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Author(s): Andrew Peter Wier

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Tensions in Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Practice:

Towards a Practical Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Social Ethic

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements

of the University of Chester for the degree of

Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology

By

Andrew Peter Wier

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I dedicate this thesis to the memory of my late father, Desmond Wier (1924-2009). From him I have inherited a desire for greater appreciation and understanding between Christians of different traditions. I hope that in a small way this research will help promote such appreciation and understanding between the different 'wings' and 'camps' of the UK urban Church.

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[1] These names are the pseudonyms that I have used throughout this thesis to ensure participant anonymity. Although I am unable to disclose the identities of the participating churches, I still wish to thank them personally.

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Andrew Peter Wier

Abstract

The past fifteen years have witnessed a growing engagement with disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods on the part of UK charismatic-evangelical churches. Yet this has received little attention within previous academic studies across a variety of disciplines (voluntary sector studies; the sociology of religion; Christian social ethics; and evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal theology). In addressing these gaps, this study achieves two main purposes. Firstly, it enables greater understanding of charismatic-evangelical motivation and urban practice. Secondly, it reflects theologically on such motivation and practice, and articulates a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. To do this, the study drew on models of practical theology to integrate qualitative research with theological reflection. Given the under-researched nature of the subject area, an exploratory, inductive, and multi-method research approach was chosen. This combined an ethnographic study of a charismatic-evangelical urban church with focus groups in a further three charismatic-evangelical churches.

Analysis of the qualitative data gathered led to the identification of six tensions that characterise contemporary charismatic-evangelical urban practice. An engagement with other bodies of literature then found that all six tensions have some resonance with the findings of previous research in voluntary sector studies and the sociology of religion. However, it also revealed that the experience of UK charismatic-evangelical urban churches challenges certain established understandings in these disciplines. The task of (more explicit) theological reflection involved a series of facilitated dialogues between charismatic-evangelical urban practice and theoretical approaches to Christian social ethics. These dialogues then led on to an attempt to construct a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. This is presented as a creative response to the tensions encountered in charismatic-evangelical urban practice that is both consistent with charismatic-evangelical convictions and open to insights from other traditions.

The thesis makes two main contributions to academic knowledge. Firstly, it brings a greater understanding of charismatic-evangelical urban practice to the disciplines of voluntary sector studies and the sociology of religion. Secondly, it represents both a contribution and a challenge to established theoretical perspectives in Christian social ethics and evangelical theology. Contributing as it does to a variety of academic disciplines, as well as enhancing institutional and professional knowledge, this is a not a prepositional thesis, but a foundational one. As such, it opens up a new field of enquiry and sets out theoretical conceptions intended to provoke further scholarly enquiry and reflective practice.

Summary of Portfolio

The four assignments in my portfolio show how my research agenda shifted and evolved during stage one of the DProf programme, culminating in the research proposal that led me into my thesis in stage two.

I used the year 1 literature review to begin to explore two provisional research questions that arose from my personal and professional practice. The first part of the literature review considered recent theological responses to the question 'what makes a good city?' within the wider context of debates about the role of religion in the public sphere. The second part explored questions about contrasting models of church-based community involvement. Here I focused particularly on debates in Christian social ethics concerning the relationship between the 'partnership' advocated by Atherton and the 'distinctiveness' emphasised by Hauerwas. Having reviewed and critiqued these contrasting positions, I then went on to consider attempts to move beyond 'either-or' solutions.

My year 2 publishable article explored the theological significance of decisions about funding for charismatic-evangelical churches. This departure from my original research interests was triggered by a changing professional context and the realisation that my literature review had failed to adequately engage with my own charismatic-evangelical tradition. The first part of the article developed a four-fold typology for assessing the theological and socio-ethical significance of churches' decisions about funding. The second part then went on to consider the relevance of this typology for churches with a charismatic-evangelical worldview.

I used the *Reflection on Practice* in year 3 to help me decide whether to return to the research questions with which I had entered the professional doctorate or proceed in the direction suggested by my publishable article. Here I reflected on the unacknowledged hopes, expectations, motivations, and convictions that lay behind my original research questions. I also went on to describe how my understanding of these questions had changed during stage one of the programme and identified revised goals for stage two. A desire to think more deeply about the way that churches of my own charismatic-evangelical tradition engage with disadvantaged neighbourhoods then led to the formulation of my thesis research proposal.

The research proposal identified a lack of attention to charismatic-evangelical urban practice within the various bodies of literature I engaged with in stage one. In response to these gaps, it then outlined the case for an exploratory multi-method study of the UK charismatic-evangelical urban church that combined qualitative research (ethnographic study and focus groups) with theological reflection.

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List of Abbreviations

COGOP   Church of God of Prophecy
DProf   Doctor of Professional Studies
MAXQDA   This is the name of a Qualitative Data Analysis software package.
OCF   Oakfield Christian Fellowship
PCE   Practical Charismatic-Evangelical

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Although churches experiencing charismatic renewal may sometimes have a tendency towards introspection and withdrawal from the world (Dixon, 1995, pp. 13-16), the past fifteen years have witnessed a growing engagement with disadvantaged urban areas on the part of many UK charismatic-evangelical churches.[2] This is indicative of a wider shift in evangelical urban ministry and theology that has been noted by commentators from within evangelicalism (Kuhrt, 2010, p. 14) and beyond (Graham, 2008, p. 24). Yet such developments have received little attention within previous academic studies. My thesis seeks to bridge the gap between this under-researched area of contemporary faith-based practice and established bodies of academic literature. It seeks firstly to enable greater understanding of charismatic-evangelical motivation and urban practice. Secondly, it seeks to reflect theologically on such motivation and practice with a view to articulating a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic.

