this way be compared with those from other regions within New Zealand both urban and rural and also to information gained about leavers in Melbourne from informed insiders interviewed there.

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602 While in Melbourne I was also able to visit 4 churches and attend two services.
Table 2. Informed Insiders Interviewed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Church Pastor</th>
<th>Theological Lecturer</th>
<th>Psychiatrist or Counsellor</th>
<th>Church Consultant</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auckland</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dunedin</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NZ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data gathered from interviews with individuals or married couples was added to by data gathered through observing and talking with three groups of leavers during 1996. These were not taped interviews but did involve me in attending group meetings and discussing why these groups of people had left their particular church and the role of the present group in their leaving and ongoing faith. In the case of two of these groups it also provided an opportunity for me to present some of my preliminary insights and allow the group to discuss these. Both of these occasions served as strong validators to the information gained through face-to-face interviews.

The final method that was used to widen the net was participant observation of ‘EPC’ churches and formal and informal gatherings of pastors of such churches. During this period of participant observation I attended seven different ‘EPC’ churches and three formal pastoral conferences as well as a number of informal pastoral gatherings. Such occasions were differentiated from my normal role as pastor as I was able to act solely as a participant observer and attended with this single aim in mind.

5. Phase Four: Analysis and Presentation

The final phase of the thesis involved the analysis of the interview and participant observation material and the writing up of the thesis itself. The decision to interview a large number of leavers (n=108) and a relatively large number of informed insiders (n=54) plus the field notes gained in interviews and in participant observation situations generated a huge quantity of data. Most interview scripts were between 15 and 30 typed pages. In order to begin analysis of this data a coding and indexing system was necessary. To facilitate this each interview was filed as a whole script in a Microsoft ‘Word’ document and also divided into sets of paragraphs as database entries on the Microsoft ‘Access’ database. The interview material was divided into 6,000 sets of paragraphs which were individually coded, each set of paragraphs being coded

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603 From other regions in New Zealand
604 Melbourne Australia
605 These documents were coded by the interview number and paragraph number. This data was consistent with the indexing of the interview scripts on the Access data base.
606 Microsoft Access was used in preference to the ‘Nudist’ programme for a number of reasons. The first and most significant of these was the sheer volume of data. Discussions with those using Nudist and the reading of comments by others on an internet page on the programme indicated that it was more useful with smaller quantities of data. These enquiries also indicated that the programme took a great deal of care in setting it up and was very time consuming. The second reason involved cost. The ‘Nudist’ programme cost $NZ800 at the time compared to $160 for the Microsoft Access programme. The cost factor was also complicated by the need for increased Ram capacity on my computer in order to run ‘Nudist’ efficiently. Two factors finally led to a decision to use the Microsoft Access Data base. Firstly the ‘Access’ database was compatible with the Microsoft ‘Word’ programme and I could therefore move data easily between the two. This capacity was increased when I considered that tables, graphs and charts generated using the ‘Access’ programme could be both moved into ‘Word’ documents and edited from within ‘Word’. The final factor was fortuitous in that I was given a free place on an Access training course. This course allowed me to experiment with the ‘Access’ data base and through the generosity of the instructor provided me with ongoing free advice and assistance.
under as many sections as was applicable. Initially the interview data was coded into seventy different categories which were later, using an axial coding method, subdivided into more distinct categories. The process of transferring the interview scripts from single word documents to paragraph-sized data entries and coding them was laborious, involving over three months of careful work. The subcategorisation took a further six weeks. But from this laborious exercise initial analysis work was begun. This work was completed in two sections. The first at the end of the second year of research, involved 5 weeks of categorisation of material. A second set of interview scripts was categorised at the end of the third year of the research. After the first cataloguing of material initial analysis work was done which helped to focus subsequent interviews into areas regularly mentioned as well as areas that were being less consistently spoken about in the first set of interview scripts.

