Consumer Individualism and Community Orientation Among Protestant Churches

By

Basil "Bo" Cassell
M.A., University of Missouri, Kansas City, 2010
M.Div., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1990
B.A., Pepperdine University, 1987

Submitted to the graduate degree program in Sociology and the Graduate Faculty of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

_____

Co-Chair: Robert Antonio

_____

Co-Chair: Lynn Davidman

_____

Ben Chappell

_____

Brian Donovan

_____

Ebenezer Obadare

Date Defended: 26 April 2022

The dissertation committee for Basil "Bo" Cassell certifies that this is the
approved version of the following dissertation:

Consumer Individualism and Community Orientation Among Protestant Churches

_____

Co-Chair: Robert Antonio

_____

Co-Chair: Lynn Davidman

Date Approved: 26 April 2022

Abstract

This dissertation addresses a question central to the sociological study of American culture: Is community involvement in American society being overwhelmed by rising individualism? How is the tension between individual needs and community demands being resolved in contemporary American culture? In order to investigate these questions, I will focus on the interaction of religious institutions within their societal contexts. I will examine religious contributions to society, and social influences upon religious groups—either to community solidarity or to the prioritization of the individual. I gathered data from Protestant churches in five states on the West Coast and in the Midwest. These consisted of predominantly non-denominational churches, but also including several denomination affiliated churches as well. My methods include participant observation, interviews of staff and church attendees, and analysis of documents and church website content. The patterns I have observed in the churches that I studied mirror the tension between these values in society at large. I focus on the role of religious institutions as a reflection of two ideal types of American citizens, each holding a particular set of values. This research in Protestant churches will contribute to broader conversations among sociologists regarding individualism, community involvement, and the relationship between religion and culture.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

On March 1, 2018, Jeremy and Nancy, a couple in their 30s, who had been pastoring a

small church plant outside a Northwestern city, posted the following on Facebook:

Exploring New Things

      One area we have struggled in is finding a faith community where we feel like we

belong or "fit"…. We have longed to find a church in which worship is not a performance

on a stage but is simple, focused on Christ, and is expressed through biblical and ancient

participatory and historical elements (including the inclusion of liturgy: the practice of

weekly confession, the weekly inclusion of Scripture, prayers, communion, creeds,

symbols, etc.) while also maintaining a commitment to creativity and newness (new

songs/liturgy, creativity, flexibility, openness, embrace of the arts, etc.).

      We have longed for a church that… speaks the language of culture without being

subsumed by it… A church that is interested in talking about, and living out, justice and

service. A church where leadership is shared and diverse (age, gender, ethnicity) and

there are multiple voices from different perspectives proclaiming good news among us. A

church in which discipleship (learning how to follow Jesus faithfully) is intergenerational

and holistic. A church in which mission isn't a program we do but a defining

characteristic of our life together. A church that sees holiness as not merely an individual

pursuit based on what we avoid but as a communal commitment based primarily on what

we embrace and how we love.

      We are not interested in finding or creating something that is "just for us" in a

consumeristic sense. We do however have a heart for those who have felt like there's no

place for them or feel like they don't fit many existing (especially evangelical) forms of church. (Personal communication, March 1, 2018, used by permission).

There are two things to note about this Facebook post. First, there is the general discontent with the status quo of their existing church life. They tell how they have "struggled in finding a faith community where we feel like we belong or 'fit.'" Their struggle is evident, "*We have longed* for a church…" (emphasis added) followed by paragraphs describing their ideal church.

Second, it is important to note the author's description of exactly what their ideal church looks like. Here are selected qualities from their list of the type of church they seek:

- Speaks language of culture, but not subsumed by culture

- Simple Christ focus, and not a stage performance focus

- Lives out justice and service

- Grounded in ancient historical liturgy

- Values creativity, embraces the arts

- Diverse leadership

- Holistic

- Not program centered

- Not "just for us" consumeristic

- Not individualistic, but having communal commitment

This is their ideal description of a church where they "fit." At the same time, there is also the implied (and at times expressed) binary opposition of their ideal—the church they long for is a new expression—not tied to the old structures and ways of doing things. In their words, it is

committed to "newness… new songs/liturgy, creativity, flexibility, openness," which apparently has not been found in their previous denominational church home.

In addition, this ideal church is not a place where worship is a performance on a stage. They would prefer their church not just be about entertainment. In their eyes church is not meant to focus on the individual. Their language is telling: "holiness as not merely an individual pursuit…" and "We are not interested in finding or creating something that is 'just for us' in a consumeristic sense." They apparently have been attending churches with this consumer, individualistic, performance perspective, and this couple finds they did not fit in those churches.

Their ideal church is a communal expression aiming its attention at serving others. They are interested in a church involved in justice issues, and lives out a value of service to their local setting. What they desire is an outwardly focused church, where "mission isn't a program we do but a defining characteristic of our life together." Individually and internally focused churches are the opposite of their ideal. They are seeking a more communal version.

My research reflects a deeper investigation of what the author of this post has casually observed. My dissertation thesis asserts there are two predominant ways in which Protestant churches are responding to changes in the culture in order to stay relevant and attract young adult membership. Two patterns of worship practices have emerged among Protestant churches. From the patterns I observed through participant observation, I have formulated a new church typology—I have labeled these two church patterns as "Consumer Individualist" and "Community Oriented." Each of these types vary significantly from the other type in their practice of worship, the representation of the church to the surrounding culture, and the shared ideology of the participants. Churches within each type are markedly similar, even though most of the churches in my data set are non-denominational, geographically separated, and have no

official affiliation with each other. Through the influence of congregational networks, both structured and informal, two new "ways of doing church" have developed. These patterns form two unique responses to the values and influence of the surrounding culture.

Community Oriented churches structure their worship services differently from Consumer Individualist congregations, and each style of worship reflects the values important to each type. In addition to Sunday worship, members of both types of these churches can be seen as acting out a discourse. These two types of churches are institutions in a dialog—both with the consumer cultural values around them, and also with other Protestant churches—those having absorbed or resisted capitalist values.

These church types are revealing something about human beings in general, and the general development of individualism in American culture. Protestant believers are exhibiting at least two different responses to cultural change—either focusing fulfilling one's own desires for oneself, or focusing one's life purpose upon concern for others, assisting their neighbors and attempting to build and preserve community.

A Consumer Individualist Worship Service

On a Sunday morning about 10:20am.[1] I left my hotel room in this suburb of a medium-size Midwestern city and followed directions onto the freeway. I was running late, as it took me a bit longer to figure out the location of the church I plan to visit. There are actually four "campuses" for Spirit Church in this city. The four campuses are spread out in four suburban areas, each about a 23 minute drive from the next closest campus. I picked the option closest to my hotel, in Bridgetown, since it was conveniently located right off the freeway.

Before I reached the exit, I saw the church. It was housed in a large, beige warehouse building with red trim. The church looked like any other warehouse in this industrial zone, with

the exception of a large curved glass entrance under a sign spelling out the church website in large red letters across the front. If not for the bright red accents, and the sign reading, "SpiritChurch.com," I would have thought it was a manufacturing business and not a church. After taking the exit, I drove through the winding street surrounded by business offices and small industrial manufacturing companies with empty parking lots. Since it was a Sunday, and since this was not a neighborhood, there were no cars parked along the street, no children playing, and no one walking their dog. There were no residential homes nor even any commercial businesses nearby. There were only block buildings after block buildings, in gray and beige, with spacious empty parking lots. There was a small automotive parts manufacturer on the left, and a small industrial cleaning company to the right. The only cars in this area were all headed to the same place—the only business open in this area today—the church.

The industrial area parking lot was spacious, and I was able to park my car quickly, and make my way to the storefront glass doors. There was a large outdoor children's playground placed directly in front of the church doors about fifty feet from the entrance, taking up the length of a parking row. The church name, with "dot com" added, (reinforcing a memorable church website address) were painted in white on the glass front doors in addition to the large red sign, above them.

As I approached the doors, a person waiting to greet us pushed them open for the woman entering ahead of me. The greeter asked, "How are you doing today?" The woman entering in front of me declared proudly, "I'm blessed." The greeter chuckled and enthusiastically returned, "why yes, yes you are!" The greeter then turned to me, and I could only manage, "I'm fine, thank you." The greeter at the door handed me a church "bulletin," an information packet describing upcoming events.

The information packet I received was full color, with a slick glossy finish. It looked like a legal sized piece of paper folded in half lengthwise, with two more half sheets inserted within. The first page was covered with a picture of ocean waters, with the church name/website address across the top, and the words, "Pirates: the Series" in a large, stylized font across the middle. A paragraph of Pirate Series information was at the bottom. Opening to the next page, revealed a full-page picture of the lead pastors, a husband and wife couple in a professional photo, looking like celebrities (the wife is wearing a sparkling silver lace gown, and the husband an all black suit with matching black shirt). Their pose made it look like they had stopped for a moment on the red carpet to let the paparazzi snap their photo. Large cursive letters spelling "welcome," covered the bottom third of the page, and underneath were listed all the social media accounts where you can "stay connected," including the church Facebook and Twitter accounts, and the five Instagram accounts associated with the lead pastors and the church. On the top half of page three there was a graphic designed advertisement for an upcoming women's conference "be.YOU.tiful," including the website where tickets could be acquired. The bottom half of the page listed three "dream team" members of the month, one at each of three church campuses, highlighting their service on the drama teams. Page four listed upcoming events, 9 of which were in the next two weeks, providing dates and a paragraph description. The events list included Growth Track (a set of workshops promoting deeper church involvement), a "serve night" (getting the church building clean and ready for next Sunday), a church cleanup day (for recent flood damage at one of the campuses), a motorcycle ride, and a youth sports event. One of the full color inserts was for a men's night out. The other was a pirate treasure map with instructions on how to win a family cruise by checking off activities requiring deeper involvement in the church.

Since I was running a bit late, the service had already started when I arrived. I walked across the marble tile floor, and straight ahead was a large curved information desk, and behind it, a tall curved dark wood-paneled wall, lined with five television screens. Every other screen displayed a picture of one of the lead pastor couple, advertising their latest book. On the alternate screens, were the large words "thank you," thanking the congregation for their contributions. In that moment, I pondered the "thank you" message. I had never been to this church before, and had never given money to it. Thus it seemed a bit odd to be "thanked" for something I had never done. I wondered if the intended message was actually a subtle reminder to all who attend to give money—but instead of pleading "please give," they essentially were thanking people in advance for giving to the church, and simultaneously reminding them to give.

The lobby was composed of a combination of beige walls, with brush metal accents, interrupted only by the dark wood paneling behind the information desk. At the time of my visit, it was decorated according to a swashbuckler pirate theme, complete with masts and sails next to the information desk, and a set of stocks for a stockade in the middle of the lobby floor.

Figure 1:

Information Desk with Mast and Crowsnest Pirate Decor

There was a "selfie station" off to one side for attendees to take a picture of their

participation in this church theme. This small selfie-ready tableau was adorned with fishing nets,

with wood and ropes made to resemble a dock with a pier. The scene was complete with a pirate

ship cannon, and blue sky background.

Figure 2:

Standing In Line for Selfie Station with Pirate Canon
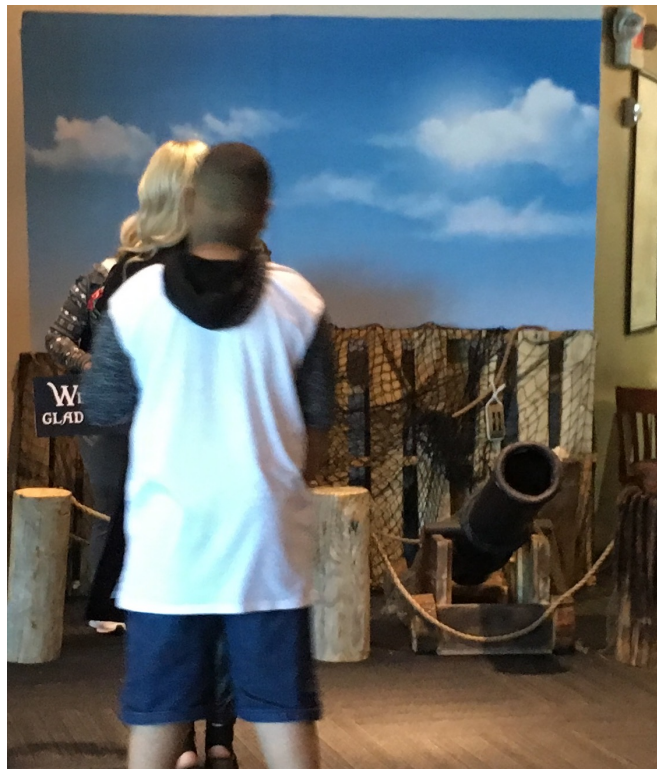
Off of the lobby, there were long hallways going to the right and to the left. The word

"Sanctuary" hung in brush metal letters over the hallway to my left and so I headed in that

direction. Music came through the walls and down the hallway now, and I entered through the

doors of the sanctuary auditorium at the hallway end. Immediately I stopped in my tracks,

because the sanctuary was dark and I could not see what was in front of me. There were no

windows to let in light, and the lights above the stage were aimed out toward the audience and

into my eyes. A fog machine had filled the stage with a smoky haze, which had spilled out into the front of the auditorium, giving the entire room a hazy look and fog chemical smell. The purple and white lights moved back and forth through the fog, creating a dazzling stage lighting effect. The stage lights made it difficult for my eyes to adjust. An usher saw me in my frozen state, and approached, speaking loudly into my ear over the music, "do you need a seat?" I nodded, and he led me forward to an open row.

I took a seat in the middle of the long row and looked around. The room was a large warehouse space, rectangular and all on one level, with a twenty foot high ceiling. The interior walls and ceiling were painted black, allowing for the lights and stage to be the primary focus. There were a few people sitting in the row in front of me, but I could not even make out the backs of their heads or the color of their hair in the dark room with the smoky stage lights in my eyes. Even though they were only a few feet away, they appeared only as silhouettes. I could not hear the people sitting in front of me over the music when they leaned over to talk to each other.

I did not feel comfortable nor uncomfortable—being new to this church, I did not want to face the embarrassment of doing something wrong. Yet at the same time, there was an anonymity in the darkness, since it was so difficult to see. Also, the setting felt familiar, like a concert, which made it comfortable to sit back and enjoy the show, or clap and sing along.

Musicians were on stage with five singers toward the front of the stage. The music was so loud it filled the room. A large rectangular video screen covered the wall at the back of the stage behind the singers, about the size of a small movie theater screen. There were two more video screens on either side of the stage. All three screens were showing the words of the songs being sung, so the congregation could sing along. The lyrics were superimposed over a repeating

motion background depicting blinking stars and floating clouds, so the song lyrics appeared to be floating in the undulating motion picture sky.

Figure 3:

Dark Sanctuary with Stage Lighting and Fog

The band played through three or four songs back to back, almost all of which I had heard at other churches who worship in this type of setting (i.e., a dark rectangular warehouse sanctuary with bright stage lighting and loud music). One song in particular was, "Good Father," by Chris Tomlin, a well-known Christian worship leader and songwriter, who had several songs played on Christian radio stations at the time. Among the lyrics were these lines: "You're a good, good father, its who you are/And I am loved by you, its who I am" (Tomlin, 2016). It was one of several songs I heard repeatedly at churches across the country while doing participant observation. At these churches, the songs were sung one after another, with no break, like a concert. Most of the music was rhythmically upbeat, with radio-play appeal. The musicians transitioned seamlessly from one song to the next, without stopping the music in between songs.

When the singing finished, a young woman stepped out on the stage and directs the crowd to what is next, resembling the master of ceremonies at an awards show. She asked the congregation to "greet" those seated around them, and "give them a high five or a handshake, and tell them, 'You smell goooood!'" The African-American woman in front of me turned around and told me I smelled good. I replied, "you too!" We both laughed at the silliness of the instructions from the stage, but the exercise had done its job, as it caused us both to laugh and smile and feel more comfortable with our surroundings.

This is followed immediately by a short dance performance on stage, where 15 dancers dressed in pirate costumes move around the stage to a song from the Pirates of the Caribbean motion picture soundtrack. The choreography interlude was short and simple, and appeared to have little religious meaning. However it served to briefly entertain, to return our attention toward the stage, and as a transition to get people to sit down after the greeting.

Then, a different worship leader came up on the stage, and guided the congregation in a prayer. (I got the impression there were several leaders serving as "master of ceremonies," taking turns leading different parts of the service.) He led a prayer for healing from various illnesses, and for God's blessing upon the people of the congregation. Toward the end of this prayer, an invitation was given to convert to Christianity, which was described as the opportunity to "make Jesus number one." The leader offered a guided "repeat after me" prayer, and many in the congregation who were familiar with this part of the service pray along out loud. Those who prayed the prayer were then asked to raise their hands, and the congregation was invited to applaud for them. Those who raised their hands were asked to fill out an information card, and promised if they do, they will be given a free Bible. The leader who prayed extended a welcome

to all the people who were visiting the church for the first time, saying, "Welcome home, you belong here."

The worship leader then expressed excitement this was the second week of the pirates series, and then said, "let's jump into today's message," and left the stage. It was time for the sermon. But there was no preacher present. The stage was empty. The band had stopped playing. However, a new song started playing over the sound system, with a different acoustic sound than the music previously played by the band. I looked back at the sound booth, and there were three sound techs intensely staring at screens. For two and a half minutes we were listening to a worship song play on the sound system, but staring at an empty stage.

The music ended, and the large middle screen lit up behind the stage. A woman with long brunette hair, dressed in a flowing taupe blouse and black jeans with high-heeled ankle boots began to preach from the screen. I scan the stage to see where the camera must be pointing, and where she was standing, but the pulpit (complete with a pirate ship captain's wheel) was empty. The woman preacher began, "Hello, Spirit Church! Hello Fountainville!" For a moment, I was confused. I had thought I was at the Bridgetown church, and in my confusion I wondered if I had accidentally drove to the wrong suburb. Then it all became clear. This was a live streaming video feed from one of the other campuses. The woman was preaching in Fountainville, 23 minutes away, and in this location, we watched the sermon on a video screen, instead of watching the preacher in person. (The song playing earlier while the stage was empty was being played by the worship team at the other location. Apparently, they switched over to the video feed too soon, before the message had started.) At first this takes a bit of getting used to, I felt somewhat cheated, and I contemplated leaving to drive over to Fountainville, to catch the "real" version—

after all, it was not far away. I decided to stay and listen, even though the preacher was not present in the room.

I was a bit distracted by the background behind her on the screen. She preached in front of a large picture of an open treasure chest, overflowing with gold and pearls. I assumed this was part of the pirate theme, and perhaps she would make reference to the treasure as an illustration in the sermon. Regardless, I found the image being shown in a church held symbolism beyond its pirate-themed utility.

Figure 4:

Co-pastor on Video with Pirate Themed Treasure Backdrop

After an opening joke, the preacher explained she had planned on preaching a message related to treasure, entitled, "X Marks the Spot," but God has changed the message for her to preach. She proceeded to tell the story of how she entered the worship music rehearsal earlier in the week at one of Spirit Church's suburban campuses. She explained the young people involved in the worship band practice had stopped rehearsing and were just worshipping, singing new songs of praise[2]. Her entire sermon was elaborating principles gleaned from what she observed from the worship practice, with supporting scripture verses. Among some of her sermon

principles were: 1) God prepares us spiritually for what he is going to do next in our lives, and 2) God is more powerful than we are, and 3) at times we need to get out of the way so God can work. She told us how one of the teenagers on the worship team that night had a "word from God," for someone—specifically God wanted to heal someone's migraine headaches. The preacher did not think this healing message was just for the people in the room, and so she took out her phone and began streaming this teenager on Instagram Live (with the aside thrown in, "You all follow me on Instagram, right?"). She told how several people reported on Instagram being healed. The audience in the auditorium applauded, even though the speaker was not currently in the room, but was herself being streamed live.

The sermon ended, and immediately another video played. This video was a pre-recorded and edited testimonial video, with a person describing their story of what God has done in their life, and how they had felt encouraged by the church through personal difficulties. The audience applauded when the person in the video explained how someone from the church gave them $90,000 to help with medical bills, and there was more applause when they told how they were now healed. After this video, the worship leader returned to the stage, and we switched our attention from the video screen back to the live worship leader when they enthusiastically yelled, "Come on, make some noise!" He encouraged applause for the previous video, and provided a quick recap of some of the principles from the sermon and the previous video. He then moved on to the topic of donating money to the church:

> Our job as Christ followers is to prepare a room for him, to prepare room for God to move. And you do that with generosity. You do that by obeying God in the area of your finances…. My mind is still exploding, $90,000 dollars… listen, listen. A little secret: That is why you don't miss church. You never know who you are going to encounter, you

never know who you are going to share your story with.… And none of this [church]

family happens without generosity. We don't have this building without generosity. We

don't get to do what we do, without generosity. So we want to say thank you Spirit

Church, for continued giving, continued generosity. We make it super simple for you to

participate. We are a generous church.

He explained all the different ways a person could give money to the church—using the

envelopes provided and putting it into the buckets when they are passed down the rows, by

paying online through SpiritChurch.com, or by using text-to-give on their cellphone to the

provided number. All of these methods and instructions were displayed on a slide on the video

screen, under the title, "There Are Three Ways to Give at Spirit Church…"

Next, the leader instructed everyone to hold their donation up in the air, saying, "We are

going to read our Banner Declaration over our seed[3] this morning, so I need you to read this with

me, loud and proud, as you hold up your offering. Let's pray this—er, let's *say* it…." The

congregation then recited the Banner Year Declaration out loud, in unison:

This is my Banner Year, spiritually, financially, physically, emotionally. Over the next

four Banner Years, God is going to bless me beyond my wildest dreams. Everything I put

my hand to is blessed. Success is multiplying in every area of my life. With 20/20 clarity,

I will see the fullness of my dream come to pass, in the Banner Year of 2020, and it starts

right now[4].

The Banner Year appeared to be an over-arching, multi-year theme—overlapping with

the current pirate theme. It had been used by the church as something to give vision and direction

for the next several years. I kept watching and listening, as the service was coming to a close.

There was a short prayer for the offering, with the leader describing how God blesses people in

order for them to be a blessing to others, and a prayer for God to use this offering to further his kingdom work.

As the offering buckets were passed, and people placed their offerings in them, more videos played on the screen. These were announcement videos, advertising the upcoming events at the church, and they appeared one after another, resembling a television commercial break. There were videos for the upcoming men's night, and an annual women's conference (and as the video highlighted, "Beauty is found in who you choose to be. The key to unlocking your truest potential is found in being 'you.'") Next, a video reminded everyone the "Missions Team" would be cleaning up the areas around the church campus during the week.

The next video invited the congregation to participate in "Growth Track." Growth Track is a four step program, designed to get attendees more deeply involved in their church. It promises to "help you connect with God, and discover your purpose." In previous observations of other non-denominational churches, I noted several churches utilized Growth Track. How is it these otherwise disconnected non-denominational churches are doing the same programs? There are no denominational structures in place providing these resources. There must be some common source for this program, where non-denominational churches can purchase or access shared resources.

The last video encouraged families to pick up a treasure map on their way out of church. If they completed the tasks on the map, they would have a chance to win a cruise vacation for their family.

The woman who led the greeting earlier returned to the stage and repeated the reminder for everyone to complete the checklist on the back of the treasure map to be entered to win the cruise: "All you have to do is complete the checkboxes on the back, including taking a picture at

our photo-op, joining an iConnect group—its super easy, its super fun." She then asked everyone to stand, and she offered a benediction blessing, "May the Lord bless you and keep you…" quoting a blessing from Numbers 6:24-26, from the Hebrew Scriptures. When she finished, she reminded everyone to come back next week for more pirates, and to invite friends and neighbors. When it was finished, the service had lasted about 56 minutes.

Next, fast-paced music played, the house lights came up, and a row of double doors opened up simultaneously on the wall to the right for everyone to exit. It reminded me of rides at Disneyland—you entered through one set of doors, and exited through another, so the next riders could enter easily, and there were no traffic jams of people running into each other. Since I could see better when the lights were turned up, I quickly estimated the congregation was predominantly middle class, and more than half African-American. I followed along the row of seats toward the right, with the rows pointing me to the exit doors.

Exiting through the auditorium doors, I walked into a hallway. Straight in front of me there was a gift shop. I chuckled to myself, and mumbled, "exit through the gift shop"—now it really felt like a Disneyland ride to me. To the left were the children's ministry rooms, to the right was the main lobby where I first entered, and straight ahead was the gift shop and café. I walked into the gift shop store area and looked around.

On one side of the store, near the back is a coffee shop counter with a lit sign overhead reading, "Portico Café." Placed over the top of the café sign there was another smaller sign, hung at a diagonal, and partially obscuring the permanent sign underneath. It read, "Galley Grub," and was one more way the church playfully promoted the pirate theme—by taking over the café signage. There were two baristas behind the counter serving people coffee and sandwiches

before and after the services. There was a section of small round tables and chairs between the coffee counter and the lobby entrance.

The rest of the store area was full of items for sale. There were shelves displaying DVD copies of recent sermons. Several bookshelves lined one wall with Christian books. The titles varied—there were bibles, books on faith and spirituality, and the popular allegorical fiction work "The Shack." There were also a number of inspirational books with titles such as, "Today Is the Day," "Unlock Your Dream," "You Have It In You," and "Power Thoughts." I was surprised at how many of the titles were oriented around self-help, and achieving success in life.

Over near the checkout counter, there were more display shelves with water bottles, coffee mugs, coasters, and baseball caps—all with the church name and logo. A decorative wood sign for sale was imprinted with the letters "#blessed," ("hashtag blessed"). There were several shirts with slogans on them, such as "small tweaks lead to big peaks." In addition, a variety of shirts with "Banner Year" printed on them highlighted the multi-year theme.

Figure 5:

Gift Shop and Café, with Banner Year T-Shirt in Foreground

There was also a section with women's blouses and purses, with no message or logo on them—just women's clothes and bags offered for sale, with no visible religious message. Five people lined up at the checkout counter, waiting to pay for their items, while another half dozen searched through the items on display, looking for something to buy.

I walked out of the store area and realized except for people in the store area, the church had mostly emptied. I had hoped to talk with some people after church, and perhaps be able to set up an interview with one or two of them. However, there were few people left in the building. I looked out through the front windows, and the cars in the parking lot were almost all gone. This was interesting to me, as I was beginning to realize it was actually more difficult to get interviews from churches of this type, because people quickly left when church was over. I decided there is no point in staying any longer myself.

As I walked out the front glass doors, I felt a strange sense of mixed feelings. I felt as though I had been led through an experience, almost herded through it. At the same time, I experienced a strange sense of encouragement, and had a sense if I didn't come back next week, I was going to miss out on the "action" happening at this church. I wondered if the other attendees felt any of the same feelings.

A Community Oriented Worship Service

I drove to Savior's Grace church[5], at 10am on a Sunday morning. On the way, I passed a busy laundromat, and a Mexican restaurant open for Sunday brunch. This was a different setting than the location where I found one of the campuses of Spirit Church. This neighborhood appeared to be run down, with paint chipping off of buildings and faded signs and street numbers. Although technically still in the suburbs of a medium sized Mid-Western city, it has more of the feeling of a near-urban area. After I passed by the corner gas station on the last major

cross street, there were only houses one after another. Single family homes lined the way, with a mix of sidewalk, weeds, and overgrown grass lawns. I passed driveways with cars in them, and a line of cars parked along the street. I had definitely crossed into a residential neighborhood.

After a few blocks, I saw an elementary school, and across the street, I saw the church. In contrast to the large industrial zoned warehouse of Spirit Church, the Savior's Grace church building was a small, light brown brick building with a low A-frame roof, nestled between houses and the school. I turned down the side street toward the church driveway. The cement sidewalk and asphalt were partially crumbled. The parking lot was full, so I parked down the street.

I walked through the lot, toward the doors, and off to one side of the parking lot near the property border fence were two picnic tables under a shade tree, with about 10-15 people sitting and milling around them. Two of them were in wheelchairs, one was smoking (a rare sight at Protestant churches I have visited). These were a group of homeless people, some of whom were from the surrounding neighborhood, and some of them have been picked up in vans by church volunteers. The volunteers have built relationships with those they meet when they have been out distributing food and clothing.

Figure 6:

Homeless Gathered Outside the Church

I climbed the stairs and enter through the unmarked glass doors. The floor was polished cement, and the walls had been painted white. The lobby was oddly "T" shaped, as if walls and rooms had been built into it as needs changed over the years. A counter angled out from the front wall, covered with boxes of doughnuts, and of all things, bins of fried chicken. It was 10 o'clock in the morning, so it made me wonder, "who eats fried chicken this early?" I wondered if it has been prepared as a more protein rich option for the homeless group who were outside—many of whom were now coming inside for the service. A few two foot diameter round tables with chairs were spread out in a small area across from the counter toward the back wall. With the food counter and section of tables, the lobby appeared small to the point of feeling cramped.

Wood doors with glass panels separated the lobby from them main auditorium, and a man stood in the doorway handing out a half page "bulletin" information sheet with church news. He handed me one and said, "Welcome."

The handout was noticeably sparse. The page had black ink on beige card stock. At the top on both sides were listed today's date and the season of the liturgical Christian calendar corresponding to the current time of year (in this case "ordinary time"). On one side was the contact information for the church (address, phone, web site, and the church's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts). Below the address there was information about the children's ministry. Two sentences of invitation to join a "small group." The term "small group" is a Protestant code of sorts, used to describe an intimate group meeting of twelve people or less for personal sharing, prayer, and Bible study. At the bottom of the page, there was a place to tear off and hand in a written prayer request. The other side listed the information for three upcoming events, as well as the "church summer calendar," which listed three additional events, stating only the event names and dates.

I stepped through the doorway into the sanctuary. The walls had the same light brown brick, interrupted by large windows along one wall. This visit was in summer time, and so most of the shades were closed, but not all of them. The floor was carpeted, and the chairs were a light colored wood, which gave the room a bright, natural feel. The chairs had been arranged in a semicircle, so no matter where you sit, you could see the faces of others in the audience across the room. The sanctuary was small, seating approximately 250, but it was the circular formation of chairs giving it an intimate feel.

There was no "stage," as such, no raised area for musicians or performers, and there was no pulpit to be seen (except for one music stand off to one side). The musicians stood up near the back wall on the same floor level as the audience.

Figure 7:

Savior's Grace Church Stage/Altar Area with Lights and Candles

There were only a few extra rugs on top of the carpeted floor to separate the "stage" space from the audience space. In front of the musicians there was an open, empty circular area,

surrounded by the semi-circle of chairs. Between the musicians and the middle open space, there was a thick wood table with a cloth draped over it serving as an altar.

The lights in the sanctuary dimmed slightly, as the musicians began to play. Even though the window shades were mostly drawn, it was still bright enough I could read the back of the T-shirt of the man sitting in front of me (it is a T-shirt from a mid-west state college). There were single bulb lamps hanging from the ceiling. In addition, more than a dozen short white three inch diameter candles decorated the "stage" area—including candles on the altar intermingled with bread and wine communion elements. A single projector screen covered the back wall behind the musicians, where song lyrics were shown.

Most of the congregation had already found their seats, but as the music began to play, the rest of the congregation wandered in from the lobby, and the service began with singing. The congregation was approximately 85% white, with the other 15% roughly divided evenly between African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Latinx background. The congregation had a youthful feel, and I estimated approximately only one third were over the age of 50.

The opening song on this day was the well known 1961 pop song, "Stand By Me." It struck me as unusual (I had not heard a 1960s pop tune sung at any churches I had visited thus far), but I found it refreshing, and the words took on an interesting nuance of meaning sung in this context. To begin their service, this church sang a well known popular song to remind everyone we have need of support, and need someone else to come and "stand by" us.

When this song finished, instead of playing on right into the next song (as I observed at Spirit Church), the music stopped, and Pastor James invited everyone to bow their heads for a time of prayer. For this part of the service, the lights were turned up—I noticed throughout the service, the lights are only dimmed during the times of singing, so the congregation could see the

words projected on the screen. During the rest of the service, the lights were turned brighter, giving the sanctuary a well-lit atmosphere, with the stage area and the congregation both visible. This was not like the concert atmosphere I experienced at Spirit Church, where the people seated around me were dark figures, and the focus of attention was on stage lighting effects.

The pastor then explained this prayer time was a time for slowing down, and not being distracted by the cares of our busy lives. He began the prayer with a time of silence, and we stood in silence for two full minutes (curious, I checked my watch) with our heads bowed. Then the pastor prayed out loud, and instructed the congregation this part of the prayer time was for expressing submission before God. He prayed, "We ask you to continue your work here at Savior's Grace, in our hearts, and our community, and extending out into our city and this world." He finished the prayer with a paraphrase from the Lord's Prayer, asking for God's kingdom to come and his will be done in this world and in this church.

Next, one of the members from the congregation walked to the front and read a Psalm from the Hebrew Bible. This was a familiar liturgical[6] practice, to have a Psalm read and later a reading from a passage from one of the Gospels. After the Psalm was read, the musicians started playing another song, this one with the lyrics: "All the poor and powerless, All the lost and lonely, And all the thieves will come confess, And know that you are holy." (All Sons & Daughters, 2011). It was interesting to me to sing those words, "poor and powerless," with homeless people present. As I looked around, I noticed the homeless who had come into the service were intermixed with the other middle class attendees—they were not seated in their own section or in the back. There seemed to have been some intentional work in this church toward inclusion of the "poor and powerless."

When the song finished, instead of transitioning immediately into another song, the music stopped once again. Another different member of the congregation walked to the front, and led another prayer. This time, the person leading prayed by name for various people in the congregation who had needs, or illnesses. Hearing the names of people being prayed for felt strangely intimate, and I almost felt embarrassed to hear names and their needs spoken out loud in a public gathering, even though it was in prayer. I glanced around to see if others expressed any visible discomfort as names and their illnesses were mentioned, but everyone I observed had their heads bowed, and their eyes closed. This appeared to be a regular practice, with (implicit?) permission given for this information to be shared for prayer, regardless of medical privacy laws. And yet, for a church to have knowledge of dozens of people and their personal needs and illnesses, I got the impression there was some kind of personal network in place in order to know what was going on in the lives of the congregation. Certainly, the church was small enough to know people by name and face, if not by name and needs.

After the prayer there was a time for silent confession, and the member from the congregation who was leading at this point suggested possible sins of omission congregants might silently confess to God. The leader ended the prayer with "amen," and the musicians began to play another song. This time it was a song I have heard at other churches of this type. It was what I would call one of the "songs of the summer," sung at most Community Oriented churches I had visited. The song was "Beautiful Things," which includes the lyrics, "You [God] make beautiful things out of the dust/You make beautiful things out of us" (Gungor, 2009). The lyrics were affirming, if not a bit sentimental, but the use of the pronoun "us" instead of "me" or "I" was notable. I wondered if there was deeper meaning in the word choice beyond something

rhyming with "dust." I thought perhaps even the song choices at this church expressed a less

"me" centered perspective, and was more concerned with "us" and "we."

After the song, another member of the congregation went to the microphone and

introduced the offering, saying, "If you would, please stand with me as we continue to worship

with tithes[7] and offerings." Nothing more was said about it, and shallow wooden bowls were

passed down each row as receptacles for donations, while the musicians played another song.

Another person came to the front and explained it was the time in the service to bless the

children before sending them out of the sanctuary for a children's teaching time. Parents were

instructed to place their hands on the shoulders of their children. Other members of the

congregation were told to extend their hands forward toward any children they see, symbolically

laying hands on them even if they cannot reach them from where they sat. The leader asked

everyone to bow their heads, and pray for the children, that they would never know a day

without an awareness of God, for their protection, and they would grow and mature in their

spirituality. The leader then dismissed the children to their teaching time in another room, and

told the rest of the adult congregation to greet those seated around them.

After a few minutes, Pastor James returned to the front and began the sermon. He

explained this sermon was part of a series on "vocation," inspired by the book, *Let Your Life

Speak*, by Christian writer and teacher, Parker Palmer. The pastor began by asserting all religion

and philosophy are attempting to answer questions of "the meaning of life and the reality of

death." Furthermore, he noted one of the recent developments related to these questions was the

work of Joseph Campbell and his study of "the hero's journey." According to Campbell, all

cultures tell basically the same stories, following a similar structure. The pastor provided a fairly

detailed recap of Campbell's hero's journey structure. Then he explained some critics of

Campbell have argued there are actually two stories—first, the hero's journey which Campbell elaborated, but there is also a "saint's story." These two stories have different motives, different ends, and different answers to the questions of the meaning of life and death. Pastor James then contrasted the two stories:

> For the hero, the answer to the meaning of life is glory and honor, for the saint the answer to the meaning question is love. The hero earns worth and identity through imposing their will on another, for saint they receive their identity and worth through a surrender of love. The goal of life for hero is self-fulfillment through achievement and heroism, for the saint, not so much a goal to life as it has a purpose, to live in caring and serving. The hero's journey is about finding the strength to rule, while the saint's journey is about finding the strength to serve. The hero wins glory for his or her self, while the saint wins glory for God (Pastor James, sermon, July 1, 2018).

Next the pastor explained in American life and culture, jobs and the concept of "work" are based on the hero's journey—which in his view is the default story for American culture. In contrast, the saint's story aligns with God's desire for human flourishing. The influence of the hero's journey motif upon American culture impedes human flourishing:

> Culture inverts and twists this [God story perspective], instead of us serving creation, creation serves us, and it leads to the exploitation of creation and of other humans. We are taught to impose our will on things, organizations, companies, people, markets—to get all we can out of those things, to get all we can out of our employer. We are taught that the meaning of work is about ascending this ladder of success— finding our way to the top. We are taught through all this, and [through] the hero's journey, that our worth as

workers is tied to how much we produce, measured in salary—and how much we consume, measured in stuff (Pastor James, sermon, July 1, 2018).

He ended the sermon by explaining work (according to Palmer) is about finding one's true self, but one's self is discovered in the context of peace (in the Hebrew, *shalom*), where we, and everything around us, is in proper relationship.

The sermon itself represented themes indicative of this type of church. From the perspective of this pastor, there are two stories. One story represents the values of the surrounding culture—personal achievement, strength and self-sufficiency, self-glorification, imposing one's will on others, getting all you can out of life, climbing the ladder of success, self worth gained through higher salary and the accumulation and consumption of more and more material things. The other story is the one advocated by this pastor and at churches like this one. The alternative story is represented by finding purpose and fulfillment through sacrificial love and caring for others, serving others, serving God, and serving creation. The pastor has declared a clash of cultures and values. He has positioned the teachings of this church as instructions in resistance to influences of the culture.

After the sermon, the congregation was invited to take communion. Row by row, the congregants filed into the aisles and down to the front altar while the band played and sung softly. At the altar, two members of the congregation were standing on each side of the altar, one holding a plate with tiny broken pieces of bread, while the other held a cup of grape juice. Participants took a piece of bread, and dipped it in the cup of juice, and ate it immediately. Then they filed back to their seats.

After everyone was seated, the pastor gave some announcements of activities happening at the church. First, he announced an upcoming baptism and picnic to be held at the lake of a

local public park. There was also information regarding an upcoming family hiking trip, and information about an upcoming funeral. This funeral was for one of the homeless men who has been a part of the church's homeless ministry for a long time, and who was well known to church members. The pastor explained they were having a gathering during the week to share memories of this man together, and to celebrate his life. I was impressed the "homeless" were not known merely by a label, but they are known by name to the pastor and to many in the congregation. It affirmed to me the alternative story preached in the sermon was not merely empty words, but the church had been caring for those in the neighborhood and building relationships with them for a long time. It made me wonder, whether or not this homeless man would have had a funeral at all if he had not been involved in the ministry of this church. I wondered whether apart from the outreach of this congregation, if he would have died homeless and alone, disconnected from family, friends and any sort of supporting group. I thought this homeless man had the support of other homeless persons with whom they had contact. Yet this church provided a religious body, with relationships and resources outside of the homeless community itself. After these announcements, the service ended with a benediction, "May the Lord bless you and keep you…" quoting a blessing from Numbers 6:24-26, from the Hebrew Scriptures.

Within a few moments after the service ended, the congregation stood, and there was a buzz of people talking and starting conversations. Some stood and turned around in their seats (much like they did during the "greeting" time within the service), and begin talking to the people who were seated behind them. Others moved around the room, forming clusters of conversation groups throughout the building. The pastor remained in the open area in front of the altar, and within moments, two or three from the congregation had approached and engaged him

in conversation. I talked with several persons who were around me, and I was able to make appointments for two interviews. A few minutes later, one of the members of the congregation led me over to the pastor, and introduced me. We talked about my research, and what was going on at his church, and he agreed to do an interview as well. Given this was a small congregation compared to others I have visited (fewer than 300 attending), there seemed to be an expectation of openness and knowing people by name and by face.

Figure 8:

Clusters of People Talking After the Service

Before I left the sanctuary, I walked along the wall with windows. Beneath one window there was a large pile of several hundred river stones, with names written on them. A sign explained how new church members were invited to write their name on a stone and place it among with all the other stones as a sign they are building something together. I thought this was a clever way to express solidarity with the group. I looked out of the next window, and I saw a community garden the church had set up right outside of their sanctuary. There were several raised beds formed of 2 x 6 wood rectangles segmenting off designated spaces. Most of the raised beds had signs, and some were marked as rental plots, and others were marked for use by the church inviting people to "take what you can use."

Figure 9:

Community Garden Outside the Sanctuary Window

As I left the sanctuary, there are still a few dozen people standing around and talking in small groups. As I passed back through the lobby, to my left there was a small room with several large laundry baskets full of used towels. These towels were used by the homeless people who take showers at the church every Sunday and sometimes during the week. Every week a group of volunteers takes the used towels home and washes them, and brings back clean towels for the next week. I exited back out the front doors, and passed by the picnic tables where a dozen or so homeless men and women were still seated in the shade, talking.

As I crossed the crumbling parking lot, I left with a sense of intentionality. This church had decided to create a place literally "grounded" (with a community garden) in this neighborhood. They certainly were a worshiping body, as much of their liturgy pointed to their acknowledgment of God and the story of God. Yet this church sought to live out their part in God's story through this specific neighborhood, and by serving the people of this neighborhood.

It was evident sacrifices had been made (it was not the cleanest or most well-kept church I have observed), but it was certain this church had made an intentional choice about how they would adapt to the culture around them. Their choice appeared to include conscious choices to re-structure the church for the needs of the local area—which for this church meant challenging the story offered to them by the culture—and serving through picnic tables, installing showers, washing towels, planting gardens, circling the chairs, and building relationships with those who live in the neighborhood.

Consumer Individualist Churches

Consumer Individualist (CI) churches focus on helping individual attendees become better versions of themselves. Much of the church activity and events are centered around "helping you be a better you." Churches of this type tend to have (and promote) multiple activities targeted at improving of the lives of the attendees—including events to enhance personal growth and development, seminars on marriage improvement, and workshops providing tax and financial planning advice. Sometimes the personal growth includes spiritual growth, but often the central purpose is "self-help" and personal development. What makes these activities spiritual is the personal development comes from a Christian perspective. Churches of this type present themselves as an "extended conference," with a plethora of workshops to attend for personal improvement. All of the churches of the CI type offered and promoted multiple workshops such as those mentioned above—the larger the church, the more workshops are offered. These events and services are "marketed" through forms of advertising for congregants to select what will best meet their needs.

What makes it "consumer"? The activity of the church utilizes ideas, values, and methods of market liberalism designed to appeal to church attendees as consumers. The market ideology

of a producer/consumer dynamic is prevalent and often evident in the structure and activity of church practice and in documents and online presence. The attendees of these churches are consuming multiple events and activities designed to help them with various aspects of their lives, such as relational seminars, personality tests to understand themselves better, parenting courses, and the like. Churches of this type are producers of these products for attendees' consumption, and as such, follow the principles of market capitalism. "Growth" as a foundational idea in capitalism, is also a fundamental ideal of church operations.

What makes it "individualist"? The practice of a CI church is directed toward benefit of the individual attendee. Most (if not all) of the church events, including the main worship service itself, are designed and advertised as something to help the personal development of the individual (and much of church activity is centered around getting people to attend church events). There is little discussion of communality as a value. The main shared component of church life is comparable to the aggregate of individual attendees at a self-improvement conference, or a concert. What is shared is the experience of the event, and the primary focus of attending is for each individual to get something out of it for their own personal development. There is shared affinity to the experience, but like an audience dispersing after the concert is over, they are free to leave with little obligation to other attendees once the event is over. One interviewee, Ashley, when she expressed what she liked about this type of church, said it this way:

> [When I go to church I expect] just a good message…[this church] is a huge church, its not like you really connect with the people around you… it works for us, because we aren't as committed as we should be to it… I guess that is kind of why we like [this church], we get our message, and then go.

There are of course exceptions to this, such as small group meetings which are designed to build intimate relationships among a small collection of attendees. Yet even these are promoted as ways for attendees to find friends for themselves, and "get connected." Most of these small groups have a time limit of 6-8 weeks, imposing a low risk commitment. In case one group does not meet their needs, they can change to another in 2 months. These are indicators of an emphasis on individual choice and fulfilling personal needs, as opposed to a focus on addressing group and community needs.

Community Oriented Churches

Community Oriented (CO) churches are focused upon involvement and connection with their surrounding neighborhood and city. Churches of this type have sermons, activities and web blog posts discussing ways to be active in the local area, and society at large. When they focus on the individual, they typically discuss how the actions of the individual have an impact on the larger group or the world (including the environment and ecology).

To be "community oriented" means being focused upon, and caring for the surrounding neighborhood—but it also means having a worldview and set of practices in which relationships are valued. It means working toward interconnection between the neighborhood and the congregation. This work is something individuals seek for themselves, until they are part of a greater whole—their church, their neighborhood, their network. This aim toward others rather than toward self is captured best by this church type.

CO churches structure their worship services to allow time for others participate. Their worship is typically "slower" than CI services, allowing time for reflection, interruptions (for prayer and scripture readings in between songs), and giving everyone time to take communion from a shared cup.