1.1 Origins and Gaps

The origins of this research lie in the gulf I encountered during stage one of the professional doctorate between established bodies of academic literature and lived realities encountered in personal and professional practice. That practice has included my involvement with urban charismatic-evangelical churches as a member, volunteer, lay-leader and consultant, alongside a career in the community regeneration industry. Over the past fifteen years, I have witnessed, and indeed participated in, increasing urban engagement by charismatic-evangelical churches in various parts of the UK. However, while sometimes acknowledged in passing (Brown, 2012, p. 11), such practice has received little sustained attention within various bodies of academic literature. Four dimensions to this lack of attention within the academy will now be considered, based around the gaps in existing literature identified in Figure 1 below.

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[2] One recent manifestation of this is the increasing number of charismatic-evangelical churches running social action projects in partnership with national organisations such as Christians Against Poverty (debt advice), the Eden Network (youth work), the Trussell Trust (Food Banks), Besom (practical support), Street Pastors, and the Hope Network.

Figure 1 – Gaps in the Literature

	Faith-based urban practice	**Charismatic and evangelical Christianity**
Secular disciplines	1. Voluntary sector studies; urban studies; social and public policy	2. The sociology of religion and religious studies
Theological disciplines	3. Christian social ethics; urban theology; political theology	4. Evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal theology

This quadrant presents four types of literature to which charismatic-evangelistic urban practice may be relevant, but which have given such practice little attention. As a simplistic typology it is open to challenge on the grounds that in forcing 'secular' and 'theological' disciplines into separate compartments, it presumes a false dichotomy (Beaumont & Baker, 2011). The distinction between literature on faith-based urban practice and that on charismatic and evangelical Christianity may also be over-stated. Yet as a device for introducing the complex array of existing bodies of literature that relate to my topic, Figure 1 serves an important function. Each of the four quadrants will now be considered in turn. As I engage with this literature extensively in Chapter 4, only a brief introduction will be provided now.[3]

Firstly, within a UK context at least,[4] there has been little acknowledgement of charismatic or evangelical urban engagement within discussions of faith-based urban involvement across the disciplines of voluntary sector studies, urban studies, social policy, and public policy. Despite numerous studies of faith-based regeneration, faith-based social action and faith-based organisations over the past fifteen years, and extensive debate about the role of faith in the public realm (Dinham, Furbey, & Lowndes, 2009), charismatic-evangelical urban practice has fallen largely "below the radar" (McCabe, Phillimore, & Mayblin, 2010).[5] One manifestation of this is the way much previous research paints a picture of faith-based urban practice that sees little

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[3] See also the literature review and publishable article in my stage one portfolio. These laid out some of the conceptual groundwork on which I am now drawing.

[4] As we go on to see in Chapter 4, evangelical and Pentecostal forms of urban involvement have received greater attention in North America.

[5] Notable exceptions include the recent work of Cloke, Thomas, and Williams (2012). We consider their work in detail later.

connection between social action and evangelism (Cairns, Harris, & Hutchinson, 2007, p. 422). As we will go on to see in Chapter 3, charismatic-evangelical urban practice reveals a complex relationship between the two. This, I will argue, suggests the need for greater attentiveness to intra-religious theological difference in accounts of faith-based urban practice.

Secondly, UK charismatic-evangelical urban involvement also appears to have received little acknowledgement within more 'sociological' [6] studies of UK charismatic and evangelical Christianity in the sociology of religion, religious studies, and congregational studies. Previous research in these fields has largely focused on interpreting charismatic-evangelical worship, sub-culture, social attitudes, and church attendance through the lens of the secularisation thesis. This has resulted in representations of charismatic-evangelical churches as predominantly suburban "congregations of experiential difference" (Heelas, Woodhead, Steel, Szerszynski, & Tusting, 2005, pp. 18-19) involved in "pragmatic, cultural bargaining" (Warner, 2007a, p. 196). While internationally there may be signs that anthropologists and other researchers of religion are showing an interest in evangelical (Elisha, 2010) and Pentecostal (Miller & Yamamori, 2007) social engagement, UK charismatic-evangelical urban involvement has received far less attention.

Thirdly (and moving into the bottom, more explicitly theological, half of Figure 1), few of the dominant voices I have encountered within UK Christian social ethics and academic urban theology appear to either speak from an evangelical or charismatic perspective, or address charismatic-evangelical concerns. In Chapter 4, I substantiate this claim by engaging with three established theoretical approaches to Christian social ethics and urban theology (public, subversive, and ecclesial) that often fail to reflect evangelical concerns. This is not to suggest that evangelical voices have been absent from UK urban theology. [7] Quite tellingly, however, evangelical urban involvement is rarely acknowledged within the public theology of the Established Church (Archbishop's Commission on Urban Life and Faith, 2006) and academic

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[6] Here I am using the word 'sociological' inclusively to refer to approaches that examine contemporary religious practice through the interpretative lens of sociology, anthropology and related disciplines (Cameron, Richter, Davies, & Ward, 2005, pp. 12-19).
[7] See for example the work of David Sheppard (1983), Colin Marchant (1985), Greg Smith (1991), Michael Eastman and Steve Latham (Eastman & Latham, 2004).

surveys of urban theology (Shannahan, 2010). Over recent years, there have been indications that this might be beginning to change. Theologians from other Christian traditions have acknowledged shifts in evangelical urban practice (Graham, 2008, p. 24) and new voices on urban theology from within evangelicalism are emerging (Kuhrt, 2010; Thompson, 2012). As yet, however, much of the evidence on evangelical urban involvement remains quite anecdotal and few studies have focused on the way specifically *charismatic*-evangelical churches engage with disadvantaged neighbourhoods.[8]