This analysis phase was greatly enhanced through the powerful and efficient system that was set up using the database. Individual comments on each subject area could then be quickly identified, compared and counted, and tables or graphs generated as necessary. The information thus generated formed the basis of the write-up for the thesis.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this research the emphasis has been on hearing the voice of the leavers, those who are marginalised within ‘EPC’ churches and whose voice is normally not heard. The use of an ethnographic methodology involving face-to-face informal interviews and participant observation provided a powerful methodological base for achieving this. A grounded theoretical approach was followed beginning with the sensitising concepts drawn from interviews with informed insiders and a sample of church leavers. The initial observations drawn from these interviews were then further tested in a wider sample of church leavers utilising Glaser and Strauss’s constant comparative method. To this sample of leavers were added: interviews with people drawn from other geographical locations (including both rural and city contexts); interviews with people considering leaving an ‘EPC’ church who at the time of the interview were ‘on the edge’ of the church, interviews with people who had left ‘EPC’ churches and after a period outside the church of at least six months had subsequently returned to some church participation; interviews with those who had made individual decisions to leave and those who had been a part of groups leaving at the same time; and finally, interviews with an array of informed insiders (including pastors, theological lecturers, Christian counsellors and church consultants). Each subsequent set of interviews provided a new source of interview scripts from which to compare the findings of the initial interviews.

It is hoped that through the multiple sets of face-to-face in-depth interviews in which a total of one hundred and sixty two people were formally interviewed and the participant observations of the ‘EPC’ churches and post-church groups a clear understanding of the reasons people leave, the leaving process and the post-church faith journey of leavers has been gained.

The researcher has been able to both listen to the leavers and be part of their groups while at the same time listening to those who lead ‘EPC’ churches and be a part of their networks, conferences, seminars and church services. This privileged position has enabled the researcher to postulate that an ongoing conversation between church leavers and church leaders, those on the margins and those at the centre of ‘EPC’ churches, provides a mechanism for greater understanding of each other’s perspective. At the same time it provides a dialogue which could help both church and post-church in their ‘mission’ to ‘be’ and to ‘bear’ the Christian message under conditions of postmodernity.

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607 In some cases a major subject code was subdivided into up to 10 or 12 subcodings.
608 In order to prepare for the writing up phase, a phase I was greatly in awe of, I attended a writers and editors course, much of which was directly applicable and gave me previously unlearned skills in written communication.
1. We believe in the inspiration and authority of the accepted canon of the scripture as originally given.

2. We believe in the Eternal Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

3. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in his sinless life, in his miracles, in his vicarious and atoning death through his shed blood, in his bodily resurrection, in his ascension of the right hand of the father and in his personal return in power and glory.

4. We believe that for the salvation of the lost and sinful man, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life and that the Baptism of the Holy Spirit is a separate and distinct experience subsequent to salvation, providing for life and service.

6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved into the resurrection of life and they that are lost into the resurrection of damnation.

7. We believe that all believers in our Lord Jesus Christ are spiritually one.

8. We believe in the creation, and the fall of man as recorded in Genesis, his total spiritual depravity and inability to attain to divine righteousness apart from God.

9. We believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, the saviour of men, conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, very God and very man.