The CO church highlights their concern for general political involvement, and long-term commitments to address city problems. This type of church builds showers in their church building for the local homeless bathe, tends to a community garden on their property, and offers free food to their neighbors. One interviewee, Nikki, expressed her attraction to this type of church by pointing out the church's involvement with the art scene in their city:

> So things like their art community I think is fantastic… It is not that they are performing for us, it is… they are representing the artistic, beautiful nature that a lot of people in our community have…. the facets of the church that I'm involved with, their goal is to incorporate people from this community, and reach out to people of this community… the reality of it is… we have got hurting people right here, and we need to be in community with them as well.

CO churches attract religious persons who hold these shared social norms and values. As sociologist Max Weber noted, people have an "elective affinity" (1958, p.284; 1920/2011, pp. 109, 146, 257) to those religious institutions with similar lifestyles and viewpoints.

The Complex Definition of Community

One of the problems with writing about community orientation as a church type is the variety of different uses and definitions of the word "community." Upon analysis of interviews and church documents, I found the word "community" was used with at least four different meanings.

First, the word was used by interviewees to reference the congregation at the church they attend. It was used in a similar sense to the word "body," or "church group," when talking about those who gather regularly in one place for worship. A church website for example, would use

the word to reference their congregation in phrases such as, "get involved in the life of our community."

Second, there was the use of the word to mean a large scale component of society, such as a city or neighborhood. Here, the word was used in particular to reference people living in a geographic location, such as in the sentence, "I live in the nearby community," or "the schools in our community."

Third, the word was sometimes used to refer to one's own personal network of friends and family. The word was used in the sense of an interpersonal network—thus "my community," had the meaning, "my group of friends and family who support me."

Fourth, several interviewees referenced the idea of community as a feeling. They made use of the word to mean the feeling of belonging, or a feeling of belonging to a church. This included feeling their group was on the same page, united, and where they could feel included. It was often used with the word "feel" as in, "our church has a community feel." Several interviewees used the term as a description of what they experienced when they attended a particular church, such as "I experienced community there." One interviewee remarked, "I think they modeled caring for one another and helping… and being very involved, and being very open with what's going on. All those things showed me that sense of community and that sense of belonging." This was a common colloquial use where a location, organization, or city had a "community feeling"—by which they meant it was open, warm, friendly, and welcoming.

For the purposes of this dissertation, when I use the label "Community Oriented" to describe a particular church type, the meaning has an emphasis closest to "neighborhood oriented." However, I am purposefully using the words "community oriented" (instead of the

word neighborhood), because it captures the other meanings and nuances used by interviewees and the leadership of churches of this type.

Research Question

This dissertation addresses a question central to the sociological study of American culture: Is community involvement in American society being overwhelmed by rising individualism? How is the tension between individual needs and group demands being resolved in contemporary American culture? In order to investigate these questions, I will focus on the interaction of religious institutions within their societal contexts. I will examine religious contributions to society, and social influences upon religious groups—either to community solidarity or to the prioritization of the individual. Specifically, I will ask: Do Protestant churches play a role in supporting neighborhood connections, or do they advance self-focused values and actions? Are there institutions remaining as anchors, holding the social connections of society together against the pressures of the strong currents pulling communities apart?

Historically, religious institutions have been one social structure serving as this anchor. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912/1995), Émile Durkheim, one of the founders of the discipline of sociology, highlighted the centrality of religion in creating and maintaining social cohesion. When members of a group come together for rituals and celebrations, they reinforce the strength of their community. When they do not regularly come together for these communal affirmations, religion loses its hold on the group, which becomes weaker as members live their separate lives with no collective rituals of "solidarity." Durkheim's work establishes a classic base for exploring the role of religion in producing and reproducing collective cohesion (1912/1995). This dissertation builds on the foundation of Durkheim's central argument about the power of religion in shaping the ebb and flow of individualism and community.

In my research, I utilize religion as a unit of analysis to update the sociological understanding of the relationship between autonomous agents and collective group membership in contemporary American life and culture. This dissertation addresses this dynamic tension as it exists now among religious groups, at the early part of the 21st century: Has individualism overtaken community involvement as a cultural value among contemporary Protestant churches? If so, in what ways do Protestant churches promote or challenge this cultural perspective? Are Protestant churches encouraging members to love their neighbors through community involvement and activism? Or has the commandment taught in these churches morphed from "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39), to merely, "love yourself"?

The study of Protestant churches offers a unique and useful perspective on the relationship between religion and culture. As Kimon Sargeant of the Pew Research Center has noted, "as an entrepreneurial and innovative yet also traditional and conservative movement, evangelicalism provides an excellent window onto how religious groups negotiate the tensions between social change...and preserving traditional belief" (Sargeant, 2000, p. ix).

The patterns I have observed in the churches I studied mirror the tension between these values in society at large. I focus on the role of religious institutions as a reflection of two ideal types of American citizens, each holding a particular set of values. This research in Protestant churches will contribute to broader conversations among sociologists regarding individualism, community involvement, and the relationship between religion and culture.

Method

I gathered data from Protestant churches in five states on the West Coast and in the Midwest. These consisted of predominantly non-denominational churches, but also including several denomination affiliated churches as well. My methods include participant observation,

interviews of staff and church attendees, and analysis of documents and church website content. Data was collected from January of 2017 to April of 2020.

Participant observation consisted of attending church worship services, and other weekly church services. More than 200 hours of observations were made at 38 churches, including observations of the surrounding neighborhood, parking lot, buildings, music, format and style of services. Photographs and recordings were taken during services, including announcements, offerings, prayers and sermons.

Church "bulletins" or "worship folders" were examined. (These were printed brochures handed out at worship services detailing the order of service, announcements, and often with fill-in-the-blank or blank pages for sermon notes.) Other brochures detailing church ministries and activities were collected and analyzed.

Pages of the websites of these churches (and a few of the websites of their network affiliations) were downloaded and analyzed. In total, over 900 web pages were analyzed (the "scroll length" of these pages varied widely, from one paragraph in length to more than 30 letter size printed pages long).

The names of interviewees were changed to protect confidentiality. The names of all churches attended by interviewees and in which participant observations were made were also changed. Often church documents and websites have been quoted, and appropriate citation references have been provided. However, where those citations included the church name, a portion of the reference has been changed to protect the church identity. For example, "churchname.com/blog" would have been changed to "pseudonym.com/blog" to maintain confidentiality, while still indicating the quotation was taken from the website of a particular church. Where photos are provided, church names have been blurred, blacked out, or replaced

with church pseudonym while attempting to match the font and style of the original. The names

of churches and pastors appearing in publications (books or news articles) have been retained

since these are publicly available and no attempt at confidentiality was made in these sources.

In addition to the methods described above, I was able to access and analyze the 2020 annual

church reports from all the churches in the United States and Canada from a single

denomination. Mixed methods analysis was performed on the 2,242 church reports which

provided an answer to the open-ended question, "What are other ministries or things your church

is doing that you would like to tell us about?" All of the other questions in the annual report ask

churches to provide attendance numbers (morning worship service attendance, bible study

attendance, number of youth and children, etc.) and finances. This open-ended question was

designed to allow church staff to describe what in their view was an important part of their

ministry—but was not captured by the quantitative portion of the report.[8] This report was not

utilized directly as data—there are no quotations from the report in this dissertation (with the

exception of the above footnote). Instead, the data was used as a cross-check comparison to test

whether the typology gleaned from participant observation and interviews was apparent in a

larger population of churches. This was indeed the case—similar language and statements from

the in-depth analysis of the 38 churches I visited was also present in the qualitative responses in

this report. In addition, statements representative of both types of churches were also present

among the churches from this denomination.

Interview Participants

I conducted more than 64 hours of interviews with 37 people (six were interviewed as couples).

Interviewees were selected through contacts made when visiting churches and through snowball

sampling. Overall, interviewees were predominantly middle class (self-defined by income), college educated, under 45 years of age, and overwhelmingly self-identified as white.

With regard to race, five of the observed churches were multi-racial, composed of an estimated minimum 35% or more non-white attendees, with two of those churches having congregations greater than 85% non-white. Conscious attempts were made to obtain interviews from non-white participants, but were unsuccessful. This may be because of a greater suspicion of non-white church members being approached by a Caucasian researcher (which was occasionally felt on my part encountering awkward hesitation by potential interviewees), but the actual reasons are unknown.

With regard to gender, there was a roughly 60/40 percent split between male and female interviewees respectively. No participants self-identified as non-binary. Upon analysis of the data, no distinctive differences between male and female responses were found. Both male and female interviewees utilized similar language to describe their church experience according to their church type. However, there was one pair interviewed as a couple who appeared to hold values different from each other—the husband's values matched Consumer Individualism, while the wife's echoed Community Orientation.

Grounded Theory

Utilizing a combination of theme analysis and grounded theory approach, I have generated this typology from the data itself. Grounded theory recognizes interviewees are themselves describing the "community" emphasis in their church, or describing how the church is meeting their needs in a convenient manner so they can come to church to get what they need.

By utilizing a Grounded Theory approach, I have attempted to stay as close to the language used by interviewees and allow the typologies and any resulting analytical categories to

emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 23-31, 37), rather than attempting to fit the data into any pre-existing or pre-supposed conceptual structures. This has the advantage of solving "the problems of fit, relevance, forcing, and richness," as well as providing "readily apparent connections between data and lower and higher level conceptual abstractions," (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 37).

This is especially relevant when observing a typology pattern emerge. It becomes tempting for the researcher to organize the data according to a set of categories conceptualized and imposed upon the data from pre-existing theories, rather than emerging from the data itself. The latter allows for a greater connection between data and theory. Previous church typologies (such as: Becker, 1999; Dulles, 1987; Flory & Miller, 2008; James, 2018; McIntosh, 2002; Roozen, McKinney, & Carroll, 1984) have utilized categories unknown and unused by the congregations themselves. For example, Flory and Miller offer type labels such as "Innovators," and "Appropriators" (2008), which are conceptually distant and not used by members of the congregations themselves. In the typology presented here, "Community Orientation" comes from the language used by interviewees—for example, in one interview with Judy, she used the word "community" five times in a span of two sentences. It is true no individual or church have chosen for themselves the "Consumer Individualist" label, however, I will show from the data those who attend this type have adopted language and behaviors reflecting both a self-focused perspective and a consumer mentality.

Chapter 2: The Historical and Theoretical Context of Individualism and Community

At the center of sociological inquiry is the tension between the needs of the individual and the needs of the group. Societies throughout history have had to make choices regarding what rights and privileges of individuals must decrease for the sake of the greater good of the whole. As they attempted to strike this balance, various institutions (political, economic, religious, etc.) have either emphasized individual freedoms (potentially sacrificing solidarity), or required individuals sacrifice rights and privileges for the sake of community cohesion (Nisbet, 1993, p. xix; see also, Bellah, et al., 1987, pp. 17, 146-147; Durkheim, 1902/2014, pp. 94, 302; Nisbet, 2010, pp. 3-7, 20).

In Europe, the material basis of community under feudalism disappeared by the time of the Industrial Revolution, forcing the peasantry to the cities to find work (Marx, 1867/1967, pp. 718, 728, 745-746). Prior to this, the fixed social positions in European aristocracy had the effect of "binding each man tightly to several of his fellow citizens" (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 483). However, the previously existing sources of social cohesion were re-shaped by the ensuing cultural changes of the 1800s. Nisbet argued the ideas of the social thinkers at the time developed in response to these major social changes. In particular, he recognized two major revolutions—the industrial and the democratic—which shaped the fundamental concepts of sociological thought[9] (Nisbet, 1993, pp. 9-11).

The American Historical Context

The sociological interest in the relationship between individualism and community in the United States stems back as early as 1840 when French sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States to study the successful "experiment" in democracy. In *Democracy in America* (1840/1969), Tocqueville expressed some admiration for the American individualism he saw, yet

he was concerned its excesses could pull members of society apart, atomizing them and diminishing social cohesion. He noted a shift from earlier centuries (prior to the mid-1700s), when European aristocracies influenced their people toward a sense of responsibility to act honorably to their ancestors and consider the effects of their actions upon their progeny. In the new "democratic" age, Tocqueville observed:

> …the track of past generations is lost. Those who have gone before are easily forgotten, and no one gives a thought to those who will follow. All a man's interests are limited to those near himself…. Such folk owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They… imagine that their whole destiny is in their own hands." (Tocqueville, 1840/1969, pp. 507-508).

In Tocqueville's view, democracy and its accompanying relative equality of position, were crucial forces encouraging the development of isolated selves. In American society, with the clearly established social positions of aristocracy abolished, democratic people no longer felt an obligation or duty to any fixed positions in the social system. Under this system, the inheritance of ascribed social position diminished, and "you easily forget those who have preceded you, and you have no idea of those who will follow you. Only those nearest have interest"[10] (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 483). Tocqueville argued the American middle class[11] developed a self-sufficiency, forming the "*habit of always considering themselves in isolation*," (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 483, emphasis added).

The expansion of the American frontier led to the rise of a "rugged individualism," which further weakened social ties (Bazzi, Fiszbein, & Gebresilasse, 2017, p. 1). In the East, industrialism and city growth had gathered people together in centralized locations, but

urbanization had done nothing to bring about any sort of communal association[12] (Nisbet, 1993, pp. 28-29, 51-52).

It is within this historical context of these multiple factors such as growing democracy, industrialization, urbanization, and shift in social structures—all worked together to influence the rise of individualism in the United States. However, a question remained for social scientists—in this context, would individualism overtake community connections and erode the social order?

The Dynamic Between Individualism and Community

In addition to Tocqueville, sociological thinkers such as Comte, Durkheim, Marx and others have taken up the question of the balance between individualism and community.[13] At one extreme, August Comte's social theories focused almost entirely on social forces. Comte saw the individual as an abstracted element already included under the study of society's structures, and not for separate study. In his view, sociology would distinguish itself by examining the social group, unlike psychology, which focused on the individual. According to Comte, "Society is no more decomposable into individuals than… a line into points" (Nisbet, 1993, p. 59). However, many theorists would agree with Nisbet—individualism in society was on the rise, causing a pulling away from group connections:

> Everywhere in the modern world, the clear direction of history seemed to be toward the separation of individuals from communal or corporate structures… there was a unanimity of recognition [among a variety of social philosophers]… Not the group but the *individual* was the heir of historical development… (Nisbet, 1993, pp. 42-43, author's emphasis).

More recently, conversations on these ideas returned to the forefront of social thought with widely read books such as *Habits of the Heart* (Bellah, et al., 1996), and *Bowling Alone*

(Putnam, 2000). The authors of these works asserted communities were becoming increasingly fragmented in the face of the ongoing power of a cultural focus on the self, and the resulting fragmentation had continued from the time of Tocqueville into the late twentieth century.

Drawing parallels from Tocqueville, *Habits of the Heart* attempted to answer the question: "Have we so withdrawn into the circle of family and friends that we have finally become shut up in the solitude of our own hearts? In other words, has… individualism… become so all-pervasive that we are no longer citizens?" (Bellah, et al., 1987, p. 3). Bellah and his co-authors argued rising individualism had created a "crisis of civic membership," and middle class Americans in the 1980s faced daily "temptations and pressures to disengage from the larger society," (1996, p. xi).

In *Habits of the Heart*, the authors explained the past Biblical and Republican traditions have provided a stabilizing anchor, preventing excessive self-focus. In the 1700s and 1800s, these traditions inspired sufficient generosity of spirit in order to produce the necessary number of people willing to work for the common good (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. ix). However, Bellah and his colleagues argued the "growing strength of modern individualism" has taken place "at the expense of biblical and civic traditions," (1996, p. 143). This had the consequence of diminished commitment to citizenship, and group benefits (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. xi, xvii, 50).

Robert Putnam presented similar themes in *Bowling Alone*, and noted the historical trend of this cultural tension:

Community has warred incessantly with individualism for preeminence…. For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper engagement in the life of their communities, but a few decades ago… that tide reversed and we were overtaken by a treacherous rip current. Without at first noticing, we have

been pulled apart from one another and from our communities over the last third of the century. (Putnam, 2000, p. 24, 27).

Putnam examined the reversal of social trends from high civic involvement among those born in the first half of the twentieth century, followed by a steady decline of involvement in the decades following the 1960s. His observations from the 1960s through the 1990s showed that even though the number of individual bowling participants increased, league bowling group membership steadily decreased (Putnam, 2000, pp. 111-112). He presented his evidence[14] in an attempt to answer the question, "Why, beginning in the 1960s… did the fabric of American community life begin to unravel?" (Putnam, 2000, p. 184). Putnam offered several possible explanations for this trend, finally arguing for generational differences, the influence of television, time and money pressures, and suburban sprawl as the chief contributing factors of civic decline (2000). Putnam discusses the Internet, but ultimately reasons that much of its impact on social capital has yet to be determined (2000, p. 170). He does conclude that because of the timing of its development, the Internet could not have been the cause of declining civic involvement (Putnam, 2000, p. 170). With regard to individualism and community, Putnam cautions, "The commercial incentives that currently govern Internet development seem destined to emphasize individualized entertainment and commerce rather than community engagement" (2000, p. 179).

The conclusions of authors such as Putnam and Bellah question the influence of individualism in the culture, and whether it has overpowered community support and commitment. Is there evidence of lingering patterns of social group membership strong enough to counter the rise of individual atomization? Or have the patterns of community involvement

diminished to such a degree these authors have rightly concluded "community life has begun to unravel"?

Evidence of Community Involvement

Although Bellah and his colleagues understood from their interviews the general social tendency toward prioritizing the self over other commitments, they also encountered those who desired involvement in community, and who had a lifestyle of "social and political commitments" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 228; see also pp. 192-195 and pp. 228-229). In particular the authors considered their interviewee Mary Taylor an exception to their generalizations about rampant individualism (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 192, 195). This woman served to illustrate of one of the ways in which Americans are "joiners," and are "expected to *get* involved—to choose for themselves to join social groups" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 167, authors' emphasis). Nevertheless, the authors wrote, "Most people get involved in social institutions to achieve their self-interests, or because they feel an affinity to certain others" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 167). In other words, they argue most people make social group commitments for self-serving reasons. Although they recognize people like Mary exhibit a strong tendency toward community involvement, they conclude she is an exception to the rule of growing individualism, summarizing their encounter with the statement "*we did not meet many Mary Taylors*" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 195, emphasis added). The authors struggled to describe the presence of some individuals who are investing in their social groups, and dismiss this emphasis as a confused mixture of values (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 83-84).

Given these examples, I ask, "has social commitment diminished as much as the *Habits of the Heart* authors declare? Have more followed in the footsteps of Mary Taylor since the time *Habits of the Heart* was written?" My research provides examples of this type of community

oriented person, and potentially offers new data to update the perspective of *Habits of the Heart* regarding the interaction between modern individualism and community concerns (or commitments). In my observations and interviews I *did meet* many "Mary Taylors" and have analyzed their interviews alongside others who expressed opposing views for comparison.

Role of Religion

Religion as an institution is heavily impacted by these tensions between between self-oriented actions and work for the greater good of society. In the United States, religion has been affirmed by its people, and is generally considered to be "a supremely 'good thing' for the individual and the community" (Herberg, 1983, p. 84). Protestantism in particular has shaped the American way of life, injecting a Puritan sense of vocation and "inner-worldly asceticism" into cultural values (Herberg, 1983, p. 81).

Tocqueville described religion as a countering force to the influence of materialism in society. Acknowledging motivations for public service were often mixed with self-interests, he viewed religion as balancing selfish values with an appropriate concern for others:

> The principal business of religions is to purify, regulate, and restrain the too ardent and… exclusive taste for well-being… They will not succeed in turning men away from love of wealth; but they can still persuade them to enrich themselves only by honest means. (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 422).

In his view, it is the nature of people to pursue their own well-being no matter what, and this drive will never go away—but religion would fill the role of preventing individuals from harming each other through selfish pursuits (such as the excessive pursuit of wealth) (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 422; see also Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 38, 223).

Some social theorists have argued the influence of religion in society has been continually diminishing. Known as the secularization thesis, its proponents reasoned that as societies grew more modernized, religious persuasion would decline. Factors such as science, rationalization, increasing governmental involvement, would take over the role that religious institutions had played in previous generations (Berger, 1967/2011).[15] Pluralization, the presence of multiple religious belief systems further undermined plausibility structures supporting any single viewpoint (Berger, 1967/2011).

Durkheim thought religion was continually losing influence over aspects of social life. He reasoned this shift allowed the individual more freedom to act separately from religious structures. Since religion was bound together with the development of societies, the decrease of religious influence pointed to a general weakening of the common consciousness (Durkheim, 1902/2014, p. 132).

However, Durkheim alluded to a historical connection between Christianity and the development of individualism, seeing the two as more mutually supportive than Tocqueville, and having intertwined influence beyond the general religious decline. Durkheim reasoned, "It is therefore a singular error to present the individualistic ethic as the antagonist of Christian morality. Quite the contrary—the former derived from the latter" (Durkheim, 1898/2004, pp. 86-87). Durkheim explained Christianity promoted an internal faith, making it uniquely positioned to promote a privatized version of religion (Durkheim, 1898/2004, p. 86). His position asserted religion would not necessarily limit the excesses of self-pursuits (as per Tocqueville). Instead, he viewed Christianity as a faith intermingled with the growth of individualism.[16]

Putnam's research showed how membership in religious groups could mitigate the potential harms of individualism, but could also contribute to group cohesion. Religious

participation "most closely associated with other forms of civic involvement, like voting, community projects, talking with neighbors, and giving to charity" (Putnam, 2000, p. 67). However, he also recognized an increasing individualized form of "privatized religion," where people were less committed to any particular congregation, and were less likely to participate in communal support (Putnam, 2000, p. 74). He concluded the level of community involvement was intermittent depending on the *type* of Protestant—finding Evangelicals were more likely to volunteer and serve *within* their churches than in the communities outside of them, while mainline Protestants (and Catholics) were more likely to volunteer *outside* of church serving secular causes (Putnam, 2000, pp. 77-78).

The authors of *Habits of the Heart* emphasized the increasing privatization of religion, remarking "most Americans see religion as something individual, prior to any organizational involvement. For many… it remains entirely individual" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 226). Bellah and his co-authors presented their interview with Nan Pfautz as one example of the different individualized ways Americans relate to their religion, and the variety of roles religion plays in both public and private spheres. They emphasized Nan's individualism and lack of group commitment stating, "…like many Americans, [Nan's] personal relationship to God transcends her involvement in any particular church" (1996, p. 228).

Even though they emphasize her self-focused nature, the authors quote Nan's description of the socially involved nature of her church:

> [According to Nan,] "Church to me is a community, and it's an organization that I belong to. They do an awful lot of good…. you have a responsibility to do something…" to "care about the people." It is this caring community, above all, that the church represents. "I

really love my church and what they have done for me, and what they do for other people, and the community that's there." (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 228).

Bellah and his co-authors emphasized the privatized nature of Nan's faith,[17] noting that her pastor shared similar views (1996, p. 229). Ultimately, they conclude that Nan's community focuses on the self, and "It is the self… that must be the source of all religious meaning" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 229). However, the above description of Nan's church resembles several churches that I observed—churches that found religious meaning through caring for their community.

Since *Habits of the Heart* focused on individual interview testimony, the authors did not examine the presence of institutions. There may be privatized religion practiced by different individuals as Bellah and company assert, but in my observations I found there are also individuals who participate in religious institutions—ones celebrating local investment. These types of churches (and the people who attend them, such as Nan) stand in contrast to the "crisis of civic membership" Bellah and his colleagues described in their book. My research will expand on *Habits of the Heart*, utilizing an analysis of multiple Protestant churches focused upon serving their neighborhoods. In addition, my observations comparing churches of different types (CI and CO) will provide insight about the role of religious groups in society, and expand Putnam's distinction of that some types of Protestants tend to serve *within* their churches while others volunteer *outside* of church (Putnam, 2000, pp. 77-78). My data will illustrate the various ways distinct types of Protestant are both furthering the influence of individualism in the culture, and how some serve as a countervailing resistance to it.

Evangelism vs. Social Justice

The discussion of individualism and community activity is reminiscent of an earlier Protestant debate in the late 1960s through the 1970s. The dialog was between advocates of social justice (who assert the role of churches to address the physical needs of those in poverty, focusing on social problems), and advocates of evangelism (who argued churches should address the salvation of individuals,[18] get them "saved," and into heaven—without attending to their social conditions). In other words, social concern primarily focuses on going "outside" church walls to address social ills such as poverty, while evangelism focuses on bringing people "inside" the church to address the spiritual needs of their individual souls.

Historically, according to sociologist David O. Moberg, these two perspectives were interrelated—before 1910, church work bound these two approaches together. "When evangelicals entered the slums as soul-winners, they learned first-hand the conditions under which people lived and quickly added social welfare programs" (Moberg, 1977, p. 28). This interconnection could be seen in several denominations at the time, such as The Salvation Army and the newly formed Church of the Nazarene (Moberg, 1977, p. 29). American Protestantism had merged the two, both in practice and in theology: "First hand knowledge of poverty was amalgamated with Christian compassion to deliver many of our evangelical forebears from the devastating interpretation that sees misfortune as solely a product of personal failure and sin" (Moberg, 1977, p. 30).

However, Moberg describes "the great reversal" transpired from about 1910 to 1930,[19] when Protestant denominations abandoned their attention toward those outside the church, and shifted their focus toward those who were already within church walls. After World War I, social welfare work diminished, as multiple denominations reinterpreted their theology in light of

personal salvation, and replaced attention to social issues with other institutional goals. Churches altered their purpose: "[Church buildings] were designed to meet the needs of others and were only secondarily for their own members. But after World War I, their uses shifted to more self-centered purposes for the parishioners" (Moberg, 1977, p. 31). This shift in theology and practice generated an either/or dichotomy polarizing churches into focusing on either evangelism or social justice (Moberg, 1977, p. 13, 34).

The reasons given for this reversal are many and varied. Moberg lists such factors as: socially involved churches progressively becoming more interested in secular issues and more associated with theological liberalism (thus creating a separation from conservatives and fundamentalists who focused on the soul); urbanization and the "white flight" of the prosperous from the inner cities (accompanied by a lack of attention to social ills); and a theological dichotomy between priestly work (evangelistic, relating individuals to God) and prophetic work (focusing on social reforms) (Moberg, 1977, pp. 34-38).

This historical debate has raised questions about whether the gospel is personal or social (Moberg, 1977, p. 15), which is reflected in the two types of churches I have delineated in my research. CI and CO types have their roots in this historical division between personal fulfillment or social action approaches to Protestant churches and their missions. "Unquestionably the problems of the various Christian bodies are interrelated; they may all be seen as part of the central question of whether evangelism or social concern is the more appropriate channel of Christian response to the complex problems of contemporary society" (Moberg, 1977, p. 19).

However, it is an oversimplification to suggest what is taking place in contemporary churches is merely an extension of this earlier debate. Since the time of Moberg's work, churches have developed different expressions beyond the evangelism vs. social justice tension.

For example, the previous priority of evangelism is no longer the main focus for those who emphasize the personal aspect of the gospel. The rise of consumer culture starting as early as the 1920s and accelerating through the 1950s, 60s, and 80s (Bartholomew & Moritz, 2000, p. 4-5), re-shaped the direction of these churches, emphasizing individualism. My research shows the focus upon evangelism and the salvation of individual souls has been influenced by cultural values, causing these churches to adapt and turn their attention toward satisfying the consumer desires of church insiders.

This debate is ongoing. My observations reveal a broader context to this dispute, and shifts the foundational arguments away from "evangelism vs. social concern," and toward Community Orientation and Consumer Individualism as the underlying perspectives influencing church actions.

Influence of Consumerism

Bellah and his co-authors described consumer capitalism as the "social basis" of twentieth century American culture (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 47), acknowledging it has accelerated the tendency of individuals to separate from their community (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 112).

The development of consumerism is both new and old[20] (Bartholomew & Moritz, 2000, p. 4-5). Consumerism has always existed, despite the assumptions of social theorists who argue it has coincided with development of late capitalism. Sociologist Colin Campbell has argued for a much earlier development of consumerism, as early as the 18th century (1983, p. 280). Max Weber highlighted the ongoing influence of consumerism upon Christianity in the early 1900s by quoting a sermon by Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter. In Weber's view, Protestant desires to remain immune to the influence of materialism had already become over-powered by its lure:

The concern for material goods, according to Baxter, should lie on the shoulders of his saints like "a lightweight coat that one can throw off at any time." Yet fate allowed this coat to become a steel-hard casing. To the extent that asceticism undertook to transform and influence the world, the world's material goods acquired and increasing and, in the end, inescapable power over people—as never before in history. (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 177).

The powerful hold of purchased goods Weber wrote about in the 1920s has since developed into an ethic of consumerism and the pursuit of the satisfaction of individual desires (Bartholemew & Moritz, 2000, pp. 4-8; Bell, 1996, pp. 64-66; Corrigan, 1997, pp. 13-16).

Evidence suggests spending and purchases have greatly increased in prominence in American culture since the 1980s. Juliet Schor, author of *The Overspent American*, acknowledges consumer spending has always been a part of capitalist culture, but in recent decades, "the culture of spending has changed and intensified" (1999, p. 3). From 1979 to 1995, per capita spending increased up to 70% for the average person (Schor, 1999, pp. 11-12). Consumption has expanded at a rate eight to twelve times faster than population growth (Princen, et al., 2002, p. 4, 6). It is becoming "the cognitive and moral focus of life, the integrative bond of society…" (Bauman, 1992, p. 49).

Putnam, who wrote at a time of ballooning consumer spending, identified a shift in values among those born after 1968. He argued that those born since then have increasingly valued materialism, and decreased communal engagement—than the generations before them (Putnam, 2000, p. 272).

Bellah and his colleagues understood individuals use consumerism as a defense against meaningless lives, even though it may prove to be unsatisfying (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 290-

291). Ultimately, Bellah and his co-authors *defend* habitual buying as being something more than egocentric materialism. In their view, shopping practices can "often involve an element of giving to another, and find their meaning in a committed relationship" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 291), such as when gifts are purchased for loved ones. Even though this attempt by individuals to turn their attention away from themselves extends only as far as their own friends and family, Bellah and his co-authors argue "the initial impulse was not simply selfish"[21] (1996, p. 291). Thus, consumerism can be understood as an expression of caring and giving to others.

Although these authors address the interconnectedness of consumerism using interview data (at the personal level), they do not address the influence of consumption upon church teachings and practice (at the institutional level). My research will provide insight into the pervasiveness of consumerist values, and the extent to which they have become integrated with the values and teachings in Protestant churches. My data offers insights into the intensification of consumer practices and values and analyzes the extent to which it has shaped the fundamental principles of our culture. It also sheds light on the opposing tendency to resistance and counter movements. In particular, I explore the relationship between demand-side economics and Protestant churches expanding on the arguments in *Habits of the Heart* whose authors argue consumerism will lead to a meaningless life—and explore the ways in which religious participants have integrated or rejected capitalist values as a part of their search for religious meaning.

Market Cities, People Cities

One recent work offers an insightful analysis of the ways different types of cities reflect this fundamental tension. The authors created a typology based upon a city's balance of individualism and community. Michael Emerson and Kevin Smiley utilized two cities as ideal

types to illustrate how these two types take different approaches to urban life. Market cities emphasize a robust economy, aiming to provide population growth and job creation. In contrast, the cultures of People Cities reflect their attempts to create cities as great places to live, offering good neighborhoods and communities. People Cities actively structure policies and physical spaces to support interaction between neighbors.

> The approaches of both Market Cities and People Cities come with a set of values: Houston, the city "built to work, and for work," is the quintessential Market City: it is geared to wealth accumulation, and holds individualism as a core value. Copenhagen, where "urban life is for people," is the quintessential People City: the city is collective-minded and focused on ensuring quality of life at a scale understandable to its citizens[22] (Emerson & Smiley, 2018, p. 4).

Emerson and Smiley created a typology of the social structures in cities similar to the one I found at the organizational level among churches.[23] "In Market Cities, individualism is the core of the economy…. In People Cities, a collective mentality links the building blocks together…." (Emerson & Smiley, 2018, p. 66). The influence of capitalism combined with individualism provides a strong parallel to the values I observed. At the same time, the People City collective-minded focus mirrors the values found that consider neighborhood involvement important. Their research of cities adds support to the typology presented here, but my analysis explores the role of religion as a social force affecting the dynamics between individualism and community.

Chapter 3: Theology and Values of Consumer Individualism and Community Orientation

Behavior is the embodiment of thought. Churches are the collective of the beliefs of members and leadership. The values and theological perspectives of a church are a sum of the agreed upon theological and value choices of those who attend them.

The observed behavioral differences between Consumer Individualist and Community Oriented church types stems from the underlying beliefs about God (theology) and general ideas of what is important, good, and moral (values). I will focus upon a comparison of how these church types hold different perspectives on the same theological concepts, or the same value categories. In other words, if we take a theological construct ("the Kingdom of God" for example), or a value category ("success" for instance), how does each type differ in their perspective on that shared topic?

There were some shared theological topics and value categories discussed by both types of churches. Yet there are nuances of context and use of the terminology related to these concepts which portray the different theological and value perspectives of each church type.

Theological Contrasts

One of the most striking differences between these church types is the difference in their attention to theology. In interviews and web page content, CO churches pay far more time and attention to the discussion of theological matters than CI churches. Many interviewees from CO churches mentioned theology was an important reason in their choice to attend their church.

For example, CO pastors and church members utilize theological words and phrases revealing previous theological study—either through formal schooling, or as a part of their church practice or inclusion in sermons. Pastors and interviewees alike used theological phrases

such as "God's preferential option for the poor," and Hebrew words and phrases such as *shalom* and *tikkun olam*.

In addition, CO pastors and attendees talked about their methods for theological study—they believe theology should be done communally, together as a congregation, and in conversation with others. This reflects an integration of their theological study with their value of community orientation. For these churches, theology is meant to be discussed with feedback from the laity, and not in a top down hierarchy where an elite group of priests tell the congregation what to believe. In fact, several of these churches invited the surrounding neighborhood—who may or may not be Christian believers—to discuss with them theological and political topics. In these ways, CO leaders and members seek a relational interaction with authors and theologians, fellow members of their own congregations, and even with the external society around them.

In contrast, few of the CI church leaders or attendees dedicated much dialog or discussion to theological matters. There were references to a few theological concepts, such as the "Kingdom of God," or studies in apologetics, (discussed below), and a few members were quick to quote scripture verses. However, quoting verses was usually done in reference to some application to their personal lives, or referencing personal encouragement or moral direction.

CI churches theological study is focused upon reinforcing beliefs. They dedicate time and energy—not necessarily in dialog with others, nor in an expression of openness to the possibility to learn from others—but instead they emphasize reinforcing and mastering one's existing beliefs, and being able to defend them to others.

CI attendees focus their teaching on helping to improve the individual attendee's development as a person, and all theological discussions are couched within the context of that

approach. These members typically have sermons centered around self-help topics; they do not invest in reflection around theological discussion. When theology is discussed, it is presented from an I/Me centric perspective, to "help you understand" your beliefs, and help you "know what you believe." Training in apologetics (knowing what you believe and being able to defend the reasons for your beliefs) was provided in workshops at several CI churches.

Kingdom of God

The concept of the "Kingdom of God" is mentioned multiple times in Christian scriptures, and books have been written about its theological meaning.[24] The phrase references the rule and reign of God over all the earth, and over the life of the believer. The implication is those who call themselves Christians are now subjects of the Kingdom of God, and participate in the accomplishment of the will of God on earth (as per the Lord's Prayer "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." (Matt. 6:10)).

CO church pastors and members mentioned this phrase in interviews, but had a particular understanding of its meaning. For CO leaders and attendees, the Kingdom of God is a reference to the activity of God in a practical way in the present time. For CO believers, the emphasis is upon God's activity in the here and now, instead of merely trusting God has power in the afterlife in heaven. Congregants are encouraged to "live in the kingdom," and "experience the reality of the kingdom" in the present, here on earth.

For CO members, the Kingdom of God is also understood as the standard by which to measure not only church activity in the world, but also political activity and government policy. Several CO pastors and attendees commented on the United States government immigration policies, comparing them to their understanding of the values inherent in the Kingdom of God.

For example, consider the comments of Evan, a twenty-something male attendee from Savior's Grace church:

> There are things that are happening that are not okay, how we're treating— or how the administrations are treating immigrants and their families. That's not okay— and I don't care if you're Republican, Democrat, whatever. That's not the Kingdom of God, and that's not what God has called us to do and to be in.

> Several CO leaders and members also commented on their belief there was a conflict

between the values of the Kingdom of God and those of the dominant culture.[25] Among several there was a desire for their churches to be in harmony with culture (especially as they were involved in their local neighborhoods); they simultaneously desired to be in harmony with the culture and anti-capitalist/anti-consumerism. As a part of this theological perspective, church members of this type specifically rejected the theology of the Prosperity Gospel movement, which they see as participation on the part of churches in the values of capitalist materialism.

CI churches hold a different perspective of the theological concept of Kingdom of God. These churches view the Kingdom of God as something to be built. Pastors, and attendees are called upon to participate in building the Kingdom of God here on earth—especially through supporting and planting new local churches. (Many CI churches are themselves a church plant, and value growing the number of attendees in their churches through evangelism, until they become large enough to plant more churches—and in this way "build" the Kingdom of God).

In addition, the CI theology of the Kingdom of God follows a war metaphor. As they seek to build the kingdom, these churches see themselves as "building an army for the kingdom," or utilize terms such as "advancing the kingdom." There is a sense of claiming territory, and expanding the realm by conquering—overcoming darkness and evil as well as obstacles in their

personal lives. Their perspective is evangelistic in nature, as the members of the church seek to "win" more people into the kingdom through their efforts. Interestingly, their methods for winning more people are accomplished by adopting the cultural values of enjoyment and comfort, lowering cultural barriers and making it easy for newly invited attendees to feel welcome and comfortable at church.

The Kingdom of God was referenced by several larger CI churches in connection with fundraising efforts. Many of these churches referenced the Kingdom of God in the context of raising money, appealing for donations with phrases such as "invest in the kingdom," or "advance God's kingdom," through generous donations. One megachurch website made a fundraising appeal asking for help to "advance God's kingdom in Cuba" by purchasing (and giving away) several million copies of the female pastor's first book.

Narrative and Story

Although it is not a classic theological category, I have included story and a narrative perspective on life as an aspect of theology, specifically because of the way CO churches include the language of "story" and narrative when describing their theology. For CO churches, theology *is storied*. Leaders and attendees of these churches view theology as set in a narrative context and recognize theology is enmeshed in stories (beginning with the stories in Hebrew and Christian scriptures). Not only do they utilize narrative in their theology, but also in their ecclesiology. CO leaders consciously reject a corporate model of church, with the pastor as "CEO" in charge of the church "business." Instead, they view themselves and their churches as part of the "larger story of God's activity in the world" (galileeshores.org). As Pastor James of Savior's Grace church stated, "We trust much more in story than in strategy. Instead of

techniques like repeatable behaviors that engineer predictable outcomes, [we talk] about virtue and how virtue is formed."

Several CO pastors described the mission of their church as an attempt to consciously tell a different story than what has been told in the dominant culture. Cameron, a member of Galilee Shores church, described "the most important aspect" of their church as, "stewarding a beautiful story, a story that brings beauty and justice and goodness out into the world… it's also embodied within the worship services… as well." Some of these churches are specifically trying to tell a different story from the narrative of capitalism. In the words of Pastor James of Savior's Grace church:

> I'm very intentionally trying to subvert the narrative of consumerism, in my own life and in my family and my work in church—to patiently, graciously, articulate an alternative narrative to the narrative of consumerism. A narrative that we would call kingdom, Kingdom of God, that calls into question the habits and rhythms and practices of consumerism… I'm trying to get people to switch stories—from the story of individualism, consumerism, and nationalism—to a story of gospel [and] kingdom.

These attendees are interested in participating in the larger story of God—which begins with the Bible, but continues to be written through their lives today. They see themselves living into a narrative which is woven into the theological understanding of CO churches and is separate from the narrative being told by the dominant culture. As Cameron explained, "it's a living into a story and beginning to embody that story." Pastors and church members alike spoke of this idea of embodying the story of God—equating their own ministries as participating in the story of God's activity in the world.

A narrative theology fits well with the CO perspective of sharing life with their community. In the view of those who attend CO churches, the life of the church is about shared stories. Their churches invite the neighborhood to come share their stories with the church, and in turn the church shares the story of God with them. For a few of these CO churches, this relational use of shared stories permeates the day to day activity of the church. For example, The Upper Room church has turned the weekly sermon moment into one of dialog and sharing stories instead of a standard one-way preaching event.

In contrast, CI churches take a different view of the role of narrative in church life. In interviews and in church documents, CI churches did not discuss stories in a theological context. They did talk about sharing stories and telling stories, but narratives were not woven into their theology used to guide church life. Stories were spoken of in the context of either a methodological approach to evangelism—stories are for sharing your faith—or they were shared as a source of encouragement and inspiration. In both interviews and church documents, CI churches recounted tales of success and overcoming obstacles in life. On several CI church websites, there were anecdotes posted highlighting how church members had overcome difficult life situations, such as divorce or addictions—and celebrating God's power to help them. Some of these narratives were posted as an appeal to get non-believers to come to church, others were there to encourage those who already attend. They were presented as a proof God was active in the church and could help the reader overcome difficulties in their own life. Stories of overcoming demonstrated the church was "alive"—God was present in their church. In this way, narrative was used to show their church had something of value to offer, and was not boring.

God Centered and Following God's Will

Almost all Protestant churches are interested in keeping God as the focus of their ministry and following in step with "the will of God" for their church and the lives of their congregants. Even though different types of churches may use the same phrases regarding being "God centered," and "following God's will," different church types understand the meaning of these phrases in different ways.

The CO understanding of being God centered is related to their understanding of the concept of following God's will. Their use of these terms implies congregants must give up some personal choice. For the CO congregation, being God centered means the individual is not the central focus of church life. Congregants understand doing God's will means they must sacrifice some of their own will and desires.

CO attendees, when discussing "putting God at the center" of their lives, speak of it in the context of relinquishing personal plans to prioritize serving the world. In the view of the leadership and attendees of these churches, the purpose of the church is "for the life of the world"; the church does not exist to serve the individual self. In fact, members of CO congregations spoke specifically about rejecting the idea that God desires (or "calls"[26]) people to be comfortable. In the words of Pastor Randy of The Upper Room church, "It's not like Jesus calls us to a life of comfort. We're going to be challenged and it's going to be hard, but it's also really good."

The theological usefulness of being "God centered" is undergirded by associated values of love for others and self-sacrifice. For these churches, centering one's life on God, and following God's will includes following Jesus as their model for living—specifically imitating his compassion toward others.

For CO churches, aligning one's own personal will with the will of God means practicing the words of Jesus, "not my will but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). For some of these church members, such as the politically activist Pastor Randy at The Upper Room, the meaning of this phrase includes being willing to go to jail—sacrificing personal comfort and freedom to join in solidarity with those in the community. In addition, CO pastors understood following the will of God as specifically contrasted against the focus on numerical growth in church attendance. For them, aligning their will with God's meant being faithful to what God asked them to do whether or not it meant the church would achieve numerical growth. This was recognized by Wayne, an attendee at Savior's Grace church:

> [Our church] speak[s] to the fact that society is so focused on numbers. Instead, it takes us away from living in the center of God's will…. He does call us to bring more people and to go and make disciples, but that's done, first off, by being in the center of God's will…. There's… this trust in, "If we stay in the center of God's will, then, maybe the numbers will come, but our success or how we're doing isn't evaluated based on numbers." Yes, I would say, it's really a step against that. Maybe too far, I don't know, but I definitely like the intentionality of not looking at numbers.

In contrast, CI churches understand the meaning of the phrases "being God centered" and "following God's will" in terms of the personal growth of the individual attendee. For example, the concept of being God centered for these attendees was often spoken of in terms of putting God first in their lives—so they could find and fulfill God's purpose and become all they could be. This perspective of individual fulfillment is reflected in the website description of the men's ministry at FoundPurpose church:

FoundPurpose Men… strive to put *God first* in all we are and all we do…. We live to

honor God, to love Him above all else, and to *fulfill God's purposes for our lives*. We

gather together to strengthen and encourage our brothers and to *be built up ourselves*. We

look for ways to serve the needs of those around us so Jesus can be revealed *through our*

actions. (FoundPurpose.church/men, emphasis added).

For this church, putting God first is combined with "fulfilling God's purpose for our

lives." It does not imply self-sacrifice—instead, putting God first means self-advancement,

fulfillment, and "being built up ourselves." For CI members, this concept is understood as a call

to become the person God made them to be as individuals. For members of these churches,

following God's will involves fulfilling God's desire for their lives, and living life as God

intended—which means fulfilling a purpose and calling. From their perspective, God has a plan

for your life, and you should attempt to fulfill it, being guided by "what the Lord wants for *me*."

The nuance is subtle and does not mean CI attendees are not interested in good

relationships and caring for others. Like all Protestants, they certainly are interested in good

relationships and service. However, being God centered and following God's will did not have

the same connotation of self-sacrifice—the idea present within the theological understanding of

CO churches.

Missional Theology, Communal Approach

There is a theological perspective underpinning the prioritization of outsiders by CO

churches. The leadership at these churches have consciously adopted a missional theological

perspective. A missional theology emphasizes "going out" into the world. It is the belief God

desires the church to be actively involved in reaching out to those outside the church, to share the

love of God with them, and attempt to meet their needs. CO leaders mentioned prioritizing those

outside of the church walls was an important aspect of their theology. Galilee Shores church explains their missional theology on their website, declaring:

> Christianity is a way of life that sends us into the world to serve God and our neighbors so that God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven. The church is never to be a withdrawn, isolated end user of the gospel of Jesus; rather, we receive it so that we may be equipped and sent into the world to love our neighbors and serve "the least of these." In this sense, Galilee Shores doesn't have a mission; it is mission. (galileeshores.org).