Fourthly, within the literature on evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal theology and ethics,[9] relatively little attention has been given to questions of social ethics in general and urban involvement in particular. Much evangelical writing on social ethics has been conservative in character, focusing primarily on issues of personal and sexual morality (Brown, 2012, p. 11), although (as we will go on to see in Chapter 4) evangelical social involvement has received attention in other more missiological literature (Lausanne Movement, 1974; 2011). In specific relation to charismatic-evangelicals, the disciplines of charismatic and Pentecostal studies have given considerably more attention to charismatic worship than social or political engagement. Internationally, attempts to develop a distinctive Hispanic American Pentecostal social ethic (Villafañe, 1993) or Pentecostal political theology (Yong, 2010) represent notable exceptions to this, as does the recent emergence of Pentecostal research interest in 'Godly Love' (Lee & Poloma, 2009).[10] Within a UK context, however, these issues have received little attention.

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[8] Although Baker and Skinner (2005, p. 62) include some charismatic-evangelical churches in their study, charismatic-evangelical urban practice is not the primary focus of their research.

[9] I go on to explain what I mean by these terms in the section on definitional issues at the end of this chapter.

[10] Lee and Poloma describe 'Godly Love' as "the dynamic interaction between divine and human love that enlivens and expands benevolence" (2009, p. 7).

1.2 Aims and Structure

This study seeks to address the four gaps highlighted above through the achievement of two overarching aims and purposes. These are:

1. To enable greater understanding of the motivation and practice of charismatic-evangelical urban churches in engaging with disadvantaged neighbourhoods; and
2. To reflect theologically on such motivation and practice with a view to articulating a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic.

In achieving these aims, I will be using resources from Practical Theology. One such resource is the understanding of "theology in four voices" (normative, formal, espoused, and operant) developed by Cameron et al (2010, p. 54). I will be using this vocabulary at various points in subsequent chapters.[11] Another significant resource is Swinton and Mowat's four-stage model for the integration of qualitative research with wider theological reflection (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 94-97). As this model has particularly influenced the structure of my thesis, a brief discussion of each of Swinton and Mowat's four stages now follows.

Stage 1 - Current praxis

As I have already indicated, the origins of this research lie in a perceived gulf between issues encountered in personal and professional practice and established bodies of literature. Building on learning and insights outlined in my *Reflection on Practice* (Portfolio), it has also been prompted by a desire to reflect on some of the ambiguities and tensions that have characterised my working life and the churches of which I have been a member.

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[11] I will be using these terms in keeping with the following definitions provided by Cameron et al: Normative theology is associated with what a practising group names as its theological authority (e.g. scriptures, creeds, official church teaching, and liturgies). Formal theology concerns the theology of theologians and dialogue with other disciplines. Espoused theology is the theology "embedded within *a group's articulation of its beliefs*" while operant theology is the theology "embedded within *the actual practices of a group*" (Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney, & Watkins, 2010, p. 54).

Stage 2 - Cultural and contextual analysis

Chapter 2 of this thesis (Methodology) goes on to describe a multi-method programme of qualitative research undertaken in an attempt to uncover the motivation and practice of four charismatic-evangelical urban churches. The findings of this research are presented in Chapter 3, and then discussed with relation to other comparable studies in the first part of Chapter 4.

Stage 3 - Theological reflection

Although there is a sense in which each of the four stages are theological, the second part of Chapter 4 will focus "more overtly on the theological significance of the data" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 96) from Chapter 3. Here I will be trying to facilitate a mutually critical conversation between charismatic-evangelical urban practice and established theoretical perspectives in Christian social ethics and urban theology. This will then lead on to an engagement with perspectives from (formal) evangelical theology and an attempt to develop a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic.

Stage 4 - Formulating revised practice

In Chapter 5, we consider the implications of the preceding analysis for the four bodies of literature highlighted in Figure 1, before going on to consider the contribution that this thesis makes to knowledge beyond the academy. This will focus particularly on the implications of the research findings for the UK urban Church, and will then lead on to the final concluding chapter.

1.3 Defining 'Charismatic-Evangelical'

Elsewhere in my portfolio, I have considered the definitional issues around the use of the terms 'charismatic' and 'evangelical', and provided a working definition of a charismatic-evangelical worldview.[12] I do not intend to repeat all this material here but instead will provide a brief explanation of the conceptual frameworks that I have used to define and locate charismatic-evangelicalism.

Firstly, my approach is informed by the four historic characteristics of UK evangelicalism identified by Bebbington. These are: "*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the Bible; and what may be called *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross" (Bebbington, 1989, p. 3). I refer to these characteristics at a number of points later in the thesis. Secondly, in locating charismatic approaches within the wider body of evangelicalism, I draw on Warner's reworking of Bebbington's model. For Warner (2007b, p. 247), "charismatic experientialism" is one of seven sectors or micro-paradigms within contemporary evangelicalism and part of a wider meso-paradigm of "cautiously open conservatives".[13] Thirdly, although the terms 'charismatic' and 'Pentecostal' are sometimes used interchangeably in popular usage, in this thesis I follow Cartledge's distinction between the classical Pentecostal traditions (that grew up in the early twentieth century) and the subsequent charismatic movement (Cartledge, 2003, p. 6). The charismatic movement is associated with both the charismatic 'renewal' of the mainline denominations from the 1960s onwards, and the subsequent independent New / House Church and 'Third Wave' movements. It involved experiences that were previously associated only with the classical Pentecostal denominations spreading into parts of the wider Church (Kay & Dyer, 2004, p. xxxi). Like Pentecostalism, the charismatic movement has "majored in tongues, healings, new songs and intense excitement" (Walker, 1999, p. 431), underpinned by the conviction that modern Christians can be infused with the power of the Holy Spirit in ways similar to the disciples of the New Testament.