10. We believe Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day, and personally appeared to His disciples.

11. We believe in the necessity for believers of water baptism by immersion.

12. We believe in sharing in the Table of the Lord, commonly called communion or the Lord’s supper, for believers.

13. We believe in the reality and personality of Satan and the eternal judgement of Satan and his angels.

14. We believe in the second coming of Christ, at which He will rule and reign for eternity.
## Appendix 4: Faith Stages By Aspects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>A. Form of Logic (Piaget)</th>
<th>B. Perspective Taking (Selman)</th>
<th>C. Form of Moral Judgement (Kohlberg)</th>
<th>D. Bounds of Social Awareness</th>
<th>E. Locus of Authority</th>
<th>F. Form of World Coherence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pre-operational</td>
<td>Rudimentary empathy- (egocentric)</td>
<td>Punishment reward</td>
<td>Family, primal others</td>
<td>Attachment/dependence relationships. Size, power, visible symbols of authority.</td>
<td>Episodic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Concrete Operational</td>
<td>Simple perspective-taking</td>
<td>Instrumental hedonism (Reciprocal fairness)</td>
<td>“Those like us” (in familial, ethnic, racial, class &amp; religious terms).</td>
<td>Incumbents of authority roles, salience increased by personal relatedness</td>
<td>Narrative Dramatic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Early Formal Operations</td>
<td>Mutual Interpersonal</td>
<td>Interpersonal expectations and concordance</td>
<td>Composite of groups in which one has interpersonal relationships</td>
<td>Consensus of valued groups and in personally worthy representatives of belief-value traditions.</td>
<td>Tacit system felt meaning symbolically mediated, globally held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Formal Operational (-Dichotomizing)</td>
<td>Mutual with self-selected group or class (societal)</td>
<td>Societal perspective Reflective relativism or class-biased universalism</td>
<td>Ideologically compatible communities with congruence to self-chosen norms and insights</td>
<td>One’s own judgement as informed by a self-ratified ideological perspective. Authorities and norms must be congruent with this.</td>
<td>Explicit system conceptually mediated, clarity about boundaries and inner connections in system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Formal Operations- (Dialectical)</td>
<td>Mutual with groups, classes and traditions “other” than one’s own.</td>
<td>Prior to Society, Principled Higher law (universal and critical)</td>
<td>Extends beyond class norms and interests. Disciplined ideological vulnerability to “truths” and “claims” of out-groups and other traditions</td>
<td>Dialectical joining of judgement-experience processes with reflective claims of others and of various expressions of cumulative human wisdom.</td>
<td>Multisystemic symbolic and conceptual mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Formal Operations- (Synthetic)</td>
<td>Mutual, with the commonwealth of being.</td>
<td>Loyalty to being</td>
<td>Identification with the species. Transnarcissistic love of being</td>
<td>In a personal judgement informed by the experiences and truths of previous</td>
<td>Unitive actual felt a participated unity of “One beyond One”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Source: Fowler 1995: 244-246
stages, purified of egoic striving, and linked by disciplined intuition to the principle of being. Many
Appendix 5: Developmentally Related Styles of Family Systems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership:</th>
<th>Chaotic</th>
<th>Legalistic</th>
<th>Symbolic</th>
<th>Individuating</th>
<th>Differentiated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arbitrary</td>
<td>Structured roles</td>
<td>Traditional expectations</td>
<td>Separate roles &amp; responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Power-oriented</td>
<td>Structured dominance</td>
<td>Interpersonal sensitivities within clear roles</td>
<td>Some sense of family as system -shared responsibility for system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent</td>
<td>Authoritarian</td>
<td>Unconscious controlling</td>
<td>Conscious controlling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision-Making:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Whim, emotion</td>
<td>Follow rules or established procedure</td>
<td>Find fit between intended or apprehended values</td>
<td>Find fit between intended or apprehended values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impulsive reactive</td>
<td>Authoritarian teaching</td>
<td>Conscious of group</td>
<td>If possible, avoid conflict maintain relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adheres to rules even if conflict or hurt - insensitive to emotional hurt</td>
<td>Unconscious controlling</td>
<td>Unconscious controlling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physically and emotionally abusive</td>
<td>Moral reciprocity</td>
<td>Emotional exclusion</td>
<td>Emotional exclusion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Legal point of view</td>
<td>Threat of isolation</td>
<td>Threat of isolation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rules, reward, and punishment</td>
<td>Appeal to conscience</td>
<td>Appeal to conscience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages of Faith &amp; Selfhood:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intuitive Projective</td>
<td>Mythic-Literal</td>
<td>Synthetic-Conventional</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impulsive</td>
<td>Imperial</td>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
<td>Institutional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Images of God:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arbitrary, powerful, magical</td>
<td>Anthropomorphic</td>
<td>Friend, life-line, companion, Spirit of harmony &amp; protection of relations</td>
<td>Personal and beyond</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed anthropomorphic and animistic focus</td>
<td>Sterna and just, but loving parent</td>
<td>Conscience and expectations</td>
<td>Conceptual mediation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>External relation</td>
<td>Internal relation</td>
<td>Conscious ideation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Law giver</td>
<td></td>
<td>Connected consciously with aspects of experience and choices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[610\] Source: Fowler 1990:118-119.
APPENDIX 6: A Comparison of Liberal Christian and Conservative/Fundamentalist Christian beliefs