There is evidence a missional theology trickles down into the congregation itself at CO churches. Attendees I interviewed echoed a missional theology perspective, and described finding fulfillment in their connection to something larger than themselves. In addition, it was not enough for members of these churches to serve their neighborhood as individuals. The *way* they seek to accomplish their missional work is *communal*—it is something done together with others.

Hand of God church seeks to be missional through outreach programs such as their "change for a dollar" offering to neighbors in need. "We're stronger together than we are alone: Our individual resources (like a dollar) may not go very far, but collectively our combined resources can make a powerful impact" (handofgodchurch.com). Savior's Grace church even attempts to reverse an individual approach to preaching, promoting it not as something done by a single preacher, but as something accomplished together with the congregation:

> When the pastor or speaker talks, they do so not from a stage, but from ground level, signifying that pastors aren't super-Christians, but they are a genuine part of our community; the one's we've chosen as a church to lead us and to give their lives, vocationally, to the service of the church; like [the] first among equals. Generally, the

message time also includes feedback time or opportunities for people in the congregation to share their thoughts as well. This reminds us that the gospel is not merely information to be transferred, but something we encounter together. (saviorsgracechurch.com).

In this way, a missional community is not merely the end in mind for these churches, but being communal is also the means to a missional end. As they seek to reach out, they pursue their goals through a process of working together in relationship with fellow congregants and by partnering in a communal manner with those outside of it.

In contrast, CI church pastors and members held a different understanding when speaking of their "mission." They did not define it in the same theological sense as CO members. For CI participants, their use of the term missional was more closely associated with efficiency in adding new members, and a church-centric approach—which added several nuances to their ecclesiology.

First, the meaning of "missional" for CI churches emphasized the idea of the "vision" of the organization. This suggests the influence of a popular corporate business practice, where a corporation identifies and publishes their primary goal as an organization, explaining their purpose and reason for existence in terms of their "mission statement." In the words of Bernie, one of the pastors at NewLife Church:

> We have a mission statement. We want everybody to start in our mission statement. That statement was: to lead people to a God who is for them and help them discover His purpose for their life. That's our mission. That's our message.

Second, the CI understanding of a mission to those outside of the church was most often referenced in terms of *evangelism* (attempting to convert non-believers), specifically by inviting outsiders to come into the church so they might be introduced to God and Jesus. Owen, a

member of Eternal Rock church put it specifically in those terms, saying, "I think the mission of Eternal Rock is to invite new believers or people who don't know Christ into the church and to introduce them to God and the Christ."

Henry, another member at Eternal Rock church described how their church utilized their property to hold a youth sports league as a way to invite people to church. They utilized a program called "Bridges." Even when this church went outside, the goal was to convert others by bringing them into the church:

> I think that, in a large part, we need to be counter to the culture… involved in changing the culture, so one of the biggest things that Eternal Rock has done for a long time is the Bridges program. That [program] is out to the entire surrounding community and invitations go out all around, "Come and join us, here's a place for your kids to be involved" and that shows the Church is… not trying to corral everybody in and then beat them over the head with Bibles. What we do is approach the community in a loving way, open way, and then invite folks who want to know more about the Church to come and visit.

Unlike CO churches, who emphasize getting outside of the church to connect and serve, CI churches emphasize inviting and drawing people inside the church for the purposes of conversion—to change them through the worship and ministries taking place on the church grounds. This inside-centric perspective is described here to show the CI emphasis on evangelism as a part of their understanding of mission. The inside/outside distinction is an important difference for understanding these two church types, and is covered in more detail in the section on Insider and Outsider Perspectives.

Third, "missional" tasks mentioned by CI interviewees included impacting the culture and non-believing individuals by re-shaping morals. Ashley from Pathway church described how she saw the work of the church as a mission to "get more of the community to get back on track in a more moralistic view." CI members tended to understand their missional involvement as a responsibility to live as a Christian example for nonbelievers. For them, getting involved in the neighborhood was to be done so the church could influence the morals of the culture around them. Indeed, several interviewees viewed secular culture with a sense of derision—with some describing society as "a mess." Ashley described the relationship of her church to society, saying, "[Our church] is definitely not in alignment with society, society is really messed up right now. I think our church is trying to re-align society…." Henry from Eternal Rock mentioned going out into the surrounding area—with the intention to invite outsiders into church, and for the purpose of moral influence:

What we can do is we've got to be involved in the community. Just keep inviting people, living out… what God has laid on our heart to do… just to be who we are as Christians and not back down from who we are as Christians. Share that... there is love in Christ to show… other people. That's the only way that we're ever going to be able to turn this society around. It's a mess.

Again, this was seen as a balancing act by CI churches. Most members recognized the difficulty of appropriating cultural forms without losing a sense of being a model for others to follow. As Rufus from Eternal Rock church explained, "I think we need to be both. I think we need to be with the times without compromising our morals."

The nuanced differences between CO and CI understandings of being missional was expressed in terms of how they perceived their relationship to society. For CO church members, being

missional was most often expressed in terms of "serving" society. For CI members, being missional was predominantly associated with changing society to conform to a Christian viewpoint—either through conversion, or by "getting them right" in terms of conforming to moral choices guided by Christian moral values and lifestyle.

Theological Reflections on Justice

Theological reflection on justice and the church was referenced often by CO church members as the reason for neighborhood involvement, and specifically social justice activism. Their theological teachings, language, and values related to social justice were expressed repeatedly at an organizational level (as represented in church publications), and on a personal level (articulated and discussed by the staff and membership).

In interviews and on church websites, church leaders (and interestingly several laypersons) made references to Liberation Theology and used phrases such as "God's preferential option for the poor."[27] Rhonda, a female staff member at The Upper Room compared her current views on justice issues with those she learned in her church growing up. When discussing her theology of justice, she included theological phrases unfamiliar to those without theological training:

> Because I grew up in a church that had the [perspective], "If you're poor it's because you've been doing something wrong," kind of thing…. Or if you were gay, it's because you're doing something wrong. I compare that with the message of the Sermon on the Mount… "Blessed are the poor, blessed are you when people persecute you...." The Sermon on the Mount, basically, entails God's blessing, which includes a preferential option for the poor. I think that's hard for any of us who are white, middle class

Protestants to really understand… God is with the marginalized. That's not a super popular view of what it means to be "blessed."

Cameron, another CO member[28] of Galilee Shores described his theological view of justice by referencing the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, as well as the language of "downward mobility," from the writings of Catholic author/professor Henri Nouwen (et. al., 2006). His description reflected a depth of interest in social justice issues, how it was counter to consumerism, as well as language revealing a background of theological study in the area:

> *Shalom* is always a term that I would use in… distilling all of that down… I think that that's a contrary understanding… to what we typically think of in a consumer's kind of mindset, in which a lifestyle that's consistently upwardly mobile… I think that Christ begins to model this [shalom] with more of a sense of this kind of downward mobility in becoming a servant and by losing one's life you find it, and in so doing… finding that life, and that *shalom* kind of begins to be what the Kingdom of God is really all about… In Jesus we see the bending of his life towards the marginalized and sharing that humanity… even sharing in some of the condemnation and shame in there, in order to have a sense of solidarity with them. But a solidarity that's moving to someplace, that is moving towards liberation.

The understanding of *shalom* as a sense of having everything in proper relationship inspires these attendees to reject the upwardly mobile lifestyle, and instead pursue a downward mobility. Instead of trying to move up in the world in terms of riches and status, they pursue a life of service intentionally putting them in a position of solidarity with the poor. CO attendees have adopted the perspective of downward mobility leading to a proper relationship with their

neighbors—especially the marginalized. It is this theological perspective motivating these church members to social justice work.

Interviewees consistently expressed equity an important value. Some discussed racism as an issue. Rhonda told me her understanding of equity this way:

> We can be at peace when people in the world, regardless of their race or sexuality or status [or] class are treated with equity…. Like, as a white person, racism might not—I can go throughout my day without having to really think about it, but people of color that's not the case. How can I learn mercy on their behalf and do justice in a way that benefits more than just me?[29]

Those who attend CO churches have integrated an emphasis on Biblical justice into their worldview, and readily articulate the importance of justice as an aspect of their church life. This articulation of theological concepts, especially related to justice, was not observed among CI interviewees. Even though CI staff persons are also theologically educated, and may be aware of theological concepts of social justice, they did not make reference to them—or the integration of justice concepts into their church life.

Hospitality and Compassion as Foundational Theological Values. CO church social justice concerns are grounded in a theology of hospitality. Hospitality serves as a guiding theological value which provides a rationale for the prioritization of social justice involvement. As a value it is often explicitly stated in CO church materials. For example, Hand of God church in a city in the Northwest U.S. includes in their church vision statement a pledge to "serve the world," specifically through "Hospitality in kindness by welcoming strangers or guests; Justice in responding with moral rightness in action or attitude; Mercy in being kind and forgiving" (Welcome to Hand of God Community, 2017). The Upper Room church, in its overall church

vision published on their website, describes social justice together with its value of hospitality: "We're a progressive, Christ-following, dinner[30] church community in [a midwestern city], seeking to be a community of reconciliation and peace in a city divided. We deeply value hospitality, community, rest, and beauty," (The Upper Room bulletin handout, May 13, 2018).

Hospitality is referenced in the context of relationship. This value and practice for these churches cannot be separated from the context of human relationships. CO churches perceive hospitality as a relational act—it is not something done *to* others or on behalf of others—it is done *with* them. The Upper Room church website provides a lengthy explanation of exactly what hospitality means for their congregation, both its explicit importance, and its relational aspect:

> Grassroots hospitality starts with friendships, and everything flows from that relational place. We wish to be place-sharers, offering a listening ear to those experiencing hardships of any kind, and offering dignity and empathy instead of quick fixes. Through relationships, our community is moved to act, to do simple things to help share the load with one another. Hospitality is a move towards sharing who we are and what we have, with a concern for the holistic well-being of each other. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus said, "I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink…." This is an expression of God's desire to care for the "least of these" among us through the practice of deep hospitality. (theupperroomchurch.com)

> The idea of compassion, defined as a "deep awareness of the suffering of another accompanied by the wish to relieve it," (American Heritage Dictionary), is sometimes mentioned as a component of hospitality. It is listed among the beliefs outlined by the Hand of God church website: "Hospitality—Experiencing the grace of Jesus by welcoming Him into our lives through the face of the stranger—making space for inclusive meals, acts of compassion and sharing the

grace and knowledge of Christ with others" (handofgodchurch.com). The value placed on relationships in these type of churches underlies their orientation toward hospitality. It is the way these churches express compassion for their neighbors and the less fortunate.

Mending the World. One repeated observation from CO church websites, mission statements and interviews was the inclusion of references to "serving the world," or "mending the world." The idea their church exists for the world is explicitly stated as an aspect of their identity. For example, Pastor James of Savior's Grace Church explained how his church shared a similar social justice vision for "serving the world" with other CO pastors he knew, saying, "There's a justice element to [our churches]—It's a self-understanding that we exist for the life of the world."

Serving the world is further mentioned in connection with social justice involvement. Several churches and their leaders used the Hebrew phrase, *tikkun olam,* translated as "to mend the world," in order to describe how they were participating in God's work to repair the inequalities and injustices in the physical realm. For example, Galilee Shores church held a sermon series about mending the earth, which included sermons directly addressing racial injustice. According to their website:

> Over the last few months, Galilee Shores hosted a sermon series called "*Tikkun Olam,*" a
> Hebrew phrase that refers to mending the world. In October, justice pastor Jacob
> preached on Racial Realities, discussing white privilege and the what it means to be a
> Christ follower amidst it all. Referencing Ephesians 2:14, he noted, "While the dividing
> wall has come down, there's still a whole heap of rubble . . .that has to be dealt with
> before we can find peace." (galileeshores.org)

Pastor James used similar theological phrases to explain his understanding of what is important in the life of his church. For him, mending broken relationships is one of the most important aspects of church life, as expressed as a "coming together," or "mending":

> The nuts and bolts, ground level work of living into new creation or *shalom* involves the atonement, "at-one-ment," the coming together, the integration, or healing of the way we relate to God, to each other, to ourselves and to the world. What is it, *tikkun olam*, the Jewish phrase, "to mend the world"? It's a mending of all the broken relationships, a reintegration of the human into the cosmos in its right place.

When I interviewed Cameron, he also used Hebrew words to describe the theological rationale for social justice involvement:

> This movement towards God's *shalom*…. about God mending our world and healing our world, and that *tikkun olam*, to mend or repair the earth, that was very much the movement in which we had already been going… a more consciousness of justice issues that it has to be more than charity. We need to look for ways in which people don't find themselves in poverty. How is that going to affect institutions? Then, how does this theological imagination begin to seep out into the rest of our world? How does that affect our politics? How does that affect how we understand creation, how we understand other things?

Leadership of these churches have been educated regarding a theology of social justice. More importantly, they have integrated this perspective and applied it in their understanding of the role of the church in society, and as a theological underpinning for their churches involvement in social justice.

Community Orientation and James 1:27. CO church staff and laypersons alike cited the Christian scriptures verse James 1:27 as a scriptural and theological basis for getting involved in social justice work: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (NIV). Their citation of this verse was often as a literal reference and reason for their involvement in working with orphans through foster child family ministries. As Ricardo, a Hand of God staff member explained, their own foster care ministry is a way of connecting to non-believers outside the church, and gives them an opportunity to explain why the church is involved in foster care work:

> …You've got a ton of non-Christian people taking in foster kids. That's amazing. That's a window into a redemptive piece, and then we get to share why *we* do foster care. Why do we care about it? It's because Christ tells us to care for the widows and orphans… We do share those pieces [with non-Christians]. It does give us access where we don't have to feel afraid necessarily of culture, or feel like nobody out there wants to know. Actually, they really do [want to know why we are involved in foster care]. When you're sitting next to somebody and you're both caring about the same thing and you get to share that, "Well, I'm actually here for this foster parent 'Embrace [Our State]' event because it's part of our church, but here's why it's part of what we do."

> For this CO pastor, the work of helping others was a point of shared connection with others involved in similar work. At the same time, he felt it was an opportunity to explain the Biblical motivation behind their foster care involvement—they care because in his view, God cares for the widow and orphan.

Consumer Individualism and James 1:27. To be clear, CI church members also quote

James 1:27. However, when they reference "taking care of the orphans and widows" it is

mentioned as a generalized responsibility for all Christians, but not necessarily as a specific

application of biblical theology directly driving their church practices. In fact, Rufus (from

Eternal Rock church) offered a contradictory explanation, saying the church as an organization is

not obligated to meet the needs of society, but instead *individuals* should take responsibility. In

his view, the church organization is there to support and "refill" those individuals. In other

words, the church exists to support the *individuals who attend*. Yet, at the same time, this person

did mention James 1:27 as a reference to the responsibility of the individuals who attend church.

When asked if he believed the Church must perform certain roles or meet certain needs for

individuals and for society, Rufus replied, "Yes, but not as an organization. I believe the

church—as a people—need to meet those needs. I think the organization of a church is where we

come to get refilled, re-educated, recoup whatever you want to call it…." He went on to

reference James 1:27, caring for the widows and orphans, and did acknowledge that is "our

responsibility." However, in the language of this attendee, there is a separation between the

responsibility of the church as an organization, and the responsibility of the individuals in the

congregation. The organizational church is responsible to recharge the individuals, and it is the

individuals' responsibility to do service akin to the work of James 1:27, caring for the widow and

orphan.

The understanding of CI attendees with regard to taking care of the orphan and widow,

involvement in social justice concerns, or meeting the physical needs of the poor in their

neighborhood is complex. They struggle with where to assign responsibility for taking care of

the poor—is it the responsibility of individual Christians to take upon themselves, or does

responsibility fall to the church as an organizational body? This is reminiscent of the observations on American religions by the authors of *Habits of the Heart,* who noted a distinction between the public (organizational) role of the church and the privatized (individual) roles of Christians: "For some, religion is primarily a private matter having to do with family and local congregation. For others, it is private in one sense but also a primary vehicle for the expression of national and even global concerns" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 219).

CI participants recognize the implications of a verse like James 1:27, but their individualist perspective on the world leads them to a convoluted understanding with regard to social justice involvement. From the viewpoint of the interviewee, above, the role of the church is to support or "refill" the individual, and then individuals are free to choose to get involved in helping the poor. CI churches participate in acts of service to others, however they do not explicitly declare or discuss justice as an important aspect of their church. That kind of work is left up to individuals to do on their own. Again, this echoes the findings of *Habits of the Heart*, "Most Americans see religion as something individual, prior to any organizational involvement. For many… it remains entirely individual" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 226).

However, this privatized viewpoint is not the perspective of CO churches. For them, the responsibility to pursue social justice lies with the church as an organization, and individuals who attend their church are expected to share the vision and theology, participating with their church in acts of compassion and social justice issues.

Values Contrast

Values differ from theology—specifically, theology is usually describing what a person or church believes about God and their understanding of the spiritual or supernatural. Although there is some overlap, values typically describe what is important to an individual or an

organization. Personal values are beliefs, not necessarily related to God or the supernatural, but are usually a set of principles describing how the world should work, and which are of such importance individuals and organizations are resistant to compromising them.

As with the contrasts in theology, the nuanced differences between these two church types will be compared using terms and value concepts described by both groups. In this way, the distinctly different understandings of these concepts can be assessed.

Meaning and Purpose

CO churches associated different ideas under the headings of "meaning" and "purpose" than CI churches. For CO attendees, their understanding of meaning tended to be expressed within the context of "meaningful work." These churchgoers were resistant to getting stuck in a job for the sake of contributing to profits for a corporation. Instead, they valued working for a cause, or at the very least a transparent business, one responsible in its actions toward the physical environment. Nate, a 30 year old male attendee of Galilee Shores explained:

> At least amongst friends and people that we know there's a common theme of meaningful work. It's important to be passionate about what you do specifically for your job. If you're not, then you do another job. There's a movement away from… "I'm going to work for the same place for 40 years and then retire on a retirement plan…" and stuff like that. I think there's more.

For CO members, the concept of "purpose," took an almost cliché form, often used in the context of being part of a "larger purpose." This understanding went hand in hand with their value of meaningful work—they wanted to participate in something making a contribution to the world around them. At the same time, being part of some larger purpose also carried with it the idea of participating in something communally, working together with others toward a common

cause. In the minds of CO church goers, it was not enough to spend one's life working for years toward self-centered goals such as building personal wealth. Instead, what gave them a sense of meaning and purpose in life was working together with others at something producing a benefit for all.

CO church leaders and members did not ignore personal values, yet even when they discussed these values, they de-emphasized or even decried their individualistic nature. For example, Blessing Place church held a series of sermons during the season of Lent which challenged individual-centric personal values. The topics centered around what they called, "essential truths" which countered the perspective of individual importance. The sermon titles included:

1. Life is Hard

2. You Are Not Important

3. Your Life is Not About You

4. You Are Not in Control

5. You Are Going to Die

 (blessingplace.com/blog)

On the other hand, CI members placed the concepts of meaning and purpose within a decidedly personal frame. For these leaders and attendees, the understanding of a meaningful life was directly associated with finding one's purpose. Meaning and purpose in life were associated with personal fulfillment, which could be achieved through personal growth. CI churches frequently promoted workshops and Bible studies on topics related to finding one's purpose in life, and in particular, how a person could fulfill their purpose by finding where they "fit in" at

the church. Emphasis was frequently placed upon connecting a person's unique skills, talents, and "gifts,"[31] with volunteer duties to keep its ministries active and growing.

The concepts of meaning and purpose among CI attendees were also closely associated with their personal experience with God through nature. Even though an experience of God is commonly understood as something associated with the supernatural, non-physical world, they connected spiritual meaning with the enjoyment of the physical world, such as being outdoors, and going on adventurous outings (hiking, kayaking, camping, and travel). CI churches were more likely to offer "recreation ministries" with church-sponsored outdoor activities. One large CI church had created its own off-shoot recreational ministry company, which offered international travel, snowboarding trips, camping, bike riding and running events promoted through the church. On their promotional flyer, they reminded readers of the connection between God and their recreational activities: "GOD CREATED THE EARTH ride it, climb it, catch it, explore it, protect it" (Lakeview Adventure Sports, Upcoming Events, 2020, author's emphasis). Eternal Rock church included future plans for recreation ministry in their church vision statement:

> A "fitness studio" could easily fit into this picture, something that both men and women could enjoy at designated or reserved times. And this workout area is as much "the church" as anything else…. We could also have nice biking and walking trails around the property. (eternalrockchurch.org-Eternal Rock Church ER VISION).

It is difficult to ascertain whether CI constituents emphasized a connection between spirituality and the outdoors, or between spirituality and the *enjoyment* of the outdoors. Whichever is true, the underlying values connected to both of these was upon finding meaning

through personal fulfillment, rather than through a connection to a larger "cause" found among CO churches.

Inspiration and Influence

Inspiration and influence were important values for both CO and CI churches. However, these two church types affirmed two distinct directions the influence should take.

CO churches placed heavy emphasis on influencers—the scholars and writers who had shaped their theology and understanding of church practice. CO pastors frequently discussed being influenced by authors, especially those who were challenging common assumptions about how church life should be done. Influential thinkers were also regularly referenced in terms of redefining or challenging the values of the culture. These influencers were frequently quoted in sermons and their thoughts shared with their congregation.

In my interview with Pastor James of Savior's Grace church, he specifically mentioned a current influencer and commented on how his own thinking on culture and the church had been shaped:

> I'm just going to channel Hauerwas, because this is what I think—he is what I think. I think in general, what my people do… in terms of evangelicals… is that they inoculate people with just enough Jesus to make them immune to the real thing. That's what they do. The Church is pulling in the wrong direction. The Church is not embodying or imaging God in any significant way. They're mostly imaging their culture, the culture in which they have been conditioned and liturgized and shaped.

In addition, some CO church pastors listed their favorite authors on their church websites. (Interestingly, CO pastors tended to reference the *same* thinkers, theologians and scholars). For example, the web site of Blessing Place church listed their "influencers," including writers such

as N.T. Wright, Robert Bellah, Walter Brueggemann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Stanley Hauerwas,

C.S. Lewis, Cormac McCarthy, Brian McLaren, Annie Dillard, Eugene Peterson, Richard Rohr,

Wendell Berry, Brene Brown, Dallas Willard, and Anne Lamott (blessingplace.org). The

importance of these theological influencers was displayed on the Blessing Place website—where

one particular author is regularly highlighted each week:

> This week at Blessing Place we acknowledge the influence of Richard Rohr on our
>
> thought and practice…. His teachings create pathways for people from diverse
>
> backgrounds to join together in conversations around topics as varied and thoughtful as
>
> social justice, incarnational mysticism, and eco-spirituality. (blessingplace.org).

> This is not to say CO pastors and members were not interested in having an impact on

their culture. However, it was clear they had prioritized *being influenced*, especially in terms of

how the church should operate within the culture. There was present in their discussions the

distinct value of *input*—reading and quoting those who challenged their thought life.

> In contrast, neither CI church leaders nor their church web sites mentioned any

"influencers" upon their theology or church practice. Instead, I found only one CI pastor who

indicated he was getting input from leaders and writers. However, the influencers he mentioned

were from the corporate business world. After an interview with this pastor, he asked if I was

reading any good books. Curious, I turned the question back to the pastor, thinking he would list

a favorite theological or inspirational Christian book (such as I had heard regularly mentioned at

CO churches). To my surprise, he listed several books on business, leadership, and management

he found helpful to his work, making him more efficient and productive.

> Aside from this one mention of books on business management, CI pastors did not

indicate they had much interest in being influenced by the latest thinkers. At the same time,

members of CI congregations *did* express appreciation for the input and influence they received from the preachers and teachers at their local church. Several members of these churches indicated one of the reasons they continued to attend was the "excellent teaching," or the inspirational sermons from their pastor.

In contrast to CO churches, CI pastors and members alike indicated much more interest in *being an influencer* rather than being influenced by someone else. There were frequent mentions of "being an inspiration" or "having an influence" upon others from CI attendees. This was expressed both on a personal level in interviews and at an organizational level—on church websites. At an individual level, the idea of being an influencer was closely tied to their purpose in life by these attendees. At an organizational level, churches were interested in increasing their influence by growing in size, and having an influence on their city. For example, Pathway church expressly stated their church value of influence to potential employees in a job listing:

> Pathway is running full speed on all cylinders, exploding in every way imaginable. Already one of the largest churches in the Pacific Northwest, Pathway is impacting our community and our world even as it continues to grow in the key areas that measure church health, including attendance, new believers, baptism, groups, volunteering, and giving. (Pathwaychurch.net).

Interestingly, the concept of having an impact on the part of CI attendees was predominantly expressed in one direction—from the church to the secular world. Overall, these churches were much more interested in shaping the culture than receiving input from thinkers. These leaders and attendees consistently spoke of how the church should impact the culture, and not vice versa. This is especially interesting, considering CI constituents have made significant adaptations to the culture through adjustments to church worship—such as the adoption of

concert style worship music, casual clothing, and the business growth mindset. Regardless, these churches prefer to see themselves as influencers and as having an impact on their world.

For some CI churches, this desire to be influencers necessitated a delicate balance between inviting people for the purpose of changing them, and adapting church practices in order to be a welcoming, culturally relevant place. For example, Lakeview church's general information brochure attempted to strike a balance when explaining their missional purpose: "Lakeview exists to reach people far from God and to show them how to follow Jesus, step-by step. As a part of that mission, we believe in taking great care of everyone who walks onto our campuses...this means you too!" (Lakeview General Info, Fall 2019). Stan, a pastor at Pathway church, explained how his church balanced relevance and influence, using hymn music to illustrate:

> The church should impact the culture rather than the culture impact the church. Yet the church has to be relevant. I love old hymns, but they're not going to reach anybody today. There's a place for them still today, but any vibrant growing new churches aren't going to be using hymnals. We have to change with the culture, but not change the message….

The people attending CI churches described being on a quest to find their purpose, and (after being inspired by the teachings at their church) strove to be people of influence who then inspired others. This was encouraged by the programs offered at their churches. At the same time, the programs and workshops offered at these churches were also designed to increase participant's sense of personal fulfillment. One of these ongoing classes similar to those observed at multiple CI churches was called Growth Track. Growth Track was the equivalent of a church membership class, and was centered around "finding your purpose," and "making an

impact." Step Four (the fourth session) of Growth Track was titled, "Serve." However, the focus was less on serving others, and more directed toward self-improvement—finding one's purpose through service, and "find the right place for your gifts and experience the fulfillment of using them." Lakeview church summarized this step of Growth Track, explaining the course will, "Inspire you to make an impact." (Lakeview Bulletin, July 2017). NewLife Church advertised Growth Track at their church in these terms: "Are you ready to find your purpose? Are you looking to find fulfillment? Are you looking to make a difference?" (NewLife Church, Growth Track bulletin insert, April, 2017). Through this membership series, these churches connected the work of inspiring and influencing others with personal self-fulfillment for themselves. The concepts of inspiration and impact at CI churches flows in one direction: from their church's inspirational programs, into the congregation, who in turn are supposed to be inspired, and then inspire and impact others. These churches are more than willing to change the style of their worship services in order to be relevant—but they are very keen to motivate their congregations with their inspirational workshops and helpful sermons. Then, members of the congregation grow in their sense of purpose and personal fulfillment, are then encouraged to influence the world and surrounding culture—inviting them to come and find their purpose and fulfillment within church walls.

Success

CO churches generally had a nuanced, yet counter-cultural concept of success. Attendees at these churches recognized their values related to success were, to varying degrees, in tension with concepts such as the "American Dream." Instead they defined success in relational terms. They subtly and sometimes explicitly rejected the standard cultural stereotypes of success

defined in terms of monetary rewards, wealth, or the status of becoming upwardly mobile. Instead, they most frequently talked of success in terms of building connections with people.

Success for the CO had a distinct focus on others. At times, this was expressed in terms of philosophical or worldview perspective, where success was discussed as something other than success for yourself. At the same time, the concept of success was more than an understanding of their purpose in life as a connection to a grand cause—success for the CO was grounded in relationships they had built with their neighbors (or at least desired to build with them). One Savior's Grace church attendee said the people at his church would define "success as their level of compassion to people outside the church." Cameron from Galilee Shores church explained, "Success for me doesn't look like individual success, but it looks for a success for those who are… around me as well. By the nature of where we've placed ourselves—[success for us] is among [the] marginalized." (Cameron and his family had intentionally moved into a neglected Spanish-speaking neighborhood in their midwestern city.)

It is not surprising success for CO church goers was defined by their connections and relations with people. The underlying value of connection to community goes hand in hand with the value of relationships. CO laity spoke of relationships as being important to them, in their personal and family life, and as a value in their church. Nikki, the twenty-something attendee of Hand of God expressed her value of relationships this way:

> [Relationships are] the point because everything here dissolves in the end. The only thing that I feel persists is… the love that we experience and that we express to people and that we receive. That's the only thing that lasts. Yes, loving relationships are the only thing that really honestly matter in the end, which is why small talk bores the heck out of me because it doesn't get down to the heart of who a person… actually really is.

In addition to valuing relationships, CO attendees also rejected the accumulation of wealth as an end in itself and replaced it with contentment as an aspect of success. For them, material success meant "having enough." In their view, working overtime to make more money at the expense of relationships was a fool's errand. Several CO church attendees echoed a similar sentiment to Ariel, a young woman who attended Galilee Shores church: "I have enough and that kind of thing… my barometer [for success is] the feeling of having enough."

Contentment fit hand in glove with the CO rejection of monetary wealth as a sign of success. Several—even those who owned their own businesses and would consider themselves "entrepreneurs"—described success as "having enough." They did not outwardly express a desire to accumulate more than they needed. They affirmed critiques of cultural tropes such as the "American Dream," or aspiring to drive an expensive car or live in a grand mansion. Replacing these ideals, they described success as "letting go of the idea of success." Contentment for the CO meant rejecting the perceived cultural standards of success—to the point of letting go of control of the outcome of their own lives. Several (such as the young family mentioned above) had laid aside what their friends and cohort were pursuing, replacing it with a set of values they believed were God-given. (This is the rationale the family above used to explain why they had moved into a marginalized neighborhood.)

In contrast, CI attendees defined success in terms of accomplishments and achievement (Moritz, 2008, p. 29). Personal success was an important value and was often expressed as advancing one's education or one's career. In addition, they described success as taking advantage of opportunity. In their view, using opportunities—acting on them—was the way to achieve personal success. In this view, success was related to activity—doing things, and being busy working toward career goals and personal growth. For some of these church goers, this

viewpoint carried with it the opposite implication; if one did not take action, then one could not expect success. In interviews, this was occasionally applied to explain inequality. In this view, the less fortunate might have had different outcomes if they had taken advantage of opportunities presented to them. Clark, a male attendee at Eternal Rock church pondered this question aloud in our interview, and concluded his own success was an achievement from taking advantage of opportunity:

> There's definitely an inequality with financial status between people in our society, and it's hard to look at it. Are they there because they didn't take certain opportunities? I don't know, I'm sure there are situations where someone's life… opportunities were a bit harder to achieve, but on the other hand, I feel there's—and maybe because I've lived it—if certain people… would just go for those opportunities, things might be slightly different. I know that can't be 100% of everyone's case, but from my personal experience, if I didn't go to college and shoot for a career, my life would probably be very different right now.

Personal development was another important aspect included in the CI definition of success. In a similar vein to the equation of numerical growth with organizational success, personal growth equated to success for the individual. Attendees of these churches spoke of reaching their potential, desiring training in order to be equipped for ministry, and being able to achieve "flourishing" as aspects of their definition of success. Living a better life—becoming a person who was good at what they do, and growing in their career, to the point of upward mobility—were descriptors of personal success. All of these pointed in the direction of personal development until one could achieve satisfaction, or a sense of being happy. The goal of individual achievement seemed to be the enjoyment of success, and a happy, enjoyable, full,

"abundant" life. This represents a change in values among religious participants, where "Traditional values linked to authority and duty are replaced by self-realization and individualistic values," (Usunier & Stolz, 2014, p. 5).

Mae, an attendee of Riverbend church provided an example of the value of success through personal development via a post shared with the public on Instagram. She uploaded a picture of herself holding a set of four journals, with this caption: "Got these Better Life Journals after almost two weeks of waiting!! I am so excited with my journey to achieve and be My Ultimate Self!!… #thebetterlife." Achievement, becoming a better version of themselves (or in this case, their "Ultimate Self"), and the pursuit of a better life are all aspects of the pursuit of success through personal development for CI members.

Hard Work

Like many in the American middle class, CO church members were taught the value of hard work by their parents from the time they were children. Throughout their upbringing, their parents had modeled hard work for them. This was mentioned specifically in relationship to working at the church. Many CO church attendees described how their parents taught them church volunteerism as a value, and also lived it out in front of them. Several mentioned when they were children, they were at church "all the time," (3 or more days during the week). Even though spending lots of time at church during childhood was a common practice among CO attendees, as they became adults, they sought a balance between work and rest. Several noted having a *sabbath* rest was also important to them.

CO attendees had a conscious awareness hard work did not always result in wealth, an increase in status, or a change of social class. Most of them spoke of the systemic barriers to success affecting some—acknowledging "not all have the same starting point." In their church

life, there was an recognition many in the church came from different backgrounds, and there should be acceptance for all. They believed God was "with the marginalized," and identified with the poor. In their view, church was meant to be accepting of both the rich and poor, and composed of those who come from different socio-economic backgrounds.

CI church members on the other hand, had a different understanding of the implications of hard work. They also had an upbringing of hard work modeled by their parents, and most of them also reported growing up attending church multiple days every week. Hard work went hand in hand with church involvement—when they were growing up, they were always working at church, and always busy with church activities. Even though their background was similar to how CO attendees described their upbringing, in contrast, CI members made a direct connection between hard work and success. In their view, "success doesn't just come to you," and a person was expected to work hard to provide for themselves. The CI mindset did not approve of giving "handouts" to the poor. Instead, they believed it is through hard work and achievement a person earns rewards in life. Personal growth, wealth, status—all a person gets out of life—comes from their hard work and achievements.

In addition, CI interviewees described hard work in terms of "conquering their path" in life. In their view, God had a purpose for each individual, but it is through an individual's effort a person was able to "overcome obstacles" to achieve their God-planned purpose. One church explained God had set out a unique path for each person, and "this path is ready for you to conquer" (Brian and Bobbie, hillsong.com). FoundPurpose church included this phrasing in their vision statement: "For any of us to live out our full potential in God, [each area of our vision] must be active and developing in our lives…. Overcoming obstacles and enjoying who God

created us to be" (FoundPurpose.church/vision). The full potential of the individual must be worked out through individual effort to overcome any obstacles to their potential.

Holistic Integration and Intentionality

Those who attend CO churches value living holistically. They see the world from a perspective of integration—everything is connected to everything else. They have an internal desire for everything in life to be in order, and have a proper relationship to everything else. This included a desire for integration between their mental and physical worlds, as well as between their life inside and outside of church. Many emphasized "connectedness" of different aspects of life, especially with regard to their social world.

Connectedness in relationships between people was a high value among interviewees. This value is central to understanding the "outward focus" of CO churches. Their attendees did not wish to isolate themselves behind church walls and were not content to merely invite others to join them inside the church. Being the type of church that only invites people to come visit a church service goes against their value of having a holistic, integrated life. They would rather see church walls dissolve, to have seamless relational connections with their neighborhood. Galilee Shores church made this an explicit declaration, stating, "Because we understand that all areas of life are connected, we strive to be holistic. We want to cultivate a space (physical, emotional, intellectual, rational, artistic) where the whole person (body, soul, mind, spirit) can encounter God, others, themselves, and creation" (galileeshores.org).

CO pastors and laity also applied the value of holistic integration to their theology as well. Their theological study and discussions addressed issues reflecting the integration of theology and lifestyle. For some, theology was integrated with their value of connected relationships. As Pastor James of Savior's Grace church put it:

I describe [my theology] most often… in relational terms. What we would traditionally

call a sin problem… fractures in the way we relate to God, to other people, to ourselves,

the way we relate to the self, and to the created order.

Specifically, the importance of integration led these church members to include

simplicity as both a theological value and lifestyle choice. For them, simplicity was something

Christians do as an act of faith, flowing from their connection to God and to their neighbors in

the world—thus, through simplicity (being economically content with "enough," not living busy,

cluttered lives), all their relationships could be integrated without dissonance.

For CI churches on the other hand, holistic integration was only discussed as an internal,

personal pursuit—a desire for a personal, spiritual integration *within oneself*. Participants at CI

churches spoke of "getting the self right," and conducting a personal exercise of self-evaluation,

to nurture an internal motivation to become a better person. Church was integral to this pursuit,

and participation at church events was seen as a necessary component to getting right with

yourself. Several expressed a viewpoint the church works to "fix" people spiritually, so they

could make their way toward spiritual health for themselves and their family. In this way,

holistic integration for CI participants was expressed with an internal focus, rather than a

relational one. Kyle, a twenty-something male from Eternal Rock church explained his

understanding of this internal integration by comparing churches to hospitals:

 I guess the first word that wants to come to my mind is hospital for the person, for the

whole person… Typical hospitals are focused on the physical but this is, I think, your

hospital for your heart, your hospital for your mind, hospital for—Are you getting

yourself right? Are you finding wholeness in your own life for the holistic life? If you

want… your spirit to be right, you want your family to be right… I think there's a lot of

health that can come from the church if it's done right. For me, I think the church plays a

massive role in that and allowing there to be health. To point out things that are

unhealthy….

Recognition of Flawed Humanity. Within the values statements made by CO churches

and their congregants, there is a consistent expression of their fundamental solidarity with all of

humanity. Those leading and attending these churches recognize the realities of human failings

and promote human dignity by accepting people as they are.

This acceptance should not be confused with the openness found in CI churches. CI

church leaders attempted to remove cultural barriers hindering people from entering their

churches. When they spoke of belonging, it was not with the connotation of the acceptance of

human imperfection. It was instead aimed at assuring potential attenders there was not a set of

church cultural standards to which they must adhere. The CI idea of acceptance meant a person

does not have to dress and act like a Christian in order to start attending. Instead, they can come

as they are, and the church will provide them with all the training they need to become a better

version of themselves.

CO churches on the other hand, have adopted a position that the church should be a

humanizing place, seeking to restore a sense of God-given humanity to human nature. In this

philosophical bend, there is an acknowledgment human beings need not perform at a level of

perfection. In other words, people have flaws, make mistakes, and are "broken" in some sense.

Some of these churches even celebrated this brokenness (it is seen as a catalyst for spiritual

deepening), but at the same time, they sought to bring a wholeness to brokenness. They

perceived this restoration work as a resource the church has to offer people. The recognition of

humanness was present in the content of sermons (one parishioner expressed appreciation for

how the pastor made "Saints seem like real people," and talked about both their good works and

their faults).

The recognition of human frailty and human dignity was regularly expressed with an

emphasis on relationships. CO pastors and members desired to affirm their own flawed

humanness as something shared with those whom they seek to serve. Thus, a recognition of

humanness was expressed as a sense of hospitality and friendship outreach through relationships.

There was a sense of affirmation of the humanness of the downtrodden, and acceptance of those

who may be from a different background or social classes. When these churches talked about

neighborhood outreach, it was frequently mentioned in connection with the acceptance of

others—outreach was something done in relationship, like helping friends. For example, The

Upper Room church described this relational emphasis and acceptance of humanness with a

distinct emphasis on the "community of shared humanity" perspective:

> Organic, authentic community is hard to come by. People are busier than ever and often
>
> don't have a space to relax and connect with others. The Upper Room strives to offer a
>
> place of deep welcome and acceptance. It is a place where people are free to question,
>
> doubt, and laugh together, while differences are appreciated and valued. We often read
>
> the Affirmation of Faith from the Iona Community in Scotland, which speaks to our
>
> emphasis on community: "…We believe in a with-us God who sits down in our midst to
>
> share our humanity." (theupperroomchurch.com).

The interest in human frailty among CO churches was also expressed in the context of

anti-individualism. Acceptance is not regarded as experienced through individual isolation, as if

it were meant as a license for everyone to be left to their own devices. As seen in The Upper

Room quote, above, acknowledgement of human frailty and differences are viewed as an aspect

of group solidarity—those who broken and alone are accepted *into community*. In fact, several attendees expressed their concern with "atomization." They spoke of opposition to the fragmentation resulting from selfishness. Cameron from Galilee Shores church, recognized the dangers inherent in the self-focused culture of the United States. Having worked among the poor, he was able to articulate his concern regarding the dehumanizing effects of viewing human beings in isolation:

> I think that individualism is actually an opposite of the good life and that there is a certain fragmentation and atomization of life that begins to happen when we look out for oneself…. I think this constant searching for one's own good leads to that fragmentation and… when we dehumanize others we're dehumanizing ourselves as well, and we become moral monsters, and some of the impulses of individualism also leads us to the commodification of other things, which also leads to the commodification of other people… then we begin to use other people as things, which dehumanizes.

Those who attend CO congregations believed the atomization of the individual leads to a dehumanization. When discussing their church values, their theological perspective focused upon restoring a proper affirmation of human beings as created in the image of God. They opposed individualism in the culture as a tool to dehumanize and separate people from their place in the community. Instead, all of humanity—flaws and all, are to be welcomed and accepted.

Social Justice Personal Values and Background

Congregants at CO churches are likely to be receptive to information presented to them regarding justice. Many of those who attend CO churches have social justice involvement as a part of their background, or express personal values related to it.

These congregants consider social justice involvement to be a part of their own personal sense of fulfillment, or at the very least they consider it to be an important aspect of living a good life. For example, one couple started a business because of a desire to address the injustice of capitalist trade. Nate and Melissa are a husband and wife who own a bakery and coffee shop. They explained how their personal social justice values motivated the kind of business they wanted to develop:

> Nate: The reason why we started this business in the first place is, we looked at coffee. If you buy coffee for $2 or $1, or whatever, and when you understand the supply chain and see how many hands it's touched, it's like the equation doesn't add up. It can't. There's too many people.
>
> Melissa: Across too many continents. For it to be a dollar.
>
> Nate: Yeah! And so we feel like we're trying actually, in our own way, to shift to that mentality [of] creating an impact and creating awareness. A lot of other companies are doing that as well. So I think we're aware of how and what we consume, how that impacts society, the environment, and other people. Because we've seen it first hand in an industry that is consumer oriented.

For Nate and Melissa, starting a business solely to make money for themselves did not provide a sense of fulfillment. They were aware of the effects of capitalism on the world around them, and they wanted their business to address issues of injustice in the world economy, and also to raise awareness among the customers they served. For them, there was a re-orientation of values—their personal values should influence their business operations, rather than business values influence their personal life.

Roger from Galilee Shores church reflected on his prior involvement in the youth ministry of Young Life[32] during his college years. He described how his work with this ministry changed his focus toward caring for others, which included compassionate outreach to the poor:

> I spent a lot of time in Young Life… and I did a lot of Young Life stuff in college. It had its pros and cons when I look back on it, but it was a powerful thing at that time, and it made me really care about… high school kids and people…. And compassion…. Caring about the underserved… that was our focus… caring about the outcast and the underserved, that's what we do.

For this interviewee, his experience volunteering with Young Life also introduced him to an awareness of the underserved. For him, compassion and caring for the outcast became important values he carried on from his college background through adulthood.

Social Justice Consciousness. CO church attendees were well informed of the theological rationale underlying social justice involvement. This was because CO churches promote a conscious awareness of social justice issues. Opportunities for activism are presented to the congregation through sermons, the promotion of social justice events, and through announcements on church webpages. Social justice topics are often discussed in small groups and at special events specifically designed to raise congregational awareness on these issues.

For example, the website for Galilee Shores church includes its own Justice section, with an ongoing justice blog. In this section, they have discussed justice issues such as: the politics of accepting refugees, understanding the difference between experiencing terrorism in the Middle East and in the West, and the church's own involvement in digging wells in Kenya. Similarly, Savior's Grace church raises the consciousness of their members by listing on their website the poverty statistics for their county, information on their involvement with the homeless, and a

description of their philosophy of compassion and justice. In addition, The Upper Room church regularly holds consciousness raising events for their church and community. In April of 2020, they started a lecture series entitled, "Sacred Earth" to mark the anniversary of Earth Day, an international event promoting environmental ecology awareness. They described it as, "a day meant to remind us of the many gifts earth brings as we advocate for conscious environmental justice and protection" (https://theupperroomchurch.com/events). The personal values of the leadership and members of these congregations accept and appreciate social justice awareness, and do not find it too controversial to be promoted by the church organization.

Equity, Systemic Issues, and Individual Responsibility. Several CO church attendees specifically discussed arguments blaming the poor for their own poverty (reasoning the poor should be able to "pick themselves up"). These attendees recognized it is not always the case. They readily articulated the influence of systemic issues as related to poverty and injustice. When talking about poverty, Wayne from Savior's Grace acknowledged a person's starting point in life plays an important role, recognizing influential factors related to upbringing and social environment:

How do you get to be poor or wealthy? I think you get to be poor based on, I think, your environment growing up. I think to some extent, it's where you grew up and where you live. The environmental factors. What kind of resources did you have growing up? How much do you know outside of that experience? I think it's hard to get out of something when that's all you know. It's hard to make a different choice when you don't know the other choices available. I think part of it is environmental.

Rhonda at The Upper Room church appreciated the dialogue taking place in her church regarding social justice issues of race, feminism, and inequality. In her current journey, she

"loved" social justice dialogue aspect of church. She specifically noted how The Upper Room is different from her previous church tradition, which believed the poor must take responsibility for their own poverty, and pull themselves out of it:

> One of the things about The Upper Room that I have come to love is the justice in action piece of it. Another thing that I feel like was missing in the tradition I grew up in was that they have a strong emphasis on family and personal piety, but not very much talk about racism or poverty or militarism or sexuality or all the things that we just talk about [in my current church], which is important. There is some sense in the community I grew up in that if you were poor it's because you did something—sort of God rewards the holy people with wealth and the poor people, it's their fault. "Just pull yourself up by your bootstraps" kind of thing. Another part of the good life I guess would be, for me, working to dismantle unjust systems on some level.