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[12] See part 2 of my publishable article.

[13] My publishable article also acknowledged that the relationship between 'charismatic' and 'evangelical' is a complex one. Charismatic experience is by no means limited to evangelicals and various scholars have identified tensions between evangelical and charismatic or Pentecostal approaches (Cartledge, 2004, p. 10; Smith J. K., 2003, p. 110).

It is important, however, to acknowledge that despite the theoretical coherence of these three frameworks, there is no easy way of determining whether a local church should be classed as charismatic-evangelical. Nevertheless, I argued in my publishable article that 'charismatic-evangelical' is a legitimate category since significant numbers of churches and churchgoers identify with it.[14] As we will now go on to see in the next chapter, such 'self-identification' has also informed my approach to church selection in this study.

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[14] For example, the Evangelical Alliance's review of the 2005 English Church Census suggests that 16% of regular churchgoers attend charismatic-evangelical churches (Evangelical Alliance, 2006, pp. 2-3).

CHAPTER 2:   METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with a brief summary of the central aims, research questions and methods employed, before going on to justify the chosen approach through an extended discussion about methodology. There then follows a description of the various qualitative research tasks undertaken: church selection, ethnographic study, focus groups, data analysis, and feedback. The chapter then concludes with some reflections around the benefits and limitations of the methodology employed.

As the previous chapter explained, this research project has been shaped around two overarching purposes. The thesis seeks firstly to enable greater understanding of the motivation and practice of the charismatic-evangelical urban church, and secondly to reflect theologically on such motivation and practice with a view to articulating a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. My strategy for achieving this has been informed by Swinton and Mowat's four-stage model. As part of the second stage in this model (cultural and contextual analysis), qualitative research methods have been used to explore the following three research questions:

1. Practices and structures – What are the ways through which UK charismatic-evangelical churches engage with disadvantaged neighbourhoods?
2. Aims and motivations - What are they trying to achieve?
3. Perceived impact - How do charismatic-evangelical urban churches perceive the impact of their community engagement?

Two main research methods were used in addressing these questions: a nine-month ethnographic study of one charismatic-evangelical urban church and focus groups with a further three charismatic-evangelical churches in the same city.[15] In view of the under-researched nature of the subject area, an ethnographic study was chosen to uncover the deeper expressions of motivation and practice not available from other research methods (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 167). Focus groups were chosen as a supplementary research method to complement the ethnographic study and make possible the triangulation of data (Litosseliti, 2003, p. 17).

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[15] The study was undertaken in an English city. In order to ensure that the identities of the participating churches remain anonymous, I have not revealed its precise location.

2.1 Methodological Issues and Assumptions

The above description provides a brief justification for my choice of research methods and builds on a more detailed research proposal (Portfolio). Before going on to describe the data gathering process in more detail, however, we also need to consider some broader methodological issues around the role of qualitative research in practical theology. In exploring whether the use of qualitative methods is justifiable on theological grounds, the discussion that follows draws on the some of the contributions to the recently published edited volume, *Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (Ward, 2012).

Ward (2012, p. 4) argues that contemporary discussions about the church must attend to "the ethnographic voice" because there is often a disconnection between what is said doctrinally about the church and the experience of a congregation. Fiddes (2012, pp. 18-19) then provides some theological reasons why ecclesiology may require an element of induction from empirical investigation,[16] and Phillips (2012, pp. 97-100) goes on to chart the "ethnographic turn" that some theologians have been proposing. Although all broadly supportive of the ethnographic turn, some of the contributors also express concern about theologians "capitulating to the methodological atheism" (Bretherton, 2012, p. 149) often associated with ethnography and other social science research methods. Swinton addresses these issues at length. He recognises that in requiring an adherence to empiricism,[17] ethnography may force the Christian researcher to bracket off their beliefs, thereby excluding theology as an interrogative category (Swinton, 2012, pp. 76-79). However, drawing on Gadamer's work around the necessity of bias, Swinton goes on to challenge the assumption that all pre-understandings, beliefs or 'prejudices' should be bracketed off. Instead, he argues that the researcher should bring such pre-understandings into a constructive dialogue with 'the text' so that a fusion of two horizons is brought about (Swinton, 2012, pp. 82-83). This leads Swinton to conclude that ethnography need not be rejected by Christian researchers but that it needs to be sanctified. "Whatever the theological position of the researcher", he argues, "that position must be allowed to become integral to the ways in which the situation is looked at" (Swinton, 2012, p. 90).

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[16] In this regard, Fiddes focuses particularly on "the central, linked ideas of incarnation, sacrament, and revelation" (Fiddes, 2012, p. 18).

[17] For Swinton, empiricism is a position which assumes that "only that which falls under the retina of the eye can be considered factual in terms of truth that is public and verifiable" (2012, p. 76).

Broadly sympathetic with Swinton's argument, I need to describe where I stand in relation to that which I am researching and how my pre-understanding has affected the way that I have looked at my subject. My stage one *Reflection on Practice* (Portfolio) includes more detailed autobiographical reflection but, in summary, I am a relative insider to charismatic-evangelical Christianity. Brought up attending a conservative-evangelical Anglican church, I first encountered the charismatic movement as a teenager and attended a large flagship charismatic-evangelical church as an undergraduate student and in my early twenties. Over the past decade, my theological outlook has broadened as I have been influenced by sources from beyond evangelicalism.[18] However, I remain deeply influenced by charismatic-evangelical Christianity and am both personally and professionally connected to charismatic-evangelical subculture. Such experiences have strongly shaped my motivations for undertaking this research, the choices I have made, and the ways that I have observed, interpreted and written up my findings. Keeping a reflexive diary (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, pp. 139-142) throughout the research process has heightened my awareness of this and the way my own horizons have interacted with those of research participants. Some of the themes that have emerged from such self-reflection are weaved into subsequent chapters.