“It is almost by definition, impossible to set out any list of beliefs of liberals. They don’t write creeds in the traditional sense of objective truths. Liberal ‘beliefs’ represent more a posture than a set of propositions. Therefore it is probably easier to sense them by comparison with fundamentalist statements” (Webster 1993:8).

| **God** | **FUNDAMENTALIST:** God is male, a person with overt intentions, all powerful, working out his pre-ordained purposes. |
| **Jesus Christ** | **LIBERAL:** The man who, more than any we know, expresses the God in us. His death and continuing life reveal the way of human wholeness. |
| **Sin** | A corruption in individual human nature which makes it impossible for any human to fulfill God’s demands and which therefore can only be removed for us by a sinless being, who stands in our place. |
| **The Devil** | A real being who from the beginning has worked to deceive, delude and destroy souls and to foil God’s purposes. |
| **Hell** | A real place to which unrepentant, unbelieving souls are banished by a righteous God, there to suffer everlasting punishment for sin. |
| **Demons** | Real supernatural beings with special powers to corrupt the good and to produce particular evils in people. |
| **Miracles** | Divine interventions involving the suspension of natural laws; used by God to demonstrate supernatural authority. |
| **The Bible** | The inerrant word of the only true God; the only Word of God; without error; absolutely literally authoritative; providing all-sufficient knowledge of God’s will and purpose; powerful to produce conviction: above human criticism or question. |

Source: Webster 1993
Appendix 7 Distribution of Stages of faith by Age in Fowler’s Early Faith Stage Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distribution of Stages of Faith by Age</th>
<th>Age Groups</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stages of Faith</strong></td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>88.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>(25)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Totals may not equal 100.0% due to rounding errors.

Source: Fowler 1995, TableB.3, p318 (first published 1981)
Appendix 8 Criteria used to categorise interviewees in faith positions

The faith positions were developed through looking for criteria within the interview scripts which provided points of demarcation between interviewees. Although I was aware of the criteria used by Fowler in his faith stage positions I did not conduct faith stage interviews. Rather crucial comments that distinguished the interviewees from within their own interview scripts were used to build up a framework through which to categorise the interviewees into the faith positions developed in this present study. The specific criteria, listed below, were then used as an analytical comparision from which to categorise the individuals.

In the process of categorising the interviewees it needs to be remembered that the individual interviewees did not meet all the criteria for a particular faith position. They did however need to meet the majority to be categorised in that position.

As well as seeking to consider the interviewee’s responses to particular criteria the interview scripts were read and re-read alongside the faith stage analysis provided in the Manual for Faith Development Research (1993).\textsuperscript{611} This was in order to gain an overall impression of each interviewee’s faith which was used to validate the categorisation process.

\textbf{Criteria for Displaced Followers}

1. Left because of specific church grumbles, arguments, directional changes and leadership issues.

2. Left through inappropriate or inadequate pastoral care at specific needy times in their lives. So left hurt, disappointed and disillusioned.

3. Retained unexamined, non reflexive faith. No sign of questioning the taken for granteds. The basis of scripture, or creeds remains.

4. Hope that one day they will return to the church.

5. Hope that God will start something new, a new style of church, way of operating etc that they can join.

6. Faith nurtured now by Radio Rhema, TV evangelists, seminars, Christian books, magazines etc.

7. Faith practices either continue (e.g quiet times, times of prayer, reading the Bible, etc). Or if not continuing or not continuing to the satisfaction of the person an acceptance or stated acknowledgement that these should be continuing.