There is a personal connection and thoughtful reflection on justice concepts among the CO. It provides them with a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment to be associated with a church holding similar values with regard to social justice issues.

Chapter 4: Worship as Embodiment--Consuming Entertainment and Neighborhood Connection

Embodiment refers to an interactive process between the human body, and the cultural acquisition occurring through the interaction of the body with its surrounding environment. Mark Johnson, in the book, *The Body in the Mind*, argues the human body is a starting point for thought, rationality, and meaning:

> …as animals we have bodies connected to the natural world, such that our consciousness and rationality are tied to our bodily orientations and interactions in and with our environment. Our embodiment is essential to who we are, to what meaning is, and to our ability to draw rational inferences and to be creative. (Johnson, 1987, p. xxxviii).

Social theorist, Pierre Bourdieu, articulated the dynamic relationship between the structured environment and its associated bodily practices. In Bourdieu's words:

> …it is in the dialectical relationship between the body and a space structure… that one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the embodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world.… (Bourdieu, 1977, P. 89).

Both Johnson and Bourdieu draw the connection between the body and the world, with Bourdieu emphasizing the multi-directional interplay between structure and human behavior. Cultural structures shape human practices, and as people live out those practices, they are re-creating the structure that influenced them in the first place. This back and forth interaction Bourdieu described as "the dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality, or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification." (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). Through this process, the body becomes a locus of culture and values.

Religion has a unique position to put embodiment on display, because religious groups regularly reproduce religious values through ritual practice. In Protestant churches, worship services are held weekly, acting out the beliefs, values, and theology of the church. In Protestant worship, bodies are regularly engaged, through singing, ritual consumption (communion), formal ritualized movements of standing and sitting, prayer, giving of offerings, and performance of sermons. Although most (if not all) Protestant churches share many elements of the worship service (singing and prayer for example), different types of churches perform these shared components in different ways, with different values displayed.

Through the ritual practice of worship Consumer Individualist churches emphasize their self-focused nature. Religious studies professor Maren Freudenberg's description of megachurch worship illustrates:

> In nondenominational evangelical megachurches, this individualistic focus is reflected, for one, in worship styles: contemporary music with repetitive lyrics on the self and its role in the world; sermons that focus on individual moral behaviour; prayer teams offering private one-on-one prayers; and even self-serve Communion. For another, the growing market of religious self-help resources coming out of megachurches reflects the neoliberal rationality of efficiency and profitability at the cost of accountability. (Freudenberg, 2015, p. 302).

The different values and goals of the different church types generate distinct kinds of congregations, with practices unique to each type. CI churches further embody values of entertainment, comfort, and convenience. "This modern American cathedral… features a… theater offering a concert-quality 'seeker[33] service' complete with live band, professional lighting and sound, dramatic presentations, and topical messages on practical concerns"

(Sargeant, 2000, p. 3). CO churches on the other hand, embody the values of connection—to neighbors, to a place, and connection to historical liturgy. "We sing, read, pray and listen *together*, following a traditional Evening Prayer (or Vespers) *liturgy*" (Hand of God Community Life Summer, 2017 (brochure), emphasis added). Each church type embodies their values through different styles of worship.

Concert Worship Metaphor

All Protestant churches include music and singing as a part of their worship services. Yet even though the practice of singing has remained constant, over time Protestant churches have changed the way they perform congregational singing. In general, the direction has moved away from singing hymns accompanied by an organ, toward singing of pop-music accompanied by a rock band (guitar, drums, bass and synthesizer keyboard) (see Chu, 2010; Eagle, 2015, p. 10; Greenblatt & Powell, 2007, p. 784; Hamilton, 2000, p. 64). At the same time, the atmosphere during the singing time has changed. Different churches approach this aspect of worship according to the values of their type.

CI churches presented their worship music in the style of a concert. The music portion of the worship service most closely resembled a rock concert in its music, lighting, and sound volume. At all the churches of this type I observed, a rock-style band stood on stage and sang pop radio style worship songs. The following description of an Australian church by religious studies professor Marion Maddox depicts well the experience of this concert style worship:

> You hear the music well before you reach the auditorium; inside, the sound is a physical shock…. expertly styled figures bounce rhythmically or sway gently on the stage, one arm raised, eyes half-closed, while the band plays pop-rock very loudly and colored lights swirl and strobe over the dancing audience. It's ten on Sunday morning and

everyone is scrubbed and clean and wholesome, but the ambience is a weird reworking of

a night club or rock concert, minus the scents of sin, smoke and alcohol (Maddox, 2012,

p. 147).

Professor Maddox's description of "expertly styled figures" refers to the clothing fashion choices and hair styles of the musicians on stage, who are dressed to look like rock band performers without being too theatrical. They expertly balance looking fashionable enough for video screens, yet with a casual, comfortable appearance setting the tone for what is acceptable church attire for the audience to wear—no longer the formal suits and ties or ankle length dresses of old, but instead jeans, t-shirts and casual sweaters. Their look and their music are expertly balanced in the middle of the road, so as not to offend anyone. One way these churches have adapted to the culture is by utilizing an embodied casual concert metaphor to make newcomers comfortable.

The metaphor equates to: church worship music is a concert. In this way, they have made comfortable the uneasiness of attending church for the first time (or after a long period of absence). Instead of walking into a room full of the sound of unfamiliar organ music from decades past, visitors now walk into something familiar with parallels in the life experience of the newcomer—a rock concert from the domain of entertainment. In fact, they may have self-selected to attend because the music style and form are familiar and appealing. The pop concert form turns an uncomfortable and unknown situation (hymn song structure and melody which are often difficult to sing or are unfamiliar), into something inviting and fun. Anyone who does not regularly go to church can immediately participate. Anyone familiar with a concert knows what to do at one—clap, sway and sing along. In this way, they can quickly adapt to church culture.

The song leader is considered a worship leader rather than a performer, although it is

impossible to miss the events' similarity to a secular rock concert. There is that same

sense of freedom and feeling within the music, with people reaching out and swaying or

dancing and singing along.… The style of music complements the style of worship,

which is lively, free and exuberant… Emotion and faith rule over history and tradition…"

(McIntyre, 2007, P. 178-179).

Lakoff and Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980/2003), and Johnson's follow up

work *The Body in the Mind* (1987), describe metaphors not merely as a literary device but as a

form of embodiment. "A… related type of embodied imaginative structure… is metaphor,

conceived as a pervasive mode of understanding by which we project patterns from one domain

of experience in order to structure another domain of a different kind" (Johnson, 1987, p. xiv-

xv). Metaphors have the ability to define our reality, by highlighting some aspects of our

observed experience, while hiding others (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003, p. 157). In this way,

metaphors become extended—through the comparison of highlighted realities from one domain

applied to another, there are "the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions

that are sanctioned by it…. we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act

on the basis of the metaphors" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003, p. 158).

In the case of Protestant worship music, the defined reality of the concert shifts from the

secular domain to sacred church ritual. In the process, aspects from the realm of entertainment

are extended into the domain of Protestant worship. The extension of the concert metaphor

highlights elements from the music industry, such as professional musicianship, stage lighting,

the style of the performance and the emotional appeal. At the same time, other aspects of

religious ritual are hidden or minimized, such as spirituality and the theological content of the

singing. The focus upon God as the receiver of worship becomes blurred together with a focus

upon the needs and desires of the worshippers themselves. The purity of the religious form

becomes absorbed into the secular metaphor and the roles played by the object of worship and

the worshiper become reversed. The worshipper used to come to offer praise to their God (often

referred to as a "sacrifice of praise") but the concert metaphor has shifted the ritual. With the

perceptions and inferences of the concert applied to worship, the role of the deity shifts away

from the object of worship to serving the worshipper—God is expected to "show up" so the

worshipper can be "filled." Instead of attending church to offer something to God through their

singing, the extended concert metaphor opens the possibility the audience attends to experience a

"good show," and walk away feeling energized, or *feeling as if they have worshipped*. Attendees

no longer come to the church to sacrifice anything, but instead they come to have a concert

experience, one which allows them to feel as though they have met with God.

Other embodied forms of entertainment that I observed at CI churches, beyond those

mentioned above (music style, performance and staging, etc.), included:

- Applause at the end of songs

- Swaying to the music

- Audience members recording parts of the singing portion of the service on their cell

  phones

- Sub-sonic deep bass vibration felt bodily through the audience

- Performance of non-religious popular songs

- Special event concert performances of guest musicians or comedians

- Fog machines

- CD albums of the worship band for sale in the lobby/bookstore (with Billboard chart rankings for album debuts published in the worship leader bio on the church website)

- Synchronized lighted wrist bands (only observed at one church for a special Christmas Eve service)

These churches have appropriated embodied stylings and practices from the domain of entertainment and have utilized its forms in a religious domain. These behaviors have blurred the sacred/secular division between "leading worship" and "concert."

Dark Sanctuary

One of the most identifiable characteristics of the CI concert metaphor style of worship is a darkly lit sanctuary. A dark auditorium is key to providing the atmosphere of a concert event, and facilitating the use of dramatic stage lighting. The sanctuary/auditorium interior ceiling and often the walls are painted black, and there are no windows to allow in light. Instead of stained-glass windows and candles, there are video screens and stage lighting. At larger churches, there are more elaborate and professional stage lighting systems—including fog machines to reveal the movement of multi-colored beams of light projected out toward the audience. However, even smaller CI churches follow the same basic pattern of a darkly lit sanctuary, and (albeit simpler) stage lighting. At one church I visited with less than 300 people, the sanctuary was so dark I stopped in my tracks upon entering—because I could not see anything directly in front of me.

These lighting effects allow for multiple forms of religious stimulation and responses on the part of the worshipper. First, the dark sanctuary provides anonymity, allowing the audience members to freely express themselves as individuals. The darkness allows for embodied swaying, singing, and freedom of expression, without embarrassment. Second, a dark sanctuary assists with religious transcendence. Wade and Hynes observed this at the Hillsong church,

noting "… dark colors and low lighting dominate, particularly during musical interludes, and this supports the individual in his or her quest for transcendence to a spiritual plane" (2013, p. 175). The pursuit of transcendence is further assisted by the impression of detachment from the physical realm provided by darkness—it is difficult to perceive walls and spacial barriers:

> The use of predominantly dark colors—black, dark gray, dark blue—in the interiors also reinforces the open layout, making the physical church structure (as it were) disappear, helping to induct the individual worshiper… into a personal experience of a spiritual space that transcends the concretely physical. (Goh, 2008, p. 293).

Anonymity and a perception of a transcendent disappearance of physical space provide a third effect on the audience—separation. The effects of the blackened auditorium generate a sense of detachment from others. In the darkness, each individual experiences the event in their own way, with minimal connection to those around them. The worshipers are separate in their transcended space, and the concert is designed for focus upon the stage rather than a recognition of fellow audience members. Indeed, it is too dark and loud to do so.

Figure 10:

Example of the Dark Sanctuary Concert Style

These churches direct the audience attention to experience the music and lyrics by utilizing video screens up high on the walls on both sides of the stage. The song lyrics and motion video backgrounds are projected to these screens so the congregation can sing along. Often there is a larger screen in the center at the back of the stage, behind the band—sometimes lyrics are shown on this screen as well, but often it is a scenic video or lighting design in the style seen at contemporary concerts.

Community Oriented Lighting and Set Up. In contrast to the dark sanctuary of the concert worship style, CO churches held their worship services in well-lit sanctuaries. In these churches, house lights were on during all or most of the service. In addition, many of these churches had a table (or "altar") near the front of the sanctuary adorned with lit candles. However, I did not observe the lights dimmed to create a "candle-light" atmosphere.[34] Instead, the sanctuaries were well-lit enough to see the faces of every other worshipper.

The lighting of the sanctuary further created and re-created the embodiment of the CO value of connection to others through visibility. CO lighting allowed for connection to fellow worshippers, by the simple fact you could *see* their faces—something not possible with the dark sanctuary characteristic of concert style worship. The value of seeing one another in worship was explicitly described on the Savior's Grace church website:

> Everything we include in our services is there for a reason. Even the way we set up the room has symbolic significance to us. The chairs are arranged in a half circle so that we always can see each other as we worship. This reminds us that we are connected to one another and that our faith is not meant to be merely private. (saviorsgracechurch.com)

The lighting and set up of the sanctuary are embodied reminders that worship for these churches was not an individualized experience (in the dark, blocking out the faces of those

nearby). Instead, lighting and chair arrangement in the sanctuary was a visual reminder worship was something done together, in the visible presence of others. This is in stark contrast with the CI concert metaphor worship performed in a dark sanctuary, which embodied values of individual experience and a theater-like focus on the stage.

Loud Volume

Consistent with concert style lighting, CI churches played worship music at a loud volume. The music is so loud you hear it before you enter the auditorium. At Energy.church, I experienced this as I walked from the back parking lot along the side of the auditorium. I could hear and *feel* the music vibrating through the red brick wall. I had arrived early, before the services started, and entered the sanctuary while the worship band played "Waiting for the World to Change," a song by secular pop musician, Jon Mayer. With the sound volume, and the song selection, my first thought as I entered was I had arrived at a concert event, except for the fact it was a Sunday morning, and there was the word "church" on the sign out front.

Most CI churches I observed utilized loud volume and bass vibration to provide an experience beyond hearing (indeed, the volume at a typical rock concert is so loud it is difficult to clearly hear the music). The loud volume produces a resonance in such a way the music becomes an experience vibrating through the body, a form of embodiment.

The sheer high volume of the music is one more contributing factor to the enchantment (Ritzer, 2010) needed to inspire collective effervescence (Durkheim, 1912/1995, pp. 218-220). Durkheim elaborates on the impact of this kind of collective effervescence in the language of "vibrations," describing it in similar terms to the physical vibrations produced by loud concert music:

Not only does the nervous current that accompanies the formation of ideas flow within the cortical centers… but it also vibrates within the motor centers, where it determines our movements.… This vibration is the stronger the more intense… the emotional element in it is developed…. It is as if… it had entered our consciousness…. as if a foreign force had penetrated us, one of the kind capable of upsetting the free functioning of our psychological life.[35] (Durkheim, 1902/2014, p. 75).

For Durkheim, collective effervescence requires a "collective emotion," which cannot be shared "without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, these gestures and cries tend to fall into rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances" (Durkheim, 1912/1995, p. 218).

Generational Differences and Music Volume. Upon entering the lobby at Energy.church and approaching the doors to the main sanctuary, I immediately noticed bins filled with earplugs hanging from the sanctuary doors. The church was apparently very aware their music was loud—loud enough to have complementary earplugs prominently displayed at the entrance.

This was not the only church offering earplugs to attendees. Lakeview church handed them out at the sound booth. At this church, the low frequency booming bass coming through the sub-woofer speakers shook the seats with vibration—it was loud and low enough to feel the sound vibration in my torso. Jeremy, (an interviewee who had left a CI church), described his family's experience visiting a church of this type—and how the loudness of the music was a factor in their church choice:

I look over, my children have their hands over their ears and I'm thinking, "Nope." [laughs] I'm thinking again long term, not just physical ear damage. [But] what's the

spiritual formation factor in this experience for them?… We had to leave the room—it's so loud. So we didn't go back.

Figure 11:

Earplug Bin on the Sanctuary Door Entrance, and Earplug Package Closeup
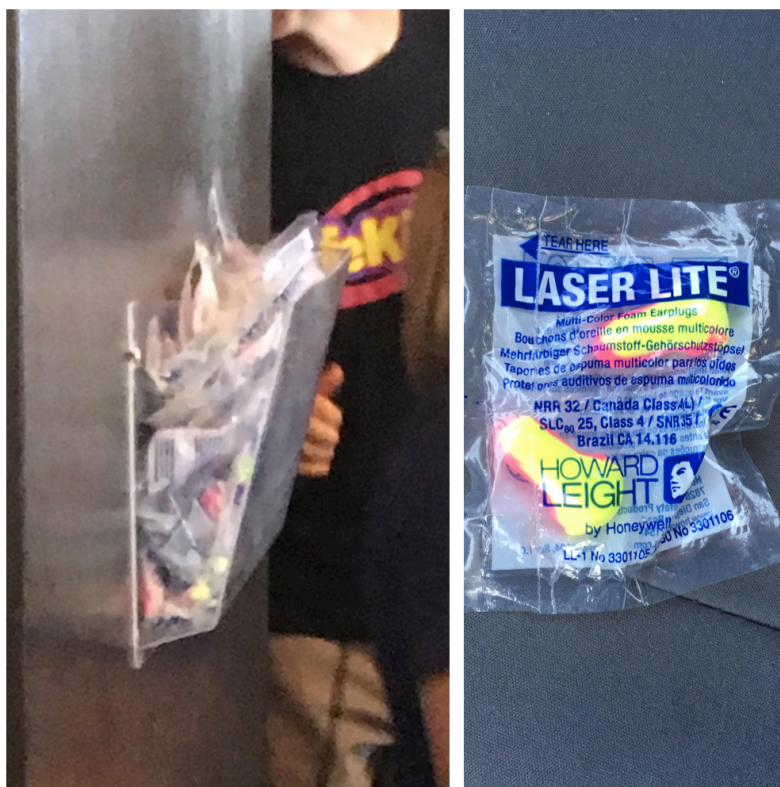
These churches recognized not everyone appreciates loud rock concert style music in church—not just young children, but those belonging to the generation over 65 years old. However, some of these older attendees at CI churches were quick to agree with the practice, and they were able to articulate an understanding of why the church had moved in that direction. Although they did not necessarily appreciate loud music, they appreciated the cultural relevance it provided, especially to younger families. As Helen, a 65+ year old attendee from Lakeview church explained:

I'm old, so, I'm not a fan of the music. I don't like loud. I miss hymns. I think there was a

lot of theology in the hymns. And the worship—I can worship in soft music. Loud music

is just something to get through. However, I understand that each generation must draw

the generations following. And church needed to reach out to the… teens, 20s, 30s with

music that—and it's not just loud to them—it causes their heart to pang for God from

what I can tell. And, so, I abide with that, even though it's not my preference.

Helen not only understood the cultural relevance of the music at her church, but its

effectiveness at attracting people to the message. She expressed the tension created by the

concert style approach, and how it might appear to make the church more secular:

I think they use what's popular in terms of the worship music… But I think—the rock

kind of music, strobe lights, fog machines—that draw… And if you get people in the

door, then they're going to hear the message. And there are… people that come to Christ

because they got in the door, because they could relate to that. And the ultra-conservative

Christians would say they're selling out to the world's methods… But I guess I have

mixed feelings about [that]—I don't think we're selling out what are the essentials of

Christianity. It's just the package it's wrapped—in terms of the pizazz.

There has been an ongoing struggle for separation between what took place within

churches ("sacred" hymns were sung) and what took place outside of church (at a rock concert).

By attempting to attract young attendees and making the church music experience appear more

like a concert, the "pizazz" of the secular entertainment world has been brought into the church.

The same music style is consumed outside of church is offered for consumption inside church

walls. Laurence Moore in his book, *Selling God*, traces the history of the influences of theatrical

performance on tent revival preaching and church music in the late 1800s. He acknowledged the

secular diversions of the day have constantly put pressure on clergy to adapt their preaching style and church music to more closely resemble performances found in the culture at large—even though clergy may object to the association:

> The clerics who objected to these huckster-like formulas for selling religion to Americans were not immune to the pressures that forced religion to make concessions to people's desire for novelty and entertainment…. they were aware that future success of religion in America required conscious competition with commercial entertainment. (Moore, 1994, p. 52).

The compromises arising from the encroachment of these forms raises the question of whether or not the theological content (of the hymns mentioned above) has been compromised and "sold out" for the concert enjoyment value needed to appeal to some consumers. For CI churches, it is not a question of selling out to culture, it is a question of offering customers what they desire to consume, in order for the church to grow. If it meant more "pizazz" and fog machines, so be it. The staff member Bernie (age range 46-65) at NewLife Church summed up how CI churches address the tension regarding concert style worship music:

> The church should impact the culture rather than the culture impact the church. Yet the church has to be relevant. I love old hymns, but they're not going to reach anybody today. There's a place for them still today, but any vibrant, growing, new churches aren't going to be using hymnals. We have to change with the culture, but not change the message— [or change in a way] that compromises the message.

These factors (concert style, dark sanctuary, loud volume) create an atmosphere of performance is worth returning for week after week. Who would not want to go to an inspiring, uplifting concert every week with their friends? And this is exactly what these churches provide.

There is no longer an expectation from yesteryear of a church experience akin to walking into a library, where you would be shushed for talking above the volume of a whisper. They have traded reverence for relevance.

The Personal, Spiritual and Therapeutic Relevance of Worship Music

Concert style worship music provides more than just entertainment. Several researchers have noted there are both spiritual and healing aspects to worship music keeping worshipers coming back week after week. Attendees are coming to "worship God," but in the process, they are addressing deeply felt needs, and seeking therapeutic benefits for themselves. Donald E. Miller argued the experience of singing worship music has positive by-products such as a lowering of defenses, the expression of deep personal emotions, spiritual and emotional healing, and a deep personal connection to God[36] (1997, p. 88).

Researcher E.H. McIntyre echoed a similar finding, in a study of the Australian megachurch and music publisher, Hillsong. The researchers noted these beneficial effects address the very problems CI members are seeking to solve:

> Referring again to Miller's (1997) therapeutic benefits of worship, the lyrical bid to "open up our hearts" shows a desire to be able to confide in God to let him see and heal our troubles. Miller's argument is an illustration of the kind of individualism that permeates the Pentecostal worship experience. It is an individualism that retains love and respect for another (God), yet views all through the lens of the Self. (McIntyre, 2007, p. 181).

The perspective of placing the self at the center is at the heart of concert style worship. There is an aspect of worship directed toward God through the practice of singing, but there is also a simultaneous deep emotional release from the concert style experience. Religious

consumers desire this emotional component and find therapeutic. Stormy, a middle aged woman from Eternal Rock church described it this way:

> I feel like our church, not that there's anything wrong with [being formal and singing hymns], but we have more of the contemporary stuff and I feel like they're meeting the need… I know that worship music isn't a need, but meeting the desires of the generations now. They don't want to listen to the older songs. They don't want to get dressed up in a stiff suit all the time. I think that's one way they've kind of flexed."

Other members of this church told me they felt spiritually connected to God through the worship music experience. This connection, however, was presented through self-focused language. In other words, their worship experience was valued for what they received from it, not in terms of an offering presented to God. Alexandra, a worshipper from Lakeview described it:

> I get to be closer to God when I'm there. I feel the Holy Spirit when we're doing praise and worship and I feel encouraged by my church… The most important components I feel... I want to meet God there. I feel like during the praise and worship, I meet God there.

The focus of this worshipper's statements are centered around how "I get to be closer,"[37] and "I feel," and "I want." Their approach to worship is from a perspective of self-benefit—what "I" can get out of it. Christy, a member of the Eternal Rock church music team, expressed how valuable the worship music portion of the service was to her, and at the same time, mirrored the language researchers use when they identify the therapeutic aspects of worship music:

> Obviously, the worship is a big part of me, because it awakens something inside of me that makes me more willing to listen… because I'm in a place of reverence and worship

and my heart is open. As opposed to, I don't know, if I didn't have music, I don't know

what I'd do. It would be a lot harder to get to the places where I am.

Without the music experienced in this concert style, this worshiper describes how they

would find it difficult to respond to spiritual direction. The music helps them to be open to an

experience with God, and without it, they could not have reached their current levels of

spirituality growth. Concert worship is clearly doing some work in the lives of CI attendees.

There is a deep sense of meeting God in the worship music experience, which is enhanced

through the by-products of the rock concert form. The singing involved in concert worship

further reflects the expressive individualism described by Bellah and his co-authors. Describing

their forms of individualism (utilitarian and expressive), they placed religion in connection with

the expressive aesthetics—in the realm of feeling and emotion (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 46). The

deeply emotional experience of CI singing during the concert worship portion of their services

fits this expressive label well.

Concert style worship music may have organizational advantages as well. In addition to

the spiritual and therapeutic ones, the fun atmosphere attracts more attendees, who provide the

critical mass and donate money to offset the cost of a weekly productions. Jeanne Kilde noted

the connection between attractive music and renumeration in her book, *When Church Became*

Theatre. She explained "Well-performed music could attract precisely the audiences that middle-

class congregations needed for social and financial support" (Kilde, 2002, p. 137).

Ancient Liturgical Emphasis

A characteristic feature of CO worship is the connection to ancient liturgical practices.

Their services follow a worship order based on ancient Christian traditions. "Liturgy" is the word

used to describe the prepared form or service order for Christian Sunday worship.

A typical Sunday worship order would include practices shared by Protestants and Catholics, (in addition to singing and a sermon), such as: Scripture Reading (usually both from the Hebrew scriptures and Christian Scriptures); Congregational responses (Leader: "The Lord be with you." Congregation: "And also with you."); Communion (eating of bread and wine); Benediction (a final prayer of blessing).

As part of the liturgy, both Catholics and Protestants publish a three year calendar cycle of weekly scripture readings known as the "lectionary." The Scripture passages are used both for personal daily readings and also as the main readings in worship on Sunday. These passages are selected to include stories and supporting verses related to the annual calendar pattern.[38] The preachers at churches utilizing the lectionary will often select one of the weekly Scripture passages and use it as the text from which to preach their sermon. Blessing Place church explained their use of ancient liturgical practices in their literature handouts, describing it is a part of the "rhythms" of their church:

> Life at Blessing Place follows the rhythm of seasons. Sunday mornings are a weekly
>
> rhythm of communion, worship, Scripture, and dialogue with one another…. We follow
>
> the liturgical calendar, including Advent and Christmas, Lent and Easter, drawing on
>
> historical writings to guide our spiritual practice. (Blessing Place, 2017, brochure).

Almost all of the CO churches followed the lectionary readings, and observed the seasons of the Christian calendar[39]—none of the CI churches I observed did. CO churches included or emphasized the sacrament of communion in their worship services. It is interesting to note this liturgical emphasis on the part of some CO churches was described in direct contrast to the concert "show" of CI worship. According to the Savior's Grace church website:

The band [is arranged on stage so that] one hardly sees the musicians. This helps to guard against the "big show" mentality. Instead, our focus is on the cross and the communion bread and cup, which are the center of our worship…. Instead of exalting the worship time or the message, we try to make communion the pinnacle of the worship time together. It is the last thing we do together before our benediction. The benediction reminds us that we do not gather just for self-enhancement, but we are sent out into the world as salt and light[40] in order to participate in the mission of God, as God puts the world back together again. (saviorsgracechurch.com).

For CO churches like this one, the symbolism inherent in the sacraments and liturgy is consciously practiced as a protective barrier between the church and the temptations of materialist values. In their view, historical practices provide a sense of being grounded, and offer an embodied resistance to the influences of consumer culture. Members of CO churches appreciate the historical grounding, and actively look for this ancient liturgy when searching for a church. Evan of Savior's Grace church, described how he rejected other churches before settling at Savior's Grace. He cited liturgy as a reason for not returning to Eternal Rock (a CI church) after he visited: "We only went there one time, and I think we were looking more for, maybe, a little bit more of liturgy in the service…."

Embodiment of Belonging in History and Neighborhood

The use of the liturgical calendar and rituals by CO churches embodies their value of connection. They utilize a connection to an ancient historical past for the purpose of grounding their theology and worship, specifically as a defense against the influences of modern capitalist culture. Ancient liturgical worship practices anchor their church worship rituals as a way to keep

from drifting into the forms of worship utilized by CI churches. This was explicitly stated by Pastor James of Savior's Grace church:

> There is a… pastoral theology at work in [liturgy] that is attempting to not get caught up in church growth culture…. We're… trying to embody a different mode of being in church… and to give us instead new liturgies that can shape our imagination for a different understanding of what it means to be human…. The reason I hone in so much on habits, rhythms, and practices is that's just another way of saying liturgy.

In addition to historical grounding, CO church liturgical practices embody their values of relational connections to others, extending to their neighborhood. The emphasis upon grounding worship in historical liturgy symbolically bridges the church group to their historical "tribe" through practices shared with Christians from the past. According to the Galilee Shores church "About Us" website description:

> We locate ourselves within the larger story of the Christian Church throughout the past 2000 years and are trying to learn from that history. We are excited by the richness of 2000+ years of Christian experience and are beginning to re-explore the ancient traditions of the church…. At the center of this is our belief that we need each other to help us in the pursuit of Jesus as our alternative basis for living and being. That is why we talk so much about community. We are on a journey; we are people with a shared mission, and we hope that your life will be enriched through your involvement here, so that together we might bring hope and healing to our world in these exciting times. (galileeshores.org).

The relational aspect of their ministry unites them with churches from the past—they see themselves as part of a liturgical tradition, but also a part of a shared history of churches who have cared for their neighbors.

Sermon Types

The different types of churches have distinctly different types of sermons. CO churches consistently followed lectionary scripture readings. The sermons were based on scripture passages assigned to match the themes of the seasons of the Christian calendar. During some months of the year, the lectionary works systematically through books of the Christian scriptures (such as the Gospel of John), and are preached start to finish, week by week, one section at a time.

In addition, CO pastors utilized expository preaching. This style of preaching follows the scripture passage in verse order, and the preacher typically stops to explain the meaning of each verse as they go through them one by one. This style of preaching is more methodical, and emphasizes intellectual analysis and interpretation. CO churches emphasized the relational aspect of preaching. At several of these churches, the pastor stopped during the sermon to elicit interaction, comments, or feedback from the congregation.

In contrast to the verse by verse expository method, the majority of sermons preached at CI churches were topical[41]—the sermon title and theme were centered around a topic, usually related to personal or relational improvement. Sermon topics at CI churches included: Love Like You've Never Been Hurt; Awesome Relationships; Approachable Jesus; How to Bring Out the Best in Your Kids; Fight the Good Fight; Harnessing Your Emotions; How to Win Spiritual Battles; Seven Words to Change Your Life; Staying in Love.

The topical sermons at CI churches were noticed and critiqued by CO interviewees who had visited these CI churches when looking for a church home. Evan described his family's journey of looking for a church, and told how the entertaining, topical sermons at CI churches became one of the reasons they decided *not* to attend there (and ended up at a CO church):

Yes, that one [church we visited], for whatever reason, just didn't really connect. I think I remember [my wife] saying the sermon felt a little bit more topical than "Let's talk about this Bible verse and really dig into the context of this." I think that was her critique… Then, at [another CI] church, I liked his preaching. [Even though] I don't feel like… everything has to have a scripture… there were some times it just felt like, "Oh, we didn't even touch the Bible once." It was really entertaining and really interesting…. I don't want to say it, but maybe [that] rubbed us the wrong way for lack of a better term.

Video Sermons and Charismatic Pastors

Video sermons[42] are where the preacher has been previously recorded, and is not physically in the building delivering the sermon. Instead, a screen lowers on the stage and the recorded presentation is projected, with the congregation watching the sermon much like a movie in a theater.

Video sermons serve several practical purposes. To achieve numerical growth, CI churches pursue expansion. This is accomplished either by adding more services at one location, or by adding locations, having multiple campuses—or both. In this way, they can increase the number of attendees by providing multiple meeting times or branch campus locations for convenience, and increase total audience capacity. However, having all those services at multiple times and locations presents a problem. How do you get your charismatic leader to speak the same message seven times in a row without exhausting them? How do you get them to be in two places at once? These churches have turned to technology to solve the problem—video recording or simulcast. Several of these churches either recorded the message once and re-broadcast it at various services, or they "live-streamed" a simulcast of the in-person message being preached in one location to their other campuses at the same time.

CI churches were the only type I observed utilizing video sermons. More than a third of these churches utilized this form. At each of the locations where I observed a video sermon, the worship music and singing was still led by a live band, physically present in the room. But after the in-person concert style singing, a pre-recorded video of the pastor preaching the sermon was presented. At some churches, the sermon was prerecorded earlier in the week and play back at Saturday evening and Sunday morning services. At others, the preacher was live and in-person at one campus, and being simulcast to the other campuses. Pre-recorded sermons allowed these congregations to leverage charismatic leadership and teachings beyond the limitations of physical space or the physical exhaustion of the pastor (who may otherwise have to preach at multiple services on a Sunday). Interestingly, this was an inversion of embodiment—to accomplish this, the preacher was *disembodied* through technology, and strangely separated from the congregation they serve. At the same time, they were utilizing increasingly ubiquitous technology, which was not unusual or out of place to a video-saturated cultural audience.[43]

At Pathway church, Stanley told me about the challenge their church was having as they moved to using video sermons. He stated their church was wrestling with the challenge of growing large, requiring multiple services, and to facilitate growth they had moved to the video sermon option. Even though the church had been struggling with this decision, this change could be justified if the church continued to grow:

> It's a challenge, and we don't even know if that's the right thing yet. …but the church has grown. It's not exponential growth but it's a challenge. We have to have a guy there that's live [as a host]. We have a good [music] team that's live to make the experience good, but why go to a building if you could watch the same thing at home?

The first time I observed a video sermon, I found it quite unusual. I immediately began looking around the room to see the reaction of members of the congregation. It was quickly apparent most had experienced this on a regular basis, and it was in essence "no big deal." In fact, I noticed several in the audience were reacting to the video preacher with comments ("Amen!" "Yes" "That's right"), and with sighs and laugher—as if the preacher was in the room. I specifically asked a married couple at Country Plaza church about their experiences with video sermons:[44]

> Laura: I would say, for me, it took a little bit to get used to, but also, I think it's a strategy of theirs… even this past [Sunday], it was a guest speaker who was also on video…. Some days it's actually pre-recorded too.

> Luke: It was never a huge adjustment for me… I mean… with the day and age that we had grown up in, and just the [availability] of videos. The content is still quality, it's just a different medium…. [The Pastors explained] "We're going to begin embracing technology so that we can carry out the mission and the vision of the church but at the same time, physically be in [two places].

For Luke and Laura, video sermons were something they accepted as necessary for the pursuit of church expansion. They even expressed an understanding of the the emotional and physical toll on the preachers (this church had a small auditorium, and held seven services each Sunday). At this church, and at others utilizing video sermons, the practice had become somewhat commonplace, not much different than an audience of people watching a screen in a movie theater, or a group gathered around a TV screen. This couple were willing to adapt to watching a video sermon for the sake of their pastors, and the vision of growing the church.

None of the CO church I observed utilized video sermons. For them, a disembodied preacher would go against their values of being present in the neighborhood, and their emphasis on communal worship.

Offering and Money Collection

The collection of money, also called the offering, is a regular ritual at Protestant churches. The most common method for collecting money in mainline churches is through a passing of plates. Metal receptacles resembling dinner plates with a sunken bowl-like center are passed down each row or pew, and congregants place money they want to give to the church into the plate. At some churches, this is preceded by a ushers walking down the church aisles to the front, where a short prayer is offered before they begin. This is frequently introduced with a matter of fact statement, "it is time for the offering."

The differences between this "traditional" offering and what happens in CI churches is subtle, but important. In CI churches, a greater amount of time is taken to highlight, explain, and encourage giving money. A composite description of how the offering ritual takes place in CI churches is as follows: One of the church leaders stands at the front of the stage, or appears in a video to explaining the offering procedures. "There are 3 ways to give at [this] church…in person (as the plates are passed), via text message, or on the church website." (Some churches listed a fourth method, usually either by ATM style kiosks in the lobby, or by mail).

CI churches regularly collected money to give away to other causes and church partners. I witnessed several regular presentations of third-party offering partnerships, explaining a portion of the money collected would go to help victims of a highly visible cause. For example, I saw collections for recent events that had been in the news: for weather disaster relief (hurricane, flood, fire, etc.), for victims of human trafficking, and for a partner organization providing an

upcoming service project or trip for the church teenagers. It was not clearly explained how much of the offering was going to these causes. In addition to pointing out the monetary offering was (whole or in part) going to an important third party cause, it was often mentioned the act of giving was an important aspect for the life of the individual attendee.[45]

The offering practices at these churches have made it easy for parishioners to participate in giving associated with Christian charity, by pre-selecting (and presumably vetting) culturally relevant causes to support. The church is also able to get people in the habit of giving directly to their church, which is important to sustain the programs, building maintenance, and the large staff necessary for ongoing growth. There is the additional benefit of setting up the church as the primary avenue through which generosity is practiced. In this way, giving money has been made increasingly convenient, with the church curating a "one-stop" location for donations. The church itself benefits, as it creates a habit among attendees encouraging them to give money to, and through the church on a regular basis.

At almost all CI churches, an appeal to give was made before the offering. At times, this monetary appeal was quite lengthy (they often had to explain any special giving to a third party partner or "current event" cause). Most often, this was followed by a prayer for a "blessing" upon the offering. On more than one occasion, it was explained the church "does not always talk about money," or God or the church "does not need your money." One pastor at Lakeview church mentioned his appeal for money (to support their upcoming big event), was probably going to get emails about how his church "always asks for money." He then went on to urge giving to support their one day big event, and asked any business owners to purchase advertising space in the printed program for the event. On another Sunday at the same church, after introducing the offering with a long disclaimer about how the church does not always ask for

money, the leader made the "Freudian" slip during the segue into prayer, saying, "Let's *pay*, er…

pray."

In contrast, CO churches de-emphasized money collection and the offering ritual. At

more than one CO church, there was *no offering taken* during the service. At these churches,

there were only "ballot box" type receptacles in the back of the church, with a slot where

parishioners could deposit cash or checks. In this way, they were making a conscious break with

traditional liturgical practices of "passing the plates." At other CO churches where they did take

an offering in the service, it was not preceded by a description of a cause or purpose for the

money, nor any special appeal. In these instances, it appeared much more closely associated with

what I have described as a "traditional" offering—plates were passed while a song was sung, and

in some churches it was preceded by a short prayer. In this way, CO churches embodied their

connection to historical liturgical practices, following what most Protestant churches had done

for centuries. In addition, by treating the offering in this "matter of fact" approach, or eliminating

it from the service altogether, CO churches avoided the perception "churches only talk about or

ask you for money"—which for CI churches, appeared to be a struggle.

Communion at Different Church Types

One of the clearest illustrations of the differences between CI and CO churches is the

difference in how they serve communion. Communion, or the Eucharist, is an ancient Christian

ritual said to have been instituted by Jesus at the Last Supper. Small pieces of bread (or the

contemporary variation, pieces of broken cracker), and red wine (or grape juice) are eaten

ritualistically by Protestant worshippers. This action of eating bread and juice symbolizes the

broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ upon the cross. Eating the bread and the wine is

done to remember the sacrifice of Christ, as these elements represent the covenant between God

and the worshiper for the forgiveness of their sins. Aside from some theological differences about the symbolism, or the practical logistics of how the bread and the wine are distributed, the practice appears to be very similar in many Protestant churches, and holds an important place as a sacrament in most of them.

One of the biggest logistic variations among Protestant churches is the decision of whether or not to use individual or shared cups for the wine or juice. On the one hand, small individual plastic cups for the liquid element (which have the appearance of tiny plastic shot glasses, but less than half the size) are passed to each individual participant. In contrast, in other churches, participants drink from a "common cup," or dip their bread in a shared cup (and then eat the wine-soaked bread—a variation known as intinction).

Consumer Individualist Communion

The practice of communion at NewLife Church serves as an example of a CI approach to the ritual. In this church, communion was offered infrequently (only once in the month I observed), and it was offered after the worship service was over. When the band performed a last song, it served as a cue for people to leave the church. No one remained during the song to sing along with the band. Instead, everyone headed for the exits and out to the parking lot. Communion was offered during this time.

There were ushers standing at the exit doors with baskets of individually wrapped communion elements. (These are thimble sized small plastic cups filled with juice, which are capped and sealed with air-tight cellophane. On top of the plastic seal is a pill-sized piece of cracker/bread, which in turn is sealed to the top with another cellophane covering. The participant peels back the first layer of plastic, takes the bread, then peels back the second layer and drinks the juice).[46]

On their way out of the sanctuary, just before passing through the exit doors, congregants have the option to grab these individually wrapped elements, and take communion on their own, at their convenience. I watched as many simply walked past the baskets without taking any, while others grabbed the elements from the basket, and went straight out to their cars and left. Still others took the elements, stopped in the hallway between the sanctuary and the lobby, huddled off to the side in pairs (with presumably another family member) or by themselves up against the wall, out of the way of other congregants headed for their cars. There in the hallway, those who stopped to take communion, sheepishly hunched over and unwrapped their elements and ate them, while the rest of the congregation walked past. The whole ritual took less than 45 seconds for any individual to complete (including those who chose to stop and take communion before they left the building).

This gave the ritual the appearance of being a matter of individual preference, with some opting not to take the time, or even take the communion elements "to go." As I stood in the hallway and watched for several minutes, I noticed approximately 10% stopped in the hallway to eat their elements immediately, 50% did not take the communion elements at all, and the other 40% grabbed elements from the basket but did not stop—these did not even seem to break stride. Many from this group looked as if they had somewhere to go and some place to be. Some nodded to the usher holding the basket as they grabbed their set of elements, and appeared to be grateful the church had made it convenient for them to be able to take communion on their own time, and not have to spend more time waiting while the ritual was performed for others.

Community Oriented Communion

In contrast, at Hand of God, a CO church on the West coast, communion looked very different. It was a part of the weekly service at this church. This was true of most CO churches I

visited. At Hand of God, there were multiple altar tables at the front of the church, just below the stage, with each table holding a single plate with pieces of bread, and a single cup of wine. In addition, at this church, there was a basket with the label "change for a dollar,"—a receptacle on the communion altar where people could drop in a dollar or spare pocket change when they came forward to take communion. This was a separate offering from the regular offering taken during the service. Only during communion time were congregants invited to approach the altar, receive communion, and deposit their "change for a dollar" offering. As described on their website, this offering was used as a gift to meet a neighbor's need:

> Do you have a neighbor or friend, outside of the Hand of God Community, who's hurting? Who's experienced a recent tragedy, trauma or crisis? Change for a Dollar is here to help. Every Sunday folks here have the opportunity to drop a single dollar bill into buckets on the communion tables. This small gesture is one way we as a church community can support you loving your neighbor well: providing a big check to meet a one-time significant need. (handofgodchurch.com)

The "Change For A Dollar" offering represents one more way this church practiced caring for those outside the church. Even when they are *receiving* communion, they are encouraged to *give* toward less fortunate neighbors.

Although the communion ritual was performed after the sermon, it was a significant part of the service itself. Congregants were invited to walk down the aisles to the front and take the bread and dip it into the wine and eat it immediately—there were no pre-packaged elements to take back to their seats or their cars. They were asked by the worship leader to come forward as family groups or small Bible study groups and were given the opportunity to pray near the stage,

at the altar tables. There seemed to be no rush, and if the tables were busy with people, everyone else waited their turn.

I watched as groups of people, went forward individually, in pairs, or in small groups of 4-5 at a time, received the communion elements, and stopped to pray—sometimes for several minutes—before eating and returning to their seats. Many groups took their time and lingered at the altar to pray together before taking communion. Some groups huddled so close together their heads were touching others heads and shoulders in the group. I watched as one group of 22 people circled up arm in arm in a large, yet tightly grouped huddle, and prayed together before taking the elements together. The musicians played 4 or 5 songs, for about 20-25 minutes, while the congregation came forward to participate.

Figure 12:

A Group Tightly Huddled for Communion

Considering the amount of time given to this ritual in the service, it appeared to have important significance for the congregation. There was a sense of patience—of waiting for each

other to take their turn. Participants who had already received the bread and the wine waited in their pews and sang along with the band until others were finished. I saw only one person leave early during this portion of the service.

The impression of communion at this church was one of participation as a group. The ritual was not about convenience or speed, but seemed to be about setting aside time to participate with others. Indeed, attention was given to others who were not even present in the service. As participants came forward for communion, they were reminded to give a dollar to help someone outside of the congregation in the neighborhood who might be in need.

A Communion Comparison

The ideal type of communion at a CI church has morphed into the minimal version of its form. There was no ceremony or collective ritual practiced, instead only pre-packaged elements were provided, and no instructions, time, or ceremony of shared participation were offered. Those who desired to participate were left to themselves to take communion on their own. This minimal "take and go" ritual allowed for individualistic expressions and options for private participation. In the pursuit of relevance, this church has transformed the ritual of communion into a cultural remnant—a carry-over from a previous time. Its position in the service is minimized for consumers who may consider the time added to the service to wait for others as an inconvenience. At the same time, it is still offered to appeal to those who may have a previous church background, and find it personally meaningful. For CI churches, *the communion ritual is minimized for the sake of convenience, individual choice, and consumer appeal.* The traditional ritual practice of the religion is changed to meet the needs and desires of CI attendees and their values of individualism (over communal sharing), and the values of privatization and speed.

In contrast, the ideal type of communion at a CO church reveals how the ritual is highlighted within the worship service. In addition, *the communal nature of the ritual is emphasized*, as approximately one fourth of the service time is dedicated to the ritual, to allow for group participation and shared practice. Not only is the ritual a part of the service where all who attend are encouraged to participate, but they are encouraged to, and do participate in groups—I regularly saw groups beyond one's immediate family were taking communion together, arm in arm, in huddles. In this church, communion was one more religious practice revealing the CO values of relationship, intentionality, and serving and caring for others.

Architectural Embodiment

The building architecture embodies the values of each church, which shape and are shaped by the worshippers themselves. The physical structure housing each congregation is determined both by the history of the arrival at their location, and by the value choices of the church leadership involved in the purchase or construction of the sanctuary. As they worship, members of the congregation are freed or constrained by the physical space around them, and they structure their surroundings to reflect their value choices.

The architecture of CI churches is practical. Almost all of these churches hold their services in box-shaped warehouses. 81% of the CI congregations I observed built or leased a box-shaped warehouse style building.

All but one located their building outside of a residential neighborhood (more than 1 block away from any residential housing, or located in an industrial or commercial zone). Warehouse spaces are inexpensive to lease, easy to convert to auditorium seating, and allow these churches to maximize the number of persons who can attend, while minimizing the monetary costs. Little money is spent on large spires or physical religious symbolism (with the

exception of megachurches spending on façades in order to provide enchantment and spectacle to the otherwise bland architectural shapes). Instead, the box-shaped buildings provide a practical space where investment can be made on other equipment to suit their values—such as expandable seating and concert stage lighting.