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[18] If pushed, I would probably now describe my theological outlook as 'open-evangelical'.

2.2 Research Methods

We now turn to describing in more detail the various qualitative research tasks that were undertaken.

Church selection

In order to reflect the breadth and diversity of UK charismatic-evangelicalism, I originally intended to study the following four types of charismatic-evangelical urban church:

1. A small-medium independent church or 'New Church';
2. A large charismatic-evangelical 'magnet church';[19]
3. A small-medium charismatic congregation in an established denomination;
4. A black-majority Pentecostal church.[20]

The research proposal also specified various criteria to be used in selecting churches and included a project timetable. Based on my position as a relative insider to charismatic-evangelicalism, I had been fairly confident that the tasks of church selection and gaining access could be completed within a three month period. In practice, however, church selection proved to be a more iterative, lengthy and at times frustrating process which lasted for a total of nine months.

The process began with drawing up a shortlist of fifteen potential churches in the city identified for the study. This was informed by my prior knowledge of the local church scene as well as by suggestions from colleagues, friends and infrastructure bodies. I then sent exploratory emails to what seemed to be the leading candidates (based around the criteria I had identified). This yielded three responses from potentially interested churches (all independent / New Churches) but upon further investigation, one proved to be unsuitable and another that was initially keen to participate later changed its mind. Thankfully, the remaining church, Oakfield

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[19] My original research proposal employed the language of 'mega church'. However, subsequent reflection suggested the term 'magnet church' (Cameron, 2010, p. 24) was more appropriate to a UK context.

[20] While acknowledging the theological and cultural differences between charismatic-evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, my research proposal justified this excursion into Pentecostalism on the grounds of the benefits of studying a black-majority church.

Christian Fellowship,[21] appeared suitable and two visits verified that they met all the criteria. In view of the need to commence the nine-month participant-observation process as soon as possible, I decided to make Oakfield Christian Fellowship the focus of the ethnographic study. Having sent a formal letter of invitation and obtained the signed consent of the church leadership, I formally commenced the ethnographic study in September 2011.

Over the autumn of 2011, I conducted two pilot focus groups with St Peter's, my own church congregation. At this stage, I did not intend to include St Peter's in the main study because of concern that my involvement might skew the data. I was also unsure whether St Peter's was sufficiently 'charismatic-evangelical' to be included in the study.[22] Having already secured the involvement of an independent / New Church (Oakfield Christian Fellowship) for the ethnographic study, I then approached a number of other churches that I considered to be potential candidates for the other three types of church identified. Firstly, two potential magnet churches were identified in the study area. Drawing on personal connections, I was able, fairly early on, to secure the participation of one of these, St John's. Two focus groups with St John's leaders and members were held in December 2011. Secondly, approaches were made to several charismatic-evangelical churches in established denominations. Of these, the only church that was willing to participate was New Life, a fresh expression Anglican congregation. Two focus groups were conducted with New Life between March and April 2012. Thirdly, I approached a number of potentially suitable black-majority churches but, with few personal relationships to draw on, these yielded no response. A helpful breakthrough, however, occurred when the pastor of Oakfield Christian Fellowship facilitated an introduction with the pastor of a potentially suitable Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP) congregation. I visited this church on three occasions but eventually decided not to include it in the study. This was because I concluded that the COGOP congregation was not at that time engaged with its local neighbourhood enough to generate sufficiently useful data.[23]

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[21] This is a pseudonym created to ensure participant anonymity. The names of the other three churches in the study are also pseudonyms, as are the names of individual church members.

[22] Conversations with the Vicar indicated he thought St Peter's outlook was somewhere in between 'charismatic-evangelical' and 'open-evangelical'.

[23] It is also significant to note that the COGOP pastor had expressed reservations about the level of common ground between charismatic-evangelicalism and Pentecostalism.

With no further black-majority church leads to investigate, I was left with the dilemma of whether to reduce the number of churches in the study (from four to three) or try to find another type of church. I opted for the latter and decided with my supervisor that the most practical and promising line of enquiry was to approach St Peter's, my home church where I had piloted the focus groups. Despite my initial reservations (explained above) about including St Peter's in the study, this was justified on the grounds that St Peter's could provide an interesting example of a church which, while influenced by the charismatic movement, might be described as 'open-evangelical'. I was also keen to reflect on the experience of my own congregation. Having reviewed the data from the two pilot focus groups in order to verify its quality, I contacted all the original participants to request their permission to include their data in the study. Then in order to guard against any bias arising from my prior relationship with the original pilot participants, I asked another researcher to help facilitate an additional church members' focus group.[24]

A few final comments and reflections on the church selection process will now be provided. Firstly, it is significant that the cultural capital I possess as a relative insider to charismatic-evangelicalism (personal relationships, insider knowledge, and shared culture) were enormously helpful in gaining access. Yet it is also important to acknowledge that this may have affected the type of churches I selected, my interaction with participants, and the way I have interpreted the data. Secondly, the dilemmas I encountered in deciding whether to include a (black-majority) Pentecostal church and open-evangelical Anglican congregation in the study casts further light on the definitional difficulties involved in attempts to classify a church 'charismatic-evangelical'. Thirdly, it is significant that three of the four churches selected had Anglican origins, although whether this is representative of UK charismatic-evangelicalism more generally is unclear. Fourthly, the unsuccessful experience of trying to recruit a suitable black-majority church may suggest that UK charismatic-evangelicalism is an essentially white-majority phenomenon. It also helped to expose the limitations of my perspective as a white researcher.