8. Strong commitment to Christian faith.

\textsuperscript{611} Moseley, R.; Jarvis, D. & Fowler, J. W. 1993
Criteria for Reflexive Exiles

1. A confused, unsettled and unsure state of faith. People make comments to the effect that they don’t know or understand their faith anymore.

2. A claim that they are not denying their faith, but continue to believe. They are still Christians, in their own eyes. Often this Christian faith is based on past events or experiences of God rather than present realities or experiences.

3. A leaving of faith issues and practice. Putting their faith down and not addressing it at the moment.

4. Significant faith questions that dominate their present faith.

5. A less condemning attitude to those who don’t fit the ‘in box’ of evangelical Christianity. e.g. greater acceptance of homosexuals etc.

6. A cautiousness or wariness when it comes to considering reading the Bible or using it as a guide for faith and practice.

7. Strong negative feelings towards the church. These may include frustration, anger or sadness. A number of interviewees in this category will cry and become visibly upset during interviews as they talk about their time in the church.

8. Finding a new sense of self, of personhood and a new freedom within themselves to be who they are without reference to external expectations.

9. An aversion to Christian things, people or teaching.

Criteria for Transitional Explorers

1. Emerging self-owned and articulated faith - emerging confidence in Christian faith.


3. Taking responsibility for their faith, not willing to let it drift, know it is up to them to take some action to build, reflect on and develop their faith.

4. Re-establishing relationships with self-selected others and groups.

5. Desire for rational, bounded comprehensive faith and world view understandings. Attempts to seek closure rather than allow tensions or paradoxes to remain open.

6. Desire for leadership structure that does not seek their dependency on it.

7. Respect for autonomy of others.
8. Focus on rational, thought out coherent faith

9. Preparedness to include groups and others that have some ideological compatibility with the individual.

10. Symbols univocal and translated into explicit conceptual meanings.

**Criteria for Integrated Way-finders**


2. Aspects of God, Christ and Christianity have been decided for them. These are definite and settled and personal.

3. A sense of identity as a Christian. Their faith is an integrated part of who they are. This is part of the essence of their make up.

4. A comfortable, settled nature to their faith (at rest). These are people who are relaxed and at ease with their faith. They are comfortable about talking about their faith in a way that reflects the integrated nature of their faith and life-style.

5. These people have integrated their previous church experience into who they now are without obvious anger or frustration. There may be past disappointments or frustrations but these have been put behind them.

6. Associated with other like minded Christian people, networks, faith groups or church commitment.
University of Canterbury
Department of Sociology

Research Information Sheet.

You are invited to participate in a sociological research project entitled: ‘A Churchless Faith.’ The aim of this project is to explore the processes by which people who leave the church nevertheless maintain their faith outside of the institutional framework. The research seeks to understand the reasons such people have for leaving and the churchless faith that emerges in the process.

Your involvement in this project will involve an interview which will take between one and two hours. As a follow-up to this investigation, you may be asked to give a second interview later in the research to explore issues further.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation. The identity of participants will not be made public. Anonymity is guaranteed. There will be no link made in subsequent publications between your name(s) and the interview material. All identifying information on individuals, churches, and para-church groups will be removed or disguised in all interview transcripts and in any subsequent publication.

The project is being carried out as part of my doctoral research within the Sociology Department of Canterbury University. The project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee.

Alan Jamieson
Ph 3582-807

Consent Form

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as an interviewee in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Signed..................................................... Date.....................................................
Leavers Interview Schedule

1. **Background:-**
   - Age
   - Gender
   - Marital status
   - Educational level
   - Employment

2. **Church Background Prior to the Charismatic/Pentecostal involvement:-**
   - Member of a church
   - Involvement as a child, teenager
   - Other family members involved in church (ESP parents)
   - What were the major influences in the development of your ideals and beliefs?

3. **Influence of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement on you:-**
   - How became involved?
   - Where were you personally involved?
   - What were you looking for that you found in the church?