Figure 13:

Warehouse "Box" Architecture of Energy.church

There is another practicality with leasing warehouses in which to install their church—CI churches do not need to build a new cathedral-like building in order to expand. They are able to simply lease another open warehouse space in the commercial or industrial zones of a nearby suburb. This allows them to open up an additional franchise campus in a new convenient location to attract more attendees and grow their church, establishing multiple convenient locations for religious customers. Larger and faster growing churches tend to lease or build in or near industrial areas, allowing access to larger warehouse structures, while newer and smaller ones tend to start with a storefront section of a strip mall in a suburban commercial zone.

In contrast, the shape of CO church emphasizes geographic location over church architecture. The buildings these congregations occupy are selected from existing church buildings available in the neighborhood which they have targeted for investment. More than one CO church I observed had selected a particular neighborhood in an urban area, and eventually bought the building of an older church—one with dwindling membership and looking to sell.

These buildings tended to have "traditional" Protestant church architecture with arched cathedral-like ceilings, stained glass windows, and were furnished with wood pews.

For example, Galilee Shores church began when the founding pastor felt a calling[47] to start a church in the middle of their midwestern city. They began meeting in the existing building of a Presbyterian church and later purchased their building. The architectural style was not mentioned as an important aspect of the calling felt by the founding leadership. Instead, their calling was directed to a targeted mid-city neighborhood.

Figure 14:

"Traditional" Interior of Galilee Shores

Similarly, Hand of God church purchased their building from a congregation that had failed to attract new young families and who could no longer financially afford the expenses of their inner-city church building. For CO churches like these, the church building embodies the value of presence in the neighborhood.

The Church Coffee Shop

One unique architectural form of embodiment among churches is the decision to allocate space for a coffee shop within the church building. Coffee is a ubiquitous component of the social gathering of Christian worship. However, whether or not a church decided to *sell* coffee was a distinction separating CI and CO churches.

The decision to offer coffee (or any item) for sale in a Protestant church is a precarious one. It forces the church to make a theological and Biblical determination of whether or not they are in conflict with the meaning of the Christian scripture passage in Mark 11:15-17:

> On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations"? But you have made it "a den of robbers." (NIV).

Every Protestant church I observed served coffee on Sundays. All CO churches I visited offered *free* coffee and only one third of them had a designated coffee shop area in their building. Free coffee at these churches was postured as hospitality and an attempt to make people feel welcome. In addition, coffee was discussed for its symbolism at two CO churches. Hand of God church wrote about a coffee company working to "provide marketable skills to refugees and immigrants," on their blog (blog.handofgodchurch.com-Archive), using the topic of coffee to reflect their interest in social justice. Fortress church affirmed their community-centric values by promoting a local brand of coffee beans, "Now proudly serving MAPS Coffee, roasted right here in [our city]!" (fortresschurch.com-Fortress Church Coffeehouse).

In contrast, CI church coffee shops embodied capitalist values through their methods of operation. More than half (58%) of the CI churches I observed sold coffee drinks from a designated coffee shop within their church building. Three of these churches acknowledged the coffee shop was being utilized as a revenue stream to subsidize costs. At Lakeview they explained "the proceeds go directly to funding ministry and compassion causes," (Lakeview Bulletin 2017). When announcing one of the workshops held at the church, Riverbend church staff explained the course was "free, but you are encouraged to purchase a drink at the coffee shop" (Riverbend Church Service Announcements, August 8, 2021).

Eternal Rock Coffee Shop and Struggles with Church Consumerism. The process by which Eternal Rock church installed a coffee shop provides an interesting case study in the struggle between Biblical, communal, and capitalist values. Coffee played a visible role in church practice and even worship at Eternal Rock church. It was the only church I observed with a 5 minute coffee break right in the middle of the worship service, immediately after singing and announcements, and right before the sermon. They provided two stations with free cups of coffee—not outside in the lobby space, but within the sanctuary itself. However, as a part of their vision to bring people into the church, they decided to build an actual coffee shop in a section of their church lobby, selling coffee and pastries and providing cafe-style seating. They designated a church staff member to oversee the coffee shop as a part of their ministry responsibilities. Church leadership published to their website how the coffee shop embodied their vision:

> So it becomes very important that everything about our building (design, colors, shapes, layout, etc.) communicate a sense of belonging, warmth, caring. . . and even fun! We believe that a typical church building in this postmodern culture is not typically well suited to accomplish this. While a multipurpose gathering space is obviously needed, the

building should clearly convey that it was built for others, not just for us. Toward this

goal, we'll establish an actual coffee shop that is open to the public like any other coffee

shop…. Our coffee shop manager would, in effect, be a pastor to this community, for the

coffee shop is just as much the church as the multipurpose/worship space…. And, of

course, we could hire and train baristas just like any other coffee shop….

(eternalrockchurch.org-Eternal Rock Church ER VISION).

Even though I have categorized this church as CI, the language in this vision is

reminiscent of a community orientation—their published intentions were to have the coffee shop

be "built for others, not just for us." It was clear this vision had been communicated to the

congregation, as Eternal Rock interviewee, Owen echoed:

I know one of the big aspects for our church is building the community through the

coffee shop, through the sports programs and things like that. It's an important thing for

the staff and the board and the members to… invite those surrounding the church into the

church and to be a part of that.

However, the implementation of the coffee shop revealed a struggle to keep the purpose

of the coffee shop from being co-opted by consumerism. One member, Trevor, who served on

the church board, expressed his frustrations. Trevor described how the coffee shop lobby

remodel had brought changes he felt were compromising the values of the church—moving them

toward becoming a store-front. Before the addition of the coffee shop, Eternal Rock had also

been giving away free loaves of (donated, soon to be expired) bread at church for anyone who

wanted them. Trevor explained the church leaders were ending this practice once the coffee shop

was installed. He described this change, and the corollaries resulting from the decision to sell

coffee:

They have put in the coffee shop. But the church decided to stop giving away free bread. They, and I quote, "didn't want it to conflict with their brand." They will continue to serve free coffee in the service (during the five minute coffee break), but they will not use the beans from the coffee shop. They want to set up the coffee shop as a business, and they don't want the quality of the coffee shop brand to be watered down. They don't want people eating low quality bread in the coffee shop and confusing it with their pastries. They want to make a distinction between the free coffee and the high quality coffee from the shop that people pay for…. The staff… are really frustrated with what kind of church they are becoming.

As a church board member, Trevor went on to explain subsequent questions came up—what if someone comes to church and they haven't eaten, and want some food (and the church is no longer giving away free bread)? The reply was they would come up with a voucher for the coffee shop to give to those in need. The church staff was concerned the mission of the coffee shop was (originally) a place for connection with those in the local area, and they had concerns regarding the idea of becoming a coffee selling business and creating a coffee shop brand.

This instance exemplifies the "incorporation of objectification" Bourdieu (1977) described. The coffee shop as an object embodies a set of inherent values associated with capitalism (money, sales, brands, advertising, etc.) which are difficult to detach from the shop itself, even when it is embedded in a church lobby. Once introduced into the church, the coffee shop reveals a struggle between conflicting sets of values. Consumer shopping values are brought forth through an externalization of internality, while simultaneously the church absorbs these values through an internalization of externality. The church attempts to appropriate a secular cultural form ("we observe culture, then we baptize culture"), in order to be relevant to

those they seek to attract. Yet the church struggles to impart its intended values upon the cultural object, which comes pre-loaded with value associations connected to consumerism.

Affirming Artistic Creativity as Community Connection

Another form of embodiment within CO churches is their affirmation of artistic expression and creativity. CO churches explicitly affirm a deep connection to art, beauty, and creativity as important expressions and values included in the fundamental values of their churches. As the pastor at Fingerprint church proclaimed in the service before a time of prayer and offering, "We have a special calling to art and beauty here at Fingerprint."

The ways CO churches related to the arts went beyond the professionally designed marketing materials, or high-level stage production observed at CI churches. Instead, music, art and beauty were expressly declared as a way CO churches could embody their value of reflecting the creativity of God the creator. Art is often displayed in the sanctuary, and integrated as part of intentional acts of service (including providing art classes for under-resourced children). As one church website summarized it, "Pinecrest is deeply committed to faith and the arts." For CO churches, artistic expression flows from their theology.

Commitment to the arts is also one of the ways CO churches connect to their surrounding neighborhood. These churches are actively seeking to "blur the line" between art and worship. In general, art is woven into multiple aspects of church life, and the personal lives of CO attendees.

These churches support the arts in multiple ways, including offering art related events, and supporting artists financially. Several CO churches I observed had their own art galleries, and held art shows, such as the year round "Art and Soul" gallery at Pinecrest church. Pinecrest church hosts a non-profit organization called "The Studio," with dedicated space on their church campus, for the purpose of integrating worship, spirituality, creativity, and neighborhood

outreach through creative expression. In addition, Hand of God has their own art collective, helping artists to grow and express themselves. Blessing Place church presents their identity on their signage as "church and gallery." Creative arts are considered an aspect of ministry at many CO churches, and several have staff members with "Creative Arts" as part of their pastoral title and responsibility. Several "creative arts" or worship pastors at these churches write and sing their own original worship songs. Three of the churches I observed record and publish their original worship songs which are sung in their services.

The number and kind of art-based events held at CO churches are many and varied. There are gatherings designed to connect with the local art community, and events where attendees are given space to express their own creativity. There are of course worship services where those with talent in music or stage production are affirmed in their skills by serving at the church. However, artistic endeavors are affirmed and practiced throughout the calendar of events at CO churches in addition to weekly worship services. Several of these churches offer ongoing groups for people who describe themselves as artistic and creative, with exercises combining art and spirituality. Some hold events where artistic types can come and experience a supportive group (where artists can "build community"), hold forum discussions on art related topics, and socialize together. At these events, artists are encouraged to utilize their talents, and are challenged in new ways, often with a spiritual component. Other CO churches hold art camps for children, and one held an event for moms to take a break from mothering and just create something artistic with other moms.

Pinecrest church holds an "art month" once a year, and offers opportunities for artists to join a team of artists at the church. During art month, I observed a stage set up to one side during the worship service, where a painter painted on a large canvas throughout the entire service.

Figure 15:

Pinecrest Painting During Worship

Figure 16:

Pinecrest Worship Art Collage

Adult attendees and their children were invited to get up from their seats and create their own small greeting card sized paintings during the service as an artistic expression of their worship. These smaller paintings were displayed together on a large wall, forming a collage of individual paintings making a larger mosaic representing the expression of the congregation together.

Art and Integration

The affirmation of artistic expression and the organizational values of integration and holism go hand in hand in CO churches. Integration is key—these churches, their leadership, and their attendees often described their artistic commitments in conjunction with a philosophical view—everything is connected. Faith is seen as intermingled with art and life; art and spirituality are meant to be combined. To illustrate, Rhonda, a staff member at The Upper Room described the church as participating in "artistic spirituality," which sought to transform their people into "mystical activists." Blessing Place church also described their vision of reconnecting the artistic community with the church on their website:

> We are happy to play our part in rebinding the arts and the church. Historically, art has played an enormous role in communicating the story of Christian faith, yet in the modern Evangelical culture, art is often reduced to schlock, trinket, kitsch, cliche, and cheap imitation. Genuine art is vital not only to an authentic expression of faith, but to an authentic understanding of what it means to be human. Join us as we engage with the prophetic voices of artists both local and national (blessingplace.com/art-church).

> Among CO churches, all human experience is seen as an expression of worship, and thus should not be separated from church. Some of these churches go as far as to express a desire their churches participate in the creation of "genuine art" (instead of a cheap imitation) as a pure reflection of faith, humanity, and God.

Integration with Theology and Life

Some CO churches describe this integration between the church and the arts as a reflection of their belief in, and worship of a God who is a master creator. Art is viewed as a human expression with a spiritual component, by believing they were created in the image of God, the congregants are affirmed in their own creative expression. Art is valued for its own sake, but it is also utilized in presenting the Scriptures.

In particular, these congregations regularly connect their affirmation of the arts with the general concept of beauty. They believe beauty enriches life, is part of the human condition, and is connected to the value of humanity. Beauty is seen as something God given, and as The Upper Room website put it, (quoting Catholic Worker Movement founder Dorothy Day), "the world will be saved by beauty" (theupperroomchurch.com). Part of the work of the church, in their view is to "steward a beautiful story."

As it is expressed by interviewees, the association of artistic expression and church life is not only theological, but it is integrated with their personal sense of identity. Many interviewees who attend CO churches describe how they appreciated the connection their church had with the artistic community, or considered themselves an artist of some form. Some describe themselves as musicians, others practice painting or sculpture, and others found enjoyment through dancing. Many viewed themselves as creative people, and described how they were happiest when they were creating or doing something artistic, or spending time in the beauty of nature. One interviewee, Judy, described how her personal identity was also connected with the artistic identity of the church:

> … I just started going there and I was really struck by just how artistic they were. In the other churches, I was this freak…. Whereas at Hand of God [church], it was like they're

writers and musicians and artists. I was introduced to the idea that whatever I did

artistically could be a form of worship. That came quite naturally to me.

Another interviewee spoke of how they appreciated the ways their church incorporated

aesthetics into worship to communicate the message of the Scriptures. Others described how they

wanted more art in their lives—their friends were getting more involved in public art, and they

desired to add more art and music to their lives because of it. In sum, many of the CO attendees I

interviewed self-identified as some kind of an artist— but even if they were not themselves an

artist, most expressed an interest, affirmation, or value of the arts.

Integration with Community

CO churches often describe their affirmation of the arts as a part of their connection to

the surrounding neighborhood. Affirming artistic expression is directly connected to what it

means to have a be involved locally. One church described it as "incorporation"—the church

sees itself as incorporating aspects of the community into the life of the church. If the

surrounding neighborhood affirms the arts and is composed of those who consider themselves

creative, so should the church.

The founding pastor of Hand of God Community Church recognized "creativity and

justice were expressions of God already widely celebrated within the culture [of their city]"

(handofgodchurch.com). When starting the church, he embraced the art scene of the city, (and

the social justice community), and incorporated these themes into the worship experience at their

church. This is represented in the name of the church, Hand of God, reflecting the idea of

celebrating artistic expression in the surrounding neighborhood was also an expression of the

hand of God[48] at work. Hand of God church wanted artists to have an impact on their city, and

seek to "blur the line—before all the world—between what is excellent work and what is ardent worship" (handofgodchurch.com).

Blessing Place is another example of a church connecting the value of artistic expression with neighborhood involvement. First and foremost, the church is located within the city's art district, its building nestled among a row of art galleries. The church presents itself on its sign as "church and gallery," and participates actively in the art district where it is located. They hold regular art shows along with the other galleries in the neighborhood.

Figure 17:

Church and Gallery Sign

Blessing Place also participates in the "First Friday" event, when on the first Friday of every month all of the neighborhood art galleries remain open into the evening, and allow people to enter and view the current art displays free of charge. Blessing Place hosts a "gallery crawl" event, leading people on a tour to visit the district's many galleries. The church has its own regular art exhibits, and posts biographies and statements of their exhibited artists and samples of their work on the church's own website.

Figure 18:

Taking in the Sanctuary Art Exhibit Before Sunday Worship

In addition, church leaders host discussions and articles commenting on other art forms, such as film noir. One article compared the church to a critically acclaimed film (the Godfather), and critiqued the American dream. At this church, the art gallery is a part of the church's ethos—a part of their "re-binding beauty and God" (blessingplace.com). At the same time, it is also part of their relationship to their surrounding neighborhood.

They have intentionally planted themselves in the midst of a thriving artistic enclave, and have culturally adapted their church to reflect the values of their community. Nevertheless, they claim they have not "sold out" to the values of the culture per se, but instead have intentionally integrated a theology of beauty with their mission to serve the areas around the church. Blessing

Place holds "imagination" as a high value, and they incorporate it as a way to connect worshipers to each other, and the church with its neighborhood.

Art and Spirituality

Artistic expression is not solely utilized for community outreach and connection. It is used as one might expect in a church, as a way for attendees to practice spirituality and encourage spiritual growth. Hand of God church lines the walls at the back of their sanctuary with original "benediction" artwork. The paintings are to remind people of the communion and communal practices of the church as they leave, providing visual anchors, or "visual prayers."

Figure 19:

Example of "Benediction Wall Art" in the Hand of God Sanctuary

Hand of God also holds art exhibitions, including an exhibition entitled, "New Icons," showing pictures to be used for contemplation and prayer. In addition, they offer art exercises

and workshops for their congregants to express their creativity, such as a group workshop to compose their own Psalms.

Worship is by its nature performed as an artistic expression. Singing is a common feature of Protestant Christian church worship services. CO churches in particular emphasize the arts and creative expression to a high degree, and have an intentional affirmation of the arts and of artists themselves. As previously mentioned, art is an integral component of their neighborhood outreach.

This is in contrast to the artistic expressions at CI churches who are also very creative. These churches value creativity for its usefulness in presenting attractive, professional graphic arts marketing materials, and appreciate the utility of artistic talents needed to present a high level of music and stage production for their concert style worship services. For one church type, creativity is the means to market, attract and enchant or entertain, for the other art is celebrated as an end in itself, or as a point of connection to neighbors through shared interests.

Chapter 5: Insider and Outsider Perspectives: Rational Choice and Self or Social Focus

The contrasts between Consumer Individualism and Community Orientation are illustrated in the relationship of the church to its walls—whether or not the church focuses on the people inside the church walls or outside of them. In general, CI churches seek to draw people within the walls of their church (for example, with resources for self-improvement), while CO churches seek to reach outside church walls to the surrounding community. This shapes the general aim of money, time and energy spent—and whether those resources are applied to activities inside or outside the church.

This inside/outside distinction is of course imperfect, and at best serves as an ideal type, useful for comparison and illustration. All churches perform some kind of service to those outside their walls, and all churches seek to draw members inside. Every week Protestant churches allocate most of their time and volunteer energy toward their weekly worship services. However, there is a difference between church types in terms of the focus of their non-worship activities (the emphasis of activities beyond Sunday morning services), and the worldview with which they make choices regarding their ministries. I observed a directional flow in terms of church focus—the direction of the attention and energy of church members emphasized a flow of resources to either internal or external investment.

This internal or external focus follows the values of these two church types. The CI values of personal growth and the development of the individual aims their resources in the direction of drawing people into their gatherings and ministries. Their emphasis is upon bringing people in—and keep them coming back (Einstein, 2008, p. 119). This is accomplished through attractive workshops designed to assist the individual's pursuit of personal improvement. In contrast, CO values of relational connection and service to the neighborhood are pointed in a

direction of concern for what is happening outside of the church. Their volunteer energies and even portions of their worship gatherings are focused upon active participation in the surrounding community.

Consumer Individualist: Busy Churches for Busy Families

CI churches are busy supplying their own activities and events, classes and conferences. They provide Christian alternative versions of secular workshops and entertainment—sanctioned versions of diversions, recreation, self-help, and personal improvement events (Freudenberg, 2015, p. 298)—usually outside of the purview of religious groups. For example, the church announcement bulletins handed out at Eternal Rock church over the Summer and Fall of 2018 included full color inserts advertising: A Sweetheart Banquet (with "catered meal, live entertainment, Photo Booth"), the "Sisters: Celebrating the Art of Friendship," (a Women of Faith Workshop, described as an "evening of laughter, stories, and lessons…"), Financial Peace University (a personal finance seminar), and "Mom Life," a social and support gathering for moms. Two other churches of this type advertised comedy shows held at their churches, marketed solely for the purpose of recreation (not for spiritual growth). These were advertised no differently than any comedy show at a night club—except the comedians were Christians, and their shows held the promise of wholesome family fun: "…with jokes and songs your whole family can enjoy. Tickets are selling FAST so get yours now!" (Pathwaychurch.net/events). The Spirit Church website summarized it this way, "For Your Family: There's always something going on at Spirit Church!" (SpiritChurch.com/services). To ensure they had plenty of events, Spirit Church had posted a job for an event planner to join their church staff: "Event Planning (No Training Necessary): Planning and coordination of small group ministry activities and church wide events. Organizational skills helpful. Minimum of one event per month. Off site

opportunities available." (SpiritChurch.com/dreamteam). They were looking to hire someone for this position in addition to the staff and volunteers running the existing 19 different ministry areas already meeting at their church, and their regular weekly worship services.

As a part of CI church marketing, these events are accompanied by appeals to "join us" and "you can be a part" and "we're saving a seat for you" and "Invite everyone you know!" Lakeview church advertised their "Trunk or Treat" Halloween event with this blanket encouragement for members not only to come, but invite others: "BRING YOUR KIDS, YOUR NEIGHBORS' KIDS, EVEN THE KIDS YOU DON'T LIKE! THIS IS AN INCREDIBLY FUN EVENT FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY." (Welcome to Granite Bay Lakeview, (brochure) Fall 2019, author's emphasis). This exemplifies the ethos of CI churches. They provide an abundance of activities and events designed to meet the needs and desires (including fun) of busy individuals and families—continually inviting them to come back and bring their friends.

A partial list of the variety of events put on by CI churches reads as follows: Ongoing "adventure" recreational activities (hiking trips, bike rides, camping trips, etc.); Marriage enrichment events; Trunk or Treat Halloween event; Easter Egg Hunt; Making Spirits Bright Christmas events; A Drive-thru Christmas light show; Special guest speaker events; Celebrity (reality TV star) guest performance; Kids only movie night; Enneagram (a personality test workshop); Annual Women's conferences: I AM WOMAN conference, AbundantLife[49] women's conference; Unleashed Youth Conference; Growth Track (four sessions to learn about the church, leading to more involvement); Faith Kids Winter Olympics; Summer One ongoing summer events for kids and adults; Comedy Nights; Fall Sermon series ("Essential Relationships" with an apple pie event, Farmers Market, and Fall Family Photo Portraits), followed by a Fall emphasis on teachers and schools, and community first responders, (the local

chief of police as the guest speaker); "Pirates" Series with Caribbean cruise giveaway (to qualify, must sign up for growth track, small group, and/or church clean up and set up); Global Worship Night; "Big Wednesdays," Wednesday night services; Teen Back to School Bash; MLB Baseball game for youth; Financial Peace University (personal finance workshop); Girls Night Out; Mens Night Out; Family Soccer Mission Trip Fundraiser; Broom Hockey; Health and Fitness Sessions, Strength and Movement Exercise Class, Yoga Classes.[50] The majority of these events are geared toward the families of insiders who already attend—as well as provide opportunities for insiders to invite other families to come with them to church.

All of these events are in addition to religious services we might typically see at most Protestant churches, such as: Ongoing weekly Sunday worship services; Ongoing mid-week small groups (friendship based support/prayer/social groups); Service Opportunities; Prayer events (although I only observed 2 mentions of a prayer events at CI churches—at one church, you must sign up for an email to receive notification of these); Weekly Youth Events (with gripping titles, such as, "Kings and Queens," "Tribal Wars!," and "Nerve!"); Spiritual, Rest and Renewal Retreat; Baptisms.

The ethos of these churches includes busy-ness. The church calendar is replete with loads of events, and the church staff feels the burden and stress of constantly having to put on numerous events. The attendees themselves lead busy lives, which complements their elective affinity to participate in the busy church culture. The religious lives of CI churches and their worshippers are influenced by the capitalist culture, driven not by needs, but by wants. These churches push to offer more for participants to consume, and the worshippers seek to fulfill desires for family recreation, and more personal development.

Sometimes the pressure of the busy schedule and the effort required to produce numerous events takes a noticeable toll upon the church staff. Stanley, a staff member at Pathway church commented:

It's coming at you like crazy and that's part of the challenge. There is no time to rest. It's a very, very fast pace. On the staff… one of the big things is that we are like, "okay, hang on, because you're going to be drinking out of a fire hose for a while." They're like, "people just hang on, you'll see it will happen, it will catch up to speed." It's just moving. We're producing a TV show. We've got two campuses. We're running our vacation Bible school, we've had 900 kids… 822 was I think our average of attendance in our vacation Bible school. 183 of them accepted Jesus in a real genuine way.[51] It took 300 volunteers to pull that off. The follow up, the planning, strategizing. It's one big event after another…. Yes. It's just different. Yes, sometimes it's very exhausting. There's too much work to do and not enough time.

Larger churches offer more and larger events. However, even small churches have an active staff and multiple activities. Stormy and Rufus, two members at Eternal Rock church, remarked on how active their church was, even though they have fewer than 400 attendees. Stormy was impressed by the capabilities of her small church; they were able to put on special Christmas services, and had "those opportunities." Rufus noticed although the church only had three staff, they were "amazing because they're doing so many different things."

Interestingly, the attendees at these churches have led busy, active church-going lives from their early childhood years through adulthood—and thus fit in very well with the busy ethos of CI churches. Christy, a mother of two described how her parents brought her up with a mindset of being heavily involved in church:

[Growing up we were] Super-involved in the church…. Sunday mornings, Sunday night, Wednesday night, [Bible] Quizzing Thursdays…. Even now, my parents—my mom… she's like, "I have quizzing," or "I have Bible study…." we volunteer for everything…. My dad completely skewed my mind too because in my mind it was like, "You have to do everything. You have to help out with everything as much as possible." Now I'm like, "How?"

CI churches benefit from participants who were brought up in an atmosphere of heavy involvement in church life and extensive hours volunteering for the church. One young adult from Eternal Rock described a list of six different leadership and volunteer roles he was committed to at his church. Several interviewees described how "we always went to church," when they were younger. As church insiders from their youth, these attendees lead active church-going lives as adults, replicating what they experienced growing up. They are attracted to a church with lots of activities, and volunteer to support spiritual services, and exciting events.

At the same time, the above interviewee responses raise questions about the sustainability and impact of such intensive hours of church involvement. Helen, who led a ministry at Lakeview church, mentioned she was not happy with the way the staff was treated. Her desire was for them to "take better care of the staff." She felt the staff worked hard, but were seen as disposable. Her views draw an interesting parallel to the exploitation of laborers under industrial capitalism explicated by Marx (1867/1967). The busy schedules held at these churches puts pressure upon staff to make them happen, leaving them (according to Stanley and Helen) exhausted and under-appreciated. Those in their congregations, like Christy, wonder how it is possible to continue attending and volunteering at all these church events. Even those deeply

entrenched in these churches raise questions and concerns about the costs inherent in this type of blurred Christian consumerism.

Why All These Events?

The churches themselves provide many reasons for these events in their promotional materials—the reasons given are most often related to personal development, support, and for socializing—they are "a great way to meet new people" (campuscity.lakeviewonline.com/events). CI churches often appeal to a desire held by individuals and families—they attempt to "scratch an itch" related to personal enrichment. In sum, the predominant reason for all these events is to appeal to the needs and desires of religious consumers. Lakeview church, in their "Experience Christmas 2019" brochure, (advertising multiple events leading up to Christmas), explained their reasoning for having numerous events during the busy Christmas season:

Why all the services? Why all the events? Why all the production and pageantry? Why pull out all the stops during a time of year when every store, site, and organization is trying to outdo itself to get your attention?

IT'S FOR YOU. YES, YOU.

Did you know that to God, you are His number one priority? Though you may not know it yet, God wants the best for you. He wants to bring hope into your life. He wants you to know you are loved, just as you are—not after you clean yourself up or get it together—as you are right now. And that's something to celebrate! That's why this season should be merry and bright. Our prayer for you is that this Christmas service would be a gift. May this gift break through the noise of your life, tap you on the

shoulder, and be a resounding encouragement. May you walk away feeling, just as the saying goes, bright. (Experience Christmas 2019, Lakeview brochure).

The advertisement for the upcoming series of Christmas events reveals several important aspects of how marketing is connected to religious consumption. The advertisement, which appeared in a paper handout bulletin (given out at the door in the weeks leading up to Christmas), utilizes slick graphic design, making the main slogan appear in neon lights. In addition, the slogan comes from the song, Jingle Bells, focusing on the words "making spirits bright." The choice of this Christmas Carol provides cultural relevance, without making any connection to the spiritual or theological Christian context of Christmas, or anything related to the birth of Jesus. Instead, they offer an intriguing play on words with the phrase "making spirits bright," which could be interpreted as "becoming happier," or "uplift and enliven your (spiritual) life." This slogan is an enticement to connect with pleasant memories associated with Christmas time, and suggest anyone who attends will be either happier, or improve their spiritual condition.

The events advertised in this Christmas brochure are a mixture of church services and pure entertainment. For example, the "Experience Christmas" events ad highlights a special guest musician, who was a reality television talent competition runner-up, and who plays an electric violin, the silhouette of which is illuminated with neon lights. Another event on the brochure, "drive through Christmas lights," is described as a "mile of spectacular lights." At the very least, these events provide religious customers an opportunity for church sanctioned, clean[52] family fun—enjoyable activities for insiders who already attend, and perhaps may want to invite their friends. Lakeview also holds a candlelight service, which focuses on the more spiritual aspects of a church worship service, but even this is promoted as "powerful" worship (the use of

the word "powerful" here is included as a part of the advertising hype, suggesting the worship service will be an intense spiritual experience.

Figure 20:

Making Spirits Bright Christmas Event Ad

The clever marketing slogan "making spirits bright," and the Christmas events it advertises, appeal to the desire for more. The self-interested pursuit of "more" was observed in American culture back at least as far as the time of Tocqueville. In the mid-1800s, during at time of growing industrialism and material wealth, Tocqueville observed a restlessness in the population, always in pursuit of more:

> In America I saw the freest and most enlightened men placed in the happiest condition
> that exists in the world; [yet] it seemed to me that a sort of cloud habitually covered their
> features; they appeared to me grave and almost sad even in their pleasures. The principal

reason for this is that… [they] dream constantly of the goods they do not have. It is a strange thing to see with what sort of feverish ardor Americans pursue well-being and how they show themselves constantly tormented by a vague fear of not having chosen the shortest route that can lead to it. (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 511).

The desire for increased "well-being" did not die out in the 1800s. More recently, David Brooks observed a similar passion among the American middle class in his book, *On Paradise Drive*. He ascribes the relentless drive for more as stemming from a two-edged "hunger of hope"—which simultaneously breeds optimism, but also stirs an unfulfilled pursuit of an unattainable something more:

> …that deep in middle-American life, even in the most placid-seeming suburb, there is an unquenchable longing and hope, and it is in committing to far-off dreams that we fight the insularity and the trivialization that threaten to swallow us up every day…. What motivates Americans to work so hard and move about so feverishly? We are motivated by the Paradise Spell, by the feeling that there is some glorious destiny just ahead. (Brooks, 2004, p. 280-281).

The numerous personal development workshops are the CI church's prescription for this restlessness.

Another typical reason given for the emphasis on event attendance is for spiritual encouragement. Protestant Christians often talk about the need for reassurance, or how their church provides inspiration for them, but often with little reflection on what it means. Encouragement is very often used to mean "support," in particular an invigoration for their spiritual journey in the midst of temptations, and struggles to live out their beliefs. Christy from Eternal Rock explained, "… that's the biggest part being together in a body of believers is [the]

encouragement and support and how it affects [me]." One older Lakeview interviewee, Helen, described the boost she received from church as being similar to birds honking to each other in flight, and like getting a pinch or a poke in the rear end:

I've already said one time that coming to church is… like getting a goose. So, we're kind of flying along, we start lagging or losing altitude, and we come [to church] and we get a goose and "Oh, we're up again…" just that regular reminder of what is true and what is important. It's—and, unfortunately, it's too much [of the attitude], "What am I receiving that's gonna keep me going?" rather than just coming to be worshipping.

Here, the reasons for coming to church are more about the attendee "receiving" and consuming what the church has to offer (in this case, encouragement) to help them get through the week.

Multiple interviewees described their reasons for attending their church were to get help and support, and attending because the sermons gave them something personal for them to reflect upon. They regularly mentioned the support it gave them to face the world outside of church, and assistance with continuing to live morally. As Ashley from Pathway church said, "It just helps get you back on track, so to speak… because the world is so worldly… and then sometimes you don't stay on track, morally on track… It just helps remind you about the path you should be on…."[53]

Of course, it is common for people to be motivated by what they can "get from" almost anything they pursue in life, so why should church be any different? Both CI and CO churches represent a struggle and response to the onset of individualism, and the challenges it presents to the presumed purpose of the church—the worship of God. Several interviewees from CI churches described their own struggle over going to church to worship God or to meet their own

needs. Helen also mentioned how she knew the reason why she *should* be going to church—people should go just to "be worshipping." At the same time, Helen explained the temptation was to attend just to enjoy the music and message:

> They say that church is too much entertainment where [people leave saying], "Well, what rating do you give the sermon today? Was it entertaining enough?" My gosh, we're there to worship…. But that's kind of the deal—that he is at the center, not how is the church making me feel.

> Even among CI members, there is a recognition the purpose of church is the worship of God. However, there is also a mixture of motives, and the desire of attendees to gain support and encouragement—which these churches provide through worship services and other events.

Enchanted Events

CI churches must constantly attract attendees back within church walls week after week. To make church events appealing, enchantment and spectacle are key. George Ritzer argued capitalism needed "cathedrals of consumption" in order to fuel ongoing hyper-consumption (defined as an all-consuming passion to consume), (2010, p. 7). Cathedrals of consumption are shopping destinations with an irresistible, almost religious attraction. They include secular structures such as shopping malls, which have been constructed to appear like churches, generating a religious awe inspiring further consumption (Ritzer, 2010, pp. 7-9, 10-12, 22). Ritzer described the need for these destinations to be enchanted, stating, "To attract consumers, such cathedrals of consumption need to offer, or at least appear to offer, increasingly magical, fantastic, and enchanted settings in which to consume" (2010, p. 7).

In addition to enchanted locations, Ritzer used the term "spectacle" to describe extravagant, enchanted events. The "spectacle" he defines as a "dramatic public display,"

(Ritzer, 2010, p. 96), which serves to "enchant" an otherwise secular action. The spectacle is the aspect of the event put on display, which helps provide the enchantment necessary to keep the interest of customers, and get them to enter through shop doors. "The cathedrals of consumption must be continually re-enchanted if they are to maintain their ability to attract a sufficient number of consumers. Without large numbers of consumers, the mechanisms oriented to control and exploitation will not yield the desired profits" (Ritzer, 2010, p. 95-96).

Ritzer also observed shopping malls and other consumption destinations were at first inspired by religious cathedrals in their capacity to generate awe and sacredness, but the influence of religious forms upon capitalism eventually reversed direction. Now religious spaces have come to be inspired and influenced by these enchanted shopping destinations (Ritzer, 2010, p. 22). Shops, stores, and malls have imitated churches to imbue sacralization to the secular act of consumption (Ritzer, 2010, pp. 7-22); see also Schmidt, 1995, pp. 159-169; and Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, Jr., 1989, pp. 8-10). As Peter Corrigan noted regarding the time when department stores were popular, "It is not an exaggeration to see department stores as similar to cathedrals: they attracted people to worship at the temple of consumption" (1997, p. 56). Since the height of department store popularity, the direction of influence has reversed, and churches have begun imitating secular stores, concerts, and conferences to attain a newly enchanted spectacle—in order to draw consumers back within church walls. This mutual influence of enchantment practices has blurred the distinction between sacred and secular cathedrals of consumption. "We can bring this discussion full-circle by pointing out that although the cathedrals of consumption have a quasi-religious character, religion has begun to emulate those cathedrals and, more generally, to become more oriented to 'Christotainment.'" (Ritzer, 2010, p.

22). Ritzer's term reflects the sacralization of the consumption of fun, a church sanctioned version of secular desire fulfillment.

Larger megachurches, with more resources at their disposal (and a greater need for monetary support), provide an illustrative ideal type of CI enchantment. The enchanted productions at these churches would not look out of place at Disneyland. For example, Lakeview church held a summer children's conference called "Welcome to the Jungle," with 20 foot high faux-rock tiger emblazoned monoliths overtaking the church entrance.

Figure 21:

Welcome to the Jungle Children's Conference Entrance

These monoliths erected at Lakeview, and their aforementioned Christmas events (and accompanying advertising brochures) are examples of enchantment. These enchanted events are presented and described with language designed to appeal to CI members' desire for enriching experiences and exciting entertainment (Wade, 2016, pp. 669-670; Sargeant, 2000, p. 31; Ritzer, 2010, pp. 159-160).

Enchanted events at churches are made to seem powerful or magical, in their ability to fulfill a desire, or provide a better, more exciting life. Conferences and special events are described in church materials using promotional language such as "unforgettable," or "take your hope into the stratosphere," echoing the "spectacular" language of centers of consumption described by Ritzer (2010, pp. 96-102). All of these descriptors are designed to heighten the anticipation of the experience, which is another enchanting technique. For example, Spirit Church included a countdown timer on their website showing how much time remained before their next service event, increasing anticipation.

CI churches must enchant their buildings, and generate anticipation for their events in order to compete with other cultural forms of recreation. With all of the activities available within suburban middle-class culture, these churches risk losing religious customers to consumerism in general—any activity with more attraction or enticement. (For example, the Christian Comedy nights offered at some of these churches must compete with every other comedy venue in the area). Even though Protestant churches are able to offer Christian spirituality, which is unique and different from secular events, CI churches choose to offer events designed for fun, enjoyment, or (spiritual and non-spiritual) personal growth. They have chosen to offer events under a spiritual umbrella (and held inside the church), but many of the events promoted in this way are not inherently spiritual in nature. These events are promoted for their enjoyment, not necessarily for their spiritual content. CI churches are thus enchanting their events for a different reason—in order to draw religious customers back inside the church on a weekly basis.

The Cultural Relevance of Self-Improvement

A large number of the events offered at CI churches are in some way a form of personal improvement. This does not mean there are no opportunities for spiritual development, which we might expect at a church—those events are offered as well. However, many of the events offered at these churches are not presented as desirable for their spiritual development component, but instead are designed for social, psychological, relational, financial, or some other form of helping the individual become a better version of themselves (Scott, 2010, p. 219; Bielo, 2017, p. 20). Lakeview church summed up their call to potential volunteers by appealing to the desire for relationships and improvement: "Become part of an authentic community while building friendships and experiencing spiritual and personal growth with people in similar life stages. Connect with God and others through events, programs, small groups and more!" (campuscity.lakeviewonline.com/volunteer). Pathway church offered this appeal: "Attend Church—You can't do this alone! Going to church is the primary way you will grow in your faith. You will meet other believers, develop friendships and find community that will support you on this new journey in life." (Pathwaychurch.net/ministry/discipleship). Stormy from Eternal Rock specifically appreciated the "how to" classes her church was offering. Her worldview does not affirm the church taking care of the physical needs of those who might visit, but instead affirms helping people "figure things out" through classes to help them learn to help and improve themselves:

> …the church's duty is guidance. Not so much the physical giving things, but more of a
> like, how can we help you figure things out? Like advice and guidance. One of the things
> that we're getting ready to do is the Summer One, how to [workshops]; After the kid's
> camp thing, there's going to be all these different classes and services [for adults]. I think

that's so awesome…. There's all these people providing services and teaching classes, and stuff like that. I'm signed up to do one.

The programming schedule at CI churches gives them the appearance of a convention or conference provider, with multiple ongoing self-help seminars. These include the ubiquitous "Financial Peace University," from Dave Ramsey, Enneagram personality inventory workshops, and multiple marriage enrichment workshops. The pastor's Sunday morning sermon takes the role of a keynote motivational speaker. The church's weekly calendar then resembles a conference on personal improvement, which re-occurs every week, and continues year after year. This appeals to those who are looking for opportunities to become the "best version of themselves," or adhere to the mantra, "live your best life."

Through self-improvement content and the adaptation of conference style workshops these churches pursue relevance with their intended audience of consumer Christians and seekers. In the context of American culture of hyper-consumption (Ritzer, 2010, p. 30), these Protestant churches have adapted their programs to appeal to those who have incorporated cultural values into their religious worldview. What religious studies professor Maren Freudenberg said was an "apt description of the nondenominational evangelical megachurch," could be applied to any CI congregation, "which propagates a consumer-oriented, feel-good individualism based on choice and entertainment" (2015, p. 298). Appealing to the desire for personal development is one way these churches remain relevant to their constituency and the culture, and simultaneously provide resources to satisfy the desires of church insiders.

Community Oriented: Social Justice Activism

Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* argued "the most consistent predictor of giving time and money is involvement in community life" (2000, p. 119). However, with regard to neighborhood service, he concluded it was more of a *secular* practice than a *religious* one:

> …involvement in secular organizations is closely associated with participation with community projects, while involvement in religious organizations is not. People active in religious organizations volunteer for ushering in church or visiting shut-in parishioners, whereas people active in secular organizations are most likely to work on cleaning up the local playground. (Putnam, 2000, p. 119).

> Putnam's observation "Most evangelical volunteering… supports the religious life of the congregation itself" (2000, p. 78), accurately describes the volunteerism I observed among CI churches. However, his conclusion related to participation in community projects not being closely associated with religious organizations does not fit with my observations among CO churches.[54] These churches invest time, attention and money in social justice activism and neighborhood improvements.

CO churches appeal to a different kind of Protestant—the *socially conscious* Christian, who values social justice activism. Their leadership and members have a conscious awareness of local (and global) issues. Social justice activities and acts of compassion are included in worship services, in preaching, in small groups, on their websites, and are expressly declared in the vision and identity statements of these churches. For example:

- Bethany Community Church provides money and volunteers for a local youth mentoring organization.

- Pinecrest church sends volunteers to cook meals and eat with the women of a local transitional program for recovery from addiction.

- The Upper Room church actively participates in the local chapter of the Poor People's Campaign, and hosts anti-racism workshops for the community.

- Hand of God church annually spends a day cleaning up the playgrounds and property of local schools before the start of the school year.

Members of these churches are regularly reminded the church exists in part for the betterment of those in their neighborhood—specifically, the poor and marginalized. These churches consider themselves to be in solidarity with the people of their surrounding area, especially the less fortunate. Several of these churches use the labels of "marginalized" and "the poor" in their website descriptions of those whom they seek to serve. They identify with the "misfits" of society. The following examples illustrate how several CO churches include connection with the poor and marginalized in their church identity:

- ValleyView Denominational church describes its mission as connecting to God, people, and the "marginalized." (valleyviewchurchonline.com).

- Pinecrest church website declares their self-identification, saying "we see ourselves in the marginalized," (pinecrest.org).

- Both Savior's Grace and Fingerprint churches have installed showers for the homeless to use in their buildings.

- The name for Galilee Shores church comes from the Christian scriptures location where Jesus strikes up a conversation with one of the marginalized of Israel at the time, a Samaritan woman (John 4:4-26), thus connecting the marginalized with the identity of their church.

In addition, Hand of God church has supported several social justice ministries—most of which were started by laypersons who learned of societal needs, and sought to address them. One

of their members started a foster care organization, which began in their city and has since expanded statewide. It began from the awareness of a church member who learned of an increasing number of homeless children and the need for foster care in their city. Another member of Hand of God church heard there was a large number of young girls being trafficked for sex in their city, and decided to get involved. In conjunction with the local police, he started a program where volunteers interact on the Internet with men who are seeking young girls for prostitution, and confront them before they have a chance to make contact. They inform the men their information will be passed on to the police. These church members have created a culture of addressing needs in the downtown area of their city.

The connection between the neighborhood and social justice was clearly articulated by those who regularly attend CO churches. They identified social justice as an important urban neighborhood concern, and have recognized the importance of getting involved.

Anti-Individualism and Its Struggle

The answer to the question, "am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9), is a resounding "yes," for CO churches. Their values of compassion and social justice involvement are inherently "others" focused. As such, they frequently take an explicit anti-individualist expression. CO attendees expressed an awareness of the internal struggle between pursuits for self-benefit versus those for the benefit of others. They appear to have made a conscious effort to put social justice involvement ahead of their own individual desires.

Evan from Savior's Grace church talked directly about his own personal struggle with self-focus versus involvement with social justice work. For him, it was an active struggle, almost as if he were fighting internally with himself, with some aspects of his personality pulling him toward self-fulfillment, and other values pulling him in the direction of concern for others.

This echoes an interview from *Habits of the Heart*, where "Brian Palmer" related his own struggle with the success aspect of a me-first culture. His struggle led him to a change of values, believing the pursuit of individual success was a possible contributing factor to his divorce: "Perhaps it was success. Perhaps it was fear of failure, but I was extremely success-oriented, to the point where everything would be sacrificed for the job, the career, the company. I said bullshit. That ain't the way it should be" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 5). In addition, this struggle represents a tension between bridging and bonding capital from Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Bridging capital is associated with expanding a person's social network beyond immediate family relationships, while bonding capital is associated with intensifying relationships within existing close relationships (Putnam, 2000, pp. 22-24). These two types of capital illustrate the internal conflict between prioritizing one's own immediate social network (of self and family), and building ties between different types of social networks extending beyond one's inner circle.

Even though some expressed this internal struggle, several other CO members had settled the issue in their minds, and could clearly articulate their own values of anti-individualism and focus on concern for others. For example, Pastor Randy of The Upper Room church explained his opposition, rejecting individualism as "idolatry," and calling it one of the "unholy trinity" of American religious life (along with consumerism, and nationalism). His language may be extreme, but it shows he has made a clear choice to live in opposition to these dominant cultural values—and was actively seeking to serve the marginalized through his church role.

Outward Compassionate Action. One of the ways in which the insider/outsider distinction can be observed is through a church's involvement in compassionate action. Neighborhood involvement and activism rely on volunteers giving time to serve others. This is an important priority explicitly stated by CO churches, to be working outside of their church

walls serving their city with compassion. Evan at Savior's Grace described his outsider-focused church culture this way:

> Yes, we come here to talk about how God's at work, but how are you participating in your community? I think "missional" is a huge word that I think of—Not just like "us versus them…." mentality of… you go out there just to bring them back here, but [instead], "how do you go out into the community and participate in people's lives in a caring and loving way?" Without really any ulterior motives… but that kind of, out there and staying there, and if they'd come here [to church], great.