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[24] The role of my co-researcher in the focus groups is explained more fully later in this chapter.

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The Ethnographic Study

The process of selecting Oakfield Christian Fellowship (OCF) for the ethnographic study has already been briefly described but some further details will now be provided, particularly with relation to informed consent. After an initial exchange of emails and a visit to a Sunday service, I was invited to meet with James, OCF's senior pastor, and Gordon, another member of the leadership team. This was an opportunity for me to explain what an ethnographic study would involve and to give the OCF leaders the chance to ask questions. We had an open and honest discussion in which James and Gordon indicated that they felt OCF could benefit from the proposed research. A number of practicalities were also discussed.[25] After this meeting, I wrote to James with a formal letter of invitation and consent form, and we agreed a September start date. On the first Sunday of the study, I was introduced to the congregation during the church notices and asked to say a few words.[26] As well as explaining what the research would involve, I also indicated that I was a member of another church, thereby signalling that I was a Christian.

In keeping with my research proposal, the ethnographic study involved attending and becoming embedded within the life of OCF for a nine month period. This included participation in three different types of activity – Sunday worship, a midweek house group, and community outreach projects. Rather than beginning all three activities at once, I decided to first familiarise myself with OCF by attending Sunday morning services and talking to people over tea and coffee after the service. This is in keeping with a "big net approach" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 35) to ethnography that involves mixing and mingling with everyone at first before narrowing down to more specific sub-groups as the study progresses.

After two months of just attending on Sundays, I began to enquire about the possibility of joining one of OCF's midweek house groups. I felt that this would be helpful in enabling me to become more embedded in OCF by experiencing and participating in the life of the church at a small group (as well as congregational)

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[25] These included the potential risks and issues around informed consent highlighted in my (approved) application to the Faculty ethics committee. We also discussed the possibility of my wife and two-year old son coming with me to OCF some weeks (during the study, this occurred about once a month).

[26] My ethics proposal had indicated that church members would be made aware of my role as a researcher from the outset.

level. Conversations with the church leaders revealed that of the various house groups at OCF, there were two that met in the immediately local area. I met with Karl, the leader of one of these to talk about the possibility of me joining and the process for obtaining the informed consent of group members. We agreed that it would initially be best for Karl to discuss this with group members in my absence and I provided some participant information sheets to aid this discussion. Karl then relayed to me the message that the group were happy for me to join and I started attending the house group on a weekly basis from November 2011.

From December onwards, I began to visit some of OCF's community outreach activities. The run-up to Christmas provided the opportunity to participate in seasonal events including an annual Christmas lunch for local people and carol singing at the local shopping precinct. With a view to trying to decide which activity or activities to get involved in more regularly, I also visited some of OCF's other community outreach activities. These included a children's club, midweek drop-in, and a 'Songs of Praise' event in a sheltered housing scheme. After Christmas, the outreach activity that I attended most regularly was the midweek drop-in. This was chosen because it lent itself particularly well to participant-observation and enabled me to meet a variety of people in an informal setting, observing the interactions between church members, fringe members, and people from the wider community. I also visited as many of OCF's other community outreach activities as I could. This included helping with a children's Easter holiday club (after I had been CRB-checked), picking up litter as part of a 'Healing on the Streets' event, and visiting a church service for adults with learning disabilities. From April 2012 onwards, I began to prepare to leave the field. This included a final meeting with the senior pastor, making arrangements for marking my final Sunday, and planning a feedback session for OCF members.

Detailed field notes were recorded for each of the three different types of activity observed (Sunday worship, house group and community outreach projects) and filed electronically using a computer software package (Microsoft OneNote). With some activities (particularly Sunday services), short-hand notes were made during the event itself and written up in full when I got home. In other cases, however, note-taking would have been obtrusive or impractical and subsequent retrospective

reconstruction (Fetterman, 2010, p. 117) was required. This sometimes involved recording the most vivid recollections and impressions on a Dictaphone immediately afterwards and writing up a more detailed account on arriving home. The field notes I produced were initially very detailed and unstructured. As the study progressed and I became more familiar with the typical content of each activity, a standard structure began to emerge and I became more selective in my choice of material. In view of the need for reflexivity in qualitative research, I also regularly wrote in a reflective journal. My entries here encompassed a variety of themes including autobiographical reflection, emerging interpretations, and reflections on how my presence and participation in OCF were affecting the nature of the data gathered. Where possible, such personal reflections were recorded and analysed separately from field notes (Fetterman, 2010, p. 118), although in practice it was often difficult to maintain a clear-cut distinction between 'observation' and 'reflection'.

Alongside the primary focus on participant-observation, various documentary sources were also gathered. These included OCF's weekly notice sheet, website content (both before and after an extensive upgrade), members' address list, annual report, financial accounts, and copies of presentations from whole church meetings. At the end of the participant-observation process, the field notes and documentary sources were exported to my chosen data analysis software package. The data analysis process is explained more fully later in this chapter. Once I had analysed and reflected on the data, I returned to OCF for two feedback sessions. The first was with the church elders in October 2012 and the second, in January 2013, was attended by around twenty church members. In each session, I presented a descriptive summary of the key themes emerging from my analysis. I then invited people's feedback on whether I had represented their church's motivations and practices accurately. At these meetings, OCF elders and members indicated that they felt I had provided a fair representation. They also commented that my presentation had been helpful in identifying issues for them to reflect on further. The elders were also invited to read a draft of the description of OCF that follows in Chapter 3. In response to their comments, some minor revisions to the text were made.