4. **What encouraged, enticed you into church?**
   - Relationships
   - Link with the place you came into contact with the renewal
   - Charismatic figure
   - Geographical

5. **Level of involvement in Institutional Christian Church:-**
   - Membership
   - Leadership roles, involvement
   - Para-church other group involvement
   - Small group involvement
   - Training courses, leadership training

6. **Why left?:-**
   - What happened?
   - Voice, ownership doubts, credibility gap
   - Work, loyalty, changing circumstances
   - Changes in church goals, methods
   - Personality relationships
   - Irrelevance to the issues of your life/world needs
   - Not intellectually challenging
   - Who was alongside you during this process?
   - Did you talk about it with someone? How did they react?
   - What finally made you leave?
     (Probe transition point in life or faith)

7. **How managed to maintain faith?**
   - Now left the church were you moving away from Christian faith?
   - Ongoing relationships with other Christians
- Group involvement
- Material read, listening to radio preachers etc.
- Having left the church why not throw away faith too?
  - Relationships
  - Roots

8. How is your present faith worked out:-
   - What does it mean to be a Christian for you now?
   - Specific areas of prayer, bible reading, service, ‘fellowship’, financial giving, telling others of faith

9. Present Disposition to Church:-
   - Would you consider going back one day?
   - Feelings towards the church now (angry, disappointed, alienated)
   - Sense of guilt (should be involved), sadness (not an appropriate group for you?)

10. Looking back through the rear vision mirror:-
    - What would you do differently now?

11. Awareness of others who are in a similar situation:-
    - How have they dealt with leaving?
    - Changed church
    - Left Institutional Christian Church
    - Become part of a house group
    - Abandoned faith altogether

12. Faith Now.
    What feelings do you have when you think about God?
    Do you consider yourself a person of faith today?
    If you pray what do you feel is going on when you pray?
    Do you feel that your belief is true? In what sense are religious traditions other than your own true?
    What is sin (or sins)? Have your feelings about this changed? How did you feel about it earlier?
    Some people believe that without religion morality breaks down. What do you feel about this?
    Where do you feel that you are changing, growing, struggling or wrestling with doubt in your life at the present time? Where is your growing edge?
    What is your image (or idea) of mature faith?
    Do you have important faith/God experiences now?

Could you give me some names of others that I could interview?
Pastors/leaders of churches Interview Schedule

1. Are there distinct types of people or times in people’s lives when you see them as most likely to leave the church without the specific intention of joining another one?

2. Are you aware of people who have left this church or other churches saying they intended to carry on as Christians but were not going to be part of a church?
   - What happened to them?
   - Did they end up joining a church? Lose touch etc.?

4. What are the reasons such people give for leaving?

5. Are there other factors which you see as being significant in their decision to leave?

6. Are you aware of people leaving this church, and going to other churches? If so what type of church are they heading to? Mainline/Pentecostal etc.
   (Mainline church leaders...20 years ago there were many people leaving the mainline churches to go to Pentecostal-charismatic churches are people still doing this? Have you noticed a returning group?)

7. Are you aware of people joining this church after a period of non-church attendance of greater than six months? (Who have come from Pentecostal-charismatic churches?)
   - How well do such people integrate into the church?
   - What are the issues/concerns that they need help to work through in coming back to a church?

8. Are you aware of any groups of `Christians’ who are not involved in a church?
   - How many?
   - Make up of the group- ages, leader, format of meeting etc.
   - How long has the group been meeting?
   - Could I make contact with any of them? - Could you let them know I am interested in talking to them?

9. Having been a leader in the church for a long time are there any clues, that could help you to pick the types of people who are likely to move off, or who are on the fringe?
   - If can identify such people, what is important for you or the church to do for them?
   - Are such people involved in other areas of the church? - Small groups, ministry? Children’s work?

10. Some people stay with the church committed and involved who have still worked through many of the factors that seem to make others leave. What do you see as the key reasons/factors which enable them to stay?

11. From what you see in your own church or from what you hear from other pastor’s, leader’s, churches., do you see this phenomenon of committed adults leaving churches they have supported for a long time as a growing trend?
   - Has it always been like this?
   - Why the increase?
11. Are you aware of any of the stages of faith theories? James Fowler?
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