Evan recognized some churches reach out to their neighbors with the intention of bringing people inside the walls of the church, adding to the growth of the congregation. However, his interest is getting "out there and staying there," and caring for neighbors, whether or not they are willing to come inside the church walls. Wayne remarked on their motivation for going out to serve the city without expecting anything back:

> It's this selfless act of, "I'm just going to give and care for people that isn't me [sic]." I don't know how many churches and how many members within churches say, "I will give money when I know for a fact it's not going to do anything to benefit me."

CO churches acknowledge this approach may not add to the growth of the church. Bethany Community showed less concern with getting people to come inside the church—and less interest in them as individual souls to be "won." Their purpose statement offers "a different vision," highlighting its contrast to a typical business mission statement. The church leadership expressed the tension between growing a church and caring for a metropolitan area in the phrase, "shaping a city versus building a church" (bethanycommunity.org). They challenged the business model methodology by asking a different question in their statement: "What would Church look

like if, instead of asking, 'What's our vision for our church?' we asked, 'What's God's vision for Pine Grove, California?'" Because "going outside" to exhibit compassionate action is such an important value, Bethany Community church included a description of it in their core values:

> The expression and end of both personal and communal transformation—the whole point of this church community—is to engage culture with love, mercy, and justice in the name of Jesus. Our mission is to make the world a better place. Our end-game is to bring Kingdom realities to bear *on our neighborhoods* and our world. Because *compassion is core to our purpose*, we seek to be a church community *that goes to the people*. We want to reach people by loving people. (Bethanycommunity.org, emphasis added).

This type of church reveals their outward orientation through their outreach to people. For these churches, their neighbors hold a higher priority in terms of their investment of time, activities, and resources, than do the members of the congregation itself. It must be recognized these churches are still providing weekly worship services, Bible studies, and small groups for those who attend and are regularly inside church walls. Yet when it comes to other activities beyond weekly worship services, their focus is external. In addition, the content of the sermons and at small group meetings very often directs the attention of participants back toward the church's outreach in the surrounding area. The members of CO churches believe this is the right thing to do. Rhonda from The Upper Room church justified the outward focus by comparing it to the outsider focus exemplified by Jesus in the Christian scriptures, saying, "He was always a lot harder on the very religious community than those who were outside of it."

Activism, Involvement in Issues

The leaders and the members of CO congregations believe part of the activity of the church is to be involved in social change through political activism. In fact, CO churches, in

contrast to CI churches, discuss politics as an important part of their church interests. There were no political discussions taking place in CI churches—instead, they pursue a less controversial approach to cultural relevance. (Individual attendees did mention their politically conservative views in interviews).

CO churches, however, not only blog and discuss social justice issues on their websites, but also preach sermons on activism, and mention politics in general from the pulpit. At Galilee Shores, a CO church, the lead pastor declared to the congregation, "the church is always political" (announcements in service, Feb. 5, 2017). In the weeks following the 2016 U.S. presidential election of Donald Trump, the same senior pastor asked the congregation whether or not they felt like the changes brought on by the election were strange to them, or causing anxiety. Also at Galilee Shores, the leadership organized a multi-congregational service with several African-American and urban inner-city pastors, as a sign of Christian unity and solidarity when racial tensions were reaching high visibility in the news media.

Several other CO churches also discussed racial issues as part of their worship services. Members from Hand of God church, traveled to the U.S./Mexico border to "show hospitality and seek justice for those seeking asylum in the U.S." (blog.handofgodchurch.com). Activism and involvement in political issues was considered an appropriate Christian response to injustice at these churches.

Examples of Activism. Almost all churches are involved in helping the less fortunate in some way. Homeless ministries or monetary support of homeless ministries, and food banks/pantries are present in many Protestant churches, regardless of type. However, there is a difference of degree with regard to the depth of involvement and the variety of social justice activities performed by CO churches. A partial list of CO social justice involvement includes:

providing food and shelter the homeless (one church provides van rides to church, and showers); refugee work; anti-sex trafficking (one church is intensely involved, addressing the demand-side by confronting men searching for sex online); antiracism workshops; fair-trade goods for sale, offering a sustainable marketplace; involvement in the Poor People's campaign; partnering with social workers as advocates; discussing and raising awareness of gentrification; teaching on feminism; involvement in immigration, assisting migrants, involvement in the sanctuary movement; teaching on and addressing poverty; workshops on sustainability and the environment; community gardens; support for foster care and adoption; at-risk youth mentor programs, and work with juvenile offenders; mobile skateboarding ministry in low income areas; working with those with disabilities, and providing support for their families; prison care ministries; support for victims of abuse; providing resources for women in transitional situations; food banks.

CO churches actively pursue addressing injustice and inequality in their neighborhoods at a level of intensity beyond the kind of service projects involving mostly landscaping and painting. Being involved in social justice activities is not something these churches do merely because they "should." Activism is part of the identity of what it means to be involved in the community, and their social justice work is focused externally—outside of the church.

Consumer Individualists and Social Justice

In contrast, discussions and consciousness of systemic social justice issues are all but absent in church publications of CI churches. I could find no events in these churches explicitly addressing these issues. There was virtually no mention[55] of inequality, racism, equity, or women's rights in any CI church handout or on their websites. However, since it was a direct

question I asked as a part of my interviews, several CI interviewees shared their thoughts on inequality and justice concerns.

These church members tended to engage with issues of justice and inequality from an individualist perspective. Only one interviewee from these churches explicitly acknowledged systemic or societal factors related to poverty. There was a shared view the issues of poverty and inequality should be addressed on an individual level, by poor persons themselves, who should work harder to get out of poverty.[56] Wealth was viewed as resulting from personal achievement and hard work, and poverty was seen as a consequence of personal failure or laziness. This point of view was explained by Ashley from Pathway church:

> They [kids in school] are being taught… everybody should pool all their money together, the ones that work super, super hard and work their hineys off, and the ones who have brought it [wealth] down in their family history… I mean if you go back [in history] to kings… [wealth] was kind of given to them… But technically, even then probably, the one who was the king probably was a really good warrior, and they made him king, and then his family just prospered from it. But he worked hard…. But I don't think the kids are being taught that. I think they are being taught… it is just unfair that there is [sic] really really rich people. And that you are poor because there is no way you can get there. But there is! There are lots of ways.

The belief the poor should not receive handouts or welfare, and instead they should "work for it," was a repeated theme among these interviewees. Alexandra from Lakeview repeated this phrase, and went as far as to critique the welfare system as diminishing any motivation to work for a living:

Like, for instance, I was listening to the news the other day. There was a black gentleman saying… the government needs to help us and we need to get this money from the government. Why not work for it? Why can't you work for it? You're an able-bodied person. Work for it. People are more addicted to the government… There's no separation between people and the government because the government is doing everything for you. I don't like that. You've got to work like everybody else has to work. Nobody gets a handout.

Other interviewees from different CI churches shared similar sentiments. Many expressed the opinion the church or the government *as organizations should not* be involved in alleviating poverty or addressing these concerns—in the view of many CI attendees, these conditions were arrived at by individuals, and should be alleviated by individuals—they were not the concern of organizations or society at large.[57] From their perspective, social justice in the church is a distraction from the focus of Christian worship.

In general, the consensus of CI interviewees on social justice topics was:

- Poverty is not systemic, it is the responsibility of the individual.

- Inequality and poverty should not be dealt with through legislation or at the organizational level—it should be addressed at the individual level.

- Struggling individuals should not be given "handouts," but instead should "work for it" to gain more wealth.

- Education should be pursued, and stratification stemming from education (or lack thereof) was acceptable.

There was a general acknowledgement inequality was a problem (together with a general scorn for racism). However, few from these churches verbalized any connection to systemic

issues. There was a general dislike of government stepping in, or a social gospel approach on the part of churches or denominations. Although few gave specifics, there was a sense problems like these were to be handled by individuals.

The Cultural Relevance of Fighting Injustice

Whereas CI churches attempt to be culturally relevant through events providing personal improvement for individuals, CO churches seek cultural relevance through activism and attending to social justice issues. The community oriented show interest in those things of concern to society as a whole—social issues.

Direct involvement addressing the injustices of society was one of the aspects of CO churches young adults found appealing. In fact, Melissa and Nate from Galilee Shores church reported their friends had been "falling away" from churches—specifically those ignoring social justice and the associated politics. Melissa explained, "It's our friends' reactions to the way the church and/or Christians are responding to social issues. Especially gay marriage, even immigration… I would say social issues might be the main reason [people are falling away]." If the church is not relevant in terms of its political position on social justice and political issues, these (previously church going) young adults will disassociate from the organizational church. In a sense, CO churches are attempting to stay relevant with this audience of young adults who value social justice activism and a more liberal political stance. This church type appeals to those who have rejected the association of Christianity with the Republican party and political conservatives.

Social justice work was repeatedly included by CO leadership and laypersons as an essential element of the role church plays in the world. In interviews and church documents, there were repeated references to what the church "should" be. For Nate and Melissa, if their

church was not involved in social justice issues in their neighborhoods, it would mean something was missing from their church (quoting Melissa):

> The church should never neglect the outsiders. That's the most important thing. I think that's [what I meant] when I was talking about [a] "collection of people; not by choice." The church has a duty to make the space for, pray for, bless, serve people who don't have, who are under-served or overlooked, don't have a place in society, or a home, or a voice, or whatever it is. If I went to a church and I felt like that wasn't happening, I would feel like the church was wrong or missing a mark.

> This aspect of social justice involvement was one of the identifying marks of CO churches. In their view, the church should be a positive force in the world, which means being involved in political activism and meeting physical needs.

Chapter 6: Religious Forms in a Capitalist Culture

The primary relationship between Consumer Individualist and Community Oriented churches is one of struggle. Each church type wrestles to position itself within the secular culture in which they are immersed. Each type makes decisions regarding the degree of non-religious influences to adopt in order to be accepted among those inside and outside of Protestant circles. Many of these decisions are centered around responses to pervading capitalist values.

CI attendees did not speak of their church's relationship to the broader culture of consumption. There was a sense their choices to adopt secular elements were not unusual, and were accepted without much hesitation. These churches were merely following similar patterns as were found in the dominant narrative. In contrast, CO attendees and leaders expressed a conscious awareness of the struggle they and their churches experienced in relation to capitalist influences. Pastor James of Savior's Grace church explained:

I was raised in a consumeristic culture where capitalism is assumed and accepted as a moral good, in distinction… to socialism, communism, which is evil…. That's how I grew up. Late-stage capitalism, consumerism, materialism is sort of the water I swim in. It is always impacting me directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, deeply. I am trying to, by engendering different habits, rhythms and practices, I am trying to switch stories from the story of capitalism.

Nikki from Hand of God church also recognized the unconscious effects, and offered her explanation for why some churches may be influenced by these forces but do not often discuss them: "Consumerism is this large part of culture… it seems… like it's almost absorbed into church culture, it's just become almost unreflective, it's just assumed." There was an apparent divide between church types—some having unconsciously adopted materialist and capitalist

influences, and some who were pushing back against it, by bringing these matters to a conscious level, and attempting to move their churches in a different direction.

However, it is at this point that the distinctions between these two types are not as clear. Although interviewees and websites from each type tended to use discrete language with very little overlap, expressing value sets sharing little in common, churches of *both* types exist in a context of late capitalism. CI churches have absorbed much from their surroundings, but even CO churches have struggled to maintain their distinctiveness—in part because of the ever present power of capitalism, and the ability of consumerism to co-opt even active resistance, turning everything into a commodity. The rest of this chapter will explore how each type attempts to maintain their uniqueness, and in what ways they end up sharing more in common with the other type—especially as it relates to capitalist consumer influences.

Protestantism and Market Competition

Secularization is a movement away from other-worldly concerns toward worldly ones, or "the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols" (Berger, 1967/2011, p. 135). In addition to the declining influence of religion, there is a second process at work, the sacralization of the secular (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, Jr., 1989, p. 8). Sacralization represents a blurring of the sacred and secular realms, particularly manifest in areas such as consumption (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, Jr., 1989, p. 8).

Sociologists have attempted to understand religious groups immersed in consumer capitalism by analyzing church practices in terms marketplace economics performed by rational actors. Given the processes of secularization and sacralization, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark (2005) applied the principles of Rational Choice Theory to religion, specifically to the history of

Protestantism in the United States. They used this framework as an integrative concept to understand multi-faceted religious actions under a single theoretical umbrella. According to Finke and Stark (and other proponents of Rational Choice Theory), the same tenets of the business sector apply to other types of organizations. Thus, churches exist within a religious marketplace, where they supply products to meet consumer demand (Finke & Stark, 2005). From this perspective, congregations operate in a way similar to corporations, and compete with each other in the religious realm. "Religious organizations are firms dedicated to the production of religious value. Congregations are franchises led by entrepreneurial salespeople (ministers), who create value for customers" (Sherkat & Ellison, 1999, p. 379). In addition, the principles of supply-side and demand-side economics are applied to church practices and the preferences of the congregation membership:

> A "seller" (whether of automobiles or absolution) cannot long survive without the steady support of "buyers" (whether money-paying customers, dues-paying members…). Consumer preferences thus shape the content of religious commodities and the structure of the institutions that provide them…. In competitive environments, religions have little choice but to abandon inefficient modes of production and unpopular products in favor of more attractive and profitable alternatives. (Iannaccone, 1995, p. 77).

From this theoretical perspective, church behaviors and structures result from competition within the religious landscape. CI churches in particular exemplify this participation in this realm. However, they also have made cultural adaptations in order to draw in customers by emulating the practices of the *entertainment* and *business* sectors as well as the religious one.

At the same time, CO churches compete as well, but do so in their own unique way. The CO type congregations put themselves in a position of resisting the CI church model. Although

they attempt to avoid marketplace practices, CO churches still end up competing for religious "customers." They are unable to completely escape the influence of capitalism. CO churches (following the principles of Rational Choice theory), must still attract religious consumers and lure them away from the powerful strategies adopted by other (CI) churches. To retain their members, the CO churches have enacted an alternative strategy, which purposefully shuns the emphases on entertainment and self-development. Instead, they have developed a substitute theological value base, focusing upon ideals important to a different kind of Protestant. In this way, they appeal to those who desire to be in relationship with their (non-religious) neighbors, and who are interested in the social justice issues of concern in their local area.

The Interaction Between Protestant Teachings and Capitalism

A tension develops when churches approach their ministries from a market perspective. It centers around a disconnect between theological teachings and the principles inherent in capitalist culture. In particular, church teachings counter the pursuit of materialism and excess wealth (e.g. Matthew 6:25; Luke 3:14; John 2:24-15; 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5). Max Weber described the interaction between Christian instruction and economic development in *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber's interest was the effects of a religious ethic upon believers, and how the resulting collective behaviors impacted the development of industrial capitalism. In a footnote, he summarized "the point of this entire essay":

> …a religion-anchored ethic, and the behavior called forth by it, places completely
> specific, and… highly effective *psychological rewards*… upon this behavior… Only to
> the extent that these rewards constitute an effective influence upon the believer's action
> (and they are often primarily influential—and this is the central point—in a significantly
> different *direction* from the influence of the theological *teachings*, for they also are only

"teachings") do they acquire an independent… directional impact upon the organization

of life… (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 295, footnote 12, author's emphasis).

Weber emphasized the psychological rewards produced by the Protestant Ethic and how

they shaped behavior in a different direction from Christian theological teachings. Weber further

articulated the struggle between a Biblically-inspired asceticism and the cultural influences of

consumerism by showing how principles taught by Puritan Pastor Baxter could not overcome the

iron cage of concern for material goods (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 177). One hundred years later,

Protestant groups are still attempting to respond to the cultural influences of capitalism.

However, the increased influence of consumerism (Schor, 1999, pp. 23-24, 84; see also:

Freudenberg, 2015, p. 312; McDannell, 1995, pp. 4-8; Miller, 2003, p. 88; Twitchell, 1999, pp.

69-71) has reshaped the interaction with Christian theological teachings, and generated a

different directional impact upon church practice. Whereas Weber described the impact of a

religious ethic upon capitalism, consumerism has now reshaped Protestant teachings and worship

practices in a new way. Blurring the distinction between the sacred and the profane, Protestant

teachings in CI churches have sacralized consumerism; "Although consumption historically has

often been opposed by institutional religious teachings… it has gained sacred status in our

consumption-oriented and hedonistic society" (Belk, Wallendorf & Sherry, Jr., 1989, p. 9).

Churches are in a position of moving either in the direction of providing exciting and

entertaining worship products to be consumed, or resisting individualism by attempting to

replace it with social services in the community. In other words, Protestant churches have

developed two patterned types of responses to the culture immersed in capitalism—either

acceptance and integration of consumerism into the religion, or resistance through alternative

expressions. Either way, as Weber observed, there are still powerful psychological rewards influencing their behavior.

Consumer Individualist Adoption of Business Models and Techniques

CI churches are the ideal type of capitalist church—their values mirror those of businesses more than any other model. These churches follow closely the "playbook" of corporate America. They have adopted the same desire for numerical increase found in publicly traded companies on Wall Street. Specifically, they follow the strategies companies use to advertise their products and grow their market share.

Although this adoption of these methods appears to be in conflict with the purposes and practices of Protestant churches, there are reasons for this unlikely association. In Freudenberg's study of Evangelical megachurches (and their counter movements), she argued there is a connection between the adoption of neoliberal practices and their appeal to religious participants immersed in a culture of consumption:

> The nondenominational evangelical megachurch remakes church into a private religious company that… creates a consumerism-oriented membership base…. The approach clearly resonates with the broader entertainment and consumer culture that the modern Western individual finds him- or herself immersed in. This model of religious organizing and practice is heavily criticized for its entrepreneurial, consumerism-focused, and profit-centered neoliberal rationality from different groups in the American religious landscape. (Freudenberg, 2015, p. 302).

CI churches utilize this association in their attempts to lower barriers imposed by traditional church methods, and utilizing methods more familiar to those raised in a consumer

culture. By doing so, they consciously and unconsciously participate in the dominant cultural standards—those of corporate businesses.

Business Metaphor

The spread of the mindset and practices of market capitalism to organizations outside of the economic realm is nothing new. American social philosopher John Dewey described the advent of "the business mind," which he declared had taken over American culture and had "determined the tone of society at large" by the 1930s (Dewey, 1999, p. 21). Dewey proposed American culture had developed "a mental and moral corporateness[58] for which history affords no parallel. Our indigenous heroes are the Fords and Edisons who typify this mind to the public" (Dewey, 1999, p. 21). The application of this mindset to churches has been noted by writers in sociology and religious studies, such as the marketing and branding of churches like corporations (e.g. Maddox, 2012; Twitchell, 2004; Usunier & Stoltz, 2014).

One particular aspect where CI churches are mirroring the commercial world is through their use of language to describe their activities. The vocabulary presenting events, roles, and job descriptions reflects the acceptance of a business metaphor applied to church work. The words used by the leadership and staff in church publications (and by participants in the congregation themselves) echoes language from the capitalist business literature. For example, CI churches use phrases such as these, (taken from interviews and church websites):

- our market
- we leverage everything
- producing for a target
- vision casting
- part of our DNA

- tipping point

- managerial role

- intentional promotion

- pushing to the next thing

- hitting benchmarks

- startup mindset

- keeping costs low

- mission statement

- success based on numbers

- leadership summit

- a place to connect, network

- make it as a business

- conceive, design, and execute

- maximize sales

- this is what we're about—"we sell hamburgers made like this"

It may be helpful to remember all of these phrases were used in the context of describing church activities. The words used provide a pervasive association, a metaphor where the church is a business, and the pastor is the CEO. For example, Ashley had this idea in her mind when she described her pastor as the "owner" of the church she attends:

We've been here about 19 years, and go to Pathway [church]. We tried some others, but that is where we go. We started going there because my aunt and uncle used to go there. They were very avid, they were there when it started with the owner…? I don't know what you call it, He is a business owner really, but he is the pastor…. Yeah, I think they

are trying to bring that back [conservative moral values], although some are trying to make it as a business, and they are making it ok, too, for everything [morally]. Some churches are a little bit more worldly, so to speak, which isn't helping any.

Ashley's language choice reflects a corporate structure, even though she recognizes business values and Christian morality may be incompatible, and some churches may become a "bit more worldly."

The phrases and quote above reflect church use economic trade language—utility, efficiency, business plans, and promotion. Church activities are selected according to their strategy for success. For example, Pathway church hired a new senior preaching pastor, who was seen as young, hip, and appealing to an audience who may not have a church background. Even his appearance, and his signature dreadlocks hairstyle were seen as a business asset. "Who's this guy with dreadlocks?" remarked staff member Stanley, "We literally leveraged everything. [Our lead pastor] leverages his hair. We leverage everything." Pathway church launched both online and TV broadcasts of his sermons, with Stanley noting "our market is to be [a] missional TV ministry," appealing to the untapped audience of the un-churched.

This kind of language is used to describe the opposite of success as well, though less frequently. Unsuccessful churches are described as "going out of business," which in turn becomes an opportunity for a "merger" or "corporate takeover." Stanley told me this example:

It's the same thing, churches going out of business. We have people approaching us all the time, to take over their church. That's what we did in [our city]. Calvary Chapel over there was going basically, out of business. We came in and we put a campus pastor there, and we video feed the message there. We have a new venue, and we have a different launch point from which the Gospel is going out, and we're taking our DNA to them.

Even relationships are seen as an aspect of the trade to be measured—connections in the congregation are analyzed in terms of their "tipping point," when a visitor moves from having acquaintances to friends in the church. (The Tipping Point references a popular bestselling book by Malcolm Gladwell—it reached the #1 bestseller in the Amazon.com category of "Market Research Business"). Pastors are hired specifically to manage congregational networks, and the first impressions visitors have when they arrive.

Some churches have gone beyond the metaphor to the incorporation of actual businesses directly into their church model. CI churches often include a store or coffee shop on their campus, where Christian books, t-shirts (with recent sermon series titles or slogans on them), and food and beverages are sold. For example, Pathway church posted this job description for a Campus Store Associate for hire on their website:

> We are seeking a part-time Campus Store Associate to assist in the organization and operation of the Pathway Community Church Campus Store…. The Associate will… organize product displays to maximize sales, receive new merchandise, track store inventory, and assist with product vendor research and quotes. This position requires excellent interpersonal skills for interaction with a diverse range of people, including our congregation, other staff members and visitors to the church. Additionally, the successful candidate must be a regular attendee of Pathway services and have a passion for the mission and ministry of our church. (Pathwaychurch.net).

In addition to operating their own stores inside their building, some CI churches have incorporated business training as a part of their workshops and small group gatherings. For example, Borders Community church, holds a 5 week study on business practices, (and associated Biblical foundations):

This five week study… will help you to apply Biblical principles to your work or

business in practical ways. We will be looking at ordering your priorities, planning,

developing and nurturing your team, managing your business finances, sales and much

more. The study is based on [the] book, *Unconventional Business*.

(groups.borderscommunitychurch.com).

To capture the attention of career minded individuals, Lakeview church created a group

meeting specifically for "young professionals." It is promoted as a "high energy program," for

those who are "looking for a place to connect, network, and relax from your work week, Young

Professionals ministry is for you!" (Lakeview Bulletin, July 2017).

Although the language used to describe the activities of CI churches integrates a business

metaphor, value set and worldview, interviewees were aware of a conflict between sacred and

secular worldviews while using this kind of language to describe their church. The conflation

these different values generated some defensiveness or disclaimers and caveats—even as

interviewees freely applied corporate language to portray the practices of their churches. Kyle

from Eternal Rock church described how he saw this encroachment:

I think success in the West is a big part of a good life. You're not successful—are you

doing things right? It even creeps its way into any job, even if it's a religious job. Are you

successful—and that's based on maybe numbers or the amount of people you have

influence over…. I think maybe a majority people wouldn't share my opinion.

Even though Kyle thinks most would not share his view, he acknowledged success is

related to numerical growth, and church practices are not different from business practices. There

are many who attend CI churches who would agree.

Growth Imperative Mindset

The organizational motivation to grow a business or a church is part of the cultural atmosphere of modern capitalism. This desire for numerical gain has been described as the economic "growth imperative" (Antonio & Brulle, 2011, pp. 199-200). It is an underlying value assumption of modern capitalism. "Economic growth has become the secular religion of advancing industrial societies: the source of individual motivation… the ground for the mobilization of society for a common purpose." (Bell, 1996, pp. 237-238). The growth imperative assumes one of the primary goals of a corporate business is to expand—in terms of the size of the organization, its market share, and profits.

> Promoting growth—achieving ever-greater economic wealth and prosperity—may be the most widely shared and robust cause in the world today…. It is not enough to grow. Economies are judged by how rapidly they grow…. Understanding growth and how to keep it up is what modern-day macroeconomics is all about. (Speth, 2008, p. 47).

Australian religious studies professor, Marion Maddox, explained this imperative has been central to some Protestant congregations, which she has labeled "growth churches" (2012). She recognized the increasing overlap between church organizations and corporate ones:

> Growth churches and other businesses share the same spiritual space. Seized by the vision of growth, they share the entrepreneurial spirit, the hierarchical corporate structures in the marketing techniques of entertainment, conversion and branding. Growth churches are the purest demonstration that… capitalism has become the unassailable global religion… In growth church campuses, no less than in advertising offices, consumerism re-enchants the world according to its own lights (Maddox, 2012, p. 155).

The identity of CI churches is intertwined with the desire for numerical increase inspired by global capitalism. In their pursuit of cultural relevance, these churches have appropriated more than just culturally popular musical styles and professional stage production for their worship services. CI churches adopt strategies in order to "capture the market," or continually push to boost their numbers and influence. This philosophy is part of their mission statements, and attendance increase is often highlighted in church publications. The Pathway church website declares, "We want our church body to grow and expand—to gather together in many locations, be full of people who love Jesus…" (Pathway.net). Other websites echo the same values: "We believe healthy things grow…" (Lakeviewonline.com) "Seizing every opportunity, we don't maintain, we multiply…" (countryplazachurch.com). These website quotes provide insight into the expansion mindset shared by these congregations.

There is a continual push to increase numerically in terms of Sunday morning worship attendance, but also in terms of the number of program offerings, involvement in small groups, and volunteer time to help make all of these events happen. In fact, it is an explicit CI strategy to advertise special events to raise their average worship attendance. Staff member Stanley at Pathway Church, explained how big attendance one Sunday creates an upsurge in the attendance the rest of the year, and how this is a part of their growth strategy: "At Easter we had 5700 adults in the building, or something. Well, the tide comes way up, but what we see is it never recedes quite back down as low. So we just continually do these things as a way to push it out there." Part of the plan of this church and others is to continually offer special events as a way to push up the count of people who come through the doors, with the hope many will stay, and the weekly average will rise.

Success for CI churches is viewed in terms of their ability to "raise the tide," and generate the "wow, a fresh thing," reaction. The underlying assumption behind this push to attract more attendees has been absorbed from the surrounding secular consumer culture—specifically the assumption "growth is good"—whether it takes place in a business or a church.

Historical Context of Church Growth. Historically within Protestantism, an emphasis developed out of Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1980s and 1990s called the "Church Growth Movement," inspired by the writings of Donald McGavran and C. Peter Wagner. Their theological philosophy of church ministry was God had the power and desire to "add to their number daily," (Acts 2:47). They believed what was keeping churches from gaining more members was not only spiritual factors, but sociological ones,[59] such as geographic location, social class, social networks, changing demographics in the surrounding community, quality of leadership, and limitations of space (McGavran, 1980; McGavran & Arn, 1973). Books such as McGavran's *Understanding Church Growth* (1980) and Wagner's, *Your Church Can Grow!* (1984) called pastors to remove these barriers to expansion—and many churches took up the challenge, and adopted the philosophy.

Shortly after the rise of the Church Growth Movement, the "Seeker Sensitive" movement arose in the 1990s. Similar to this movement (and perhaps inspired by it), aspiring congregations attempted to appeal to people who were genuinely interested in spirituality, but who were turned off by institutional religion. They sought to "speak the language of our modern culture and encourage non-believers to investigate Christianity at their own pace, free from the traditional trappings of religion that tend to chase [non-believers] away" (Sargeant, 2000, p. 190; see also James, 2018; Lee & Sinitiere, 2009; Roof, 1993; Thumma & Travis, 2007).

The Seeker Sensitive movement was typified by Willow Creek church in suburban Chicago, led by pastor Bill Hybels. He called church leaders to remove cultural barriers preventing non-believers and lapsed believers from feeling comfortable entering a church building. (For example, he encouraged updated music, topical sermons with life application, no pressure to convert, a relaxed atmosphere with casual dress). Willow Creek[60] became one of the largest Protestant megachurches in the United States, but more importantly, it became a model of successful advancement to emulate. Willow Creek made their strategy easy to follow by providing conferences and leadership seminars, as well as books by pastor Hybels. Their resources gave both existing and newly planted churches advice to follow if they wanted their church to expand.

The Church Growth and Seeker Sensitive movements have been influential sources of the acceptance of the capitalist growth imperative within CI churches. My purposes here are not to explain these previous movements, only to recognize the historical presence of an emphasis on numerical increase—which has encouraged expansion within CI churches today.

Growth as Success. Numerical addition of church members is the dominant measure or descriptor of success among CI churches. Church staff and laypersons describe churches with attendance gains as "alive." Hillsong church, which has expanded from Australia to starting churches in the United States, captured this value in a vision statement on their website: "The Church… I see is a Church of influence. A Church so large in size… the city and nation cannot ignore it. A Church growing so quickly that buildings struggle to contain the increase" (hillsong.com/vision).

Numbers are frequently highlighted as the measure of success on church websites by pastoral leadership, and by the attendees themselves. "Well, however they have it setup, it's

working, it's growing," explained Alexandra, a Lakeview volunteer and attendee. She further explained how she appreciated the increasing participant numbers. She also reported her church had a desire to continue accruing, even though they were already large: "I do like… how they want to expand even though they're big. I think [it's] great. If we can get more people in the Kingdom of God, then that's what we're here to do."

In fact, this idea has become so ingrained in CI churches, they hire based on past performance gains. For example, on the Lakeview church website, the credentials of their former youth pastor (who became their Recreation Ministries leader) highlights the following: "He had grown the ministry to include several hundred students and a thriving body of volunteers serving alongside of him" (lakeviewsports.com/our-history.html).

Not only do participants in these churches approve of this mentality, but many of them personally share it—bigger numbers equals success in their own lives. One attendee, Slade, put it this way:

> Am I satisfied? Heck, no. I'm ambitious. I want to grow a business. I've got 20 years experience in the [construction] business and I want to do some really cool things. I showed you pictures of some of my work. I want to go places with this. I'm not satisfied.

The dissatisfaction expressed here is an example of the ambition shared by these churches and their members. Whether an attendee is discussing their own employment or their church, the value expressed is the same—a desire for increase. Indeed, successful gains on the part of the church is what the religious consumers of these churches expect—they expect growth in their own lives and in the church they attend. To not expand numerically or in terms of influence would be failure—personally in the life of the individual, and corporately in the life of the organization.

Franchise for Growth. One of the ways to keep pace with a desire for continual, ongoing growth is to franchise—another technique CI churches have appropriated from the corporate world. These churches have started "branch offices" at different locations. Bernie, a staff member at NewLife Church admitted, "It's hard to compare it, other than a franchise, really." As CI churches expand, they start duplicate congregations in nearby suburbs, using the same name, and often use the same pastors and sermons each week. At times they utilize recorded video or live streaming across locations. Each individual church becomes a "campus," under one label or brand. Instead of "planting," (the older terminology when one church starts another in a different city, and each church becomes separate and autonomous), these churches have chosen to replicate their name and style, having multiple points of operation in the same city. Lakeview is a multi-campus megachurch, which was listed in 2019 as the #7 largest church and the #1 fastest growing church in America (Outreach100.com). They see themselves as "one church with many campuses." (Welcome to Lakeview brochure, Fall 2019). For instance, Lakeview church published their "Dream for 2020," which included adding 3 more locations (to their existing 8), and an additional "Global Online Campus." Energy.church states, "We are one church meeting in nine states and globally online" (Energy.church bulletin handout, Sept. 16, 2018). Through all of this, it is the growth imperative driving these churches to ever greater expansion, accomplished through franchising.

Often these branch locations are within a short distance of each other. Spirit Church has three campuses in different suburban areas of their midwestern metropolis, covering the Northwest, Southwest, and far Western expansions of the suburban sprawl. None of these campuses are more than a 23 minute drive from each other. In addition, they also have two more campuses near West Palm Beach, Florida, and those two campuses are only 13 minutes apart on

the same road. (Two of the eight Lakeview church campuses in the Western United States are only an 8 minute drive apart). In the past, churches may have located near (or even next door) to each other—however, they were often different (competing) denominations, or were unassociated, separate, autonomous churches. What is new here is the use of a fast food model (Ritzer, 2010, pp. 9-10)—one church starting multiple new campuses, all under the same name, the same brand, and often utilizing the same resources. It begs the question, why this "Starbucks style," "one in every strip mall" positioning?

The answer is growth. These churches are following a proven model provided by a formal network organization, which offers resources to help churches hike up numbers quickly. Several CI churches in this study are supported through an organizational network, such as the ARC (Association of Related Churches), which contributes the resources to offset the startup costs of a new church. Luke, a layperson and musician at Country Plaza church provided insight into the motivation for increase in this way:

> Our church follows… the ARC model…. It's the idea… opening something new—It gives a lot more of attention and movement forward than just—I think that's why they didn't just open a huge, ginormous church… but the idea… you're planting yourself at different parts of the community. It just has more momentum that way. So instead of… like how I grew up, if you outgrew your church, you added this huge addition onto it and then you grew it, grew it, grew it….

Instead of adding rooms onto or expanding an existing building in one location, these churches have found (on the advice of the ARC network) starting new churches gives them more momentum and attention. It makes practical marketing sense—how many people will come to a church advertising, "come and see our new room addition," versus how many will come when

told, "come and see the new church starting in your town?" There is more appeal in the latter, as well as more convenience.

To be clear, the language of church "franchising" is not new. Donald Miller included a chapter on the topic in *Reinventing American Protestantism* (1997). There, he describes what he terms "New Paradigm Churches." He uses the franchising language to describe the process by which independent churches came to join existing (Pentecostal/Charismatic) denominations such as Calvary Chapel, Vineyard Christian Fellowship, and Hope Chapel. In his survey analysis, he found emerging pastoral leaders obtain a sense of "calling" to start a new church. Subsequently, these leaders moved to a new city, started an in-home Bible study, and eventually attracted enough people to call themselves a church and acquire a building. According to his data, this often occurs when a fledgling associate pastor steps out from under the mentorship of their senior pastor to start a church within the same denomination and structure. At other times, the pastor begins the church as a separate nondenominational entity, and later the church decides to attach themselves to an existing denomination, or are "adopted" by one.

Even though Miller is describing "new" paradigm churches, the patterns he describes have existed for decades and even centuries, and have been the primary methods by which new churches have been started as part of denominational programs, international missionary work, and how clusters of independent churches joined together to form denominations. (Incidentally, his description is no different than the activity of Paul the Apostle in the Christian scriptures book of Acts). Similar descriptions of the patterns presented by Miller can be found in the writings of the church growth movement dating back to 1973 (McGavran & Arn, 1973, pp. 125-132), and often have been described using the term, "church planting." I do not consider Miller's use of the term "franchising" as an accurate descriptor, considering when these new churches are

started under this pattern, they are independent from other church congregations, and are started under pastoral leadership separate from other congregations (although they may receive support from the "planting" congregation for a time). Typically, a church planted in this manner will take on a new name and new identity separate from any other church congregation. What Miller describes is only "franchising" in the sense every church started within a denominational structure is essentially a "franchise branch" of that denomination. However, this is nothing new.

I am using the term franchising to describe the phenomenon where one church starts multiple congregations but utilizes the same name, identity, and resources (website, teaching resources, and administrative support). What Miller is describing would be akin to McDonalds starting a new restaurant in a new city and calling it "Burger King." The phenomenon I observed more closely resembles corporate business franchising—multiple locations under the same brand. In addition, these multiple campuses are started with a similar motivation as the commercial model, for the express purpose of expansion in a new convenient location.

Advertising: Using Marketing Strategies

Before a visitor even arrives at a CI church, they may have experienced their marketing. Use of advertising methods, slogans, and graphic design is part of the DNA of CI churches. It is true all churches (of either type) use some form of website promotion (posting of upcoming services, etc.), yet CI churches utilize mass media techniques to a greater degree, and through more avenues than other churches. This is no accident. CI church leaders are consciously aware they are trying to appeal to an audience immersed in a media and advertising culture, and this contributes to their efforts to brand the church, in order to draw in their consumer audience (Einstein, 2008).

Advertising is central to the operation of CI churches. Larger churches (with sufficient financial capabilities) hire full time promotional specialists as church staff. One church had posted on their web site a full time job opening at the church for a "digital marketing strategist," to coordinate their online and social media presence. The depth of the integration of advertising methods in these congregations plays out on multiple levels.

Slogans. In particular, CI churches have adopted the use of simple, pithy slogans to promote their message and identity. These phrases are used to communicate their mission and to attract newcomers, re-attract regulars, and reassure their loyalty (Wade & Hynes, 2012, p. 177-178). Several of these churches advertise on local billboards seen by church goers and non-church goers alike.

For example, Pathway church utilized roadway signage and bumper stickers to raise awareness of the church in their local area. Their slogan, "Jesus is real," can be seen on billboards and on car bumpers around town. This slogan is prominently painted on walls around the church, and can be seen on a small mock-up of a billboard in the church office.

Figure 22:

Billboard Mockup at Front Counter of the Church Office

NewLife church presents their slogan, "God is for you," on billboards and have it painted prominently across the windows of the church, visible to all who enter. This short phrase distills the message of the church in an easily memorized, identifiable manner. Attendees are able to grasp the brief proverb, and share it with friends when inviting them. Whether on a billboard, church walls, or just on their website, these churches use these slogans to communicate their vision and brand.

It is important to recognize is not merely flippant advertising. They are part of an overall rational strategy. NewLife Church drew their slogan "God is for you," from their mission statement. As staff member Bernie explained to me:

> We have a mission statement. We want everybody to start in our mission statement. That statement was to lead people to a God who is for them, and help them discover His purpose for their life. That's our mission. That's our message.

Figure 23:

Matching Slogans on Billboard and Sanctuary Windows

(It is interesting to note one of the ways this slogan could be interpreted is the commodification of the deity—God is something for you to acquire and add to your life.) Their mission is thus communicated repeatedly and clearly to all who visit, and to all who drive past their billboards.

Lakeview Church uses slogans throughout church materials to attract newcomers, and re-engage the loyalty of existing attendees. "Got kids? No problem!" and "Your kids will love church!" (Lakeviewonline.com) read the promotions on multiple web pages of Lakeview children's ministries, reassuring parents who struggle with the hassle of getting the kids up for church on Sunday morning—the kids will want to go to church, and thus, parents choosing to attend this church will find their lives easier. Their youth ministry information on their website is headlined in a simple three word slogan, "Known. Valued. Connected." (Lakeviewonline.com). An advertisement for the youth ministry shows a picture of a young person's hand on a video game controller, captioned with, "We speak teenager." An invitation to follow their church on multiple social media platforms includes a slogan playing off of their Lakeview brand with the hashtag, "#nomistakeview." Their four-week church introduction Growth Track classes are accompanied by the slogan, "made for more."

The use of the word "more" is worth examination in detail. It raises the question, "more what?" Given the context of the slogan used in the promotion of these events, "made for more" suggests you are made to be and do more than you are at present. The expression suggests their workshops will help you to be a better version of yourself, which God has created you to be. Instead of promoting Growth Track as the first steps toward church membership or a deeper commitment to the organization, the four workshop sessions at Lakeview are summed up and promoted as: "Know God. Find Freedom. Discover Your Purpose. Make A Difference."

(Lakeviewonline.com). It suggests "more" is related to finding your purpose in life, finding meaning and significance by making a difference in the world, and becoming free from all forces holding you back.

A Lakeview bulletin includes a flyer with an invitation for attendees to host their own in-home small group meeting. The invitation is summarized in a pithy, "you" centered statement, "Host a group. Your way, Your time, Your people." This slogan in particular reveals the consumer-centric nature underlying marketing appeals. These sayings are designed to make promises to churchgoing customers—promises of comfort, convenience, and choice. They realize meeting with a small group of people might make some uncomfortable, the church has minimized the problem. A person can create their own group, pick their own people to meet with, at whatever time is convenient for them. The church has made the "buyer's" choice easier through their promotional appeals.

Another CI church, Spirit Church,[61] uses slogans to promote their small group ministries with phrases such as, "People connect… Families grow… Lives are changed" (SpiritChurch.com). The church also publicized a multiyear program under the slogan, "Banner Years," encouraging people to expect great things to happen in their lives in the near future. The campaign included the useful hashtag, "#banneryears" to accompany social media posts, further promoting the church services, and allowing their leadership to tally the number of people who had posted about their programs. The campaign also included merchandise offered for sale in the church store off the main lobby, with "Banner Year" branded T-shirts and bags for sale, providing further exposure with their slogan.

Energy church encourages weekly service attendance through the use of a series of topical sermons intended to assist with personal development. The topics of each sermon series

can be summed up in catchy slogans—ones which appeal to the desire of CI attendees for improvement. One sermon series, where 4-5 weekly sermons all focused on the an individual's thinking patterns, was promoted as, "MASTERMIND: CHANGE YOUR THINKING, CHANGE YOUR LIFE." The series was accompanied by a wired brain graphic to illustrate each individual has the opportunity to re-wire their brain and think in new ways. These catchy phrases contribute to the overall enchantment (Ritzer, 2010) of the events taking place at the church, instilling anticipation and raising the expectation the church provides "life-changing" events, leading to "unbelievable" experiences. Take for instance the slogan advertising a Lakeview church annual AbundantLife Women's Conference, "take your hope levels to another stratosphere!"

Figure 24:

Mastermind Sermon Series Slogan
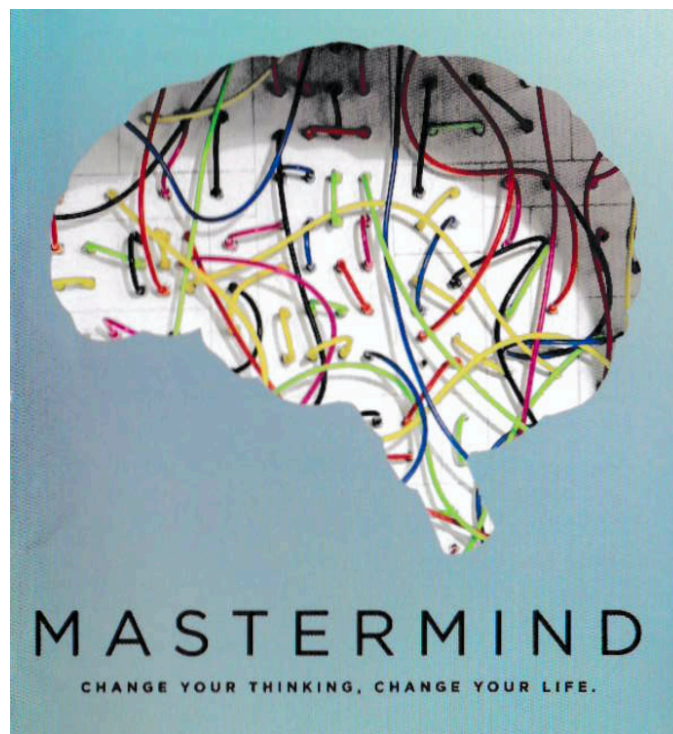
The point of providing all of these examples is to highlight the centrality of marketing to the identity of CI churches. Of course, all churches promote their events and services in some way. However, there is a difference in the style and means used by CI churches to promote their events. They consciously work to appeal to attendees *as consumers*—through business-world advertising techniques. They offer high quality promotion with slogans hoping to capture what the customer desires.

Graphic Design and Video Production. Intensive use of graphic design is one of the hallmarks of CI church marketing. They hand out full-color brochures, replete with advertisements for upcoming church events. In CI churches with more financial resources, handouts are done on glossy paper with attractive professional graphic design.

Figure 25:

Men's Night Web Site Ad (SpiritChurch.com)

Figure 26:

Culture of Christ Series Bulletin Handout (Country Plaza church)

In smaller CI churches (of less than 1,000 attendees), for whom costs are prohibitive, the graphic design is done by volunteers, and may be less prevalent. In CI churches of all sizes, digital graphics and videos are employed during the service.

Many CI churches have adopted the use of short videos for various components of their services. Announcements are often presented as a commercial in the middle of the service, broadcasting upcoming events, with a well-rehearsed and well-lit presenter describing what "don't miss" activities are happening next. Before and after the church service, video screens with PowerPoint announcements are ubiquitous. As mentioned previously, motion graphics and backgrounds during the singing are part of the video "eye candy," creating an atmosphere of production designed to grab the attention and stimulate the senses of the audience. These videos have a high level of quality, regardless of the size of the church. Laura remarked on the professional quality of the production at Country Plaza church:

> Everything's purposeful, nothing is like "we just threw it together" and for our
> generation, people notice that— so it's all very completely packaged like Apple style
> stuff. You open the box and it's all thought out and put together and it's like opening a

new iPhone for the first time and you're like, "Oh my gosh, this is just so like—

everything fits".… It's so well presented.

These churches have done a very good job of being able to attract volunteers who have

talent and experience—and seem to be able to keep pace with other professionally produced

media content in the larger culture. This affirms how CI church leaders "have expanded their

'market share' because of their innovative organizational structures, unique 'product' offerings,

and inventive methods of marketing and financing their activities, all of which leverage the

power of digital communications technologies" (Christerson & Flory, 2017, p. 13).

Inclusion of External Organization Ads. Larger churches and megachurches also

include advertisements from external organizations as a source of revenue to fund some of their

programs. While promoting a large "city serve" weekend event, Lakeview church put together a

multipage brochure to assist congregants with the selection of a service project. During services,

the founding pastor openly appealed to business owners to purchase ads in the booklet to be

handed out at the "celebration" event following the weekend service projects—to help cover the

costs. This practice would otherwise be relegated to the corporate world, but has become a part

of the normal operations of larger CI churches. They have not only integrated marketing as a

method of promoting their own products, but also have adopted the corporate media practice of

enlisting paid advertisers to sponsor their ministries.