Focus Groups

In each of the three focus group churches (St John's, New Life, and St Peter's), separate focus groups were held with church leaders and members. In total, seven focus groups were conducted. [27] Litosseliti (2003, p. 83) suggests that the involvement of an additional researcher is invaluable in focus groups so this element of the research was delivered with the assistance of another experienced researcher, Dr Rob Furbey (retired lecturer in Urban Sociology at Sheffield Hallam University). For all but one of the focus groups (the additional session with St Peter's members), I was the main facilitator, with Rob observing and asking follow-up questions. This arrangement worked well and the presence of a co-researcher was enormously beneficial. Given my prior relationship with some of the churches studied, I particularly appreciated the involvement of a researcher with more critical distance than myself.

The focus groups were conducted between October 2011 and April 2012 and involved 29 participants (15 female, 14 male) in total. Five of the focus groups were conducted in church premises and two in members' homes, the main rationale for the choice of venue being the stated preference of participants. In each church, identifying potential participants required close liaison with the church leader. The way this occurred varied from church to church. In all cases, however, potential participants were provided with a participant information sheet at least a week before the scheduled focus group. This stressed that they were free to decide whether or not to take part. At the beginning of each focus group, participants were also asked to sign a consent form.

Each focus group lasted around ninety minutes and was structured around a list of questions that can be found in Appendix 1. The first part involved a series of open questions related to my three central questions. The second part encouraged participants to engage in theological refection by thinking about the connections between the Christian faith and their experiences of urban ministry. With the permission of participants, each focus group was digitally recorded and transcribed

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[27] My original plan had been to conduct two focus groups in each church but for reasons explained earlier, an additional church members' focus group (facilitated by my co-researcher) was held with St Peter's.

in full, with individual identities made anonymous. Participants were then sent and invited to comment on a copy of their focus group transcript. After the transcripts had been analysed and a draft summary prepared, each church leader was invited to comment on the findings. Some minor revisions to the text were made in response to their comments.

Data Analysis

In view of the inductive nature of the study, I opted for a primarily data-driven (open coding) rather than concept-driven approach to analysis. However, in keeping with Gibbs' suggestion that these two approaches do not have to be mutually exclusive (2007, pp. 44-46) and Litosseliti's description of a "back-and-forth or cyclical process of coding and analysis" (Litosseliti, 2003, p. 88), the three research questions with which I entered the study provided a provisional conceptual framework. In the light of the large volume of data obtained (over 160,000 words),[28] I decided that the task of data management and analysis would be greatly assisted by the use of qualitative analysis software.[29] Material from the ethnographic study and focus groups were treated as two sets of data and coded separately.[30] This then led to the production of two lengthy descriptive summaries that set out the key issues and themes emerging from each research method. The provisional findings of the ethnographic study were then presented and discussed with Oakfield Christian Fellowship. The provisional focus groups findings were shared and discussed with my co-researcher (who had re-read and commented on the transcripts independently of my analysis) and the leaders of the three focus group churches.

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[28] There were over 80,000 words of field notes from the ethnographic study and over 80,000 words of focus group transcripts.

[29] Having briefly reviewed and tested the online tutorials and trial versions available for the three leading packages reviewed by Gibbs (2007, pp. 105-123), I concluded that 'MAXQDA' best met my requirements on the grounds that it was simple to use and represented value for money.

[30] Appendix 2 contains a simplified version of the coding system used.

2.3 Concluding Reflections on Methodology

Before we move on, a brief summary of the main benefits, limitations, and learning arising from each of the methods employed will now be provided.

Conducting an ethnographic study in a charismatic-evangelical urban church was a time-consuming, mentally tiring, relationally demanding and at times unsettling process. Yet it was also personally rewarding and enabled me to obtain a quality of data that was far richer than any other research method would have allowed. As we will go on to see in Chapter 3, the experience of participant-observation at OCF also helped to uncover some of the ambiguities and tensions that characterise charismatic-evangelical urban practice. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the multi-method approach employed (combining ethnographic study with focus groups) may have diluted the benefits of a "full-blown ethnography" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 128). Had I, for example, been living on the Jackfield estate while conducting the study, I may have been able to provide an even richer account of OCF's motivation and practice.

Focus groups were chosen as a supplementary research method to complement the ethnographic study and make possible the triangulation of data. The process of selecting and recruiting participants proved to be more time-consuming and demanding than I had originally envisaged. Once I had found some willing participants, however, each focus group generated a useful volume of relevant material (addressing each of my research questions) in a relatively short space of time. That said, Litosseliti (2003, pp. 20-27) highlights various limitations of focus groups that relate to this research. Firstly there is the risk of bias and manipulation that arises from participants being subtly encouraged to say what they think the researcher wants them to say. Given my prior relationship with some of the participants, I was particularly conscious of this risk and tried to offset it through the involvement of an additional researcher. Secondly, within focus groups there is the danger of false consensus caused by participants with strong personalities or similar views dominating the discussion. Thirdly, and related to this, focus groups can sometimes appear more consistent than they are since it is difficult to distinguish between an individual view and a group view. Particularly in churches, the unspoken power of group dynamics may be seen to flatten out difference and silence dissenting

voices. In this sense, some of my questions may have been answered differently had I conducted one-to-one interviews. Fourthly, the difficulty of obtaining a truly representative sample means that making generalisations on the basis of focus group data is inadvisable. As Litosseliti (2003, p. 22) suggests, focus group results should be seen as indicative, and not necessarily representative.