Marketing the Church: Pirate Themes, Cruises, and Other Giveaways. The ultimate

example of CI church marketing I observed was the "Pirates" campaign at Spirit Church. The

church offered a series of sermons centered around this theme. The concept was only loosely tied

to sermon content, in fact, one sermon I observed had no mention or reference to pirates, while

another was loosely related—asking the congregation to consider "what have you got in your

boat with you?" When the pastor raised this question in the sermon, three pirates in costume stepped into a small row boat on stage, each one on cue as the pastor described different common life issues.

The use of the pirates theme in terms of visual production and decor could be seen in the services and throughout the church building. The stage in the main auditorium and the entire church lobby were decorated with nautical themed scenery, including a station in the lobby for photo "selfies" in a boat. The pastor's preaching pulpit was turned into a ships wheel. During services, teams of performers danced on stage in costumes to music from the *Pirates of the Caribbean* motion picture soundtrack.

The graphic design on the program handouts depicted beams of sunlight shining through an underwater scene onto a gleaming treasure chest at the bottom of the sea. Another handout depicted a treasure map, which explained the rules for a number of activities promoting church involvement. Participants who completed all the activities could be registered to win a Caribbean cruise as a reward:

AVAST YE MATEYS! YE WILL NOT WANT TO MISS THE NEW PIRATES

SERIES! DURING THIS SWASH BUCKLING SERIES, YE CAN BE ENTERED FOR

YER CHANCE TO WIN A CRUISE VACATION ON THE HIGH SEAS FOR TWO,

INCLUDING AIRFARE! YE MAY ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK BY VISITING

THE STOPS ON THE HANDY TREASURE MAP AND COMPLETING THE TASKS.

ONCE YER TREASURE MAP BE COMPLETE, YE WILL DROP IT IN THE

BARREL. X MARKS THE SPOT! THE LUCKY BUCCANEER WILL BE

ANNOUNCED BY THE TOWN CRIER AT THE END OF THE ADVENTURE AND

PLEASE ONLY ENTER ONE TREASURE MAP PER BUCCANEER.

(SpiritChurch.com, author's emphasis).

Activities to qualify for the giveaway included: updating contact information on the church website; registering for the Growth Track workshops (a version of the first steps to committing oneself to regularly attending and serving at this church); registration for at least one small group; volunteering for the church cleanup and set up team; following one of the Church's social media accounts; and subscribing to the pastors' blogs. Most of these are activities geared toward increasing event attendance and connection to the church, which was the purpose of this Pirate event—and most CI church promotional materials.

Figure 27:

Spirit Church Pirates Handouts
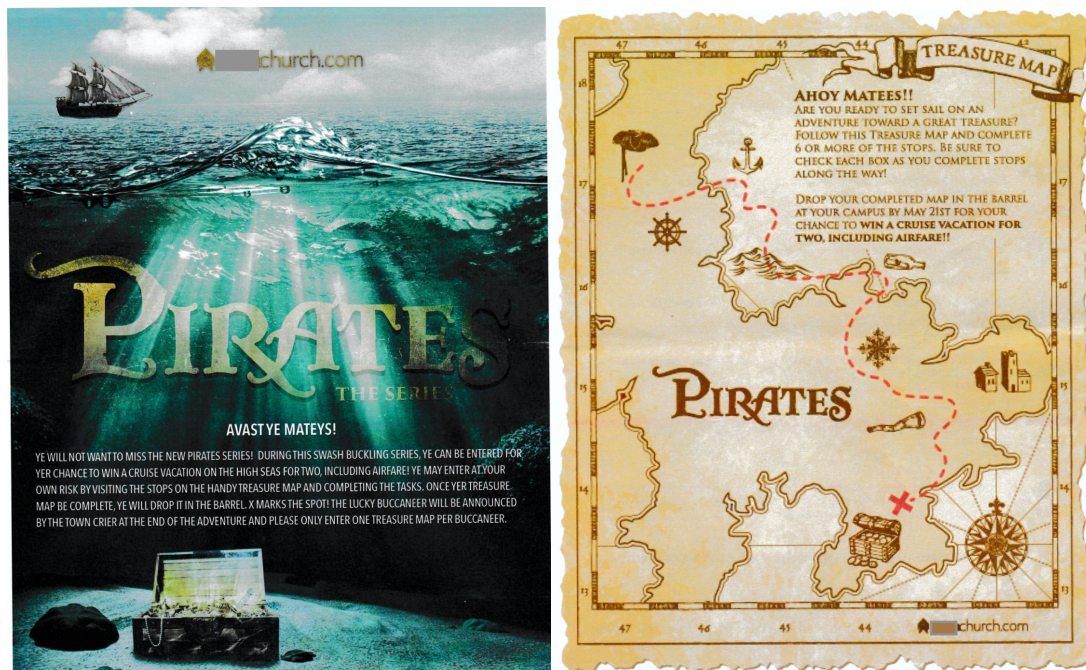
Spirit Church is not the only church to offer giveaways as a method to encourage church involvement. Prizes are sometimes used as an enticement to get the needed volunteers to make

large events happen. Lakeview church used a giveaway to enlist more families for their

Halloween "Trunk or Treat" event, which required numerous families to park their cars and hand

out candy from their car trunks. To get a large enough group of candy givers, they posted this ad,

"ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN 4 DISNEYLAND TICKETS! HERE'S HOW:

DECORATE YOUR TRUNK! THE BEST DECORATED TRUNK WILL WIN A TRIP TO

DISNEYLAND" (Lakeview bulletin handout, October, 2019). Families can have fun decorating

their cars, with hopes of winning a Disneyland trip, and at the same time, the church gets their

needed amount of volunteers to hand out candy to attract more visitors to the church.

All of this is useful for entertainment and for enchantment (Ritzer, 2010), however, all of

the advertising, pageantry, and potential giveaway are centered around methods to attract and re-

attract the consumer audience. What they are trying to accomplish is customer loyalty, through

ever increasing demands for involvement on the part of the participant. This reflects the

observations of Wade, "…The greedy institution operates by capturing the loyalty of the

individual through psychologically pressured but ultimately voluntary acquiescence… In this

way [the church] seeks to garner such a degree of fidelity by tying the organization and all its

activities to a higher, collective purpose, namely 'saving' the 'unsaved'" (Wade, 2016, p. 669).

In addition to enlisting loyalty, these giveaways and themes immerse church goers in advertising

typically seen in the corporate marketplace.

Community Oriented Marketing. CO churches also employ graphic design for their

websites and paper handouts. However, the extent of their marketing is minimal compared to CI

churches. Unlike the Pirates series full-color glossy handouts given at Spirit church, the handout

I received at Savior's Grace church appeared minimalist. Their bulletin was black and white, one

page, listing several upcoming events and reminders. It gave the date of the church service, and

the season of the Christian liturgical calendar (in this case, "ordinary time" which is a season not associated with any important holidays such as Christmas or Easter). The handout itself was dominated by text, and did not depict any special campaign. The only graphic design was a dotted line and arrow rounding one corner, a border around the text, and a logo of a cross with a circle in the opposite corner (reminiscent of a Coptic or Celtic cross design, even though this was a non-denominational church). There was a tear-off card at the bottom, where attendees could write in their contact information to stay connected with the church if desired. The impression given by this handout was purposefully simple, a deliberate attempt to provide the bare essential information of church happenings, without undue distraction—and at a cheaper cost.

Figure 28:

Savior's Grace Bulletin Handout

A Contrast of Website Marketing. Both types of churches advertise upcoming events on their respective websites. However, CI churches promote these events in a much more stylized manner. They do so with eye-catching web videos, gifs, slogans, and other tools. CO churches on the other hand tended to present simple lists to promote their events. Consider the following examples from two church websites for comparison. The following pictures are screenshots taken of the home web pages on the same day, (Dec. 18, 2019), from representative church websites:

Figure 29:

Community Oriented Events List
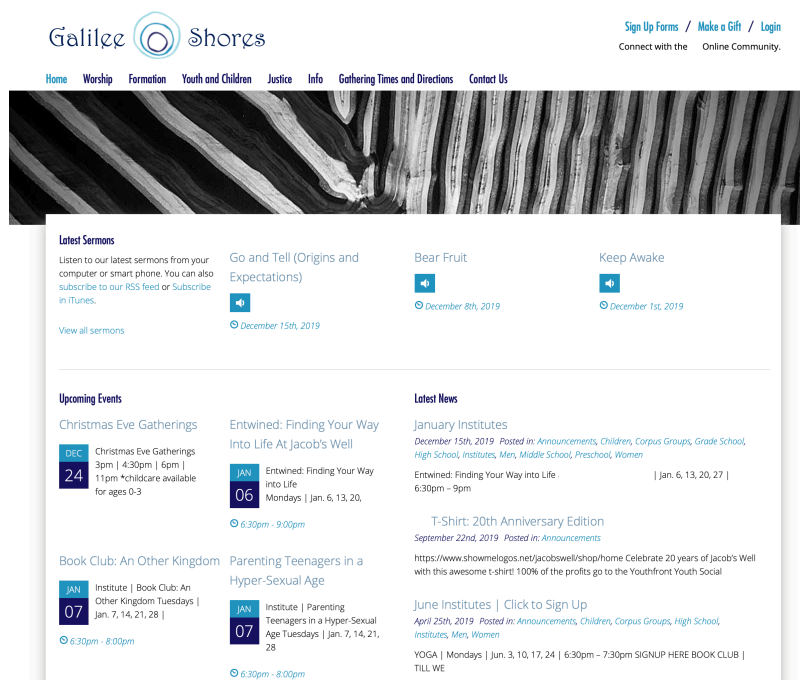
On the Galilee Shores website homepage, words and text dominate, while pictures are simple and part of the background. Upcoming events are listed, but they are presented below recent sermons, and included with other news from the congregation. Even during the Christmas season, there is nothing noteworthy on this page to emphasize or draw attention to Christmas

events, or emphasize an invitation to attend. On this homepage, in addition to the lists and links

of regular worship services, sermons, there is one particular element not observed among CI

churches—an emphasis on justice. This can be seen near the top of the homepage, which has its

own tabbed section for "Justice" (see Figure 6.8).

In contrast, consider this example from Lakeview church (See Figure 30):

Figure 30:

Consumer Individualist Website Event Ad

This promotion highlights the first of several events, in this case a drive-thru Christmas

light display. The picture is cinematic (including lens flares), and the text is illuminated and

styled. The marketing of this event dominates the webpage, and scrolling down reveals several

more events similarly depicted. CI churches place a much greater emphasis on visual

presentation, and the promotion of activities. CO churches also present information, but do it in a

much simpler format, without utilizing the graphic design advertising techniques found among

businesses competing for customers.

Community Oriented Resistance: Rejecting the Dominant Cultural Narrative

CO churches oppose the acceptance of capitalist cultural influences, and in particular the business-model approach adopted by CI pastors. CO church leaders consciously seek an alternative church ecclesiology—one without an integration of market ideology. CO pastors expressed disagreement with the idea the church should have growth as a goal. This led to occasional antagonism toward the values and practices of the other church type. At times, this clash was explicit, while at other times it was simply implied by the emphasis of their value alternatives.

Even though they have attempted to resist consumerism, CO churches were not able to completely escape from their own version of catering to customer preferences. This was acknowledged by Cameron, one of the interviewees from Galilee Shores. When discussing anti-consumer tendencies of his church, he elaborated on something he had heard from one of the pastors, "[Our Pastor said,] 'You can't say… Galilee Shores isn't a consumeristic church, [at best] they're just *better* consumers.…' We're still bound up in these upwardly mobile narratives of… what the good life is… even if it has its own kind of layer to it." The "layer" Cameron described the pattern of community orientation which appeals to a *different* religious consumer— but which is operating according to capitalist marketplace rules nonetheless. This admission echoes Freudenberg's conclusion—even though there is an emerging Protestant movement "vehemently critical of the neoliberalization of the religious sphere… it is yet inherently shaped by and infused with… neoliberal rationality" (2015, p. 298). CO churches express their "better version" of religious consumption through a distinct and conscious resistance—which appeals to religious consumers who are interested in societal issues.

Rejecting the Business Model and Metaphor

One of the ways CO church members and leaders expressed their rejection of the dominant cultural narrative was by directly challenging the application of a business metaphor to church ministry. Pastor James of Savior's Grace explained corporations are evaluated by success, but churches should be evaluated by different standards:

Success defined in numbers and growth, "up and to the right charting," versus faithfulness, which has completely different metrics that aren't really metrics. It's a way of being…. Success versus faithfulness, or you could say pragmatic leadership versus embodiment or "iconing,"—imaging God as communities, as persons…. "How to be human as human is meant to be…."

This pastor explicitly dismissed the "pastor as CEO" language used by CI participants to describe church leadership. Pastor James put the two models adopted by each church type in a contrasting "versus," relationship: "bigger, better, higher, stronger, faster versus the Biblical picture of *shalom*…. Success… pragmatics, and… the CEO models, strategies and techniques of business leadership—versus an ecclesiology… that's foundational." In his view, there was a separation between how a church practices its faith, and the methods of commercial organizations—the models were mutually exclusive. In fact, he did not think churches should be operating according to models at all, "Not models of—Seeker model, whatever, purpose driven model, whatever. There's a million. There's always a new one."

Rhonda echoed a similar personal rejection of business operations imposing on her personal decisions about church. In fact, her decision to leave a hospital chaplaincy and join the staff at a CO church like the Upper Room was based on efforts to remove herself from the caged feeling imposed by capitalist influences:

I don't know if I would be going to church if I wasn't at the Upper Room or if the Upper

Room did not exist…. For the same reason I didn't want to stay at the hospital

environment, because [hospitals and some churches] feel corporate and confining and

imposing in a lot of ways…. I'm interested in spiritual formation and community[62] but

not necessarily as part of one particular religious tradition.

Rhonda felt a need to find a church where she could escape feeling trapped in a cage-like

atmosphere—she wanted to be free to pursue among other things, belonging to a group. Part of

her faith journey included participating in several denominational structures, which for her also

operated too much like corporations, which she found restrictive.

Blessing Place church, which calls itself a "church and gallery," is located in the arts

district in the downtown area of their Midwestern city. This church describes one of their "seven

distinctives" as "boutique hospitality." They define this as anchoring their ministry in a local

setting—accomplished by rejecting a business model:

We value the neighborliness that comes through unique, creative, and intimate

gatherings. We strive to offer a local and unique expression of the church. Blessing Place

is not a reflection of any mass marketing, multi-campus initiative, or corporate growth

strategy. We long for an experiential orientation (blessingplace.com/our-ethos).

The rejection of corporate values by some CO church goers reaches beyond attempts to

keep those influences out of the realm of their faith. Some also seek to approach their own

secular jobs in a manner counter to the values of capitalism. Nate and Melissa, who own their

own business, made a point to explain how their approach to the world and the environment

caused them to rebuff the assumptions of industrialism. In Nate's words, "We care about the

environment and know what mass production does. We try to fight it in… our business." He

went on to explain how this dismissal of enterprise principles integrated with their desire to live in connection to their surroundings:

> Even in our neighborhood, we want to be more connected with the people there. We constantly think because we own our own business, we're serving a lot of people in some capacity here, and we try to be intentional with… what our relationship looks like with them and what our company does for them…. We're also interested in utilizing the business as something to better the community around us….

This couple does not believe their business should be run with an assumption of isolation from its impact upon the environment, their employees and customers, and their neighborhood. They are aware of the impact of industrial mass production upon these elements, and work to avoid participation in the negative assumptions of a capitalist business mindset.

Anti-Church Growth: Resisting the Capitalist Growth Imperative

CO members do not ascribe to a philosophy of church growth or the assumptions of the capitalist growth imperative. For example, Wayne from Savior's Grace church described two paths for churches to follow, one based on increasing numbers, and the opposite—focusing on faithfulness in church duties, without making numerical gains a focal point of the overall philosophy of the church. Wayne explained his parents had pastored a church, and he recalled an assumption they had made—they believed if they were faithful, the church would become larger, and their influence would increase as well. However, he had come to realize this belief came from cultural sources in society. "[My parents wondered] 'Why is the church… not growing?' as if numbers define success, or success is driven by numbers…. [Those beliefs] speak to the fact that society is so focused on numbers." Wayne also tried attending a large church, but it was "too

big." He and his wife found it difficult to "plug-in," and get involved in ministry work, and eventually landed at Savior's Grace.

CO participants recognized churches that distance themselves from a business model may in fact not grow, or even decline in numbers, resources, and influence. They acknowledged the avoidance of such foundational business principles could cause them to lose relevance among potential church members who had accepted and aligned their beliefs with pervading cultural values. William described what happened when his previous church shifted toward a more community oriented approach: "There was a huge decline when the church pivoted from being this church for business people or whatever, to being a church that served the community."

However, this was a price CO leaders were willing to pay. Some of these churches intentionally focused their approach to their ministries—purposefully avoiding becoming too big. Hand of God church articulated a "quality over quantity" approach to their ministry partnerships, explaining their church was more interested in "intentionally investing" in fewer ministry partnerships to facilitate "more focused attention" (handofgod.com/internationalpartners).

Books Rejecting Growth and Consumerism. In addition to the anti-church growth sentiment I observed from CO pastors and church members, there have been at least two books written on the subject. The pastors from two CO churches[63] published their critiques on church growth assumptions, and described the journey their churches took to intentionally become smaller. The first, *Renovation of the Church*, by Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken, tells of Oak Hills church in Folsom, California as they transitioned from an "attraction-model" megachurch to a smaller church more focused on spiritual formation and local involvement. These pastors had learned the attraction-model by attending conferences sponsored by the leadership at Willow

Creek, a suburban Chicago megachurch with over 20,000 members. Oak Hills had turned their services into an "hour-long theatrical production" (Carlson & Lueken, 2011, p. 21), aimed at drawing in a non-churched audience.

The pastoral staff at Oak Hills began a dramatic re-orientation when they held a leadership retreat and studied a book on very large churches.[64] Carlson and Lueken recalled almost every staff person was bothered by one particular chapter entitled, "The Consequences of Consumerism." They were challenged by the pervasiveness of the cultural value of consumption, and questioned whether or not the church should accept this as the norm, or fight against this trend where it conflicted with biblical teachings. They realized their pattern of "attracting people to church based on their consumer demands is in direct and irredeemable conflict with inviting people, in Jesus' words, to lose their lives in order to find them" (Carlson & Lueken, 2011, p. 35). In their view, the growth imperative adopted by churches and pastors (and the conferences they attended) was closely connected to the consumption mindset present in the culture. They felt "the church in North America has, for the most part, embraced this insidious monster of consumerism in the most pragmatic manner and has used it as a principal foundation for church growth" (Carlson & Lueken, 2011, p. 66). They struggled with their identity of having become "a composite of suburban America, consumerism and Jesus" (Carlson & Lueken, 2011, p. 142). Their book catalogues the journey the church took to move away from treating church visitors as religious shoppers—eventually teaching about the problems of materialism and the unchecked pursuit of personal wants and desires in sermons and Bible studies. This new approach disappointed many existing members, and attendance diminished from several thousand to a few hundred. However, these pastors argued the business influences from the culture must be rejected in order to adhere to the teachings of their faith (Carlson & Lueken, 2011, p. 72).

The second book, by Pastor Tim Suttle is appropriately titled, *Shrink: Faithful Ministry in a Church Growth Culture*. In it, Pastor Suttle argued market-based cultural influences have led church leaders to aim for attendance increase and assume bigger numbers equals success. He described how Protestant pastors across the United States spend "millions of dollars each year attending conferences, buying books, hiring consultants and advertisers… all trying to accomplish one thing: *success*… Read: bigger, better, more celebrated, and more talked about. I am convinced this is the wrong tack" (Suttle, 2014, p. 22, author's emphasis). Like Carlson and Lueken, Pastor Suttle proposed church leaders resist influences of the business culture creeping into the church, altering theology and even how the Bible is interpreted. For Suttle, "When we read the New Testament through the lenses of colonialism and consumer capitalism, we cannot help but accentuate those bits of Scripture that portray expansion and growth.… This is a false assumption" (2014, p. 27).

These two books display the counter-cultural trend present among CO churches. These authors acknowledged the struggle between business principles and the values inherent in Protestant teachings. In addition to critiquing the capitalist growth imperative, they expanded on broader themes of the influence of capitalist culture upon church development. These books are cultural artifacts of the resistance of CO churches to market influences, and their opposition to the CI model.

Activism as Anti-Consumerism

The anti-consumerism tendencies in CO churches were frequently expressed in conjunction with social justice activities. In addition to the worldview perspective aiming church attention to outside concerns, social justice involvement was mentioned as a solution for commercialism's self-centeredness. One of the ways in which CO churches expressed resistance

to material concerns was by replacing it with societal involvement to balance excessive consumption.

For example, Rhonda from the Upper Room church explained how in her view, consumption was connected to social concerns, saying, "I've become more and more convicted about fast fashion and not spending money in places that have poor working conditions for workers around the world." CO churches encourage this perspective by raising awareness (through website articles) of the connection between the actions of consumer capitalists and the resulting consequences in the lives of others.

Another example of the ways these churches bring a critique of consumerism to the minds of their attendees is through a program called Advent Conspiracy. The Advent Conspiracy is a loose confederation of Christians and others who (recognizing the excesses of capitalism) want to see Christmas be more meaningful and less commercial. Started by a group of Protestant pastors, the Advent Conspiracy consists mostly of a web site and other resources available to help churches present alternatives to the commercialization of Christmas to their congregations. Among the resources offered are suggestions for spending less money on Christmas presents, and ideas for investing to help others—especially by digging wells in countries around the world who don't have access to clean water (Biaggne, 2009). Among their resources are brochures, videos, podcasts, and posters—such as one depicting a Magi on a camel (presumably on his way to the birth of Jesus) stopped by a face-to-face encounter with a woman pushing a shopping cart. The two figures symbolically represent the inherent contradiction of Christmas hyper-consumption.

The Advent Conspiracy is not against gift-giving in general—just excessive spending encouraged at Christmas. Their literature suggests buying one or two fewer presents for children,

and giving personal gifts of "presence" instead of "presents" (Biaggne, 2009). The CO churches promoting this program instruct their parishioners to save money by buying fewer gifts, and using the money not spent on presents to help those in need (more than one of these churches use the money to support digging wells in Kenya and elsewhere).

Several CO churches I observed were involved with the Advent Conspiracy, blogging information on minimizing shopping, recycling and purchasing used items, and other forms of challenging consumer culture. None of these forms were present among CI churches.

Consumerism and Shopping

Shopping was the one interview topic related to consumerism which had the most overlap in similarity of responses between members of these two church types. Both CI and CO members used similar language to describe their experiences and personal feelings with regard to shopping.

Where there were differences in approaches to shopping, they were strongest at the institutional level. For example, the Galilee Shores website posted multiple blog pages on the topic of "ethical shopping," informing their constituents of the impact of unregulated shopping on the environment, and informing readers of alternatives. It included discussions of buying ethically (such as considering the factory conditions of the manufacturers, or the impact on global warming and its relation to meat production)—all of which aligned with CO values. On the other hand, the Lakeview church website posted advertisements for events which encouraged and integrated shopping with church activities, modeling CI values. One event was for a "ladies night out" which included a shopping trip. The other was part of an advertised "12 days of Christmas sale" at the church. For each of the twelve days leading up to Christmas, their website featured different items to be purchased through the church. This particular deal invited parents

to buy tickets for their kids to an upcoming church sponsored conference for teenagers. In these two examples the church expressions fall in line with their types—one critiqued shopping, the other encouraged it.

In interviews at the interpersonal level, however, the similarities of language and experiences with regard to shopping were noticeable. Members of both types described learning their shopping behaviors from their parents. One specific purchasing habit emphasized by both types was thrift—the art of finding lower prices when spending. Finding items on sale was an important pursuit for those from both types of churches.

Members of CI and CO churches described a mixture of similar feelings and reactions they experienced when shopping. Some attendees from both kinds of churches described hating shopping, while some from each said they loved it. A few from each type described using shopping as therapy, to fill a void or to soothe some emotional difficulties. Some from each kind described the need to be content with what you have.

The Limits of Shopping

When I asked if there are limits to what people should buy, congregants from both types of churches shared similar statements. First, CI and CO members alike said they were not in any position to judge whether others should restrict their purchases. Being non-judgemental with regard to consumption was often the first response to this question by members of both types. There was an apparent recognition of the personal nature of shopping, and a belief no one had a right to tell others to stop buying.

Second, congregants from each type consistently stated there should be no limits on purchases. The only suggested limit was being fiscally responsible—as long as people spend "within their means," they should buy whatever they want. There was some slight nuance of

language on this topic—some CO members suggested moderation should be valued, while some CI attendees were more cavalier, stating, "as long as you can afford it, go for it." (Even though CO interviewees agreed there were no limits, it was only those from this type who suggested the motive behind shopping offered a limit to spending—one should not shop for the "wrong reasons," such as greed, excessive wastefulness, or for status).

These findings mirror the data collected in the National Study on Youth and Religion by Christian Smith and his colleagues. They observed the values of capitalism are pervasive among young adults in America, regardless of their religious background:

> Not only was there no danger of leading emerging adults into expressing false opposition to materialistic consumerism; interviewers could not, no matter how hard they pushed, get emerging adults to express any serious concerns about any aspect of mass-consumer materialism…. As long as people can afford their purchases, they are fully entitled to buy and consume whatever they want. There should be no limits to what people might buy and own, and consuming products is often a great source of satisfaction that helps to define ultimate goals in life. Voices critical of mass consumerism, materialistic values, or the environmental or social costs of a consumer-driven economy were nearly nonexistent among emerging adults. (Smith and Snell, 2009, p. 67).

Among young adults, some of the most deeply held values are consumer values. One of Smith and Snell's interviewees, "John," when asked about his thoughts on materialism, unambiguously stated, "A lot of people's pleasures in life derive from consumerism. Consumerism is good for the economy. No limits in our capitalist society, if you can afford it." (2009, p. 204). My observations revealed similar responses—regardless of the type of church they attended.

Simplicity vs. Progression

Even though responses to shopping were uncharacteristically similar, one set of perspectives with regard to consumerism and materialism was noticeably different. CO members were the only ones to express a desire for simplicity; CI members were the only ones to view consumption in terms of a progressive reward for hard work.

Only CO attendees mentioned the importance of a simple lifestyle. Only members of this type talked about possessions in terms of "clutter" or "junk." Several emphasized aspirations of downsizing, and a few were pursuing or had entertained the possibility of living a minimalist lifestyle. In the words of Pastor Randy from the Upper Room church, "Part of me thinks being really, really, really rich doesn't sound fun to me. I have experienced a lot personal liberation from getting rid of crap." Melissa from Galilee Shores church summed up her views stating, "Simplicity is important for me. Not owning too many things or having too many commitments." On the Pinecrest website, under their description of the church's goals for spiritual formation, they include this aspect as a part of the desired direction for their church members: "LIVE SIMPLY: There is a healthy detachment from things and a growing desire to give away our money and other resources" (pinecrest.org/spiritual-formation, author's emphasis).

The word "enough" was an important repeated word among these CO members. This expression of moderation with regard to consumption was frequently put in terms of not buying more than you need—excess was superfluous. "Having enough" for some attendees was also expressed in terms of buying quality over quantity. Several CO attendees preferred non-disposable items. They would rather select lasting or repairable goods instead of throwing away disposable items and have a negative impact on the environment.

In contrast, CI church attendees spoke of their shopping behavior in terms of an upwardly mobile progression. In their view, as a person is able to earn more money, it opened up avenues for them to purchase more, or obtain higher quality items. This sense of moving up in terms of wealth, social class, and purchasing power was understood as the result of hard work. As Ashley of Pathway church put it:

> I see it as our hard work showing up… a progression of hard work. Progression, that is a good word. I see consumerism now for us as progression of hard work. We didn't used to be able to just go out and buy whatever, we were more on a budget. And now our budget doesn't have to be quite as restrictive, because we worked really hard to get where we are at, and we don't have to worry about it as much.

CI participants believed people could work their way up, and improve their selection of affordable choices. When members of this type discussed buying quality merchandise, it was not talked about in terms of countering the wastefulness of disposable items, but instead in terms of having the best, or being able to appreciate good quality. (One of the pastors at Lakeview described on their website how he had bugs in his teeth from "smiling so broadly" from the excitement of riding "one of the best engineered dirt bikes ever made" (lakeviewsports.com/our-history.html)). A few CI attendees expressed they had previously been more frugal but now (as they became more wealthy) they did not need to be as thrifty.[65]

Consumer Christianity and the Justification of Desire

CI and CO congregations must engage with the culture around them, specifically the influences of capitalist hyper-consumption. While members of each type of church take different approaches, the choices of each affect the development of not only their shopping preferences—but also their personal values. Taylor suggests all modern persons generate mental frameworks,

developing their own combined versions of spirituality with their own inventions of the self.

These frameworks are an attempt to stave off meaninglessness in modern everyday life (Taylor,

1989, pp. 16-18). The expression of these quests for meaning among CI in particular reflect an

attempt to justify existing desires. In other words, one of the reasons why CI members attend this

type of church is because it helps them to manage their self identity—a unique combination of

spirituality with a sense of living full (wealthy, middle-class) lives. A general form of consumer

Christianity gives a validation and articulation (Taylor, 1989, p. 18) to the otherwise meaningless

consumption prevalent in middle class culture. The Christians who attend these churches lead

lives full of entertainments, material possessions, and activities—all centered around the

avoidance of suffering and a desire to live life to the fullest—but generally lacking spiritual

significance or meaning.

CI believers seek out churches providing an entertaining umbrella of spirituality under

which they bring their hobbies, life-fulfilling activities, and material consumption. Their church

involvement (combined with church sponsored recreation) adds a dimension of approval and a

sense of acceptance—or sense of spirituality—to their otherwise capitalist cultural activities. CI

churches then assist individual members in their quest toward an integration of fun with

morality, or pleasure as a duty (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 367).

This integration represents the CI response to the dynamic between Protestant teachings

and capitalist values. Weber argued the psychological rewards of the Protestant Ethic would

change believers' behavior in a different direction from Protestant teachings (Weber, 1920/2011,

p. 295, footnote 12). Although Weber argued these would move in a *different* direction from

each other, Miller contends both consumerism and Christianity are similar enough to make for an

effortless intermingling of the two:

Consumer culture poses a particularly vexing problem for Christianity because the shape and texture of the desires that it cultivates are profoundly similar to Christian forms of desire…. Consumer desire will be portrayed not… contrasted with Christianity or challenged as heresy… but as a system of formation that structures desire in a manner similar enough to Christianity to sidetrack it in subtle but profound ways. (Miller, 2003, p. 107).

CO church members are also on a quest to add meaning to their everyday lives; however, their pursuit attempts to resist the lure of the desires of the self. In their quest for meaning, CO members oppose pleasure as a duty, and instead attempt to find meaning by valuing the stoic sacrifice of personal desires for the sake of the group. Their attempts at the integration of all areas of life leads them to seek meaning in the pursuit of simplicity—which allows them to live in relationship to others and to the world without violating those deeply held values (or Protestant teachings). Their quest for meaning is furthered through the service of others, often accomplished in the form of social justice activism.

In addition, CO members find meaning in their opposition to the dominant narrative of capitalist hyper-consumption. They challenge and reject the application of business models and the capitalist growth imperative to church activity—which in their view represents an incompatible integration of two competing systems.

Both of these church types represent the engagement of Protestant Christianity with capitalist culture. However, each type has taken a different approach to cultural relevance along a continuum of acceptance or resistance of the dominant forms.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

At the heart of this study is the tension between individualism and community; a conflict discussed by classical sociological theorists, such as Marx, Durkheim and Tocqueville, and further developed in recent empirical works: *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah, et al., and *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam. In this conclusion I am basing my argument on Bellah, et al.'s book due to its originality and widespread influence. The conclusions of *Habits of the Heart* were actually echoed by Putnam's *Bowling Alone*. Further, *Habits of the Heart* was published in 1985 and reproduced in 2007, indicating its arguments continued to be important to social discourse. In contrast, Putnam's book did not initiate a discussion lasting lasted decades beyond its original production, and was not re-issued.

Habits of the Heart investigates the kinds of resources Americans use to make sense of their lives and their role in the world, the ways this cognitive dimension relates to their actions and their understanding of their position in society. The authors' analysis of two hundred interviews, in which the majority of respondents defined themselves in individualistic ways led the authors to conclude that personal gratification had replaced previous forms of social cohesion in American life.

The authors cite numerous respondents as the basis for their argument and conclusions. For example, they describe Brian Palmer, whose life is lived according to an internal, personal set of principles:

> "Brian sees himself as pursuing… devotion to his own self-interests…. he keeps referring to "values" and "priorities" not justified by any wider framework of purpose or belief…. Even the deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals should be able to pursue whatever they

find rewarding…. [In Brian's words,] "One of the things that… makes California such a pleasant place to live, is people… aren't bothered by other people's value systems as long as they don't infringe upon your own." (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 6-7).

A similar individualistic point of view was expressed by Margaret Oldham, who, the authors claim, lives her life according to a similar, self-directed manifesto: "I tend to operate on the assumption that what I want to do and what I feel like is what I should do" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 14). And "I do think it's important for you to take responsibility for yourself, I mean, nobody else is going to really do it…. In the end, you're really alone, and you really have to answer to yourself…." (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 15). The authors note that "individual's ultimate self-reliance," such as expressed by Margaret, "turns out to leave very little place for interdependence and… correspond to a fairly grim view of the individual's place in the social world" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 15).

The paragon of the individualism they see everywhere is in their description of a woman named Sheila Larson. She herself described her religion as "Sheilaism," un-ashamedly making clear how self-focused, rather than interdependent or shared, her own religion is. In many reviews of *Habits of the Heart,* "Sheilaism" became the summation and the key buzz word for all depictions of individualistic religion.

This trend of personal religion has led to a separation of the public and private spheres of life, in which the public side lost ground: "Viewing one's primary task as 'finding oneself' in autonomous self-reliance, separating oneself… from those later communities and traditions that constitute one's past, leads to the notion that it is in oneself… that fulfillment is to be found" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 163). Bellah et al.'s summary of these interviews leads to their characterization of society as decidedly individualistic and segmented. It is "a society in which

the individual can only rarely and with difficulty understand himself and his activities as interrelated in morally meaningful ways with those of other, different Americans" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 50). American culture, they assert, rests upon the principle of self-reliance, which was the "general orientation in many of those to whom we spoke" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 56). They describe the pursuit of "finding oneself," through immersion in a "lifestyle enclave," a social form that is "segmental" and based on "individual choice"—which exists because "the purpose of individualism has always been linked to… finding others who reflect and affirm one's selfhood" (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 72-73). Although these individuals join with others in their pursuit of desired lifestyle, their goal in these contexts is affirmation of self.

Although religions can offer Americans a means to "get involved in their community and society" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 219), contemporary religion has been so distorted by relentless individualism that it has taken shape as a self-centered form: "Today religion in America is… private and diverse…" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 220).

Despite this conclusion, the authors quoted those few interviewees whose language suggested a communal orientation. The words spoken by Nan Pfautz could be characterized this way—Nan belongs to a church the she described as, "… caring about people. What I like about my church is its community…. I feel we have a commitment to the world… to the environment… to the whole thing…." (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 228-229). The statements of Mary Taylor could also be seen as community oriented. She declared that the way for all people to be happy was "to recognize that you have a debt to society" (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 192-193). Her understanding of the "public good" is based on her acknowledgement of caring for future generations. Her words directly contradict Tocqueville's sense that an individualistic society loses any thought of generations that follow (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 193-194; see also

Tocqueville, 1840/1969, pp. 507-508). The authors acknowledge Mary as "a civic-minded professional who was able to move… toward the kind of commitment to the common good that is necessary to assure the integrity of a community"[66] (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 192).

Despite these women's explicit language emphasizing the social conscience present in their churches and their commitment to doing social good in the world, Bellah and his co-authors chose to interpret their stories within the lens of their established framework of individualism and privatized religion. They dismissed Nan's depiction of the collective orientation of her church by offering an interpretation of her words that showed they were simply representing another form of eclectic, privatized religion stemming from American individualism. They claimed that Nan's "religiousness has developed a mystical cast…. It is this mysticism and her sense of empathy with others, rather than any particularly Christian vision, that seems to motivate Nan's extraordinary range of social and political commitments" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 228). Here they reduce her experience of a collectively oriented church because they find that for her "the ultimate meaning of the church is an expressive-individualist one," emphasizing the congregation's shared "joy of belonging"—and deemphasizing Nan's "sense of community involvement," and social activism (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 228-230). The authors chose to place both Nan and Mary into their pre-extant, etic category. It was imposed by them to bring her into line with their preexisting individualist dominant perspective.

Challenging Bellah's Findings

When I read and re-read these quotations, I questioned Bellah and his colleagues' reduction of some respondents' statements as evidence of the predominance of individualism. To me, their words suggested an alternative interpretation, one that seems to push against individualism and in favor of community connection. Nan's depiction of her church reveals the

ways it encourages empathy, and a sense of responsibility toward others. Her language

emphasizes obligations of "kinship, equality, perhaps even a kind of fusion with all others in the

world," such that she claims she "suffers for [others] suffering" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 229).

Nan's language and approach differs substantially from the words spoken by others who are

quoted in *Habits of the Heart*. Nan's religiosity has an external focus, social concern emphasis,

with a focus on community and those outside of the church.

Bellah, et al.'s refusal to attend to sets of comments suggesting an alternative way of

being than the dominant individualist one they have chosen, led me to question the broadly

drawn conclusions of Bellah and his co-authors. I wondered why they chose to include, yet not

acknowledge the importance of these few competing perspectives. I questioned whether their key

finding was an artifact of their choice to study of individuals without situating them in any

context. In order to challenge their one-sided conclusion, I sought out individuals within church

contexts to see if they would articulate the same individualism these authors claimed. As

sociologists Bellah and his co-authors surely were familiar with the famous maxim of C. Wright

Mills that individuals must be situated in their social contexts to better understand their everyday

lives (1959/2000).

I was not convinced by the imbalanced view offered by Bellah and his colleagues.

Perhaps their findings were a reflection of the individualist nature of interview research? Were

their findings somehow artifacts of their chosen methods? To better understand the context of

individuals' responses, I decided upon a more complex methodology that would include not only

interviews with individuals but also participant observation and analysis of institutional

documents. Studying religious organizations—in particular Protestant Churches—might reveal

more of a collectivist orientation at the heart of the institutions and their members.

I designed a research plan that would allow me to study multiple forms of religious communities to see whether Bellah, et al.'s concept of individualism could be found in all kinds of churches across the country. Would my investigation confirm or challenge the conclusions of prior studies pointing to the rising dominance of individualism?

From my observations in various religious communities and interviews with their members, I developed a typology of two ideal types of churches: Consumer Individualist and Community Oriented. Working with this typology I was able to see those religious institutions and the individuals affiliated with them, did not neatly conform to the extant portrayal of individualism.

My research revealed many churches and their members eschewed individual self-gratification. Many were in fact community oriented. Pastor Randy of the Upper Room church stated, "I love [our city]. I love the community that's here. I have been heavily invested in this community for a long time, both in peace and justice work, as well as just community stuff." Wayne, an interviewee from Savior's Grace church had a similar description of the desire to be a part of the locale: "I feel like [Savior's Grace church], more than others, have a real kind of parish-type ministry…. They chose [this location] because of the community and they felt like this is a community that they could really invest in." These are people participating in religious institutions for which community involvement is part of what it means to be a church.

However, I could not dismiss Bellah, et al.'s central finding. In addition to this communal orientation, I also found religious organizations and members that echoed the individualism so prominent in Bellah's work. My research data did not disprove individualism but made clear there was another type of orientation—community focused—reinforced in churches and their members.

Individualism, Community and Consumerism

My study of these distinct types of churches suggests religious individuals and communities are more complex than any one-sided interpretation. My participant observation of individuals in their institutional contexts such as churches revealed not all contemporary social institutions go along with the dominant individualism; rather some religious institutions are most decidedly focused and oriented to the larger social world.

My study was conducted at the historical moment of late-stage capitalism. Predominant in this context are the values of consumerism—which have become pervasive in American culture and have even spread to religious institutions such Protestant churches. Bellah, et al. argue that people engage in consumerism because they do not find meaning in religion and use shopping as an alternative way of creating meaning; shopping is their attempt to defend or distract themselves from an otherwise empty life (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 291). In contrast, consumerism is not necessarily a bulwark against the total meaningless of a secular society. The churches I studied incorporate consumerism *into the meaning systems* of these churches.

Consumerism is a part of the meaning of CO members in their opposition to it. CO church participants attempt to derive meaning from their position of resistance to consumption. Through church sanctioned activities such as the Advent Conspiracy (to buy fewer presents at Christmas), concern for the environment, and instructions on ethical shopping, aspects of their religious purpose as a church are defined by their position of struggle in relation to capitalist consumerism (Bourdieu, 1993)—even though the question remains as to how successful they have been at separating themselves from its influence.

Values related to consumption have been directly incorporated into CI activities. For these participants, what it means to be a Christian is intermingled with what it means to be a

consumer. The self-development of the person—to become a better version of themselves, to live their best life, to be an influencer—are now directly integrated with the meaning of life and the Christian identity. It is through attendance at CI churches, and the consumption of their workshops and products that one can become their ultimate self. From my observations, consumerism has become a part of the meaning systems of both types churches—either through direct incorporation or by taking a stance of resistance.

Until now I have presented the categories of CI and CO as discrete, separated from each other with very little overlap. This reflects what I observed among these churches, in interviews and church documents. The language, theology, and values expressed by churches of each type were for the most part distinct and different from each other in almost every instance.

A close analysis of the multiple foci of both types of churches reveals that despite my basing my typology in a duality, these churches are not opposed in every area of church and members' lives. When I compared them on their engagement with capitalist consumerism, and especially attitudes and perspectives toward shopping, there was considerable overlap and similarities of responses.

This overlap represents the powerful dominance of consumerism in American culture. Even the CO type, which typically attempted to resist the narratives of capitalism, was not immune to being co-opted by its influences—with pastors of this type describing their congregants as merely "a better form of consumer"—but consumers nonetheless. In addition, perspectives on shopping by members of each type were nearly identical. The values of simplicity (for CO members), and an understanding of material goods as a reward for hard work (for CI members) were the only apparent distinctions that divided their viewpoints. Members of both types expressed similar understandings of shopping limits—there were none. People could

buy whatever they wanted, and as much as they wanted, as long as they could afford it. The wealthy upper classes had no restrictions (see Smith and Snell, 2009, p. 67).

The acceptance of consumption has transformed American Protestants to such an extent they ignore the biblical and historical teachings (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 295, footnote 12)—stating material concerns should rest upon saints' shoulders like a light cloak, easily thrown off (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 177; see also Matthew 6:25; Luke 3:14; John 2:24-15; 1 Timothy 6:10; Hebrews 13:5). Despite clearly-stated intentions by CO churches to resist consumerism, the values of capitalism have hardened into a steel hard cage, no matter what type of church American Protestants attend (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 177).

Challenges to Theories of Secularization

Secularization theory, as described by classical social theorists, and made famous by Berger's work *The Sacred Canopy* (1967/2011), and Thomas Luckmann's *The Invisible Religion* (1967), was credibly seen as the most apt depiction of the decline in religion in the United States in the mid-1960s and onward. Nevertheless the sway of the theory has not disappeared and scholars refer to it today, generally now describing it as the secularization debate. Sociologists Finke and Stark, among others, declared that secularization did not necessarily lead to a decline in religion (e.g. Finke & Stark, 2005; see also: Yamane, 1997; Berger, 1999, 2012). Chaves acknowledged religious decline, but limited it to only a few aspects of religion, such as religious authority in society (Chaves, 1994).

In contrast to the secularization thesis, other scholars (e.g. Davidman, 1991; see also Yamane, 1997) have argued religious institutions find ways to survive despite the challenges of secularization. Instead, they manage to elude religious decline by pursuing alternatives such as adapting to the larger society or reacting against it.

My research is in line with these current challenges to secularization theory. My data shows creative incorporation and adaptation on the part of Christian churches in the face of secular pressures. These congregations work to evade marginalization by the secular forces of modernization. Among Protestant churches in my study, I have seen various ways they challenge the thesis of religious decline by creatively adapting to the features of modernity—by either incorporating consumerism into church life (in the case of CI churches), or replacing individualist tendencies with community care and social activism (as in the case of CO churches). My findings in these two Protestant ideal types resembles the conclusions of Davidman's study of women at two distinct types of Jewish communities. She had concluded that religious communities find ways to construct and reconstruct themselves in the larger secularized society. One community she studied, the modern Orthodox, accommodate by "adapting certain features of the religion to make it more consonant with secular ways of life" (Davidman, 1991, pp. 31-32). A second strategy she found is resistance, becoming an alternative to "cultural encroachments" (Davidman, 1991, p. 32).

It is hard to deny any impact of secularization at the turn of the 21st century in the United States. However, like many others who challenge the one-sided, traditional view of modernization as necessarily leading to secularization, my data and analysis show clear ways both kinds of churches in my typology—CI and CO—have dealt head-on with the challenges of modernity. These churches have developed responses, such as sacralization that *help maintain religious authority in the lives of believers*. In order to preserve this attitude that the church is indeed sacred—and not secular—the communities serve as plausibility structures in which Church teachings are made to seem self-evident and real. In this way, despite any hints of a looming secularization, such as the evidence of individual and group consumption, my churches

have turned the negative stereotype of consumerism upside down, and appropriated it to serve their own interests and goals of sacralization.

Further Research

If we take consumption as a reflection of individualism, then the religious expressions of both CI and CO confirm aspects of the self-emphasis highlighted by Tocqueville. Can we see in contemporary society these same tensions between individuals and their societies?

I would argue that the polarized reactions to COVID-19 and vaccine mandates can be understood as an example of the tensions I found in churches. The battle is so strong here it has resulted in physical violence in clashes over wearing protective masks on airplanes and aggressive social actions exemplified in the ensuing strikes of truckers in protest. Many news reporters discussed whether or not this medical and public health issue had become "politicized."

This divided reaction to a global illness is manifested in political party ideologies. In what ways do these church types help social scientists to understand Democrat/Republican political perspectives? For example, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, divisions arose in American culture as to whether or not to get vaccinated, and whether or not to wear a mask to protect oneself and others. My observations point to a deeper worldview influence, that of the CI and CO perspectives. The divisions in the culture over responses to the COVID-19 virus can be understood as divisions between individualist and community centered ideologies. For example, those who heed the warning to wear masks and get vaccinated for the sake of public health represent a Community Oriented perspective—doing what is best for the group. In contrast, those whose first priority is toward the self, use the language of freedom and personal choice as their basis for resisting government mandates; the typology of Consumer Individualism would fit this approach. This reaction to pandemic guidelines on the part of individualists was also found

by economics professors Bazzi, Fiszbein, and Gebresilasse (2021), whose research revealed that "rugged individualists" (similar to my CI type) were more distrusting of science, and more likely to ignore public health guidelines such as social distancing.

Although my ideal type of CI and CO churches is also applicable to this instance of political polarizations, I must further interrogate whether a typology based on Protestant churches can help make sense of divisions among other religions in the United States.

For example, would this typology apply to Islam—does the tension between individualism and community exist among religious groups that have strong ritual traditions, where everyone is expected to participate in similar ways (such as Ramadan, or facing Mecca to pray)? There have been several studies done on consumerism among Muslims (e.g. Crow, 2010; Godazgar, 2007; Migdalis, et al., 2014; Varul, 2008), showing similar patterns of accommodation and resistance. Still, the question remains: does a consumer individualism—or community orientation—similar to the ideal types described here exist among mosques in the United States?

For another example, there are divisions found in Judaism (reflecting degrees of adherence to Jewish Law), yet none of the Jewish organizations can be seen as individualistically oriented. Rather, all Jewish religious organizations (such as synagogues, Chabad and Hillel at colleges) emphasize community orientation—in the sermons, their websites, committees and in encouraging participants to engage in protests and social action. Other Jewish organizations such as the ADL and ACLU (fighting against anti-Semitism and hate) similarly are oriented toward social justice and change. The consumerist tendency I found inherent in some of the Protestant churches has no parallels in Jewish synagogues and other Jewish organizations.

The CI and CO typology is derived from a study of Protestant religious organizations. Are there any others types of institutions at broader levels might reflect this typology? One, created by Emerson and Smiley composed a similar typology examining cities as their unit of analysis. Their book, *Market Cities, People Cities* (2018), argued that metropolitan areas lean either toward an economy-centric type of individualism, or toward city designs focused on bringing people together and supporting the collective. This raises interesting questions: Are there other kinds of institutions that can be delineated according to consumer individualism and community orientation? Are there CI and CO corporations? Schools? Individuals? How widespread is the usefulness of the CI and CO categories as ideal types? For example, in American politics, are Democrats essentially community oriented and Republicans essentially consumer individualist? In business, are there new types of corporations developing community-centric models in opposition to corporate capitalism? Further research on this is needed. The broader implication of these additional research inquiries is to get at the central sociological research questions investigated in this dissertation: In what ways do we as human beings lean toward an individualism shaped by consumption, or lean in the direction of prioritizing the group first, and being willing to sacrifice for the sake of our neighbors? I have attempted to explore this through the lens of Protestant types, but there is more work to be done.

References

All Sons & Daughters. (2011). All the poor and powerless [Song]. On *Brokenness Aside*.

Integrity Music.

Antonio, R. J., & Brulle, R. J. (2011). The Unbearable Lightness of Politics: Climate Change

Denial and Political Polarization. *Sociological quarterly*, *52*(2), 195-202.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.2011.01199.x

Bartholomew, C., & Moritz, T. (Eds.). (2000). *Christ and consumerism: A critical analysis of*

the spirit of the age. Paternoster Press.

Bauman, Z. (1992). *Intimations of postmodernity*. Routledge.

Bazzi, S., Fiszbein, M., & Gebresilasse, M. (2017). Frontier Culture: The Roots and Persistence

of Rugged Individualism in the United States. *National Bureau of Economic Research*

Working Paper Series, *No. 23997*. https://doi.org/10.3386/w23997

Bazzi, S., Fiszbein, M., & Gebresilasse, M. (2021). Rugged individualism and collective

(in)action during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Public Economics*, *195*, 104357.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2020.104357

Becker, P. (1999). *Congregations in conflict: Cultural models of local religious life*. Cambridge

University Press.

Belk, R. W., Wallendorf, M., & Sherry Jr., J. F. (1989). The sacred and the profane in consumer

behavior: Theodicy on the odyssey. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *16*(1), 1-38.

Bell, D. (1996). *The cultural contradictions of capitalism* (20th anniversary ed.). Basic Books.

(Original work published 1976).

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1985). *Habits of the*

heart: Individualism and commitment in American life. Harper and Row.

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1987). *Individualism & commitment in American life: Readings on the themes of Habits of the Heart* (1st ed.). Perennial Library.

Bellah, R. N., Madsen, R., Sullivan, W. M., Swidler, A., & Tipton, S. M. (1996). *Habits of the heart: Individualism and commitment in American life: Updated edition with a new introduction* (1st Calif. pbk. ed.). University of California Press.

Berger, P. L. (1999). *The desecularization of the world: Resurgent religion and world politics*. Ethics and Public Policy Center; W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

Berger, P. L. (2011). *The sacred canopy: Elements of a sociological theory of religion*. Open Road Integrated Media (Original work published 1967).

Berger, P. L. (2012). Further thoughts on religion and modernity. *Society*, *49*(4), 313-316. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-012-9551-y

Berger, S. D. (1971). The sects and the breakthrough into the modern world: On the centrality of the sects in Weber's Protestant ethic thesis. *Sociological quarterly*, *12*(4), 486-499. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1971.tb01377.x

Biaggne, T. (2009). *Don't believe the [AC] hype*. http://www.adventconspiracy.org/blog/

Bielo, J. S. (2017). The Question of Cultural Change in the Social Scientific Study of Religion: Notes from the Emerging Church. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, *56*(1), 19-25. https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12323

Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgement of taste*. Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production: Essays on art and literature*. Columbia University Press.

Bowler, K. (2013). *Blessed: A history of the American prosperity gospel*. Oxford University Press.

Brooks, D. (2004). *On paradise drive: How we live now (and always have) in the future tense*. Simon & Schuster.

Campbell, C. (1983). Romanticism and The Consumer Ethic: Intimations of a Weber-Style Thesis. *Sociological Analysis*, *44*(4), 279-295. https://doi.org/10.2307/3711611

Carlson, K., & Lueken, M. (2011). *Renovation of the church: What happens when a seeker church discovers spiritual formation*. IVP Books.

Chaves, M. (1994). Secularization as declining religious authority. *Social Forces*, *72*(3), 749-774. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/72.3.749

Christerson, B., & Flory, R. W. (2017). *The rise of network Christianity: How independent leaders are changing the religious landscape*. Oxford University Press.

Chu, J. (2010). What Would Jack* Do? *Fast Company*, *151*, 128.

Cook, C. (Ed.). (1998). *Dictionary of Historical Terms*. Random House.

Corrigan, P. (1997). *The sociology of consumption: An introduction*. Sage Publications.

Crow, K. D. (2010). Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping Among the Malays in Modern Malaysia. *Islam and Civilisational Renewal*, *2*(1), 208-210.

Dault, L. (2015). What is the preferential option for the poor? *U.S. Catholic*, *80*.

Davidman, L. (1991). *Tradition in a rootless world: Women turn to Orthodox Judaism*. University of California Press.

Dewey, J. (1999). *Individualism old and new*. Prometheus Books.

Disraeli, B. (2017). *Sybil or the two nations*. Oxford University Press (Original work published 1845).

Dulles, A. (1974). *Models of the church* (1st ed.). Doubleday.

Durkheim, É. (1995). *The elementary forms of religious life* (K. E. Fields, Trans.). Free Press. (Original work published 1912).

Durkheim, É. (2004). Individualism and the intellectuals (M. Traugott, Trans.). In J. Farganis (Ed.), *Readings in social theory: The classic tradition to post-modernism* (4th ed., pp. 81-89). McGraw Hill (Original work published 1898).

Durkheim, É. (2014). *The division of labor in society* (S. H. Lukes, W. D., Trans.). Free Press (Original work published 1902).

Durlauf, S. N. (2002). Bowling Alone: a review essay. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, *47*(3), 259-273. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0167-2681(01)00210-4

Eagle, D. (2015). Historicizing the megachurch. *Journal of Social History*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shu109

Einstein, M. (2008). *Brands of faith: Marketing religion in a commercial age*. Routledge.

Emerson, M. O., & Smiley, K. T. (2018). *Market cities, people cities: The shape of our urban future*. New York University Press.

Finke, R., & Stark, R. (2005). *The churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and losers in our religious economy* (2nd ed.). Rutgers University Press.

Fischer, C. (2005). Bowling Alone: What's the Score. *Social Networks*, *27*, 155-167. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socnet.2005.01.009

Flory, R. W., & Miller, D. E. (2008). *Finding faith: The spiritual quest of the post-boomer generation*. Rutgers University Press.

Freudenberg, M. (2015). The Emerging church as a critical response to the neoliberalization of the American religious landscape. *Politikologija religije*, *9*(2).

Gauthier, F. (2017). *Religion is Not what it Used to be. Consumerism, Neoliberalism, and the Global Reshaping of Religion*. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2017/10/religion-is-not-what-it-used-to-be-consumerism-neoliberalism-and-the-global-reshaping-of-religion/

Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference* (1st ed. ed.). Little, Brown.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Godazgar, H. (2007). Islam Versus Consumerism and Postmodernism in the Context of Iran. *Social Compass*, *54*(3), 389-418. https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768607080835

Goh, R. B. H. (2008). Hillsong and "megachurch" practice: Semiotics spatial logic and the embodiment of contemporary evangelical protestantism. *Material Religion*, *4*(3), 284-304.

Goldstein, W. S. (2009). Secularization patterns in the old paradigm. *Sociology of religion*, *70*(2), 157-178. https://doi.org/10.1093/socrel/srp029

Greenblatt, A., & Powell, T. (2007). Rise of Megachurches. *CQ Researcher*, 769-792.

Gungor. (2009). Beautiful things [Song] : On *Beautiful Things*. Brash Music.

Hamilton, M. S. (2000). Willow Creek's place in history. *Christianity Today*, *44*(13), 62-68.

Herberg, W. (1983). *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An essay in American religious sociology*. University of Chicago Press.

Hofstede, G. H., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind: Intercultural cooperation and its importance for survival* (3rd ed. ed.). McGraw-Hill.

Humphery, K. (2010). *Excess: Anti-consumerism in the West*. Polity.

Iannaccone, L. R. (1995). Voodoo Economics? Reviewing the Rational Choice Approach to Religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, *34*(1), 76-88. https://doi.org/10.2307/1386524

James, C. B. (2018). *Church planting in post-Christian soil: Theology and practice*. Oxford University Press.

Johnson, B. (1971). Church and sect revisited. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, *10*(2), 124-137. https://doi.org/10.2307/1385301

Johnson, M. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of Chicago Press.

Kilde, J. H. (2002). *When Church became theatre: The transformation of evangelical architecture and worship in nineteenth-century America*. Oxford University Press.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. University of Chicago Press.

Leach, W. (1994). *Land of desire: Merchants, power, and the rise of a new American culture* (1st ed.). Vintage Books.

Luckmann, T. (1967). *The invisible religion: The problem of religion in modern society*. Macmillan.

Lyon, D. (2000). *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in postmodern times*. Polity Press.

Maddox, M. (2012). "In the Goofy parking lot": Growth churches as a novel religious form for late capitalism. *Social Compass*, *59*(2), 146-158.

Marx, K. (1967). *Capital; A critique of political economy* (S. Moore & E. Aveling, Trans.). (Vol. 1). International Publishers (Original work published 1867).

McDannell, C. (1995). *Material Christianity: Religion and popular culture in America*. Yale University Press.

McGavran, D., & Arn, W. (1973). *How to grow a church*. Regal Books Division, G/L Publications.

McGavran, D. A. (1980). *Understanding church growth* (Rev. ed. ed.). Eerdmans.

McIntosh, G. (2002). *One church, four generations: Understanding and reaching all ages in your church*. Baker Books.

McIntyre, E. H. (2007). Brand of choice: Why Hillsong music is winning sales and souls. *Australian Religion Studies Review*.

McKelvie, L. M. (2013). *The emerging church movement: An exploratory case study of its environmental and political attitudes*. [Unpublished master's thesis]. Oregon State University.

McKinnon, A. M. (2010). Elective Affinities of the Protestant Ethic: Weber and the Chemistry of Capitalism. *Sociological Theory*, *28*(1), 108-126. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9558.2009.01367.x

Migdalis, N. I., Tomlekova, N., Serdaris, P. K., & Yordanov, Y. G. (2014). The impact of religion on shopping behavior. *International Journal of Management Research and Reviews*, *4*(12), 1120-1128.

Miller, D. E. (1997). *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the new millennium*. University of California Press.

Miller, V. J. (2003). *Consuming religion: Christian faith and practice in a consumer culture*. Continuum.

Mills, C. W. (2000). *The sociological imagination*. Oxford University Press (Original work published 1959).

Moberg, D. O. (1977). *The great reversal: Evangelism and social concern* (Rev. ed.). Lippincott.

Moore, R. L. (1994). *Selling God: American religion in the marketplace of culture*. Oxford University Press.

Moritz, J. M. (2008). Beyond Strategy, Towards the Kingdom of God: The Post-Critical Reconstructionist Mission of the Emerging Church. *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, *47*(1), 27-36. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1540-6385.2008.00365.X

Niebuhr, H. R. (1957). *The social sources of denominationalism*. Meridian Books (Original work published 1929).

Nisbet, R. A. (1993). *The sociological tradition*. Transaction Publishers; Basic Books (Original work published 1966).

Nisbet, R. A. (2010). *The quest for community: A study in the ethics of order and freedom* (New critical ed. ed.). ISI Books.

Nouwen, H. J. M., McNeill, D. P., & Morrison, D. A. (2006). *Compassion: A reflection on the Christian life*. Image Books/Doubleday.

Pew Forum. (2005). *Myths of the modern megachurch*. https://www.pewforum.org/2005/05/23/myths-of-the-modern-megachurch/

Princen, T., Maniates, M., & Conca, K. (2002). Confronting Consumption. In T. Princen, M. Maniates, & K. Conca (Eds.), *Confronting Consumption* (Vol. 1). The MIT Press.

Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.

Ritzer, G. (2010). *Enchanting a disenchanted world: Continuity and change in the cathedrals of consumption* (3rd ed.). Pine Forge Press.

Roberts, K. A., & Yamane, D. (2016). *Religion in sociological perspective* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Roof, W. C. (1993). *A generation of seekers: The spiritual journeys of the baby boom generation* (1st ed.). HarperSanFrancisco.

Roozen, D. A., McKinney, W., & Carroll, J. W. (1984). *Varieties of religious presence: Mission in public life*. Pilgrim Press.

Sargeant, K. H. (2000). *Seeker churches: Promoting traditional religion in a nontraditional way*. Rutgers University Press.

Schaller, L. (2000). *The very large church: New rules for leaders*. Abingdon Press.

Schmidt, L. E. (1995). *Consumer rites: The buying & selling of American holidays*. Princeton University Press.

Schor, J. (1999). *The overspent American: Why we want what we don't need*. HarperPerennial.

Scott, S. (2010). Revisiting the Total Institution: Performative Regulation in the Reinventive Institution. *Sociology*, *44*(2), 213-231. www.jstor.org/stable/42857391

Sherkat, D. E., & Ellison, C. G. (1999). Recent developments and current controversies in the sociology of religion. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *25*(1), 363-394. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.25.1.363

Smith, C., & Snell, P. (2009). *Souls in transition: The religious and spiritual lives of emerging adults*. Oxford University Press.

Speth, J. G. (2008). *The bridge at the end of the world: Capitalism, the environment, and crossing from crisis to sustainability*. Yale University Press.

Suttle, T. (2014). *Shrink: Faithful ministry in a church-growth culture*. Zondervan.

Swartz, D. (1997). *Culture & power: The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*. University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: The making of the modern identity*. Harvard University Press.

Thumma, S., & Travis, D. (2007). *Beyond megachurch myths: What we can learn from America's largest churches*. Jossey-Bass.

Tocqueville, A. D. (1969). *Democracy in America* (G. Lawrence, Trans.; 1st ed.). Doubleday. (Original work published 1840).

Tocqueville, A. D. (2000). *Democracy in America* (H. C. Mansfield & D. Winthrop, Trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published in 1840).

Tomlin, C. (2016). Good good father [Song] : On *Never Lose Sight*. Six Step Records/Sparrow Records.

Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism & collectivism*. Westview Press.

Twitchell, J. B. (1999). *Lead us into temptation: The triumph of American materialism*. Columbia University Press.

Twitchell, J. B. (2004). *Branded nation: The marketing of megachurch, college, inc., and museumworld*. Simon & Schuster.

Usunier, J.-C., & Stolz, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Religion as brands: New perspectives on the marketization of religion and spirituality*. Ashgate.

Varul, M. Z. (2008). After Heroism: Religion versus consumerism. Preliminaries for an investigation of Protestantism and Islam under consumer culture. *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations*, *19*(2), 237-255. https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410801924046

Wade, M. (2016). Seeker-friendly: The Hillsong megachurch as an enchanting total institution. *Journal of Sociology*, *52*(4), 661-676. https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783315575171

Wade, M., & Hynes, M. (2013). Worshipping bodies: Affective labour in the Hillsong church. *Geographical Research*, *51*(2), 173-179. https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-5871.12010

Wagner, C. P. (1984). *Your church can grow* (Rev. ed.). Regal Books.

Weber, M. (1958). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (H. H. Gerth, & C. W. Mills, Trans.). Oxford University Press.

Weber, M. (2011). *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism* (S. Kalberg, Trans.; Revised 1920 ed.). Oxford University Press (Original work published 1920).

Yamane, D. (1997). Secularization on trial: In defense of a neosecularization paradigm. *Journal for the scientific study of religion*, *36*(1), 109-122. https://doi.org/10.2307/1387887

Footnotes

¹ The observations of this church visit were reconstructed from memory, field notes, photos, video clips, and an audio recording of the majority of the service. All of these were recorded on the day of the visit.

² This sounds very much like the spontaneity I have observed among Charismatic Pentecostals, and I begin to wonder if this church has come from that background—even though they are non-denominational.

³ The use of the word "seed" catches my attention. To refer to money given in a church offering as "seed" is a reference to a practice known as "seed faith," that is usually associated with "Prosperity Gospel" churches. Seed Faith is the practice of giving money to a church ministry with the expectation that God will, in return, bless your life and finances. Thus, the money given in the offering is the "seed" planted, believing that God will return to you a larger harvest. The practice of holding the offering in the air traces back to the Kenneth Hagin's ministries, and was adopted by a group of Prosperity Gospel churches known as Rhema churches (Bowler, 2013, p. 129). The seed faith reference makes me wonder more about the background connections of this non-denominational church. It seems to have ties to both Pentecostalism, and to the Prosperity Gospel movement. Even though I have observed some hints of practices associated with Prosperity Gospel churches here (such as the treasure chest background behind the preacher), this offering practice is the first overt indicator of these type of practices in this service that I have observed.

⁴ Those who have studied Protestant churches will recognize elements from Prosperity Gospel churches in this description. Certainly, there are some Prosperity Gospel influences here. However, as I will attempt to show in this dissertation, the Prosperity Gospel label is too simple,

and too narrow as a category to capture all that I observed at this church and others like it. There were many elements that I observed in this service that do not reflect Prosperity Gospel teachings. In addition, the label "Pentecostalism" (a label often associated with Prosperity Gospel churches) does not fit well as a descriptor of this church, since they were missing references to the Holy Spirit and distinctive practices of laying on hands and speaking in tongues for which Pentecostal churches are known. There were a cluster of values and behaviors reflected in these services which represents something more than Prosperity Gospel or Pentecostalism. This dissertation will attempt to provide a typology that will more accurately represent these observations.

[5] The observations of this church visit were reconstructed from memory, field notes, photos, video clips, and an audio recording of the majority of the service. All of these were recorded on the day of the visit. The events described here are a composite compiled from two consecutive weekly church services.

[6] "Liturgy" is the word used to describe the prepared form or service order for Christian Sunday worship. This will be described in detail in another section.

[7] "Tithe" means "tenth" and is a standard Cristian measure of giving. It is based on an instruction from the Hebrew scriptures to bring 1/10th of a person's harvest/income to the church to care for the needs of the church. Churches often use the plural term "tithes" to mean the regular 1/10th giving expected of regular members, and "offering" to mean any monetary giving over and above that minimum, or money given for some special cause or project.

[8] Interestingly, 38.6% of those churches that provided an answer to the above question (16.9% of all USA and Canada churches from this denomination) mentioned some form of community involvement. For example, one church emphasized their community involvement in

this way: "WE ARE EMBRACING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A COMMUNITY CHURCH.
We strive to be part of our community and be a blessing to it." (Author's emphasis).

[9] Observing these social changes, early social theorists developed their works in the
historical and philosophical context of two trends: On one hand there was growing individual
freedoms espoused by liberalism, and on the other conservative thought which bemoaned the
loss of past social traditions. Note that Nisbet acknowledged three philosophical camps, adding
radicalism to the aforementioned liberalism and conservativism (Nisbet, 1993, pp. 9-11).

[10] Tocqueville also wrote about the balance between individualism and public service that
he observed. Freedom and autonomy had the effect of increasing the tendency toward
individualism, but that democratic systems also required the average citizen to participate in
(political) public service to function (Tocqueville, 1840/2000, p. 487). Tocqueville also observed
the tendency by American citizens to form associations and to participate in politics through free
institutions (1840/2000, p. 486-488, 490, 492). In a democratic society, political institutions were
a constant reminder that even individuals must at some point occupy themselves with the
interests of others. Even with the rise of individualistic values, Tocqueville remarked that he
"often saw Americans make great and genuine sacrifices for the public, and… when needed, they
almost never fail to lend faithful support to one another" (1840/2000, p. 488). However, the
context of this observation was the acknowledgement that public service was simultaneously
mixed with self interests—that it would take the government putting a road through private
property to awaken the individual to the necessity of involvement in public affairs (Tocqueville,
1840/2000, p. 487). Tocqueville thus observed a mixture of both individualistic tendencies and
voluntary public service. However, his observations ultimately led him to describe an
increasingly strong individualism and declining public involvement in American society,

accompanied by an isolated citizenry, with diminished support in political affairs (1840/2000, p. 485, 487).

[11] The context of the quotes from Tocqueville's writings in this paragraph refer to the middle class, which Tocqueville described as "not being wealthy enough or powerful enough to exert great influence over the fates of those like them, have nevertheless acquired or preserved enough enlightenment and goods to be able to be self-sufficient" (1840/2000, p. 43).

[12] The effects of urbanization upon community in the United States paralleled what had happened in England at the time. Nisbet argues that the conservatives at that time bemoaned the decline of community in England, describing how industrialism had destroyed any sense of community, turning English towns into mere aggregations of individuals (1993, pp. 51-52).

[13] Often social theorists place this discussion in the context of the broader comparison of individualism with collectivism (for example, Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). These writers tend to categorize nation-states or whole cultures in one category or the other—predominantly placing the West (individualistic) against the "rest" (collectivist) (Triandis, 1995, p. 16). Although such sweeping macro level comparisons may be helpful, they have a tendency to underemphasize the distinctions that occur within a culture or within institutions.

[14] Putnam produced a wide variety of evidence supporting his observations, citing declining membership statistics from multiple civic organizations such as Knights of Columbus, the Rotary, Kiwanis, and League of Women Voters (2000).

[15] Peter Berger was a well-known scholar of secularization, who argued for the decline of religion in society (1967/2011), but later famously reversed his position, affirming his previous conclusion was not supported by data (Berger, 1999, 2012). Others have since argued for a

neosecularization theory, reasoning that it is not religious groups that have declined per se, but but the persuasive power of religious authority (Chaves, 1994).

[16] In other writings, Durkheim made clear his understanding that even the most individualized of religious forms were still inherently social, based on shared experiences (1912/1995, pp. 426-427). However, the point of this paragraph is that Durkheim also recognized factors related to Christianity that connect it to the expansion of individualism.

[17] For context, Bellah and colleagues attribute the community emphasis to a mysticism included in Nan's worldview. They see her emphasis on community as coming from a mystical motivation to be in touch with the world around her, rather than any particular Christian teaching (Bellah, et al., 1996, pp. 228-229).

[18] The individual nature of evangelism is exemplified in the common language used in the process—asking the person to "accept Christ as their *personal* savior."

[19] Although it is merely a correlation and does not necessarily imply causation, William Leach in his history of the rise of consumer capitalism marks this same time period (1880-1930) as the "crucial formative years" of consumer culture (1994, p. xiii, 3-4). Campbell (and others) argue for an earlier rise of consumerism, roughly simultaneous with the rise of production during the Industrial Revolution, with roots in the 1700s and the rise of Romanticism (1983, p. 280).

[20] In the mid 1800s, Tocqueville observed an attitude of constant restlessness among Americans, seeing that they had difficulty being satisfied with their current possessions, and were always looking to possess goods not currently owned (1840/2000, p. 511).

[21] Adding nuance to this conclusion, Tocqueville asserts that caring for one's own friends and family is still an example of self-focused individualism, in that it expresses care and concern for "me and mine," and stops short of care for "us and ours"—which reflects a concern for others

in the community. This is an important aspect of the definition of individualism offered by

Tocqueville (the inclusion of friends and family as a part of one's individual little society)

(1840/2000, p. 482), and seems to have escaped the attention of Bellah and his co-authors.

[22] To illustrate these types, Emerson and Smiley emphasize how taxes are handled

matters greatly. They note that in Market Cities, taxes are kept as low as possible, and that "The

idea is to let individuals hold on to more of their money," (Emerson & Smiley, 2018, p. 54).

Individuals will then innovate and stimulate the economy. In contrast, People Cities have

"substantial taxes," and that those taxes are intended to be used to to provide top of the line

public services—which are equally distributed to all. This is because "People Cities thrive on the

idea that equity for all is being achieved," (Emerson & Smiley, 2018, p. 54)—an important

communal value.

[23] When I spoke to Michael Emerson after a presentation on these two ideal types of

cities, I asked him about possible parallels among church types—he replied, "I didn't even think

to look at churches," (M. Emerson, personal communication, May 16, 2017). Although there

may not be a direct correlation between city and church types (it is unknown whether or not

People Cities would harbor more Community Oriented churches, for example), the two city

typology lays the groundwork for further examination of other social structures such as churches.

[24] Two classic examples of theological books on the kingdom of God are: *The*

Upsidedown Kingdom, by Donald Kraybill, and *The Gospel of the Kingdom,* by George Eldon

Ladd.

[25] Pastor Randy of The Upper Room spoke of a conflict of the Kingdom of God against

"Empire"—the dominant capitalist system.

[26] The use of the word "calls" as in "God calls" has the meaning of "asks" or that God directs a person to do something. Here, the phrase used by interviewees would be in the negative to make a point—"God does not call us to be comfortable," in other words, God calls people to do his will, even if that makes the person uncomfortable. See the sentence following the one including this footnote.

[27] Liberation theology is a theological lens that interprets the Bible through the perspective of the poor. It the lenses of "social concern for the poor and political liberation for oppressed peoples" (Cook, 1998, p. 203) as a underlying ideological approach to understand the teachings of Christianity. It began in the 1960s by Latin American theologians, as a Catholic response to injustices happening in South American countries at that time.

The phrase, "God's preferential option for the poor," describes a Biblical interpretation recognizing God's concern for, and awareness of the plight of the poor in a unique way. It is a theological position that God expresses more concern for the poor than for those who have an abundance of resources. For this reason, it can be a controversial position, as it suggests that God does not give attention to—and thus possibly does not love— all humans equally. The phrase was popularized by liberation theologian, Jon Sobrino (Dault, 2015, p. 46).

[28] The church association of this interviewee is complex. They were an attendee at the CO church where I was doing participant observation, but had a lingering association and staff position at a different church—which had sponsored their mission work in Mexico in previous years. This person certainly had a community orientation, as he had moved his family into an underserved Spanish speaking neighborhood in their Midwest city as an expression of solidarity, and has completed a masters degree in Social Justice.

[29] The references to race and racism in this quotation raise issues of race, social class and white privilege. The perspective of this interviewee is one that comes from a background of privilege. Even though they recognize that their experience is different as a white person than those of people of color, they still speak from a position of power. They acknowledge their desire and need to learn with regard to race, but they still see themselves as one who must intervene as a white savior to help the "needy" people of color. The theological understanding of downward mobility does not address or diminish privilege—it is a mixture of both an initial recognition of a background of privilege, and at the same time attempting to come to solidarity with the marginalized.

[30] The Upper Room church holds a potluck dinner as a part of their Sunday night services. It is considered an important part of their mission and theology, to gather together to eat as one aspect of their church life. It is also reflected in their church name.

[31] "Gifts" is a term often used in Protestant churches. It can be defined as skills or talents specifically given by God to a person—to be used in service to the church. In many churches these talents are described as "spiritual gifts." However, some churches reserve the term "spiritual gifts" for supernatural abilities such as speaking in tongues, while others include more general volunteer oriented abilities labeled as the gifts of "helping," or "service."

[32] Young Life is a Protestant parachurch ministry, which introduces Christianity to high school students through meetings and summer camps. It has chapters connected with over 8,000 high school campuses in the United States.

[33] In the late 1980s and 1990s, Evangelicals and sociologists of religion used the term "seeker churches," as a label to describe a type of church that focused on drawing people in: "A seeker church is one that tailors its programs and services to attract people who are not church

attenders," (Sergeant, 2000, p. 2). This is explained in more detail later, in the section on the Historical Context of Church Growth.

It is important to note that I am arguing that Consumer Individualism is a more accurate term, especially after more than 20 years of practicing this seeker "attraction" approach—these churches are now (and I argue, always have been) full of consumers who are drawn to the programs that satisfy their individualistic worldview.

[34] At one CO church, I observed the lights dimmed during the singing so that the projected words on the screens could be read more easily. The lights were then turned all the way up for the rest of the service. But with that exception, the lights were on during the entire service at every CO church that I observed.

[35] The context of this quote from Durkheim is the effect of punishment upon social solidarity. However, the description of vibrations and music echoes his connection of collective effervescence to music (Durkheim, 1912/1995, p. 218).

[36] Miller in *Reinventing American Protestantism,* wrote of several worshippers who described a deep emotional experience that was frequently accompanied by crying. Miller quotes several worshipers from Vineyard church congregations, who described "something in worship [that] frequently evokes tears and extremely deep emotions" (1997, p. 88). Miller interprets these descriptions of "spontaneous tears during worship" (1997, p. 88), as a different type of consciousness, which can be triggered by religious practices, such as music, which plays "a strong role in triggering one's consciousness during a… worship service" (Miller, 1997, p. 90). In my research, I observed worshippers raising their arms and swaying to the music, and I also observed people experiencing deep emotions. However, no interviewees spoke of intense emotions expressed through crying—nor did I observe people crying while singing. Instead,

those I interviewed spoke of how worship affected them, in terms of how much they enjoyed worship, or of the "pizazz" of the music at church. "Enjoyment of worship" was a frequent descriptor on CI church websites as well. In general, the CI emphasis was upon the pleasureable quality of the worship experience, as well as the therapeutic effect described in this section.

[37] Closeness to God has been described by worshippers as an intimacy with the divine, or a sense of the presence of God in the room. Donald Miller describes the experience that results from worship as a kind of transcendence, or "sacred lovemaking," which worshippers in his study characterized as getting caught up in the moment of "just adoring the Lord" (1997, p. 87-88).

[38] The Christian calendar observes the following seasons: Advent (in December, anticipating the birth of Jesus); Christmas; Epiphany (in January, recognizing the revelation of Jesus as the Christ, the savior); Lent (in the spring, a period of repentance in preparation for Easter); Holy Week (the week leading up to the crucifixion); Easter (the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the 49 day period after Easter, until the Hebrew celebration of Pentecost, when Christians celebrate the Holy Spirit descending upon the disciples); and finally the period after Pentecost, also called "Ordinary Time" (when the scripture passages selected do not link to any calendar event).

[39] Two caveats are worth mentioning. First, all Protestants observe Christmas and Easter, whether or not they observe the rest of the Christian calendar seasons. It is the observance of the other seasons surrounding these two pillar events that represents the use of the Christian calendar as an aspect of ancient liturgical emphasis. Second, Protestants do not observe days dedicated to Saints or Saint birthdays as is customary for Catholics.

[40] This is a reference to the Gospel passage, Matthew 5:13-16.

[41] There were exceptions to this—for example, the pastor at Pathway church preached through Bible books, but gave them intriguing topic-like titles. At Lakeview, an occasional sermon series were preached through a Bible book. These were mixed with topical series— although most of the sermons preached were topical in nature.

[42] The use of video sermons and live web streaming of sermons was in place well before the 2020 Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown, when churches in the United States were restricted from meeting in person, and most moved their services online.

[43] In addition to the use of video sermons, I also observed among Consumer Individualist churches the use of numerous guest speakers. These high-powered, dynamic preachers was one more method of generating the best possible engaging and entertaining message for attendees to consume.

[44] Luke and Laura from Country Plaza church informed me that some reactions by the audience were "performed"—regular attendee had been coached to react to the video sermon as if the preacher were physically present:

Laura: People were talking back to the video like the person was there, but I think it's because they have those people, quote, unquote, "planted" that are initiating that response. And then it's almost like there's this phenomenon that everybody just follows along.

Luke: There's always encouragement and like, "Hey, if you hear something good, [or] you hear something that challenges you, you vocalize that—if you feel comfortable." We have begun to see people adopt that, and that does create a culture.

[45] Some CI churches that leaned closely to "Prosperity Gospel" in their preaching or offering appeal, would talk about the giving of money as a "seed" to be planted, as an act of

faith, almost like making a deposit—with the implication that the giver would then receive even more back from God.

[46] Even though these are small receptacles, they face the criticism of the potential waste connected with increased single use plastic wrapping—one of the side effects of individualism present in capitalist production.

[47] The concept of "calling" was utilized by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* to describe a motivating duty to work which promoted the development of capitalism. The use of the concept by the leadership of this church emphasizes the spiritual definition of calling, which "denotes a task given by God and the incorporation of a demarcated realm of work into the core of the Protestant believer's life" (Weber, 1920/2011, p. 426). The point of this paragraph is that in their materials describing the origin of Galilee Shores church, this pastor's understanding of their calling included a God inspired direction to a specific urban neighborhood, which led to the purchase of an existing congregation's building.

[48] For confidentiality, the name of this church has been changed. However, the name "Hand of God" was chosen as a pseudonym to capture the same intentional reflection of God at work that is found in the actual church name.

[49] AbundantLife [name changed for confidentiality] is a separate non-profit organization and brand started by Lakeview church. It exists to support churches through conferences around the theme of becoming "abundant life churches." The mission description includes asking participating churches to: "Passionately Focus On Outreach, Spiritual Growth, And Leadership Development-Commit To Attending The Annual AbundantLife Conference, Commit To Annual Goals For Outreach, Spiritual Growth, And Leadership Development-Agree With The Abundant

Life Churches International Statement Of Faith."

(https://www.taxexemptworld.com/organization.asp?tn=1251731).

[50] It should be noted that not any one church has all of these events—this list is provided to show the variety of the kind of events that Consumer Individualists offer. Some of the events listed were only offered by a single large church (for example, Lakeview alone offered the Christmas light show, and SpiritChurch.com was the only one to offer the I AM WOMAN conference, and the Pirates themed giveaways). At the same time, many events on this list were offered by multiple CI churches that I observed. All offered some form of non-religious workshop or participated in a Christian conference. Here are some percentage examples to give perspective: 20% had a comedian entertainer show; 50% advertised Financial Peace University workshop; 40% hold some type of physical exercise classes, and 60% offered some sort of sports team participation; 50% held some form of Growth Track training courses; 50% offered a non-Bible study women's workshop; 60% offered some kind of marriage enrichment seminar.

[51] For those not familiar with Christian conversion, the phrase "accepted Jesus in a real genuine way," may not be readily understood. First, "accepting Jesus" is the common phrase for the conversion process, which involves "accepting" by belief that Jesus was all that the Christian scriptures claim he is (the Jewish messiah, the son of God). The second part of this phrase "in a real genuine way" requires further interpretation. It is most accurately understood as a statement in defense of the previous claim on the part of this pastor. In Christian ministry circles, upon hearing of large numbers of converts, it would be a common response to question whether those were true or "real" conversions. This pastor is anticipating that response and defending his claim that these were not just children being emotionally manipulated to "raise your hand if you love Jesus," but instead are true believers.

[52] The meaning of "clean" family fun is that these churches often borrow forms of entertainment from the secular culture (e.g. a performance by a celebrity musician), but often present a version that does not have morally objectionable content (such as sexually explicit dance movements, or obscene language).

[53] This quote in part defines the desired support to continue to live morally. There is a viewpoint expressed by Protestants, but especially the CI type, that the world discourages Christians and tempts them to go against God's rules and a Christian lifestyle. Moral living means "clean" living—not lying, cheating, stealing, or being unkind—but also following God's commandments. There is also a connotation to specifically keep oneself from being sexually promiscuous.

[54] In preceding chapters of *Bowling Alone*, Putnam does acknowledge that religious participation is highly associated with civic volunteerism (2000, p. 66-67). However, he quickly negates this as a contributor to social capital and community involvement, arguing that there has been a decline in religious membership in general, and that religion has become more privatized—resulting in a loss of community engagement (Putnam, 2000, p. 70-74). My argument is that the existence of the Community Oriented church type and their examples of community involvement are evidence to counter the conclusion that religious organizations are not involved in their neighborhoods. At least there is evidence of community involvement among these Protestant congregations.

[55] To double check this statement, I did a search in every CI church document and web page that I collected for data. I searched for the words: equality, inequality, race, racism, justice, and equity. Not one of these words appeared in the publications of any of these churches—except for one single reference to "gender equality" on a webpage referencing a global ministry

partner of Lakeview church (the mention was in reference to the work of the missionary partner that they supported, not the direct work of the church itself).

[56] Consistent with their viewpoint, several CIinterviewees did express that it would be acceptable for Christian individuals to serve the poor if that was their personal choice. What was consistently absent from their comments was a sense that their church should be working on behalf of the poor together as a congregation.

[57] One young mother at Eternal Rock church took the emphasis on the individual source of inequality to an extreme, expressing her belief that inequality was within the individual themselves, under their control:

"You can change your environment drastically just with who you are…. There is something inside of us that wants us to do better, but there's also something inside of us that tells we can't. A lot of that inequality is inside of ourselves and it's how we deal with it when we see it."

[58] In context, Dewey's reference to "corporateness" is not a reference to social collectivity or "community," but instead to industrial corporations and the influence of capitalist economic life upon society at large.

[59] This thought has been echoed by megachurch pastor Rick Warren, in the Pew Forum interview, "Myths of the Modern Megachurch," (2005).

[60] For a brief history of Willow Creek, see Sargeant, 2000, pp. 190ff.

[61] Although not necessarily a slogan, Spirit Church has internet promotion deeply integrated into its identity. Every place the church name appears visually—in print, on every church sign, and even on the front doors—it appears as "SpiritChurch.com" pointing people to the church website. In this way, the very name of the church is co-opted as a marketing tool to

drive multimedia traffic. (I observed during services they verbally refer to themselves as "Spirit Church," but I could find no print material or signage not including ".com" as a part of the church name).

[62] Interpreting from the context of my interview with Rhonda, her meaning of the word community here included both definitions of "a sense of belonging," and "a neighborhood location." For several Community Oriented interviewees, those definitions were blurred—their sense of belonging to a church body was mixed with its mission to connect to those around them.

[63] In addition to reading both books, I attended services at both of these churches.

[64] Schaller, L. (2000). The Very Large Church: New Rules for Leaders. Abingdon Press.

[65] Reflecting the ambivalent mixture of shopping responses that were consistently similar, but did show some differences, some Consumer Individualists sought to balance their perspective on an upwardly mobile progression. Pastor Bernie from NewLife church expressed his mixed feelings stating, "I think it's great to desire more or better or whatever but we should be content with what we have as well." Even though this response is mixed, it is consistent with interviews on shopping, reflecting both the similar responses by both types (some contentment), and the unique difference by Consumer Individualists (upward progression of desiring more or better).

[66] The authors present additional quotations that appear to me to contradict their central argument. In addition to Nan's and Mary's words above, another interviewee, Angelo, described himself as engaging in politics out of a concern "for the welfare of the town as a whole" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 192). Similarly, they discuss Cecilia, who desired to "create a society that will genuinely include the have-nots" (Bellah, et al., 1996, p. 192).

Appendix A: Interview Question Guide

Interviews were based on the following questions/topics:

THE GOOD LIFE

What do you think constitutes the good life? What does the good life involve?

What factors contribute to a good life?

[if the following are not mentioned, follow up…]

How important to the good life are factors such as:

       health or wealth?

       What about participation in a group? Participation in what sort of groups would contribute to a good life for you?

       Is being a good citizen? What does that mean to you?

       What about involvement in social change?

       Are there others with whom you share these notions of a good life?

       Is success an important part of the good life? What kinds of success? Please tell me how you would define success?

       Do you participate in any religious activities?

         Has this shaped how you define the good life for yourself? Describe.

       What other groups or experiences have contributed to your notions of the good life?

       Are close family relations a part of it?

Is there an opposite to the good life?

What factors might contribute to this?

FAMILY AND THE GOOD LIFE

Tell me what your life was like when you were growing up?

Describe your family

Did you feel your family was living the good life? Describe…

Do you think your parents had a model of the good life they were trying to follow?

Did they talk about this explicitly?

     If yes, what sorts of ideas, concepts, beliefs and/or words would they have used?

     If so, did you believe in their view as you were growing up?

Did your parents explicitly, or, by example, try to teach you values?

Can you tell me about them?

Were your parents members of any social or religious groups?

Did this association contribute to their ability to create for themselves "the good life"?

Were there beliefs and activities that they shared with members of these groups?

SENSE OF SELF, SELF RELIANCE AND VALUES

Are you satisfied with your life as it is currently?

     Do you feel your life now constitutes what we may call "the good life"?

What aspects of your life contribute to this sense of whether you believe you are living the good life? Are there factors which detract from that? What about your life makes you the most satisfied? The Least?

Do you have a guiding set of values or principles that you live by? What are they? Where did those come from?

(If appropriate): Is there anything you would like to change so your life would more closely approximate your notion of the good life? Tell me about it.

Are you involved in any activities outside of home life? If so, what are they, and what do they mean to you?

What are some activities that you would like to do that you have not yet done?

When you experience a need or difficulty in life, what do you do first? (if that doesn't work, what do you do next?)

How would you summarize and describe who you are to someone who did not know you?

RELATIONSHIPS

Do you feel a loving relationship is an important part of living the good life?

Describe your version of an ideal loving relationship.

If you were going to give examples of what "love" is between two people, what would you emphasize in your examples?

Are there any obligations that are a part of a loving relationship? If so, what are they?

RELATIONS TO CHURCH

Can you please tell me about the church you attend, if you do so currently?

How did you come to start attending this church?

How do you see yourself in relationship to the church?

What do you get out of church? What do you contribute to it?

Do you expect anything in particular when you go to church? (If yes, can you please describe it?)

What keeps you going to church?

Do you pray? What do you pray for? Are there things you find yourself praying for on a regular basis?

Have your standards, perspectives or behavior changed since you began attending your church? In what ways? Please be specific…

What is for you the most important component or aspect of the church?

Is there anything that makes your church unique?

Does the church have a mission or a sense of purpose? Please describe it.

What is the role or duty of the church?

What role does the church serve in your life?

What about in the broader society?

If someone asked you to describe what your church is all about and what it means to you, what would you say?

Can you think of any stories you would tell to give a clear idea of what your church is like?

Some Christians talk about being "blessed." In your view, what does it mean to be "blessed"? Do you feel that you are blessed? What makes a person blessed?

Do you believe the Church must perform certain roles or meet certain needs for individuals and for society?

(If yes: What types of activities, duties, or roles should not be neglected by the church?)

Do you feel that your church is in tension with the surrounding society or in alignment with it? In what ways?

What do you think is the ideal relationship of church to its surrounding culture?

SOCIETY

Are you satisfied with things as they are in the world around you?

With what aspects are you satisfied?

What would you change if you could?

How do you think that change should happen?

Is equality an aspect of a good society? How so?

What in your view is the impact of inequality on the social order?

Do you have any thoughts about the sources of inequality –both at the poor end of the continuum or at the wealthy…

Can people who are poor (or wealthy) believe they are living out "the good life?"

Please explain…

CONSUMERISM

What factors shape your attitudes and feelings about shopping? (factors: things from your background, history, story…)

Do you think acquisitions (getting and owning possessions) contribute to your sense of a meaningful life? If so, how much do they contribute?

In your mind, are there any limits to how much you feel you should buy? If so, on what are these limits based?

Have you ever thought about what role shopping plays in your life? Do you think about how shopping and consumerism have an impact on society?

Have your feelings about shopping or your shopping activities ever undergone any kind of transition or major change? Under what circumstances? Can you describe those transitions or changes….

How do you feel when you are shopping? When you finish shopping?

SNOWBALL SAMPLING

Who else do you know that might be interested in doing this interview?

Appendix B: Interviewee Demographics

Gender

Male	21
Female	15
Non-binary/Other	0

Age

18-29	7
30-45	20
46-65	8
66+	1

Race

White	35
Hispanic/ Latinx	1

Education

Some College	2
College Degree	22
Graduate Degree	12

Income

0-23k	1

24-34k	3
35-60k	16
61-149k	15
150k+	1