Finally, four wider limitations associated with my overall methodology will be briefly noted. Firstly, the under-researched nature of the subject area means that my approach to determining whether a church is 'charismatic-evangelical' has not been particularly systematic (relying primarily on self-identification). Secondly, the fact that I am already an insider to charismatic-evangelical subculture, while an advantage in gaining access, may have made it harder for me to maintain the critical distance required of a researcher (Guest, 2005, p. 107). Thirdly, in focusing primarily on the ways in which charismatic-evangelical churches view their impact, my research methods offered little scope for exploring how others in their neighbourhoods perceive them. Fourthly, and finally, the wider relevance of the research may be constrained by the fact that is confined to charismatic-evangelical churches in one particular English city.

CHAPTER 3:   DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS

In this chapter, we consider the descriptive findings of the programme of qualitative research described in Chapter 2. The first section of the chapter presents the key findings of the ethnographic study at Oakfield Christian Fellowship and the second section summarises the findings of the focus groups with a further three churches. The third section then compares these two sets of findings and outlines the study's main descriptive conclusions. These conclusions are presented in the form of a tensions typology with which the subsequent chapters will continue to engage.

3.1   The Ethnographic Study

This section presents the main findings of the ethnographic study at Oakfield Christian Fellowship (OCF). As a vast amount of data was gathered during the study, I have had to be selective in what I present here. The decision about what to include has been guided by my three main research questions. We begin with an introduction to OCF and some snapshots of different aspects of church life. This is followed by a presentation of the key findings in relation to each of our three research questions (practices and structures, aims and motivations, and perceived impact).

Introducing Oakfield Christian Fellowship

Oakfield Christian Fellowship (OCF) is an independent church with origins in the House Church movement and is a member of the Evangelical Alliance. It is based in Jackfield, an outer urban estate in a northern English city. The church was founded in the early 1980s as a church plant of another House Church. For most of its first twenty years, OCF met to worship in rented facilities (various school halls) in different parts of the city. Nearly ten years ago, however, OCF decided to purchase its own premises, a former mini-supermarket unit on the Jackfield estate, and has been based there ever since.

Jackfield is an outer urban estate that forms part of the wider Jackfield, Brackley and Long Ebberly area. These three estates have a combined population of around 10,000 which, according to neighbourhood profiles obtained from the Primary Care Trust, is over 97% white. Searches on the government's *Neighbourhood Statistics* website

indicate that most of this area falls within the 10% most deprived parts of England (Office for National Statistics, 2012).[31] Collectively referred to by OCF members as "the estates", these three areas are the focus of much of OCF's local outreach activity. Significantly, however, the Jackfield, Brackley and Long Ebberly area is bordered by a number of more affluent suburbs where many (though not all) of OCF's members live.

Legally, OCF is constituted as a registered charity and company limited by guarantee with five trustees and directors. Its paid staff team consists of a senior pastor named James, a Church Army evangelist named Karl, and a part-time Administrator named Simon. The life of the church is overseen by a group of three elders (James, Gordon and Anthony). The church members' address list indicates that in November 2011, OCF had 158 adult members and 34 children. Further analysis of this suggests that around 31% of OCF households are on one of the three local estates (Jackfield, Brackley and Long Ebberly). 15% are in the nearby affluent area of Nobold (on the other side of a dual carriageway) and a further 42% are less than five miles away. The remaining 12% of OCF households are between five and ten miles away from Jackfield.

In order to begin to paint a picture of OCF, two brief snapshots of different dimensions of church life (a Sunday service and midweek house group meeting) will now be presented. This will then lead on to a description of OCF's main community outreach activities.

The Sunday service (September 2011)
Like many OCF members, I arrive by car and walk from the car park to the shopping precinct at the centre of the Jackfield estate. It is 9.50am on a Sunday morning and with the exception of OCF church-goers making their way to the former mini-supermarket that is now a place of worship, the small parade of shops is deserted. This is my fourth visit to an OCF service and on the door I am given a warm

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[31] To use the language of the Office for National Statistics (2012), there are four "Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs)" within the Jackfield, Brackley and Long Ebberly area. Their national deprivation rankings indicate that two of these are within the most deprived 5% of the country, one is within the most deprived 10%, and the other is within the most deprived 15%.

handshake and welcome by Thomas, an older man in his seventies. Thomas asks how my family are and hands me a notice sheet. I then head inside the single storey building and into the worship area which overlooks the parade of shops. (The worship area, I imagine, would have been the main body of the supermarket in days gone by, with back offices and other facilities at the rear). The room is rectangular in shape with a low ceiling and I see that seven or eight long rows of chairs have been put out, the usual configuration for a Sunday morning. At the front, there is no stage or platform (as I have sometimes witnessed at other charismatic churches) but various Christian banners, posters and paintings are displayed on the wall that faces the chairs. To one side, a group of musicians is beginning to warm up. It seems that Matthew, a middle-aged man with an acoustic guitar, is leading worship this morning. He is accompanied by two young men (probably in their late teens) on bass guitar and drums and two middle-aged women who are singing.

In each of my previous visits to OCF, I have sat in a different part of the worship area (so as to experience the service from different vantage points). This week, I decide to position myself in the middle of a currently unoccupied row towards the back. Most of the chairs around me are empty but over the next ten minutes, more people begin to arrive and sit down. A man in the row in front who I met last week turns round to say hello and we have a brief 'how was your week?' conversation. As the building begins to fill up, I notice that there is a wide range of ages present – from toddlers and older children through to people I imagine are in their eighties. However, adults of my age (mid-thirties) and younger seem to be under-represented and I also observe that the congregation is nearly exclusively white.[32]

Before the service begins, there is a noisy air of conversation as people are catching up and sharing news. However, Matthew (the worship leader) soon calls things to order and we all stand to join in the singing of the opening song, 'Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord'. The words appear by video projector on the wall in front of us, although it seems that many people already know the words. Quite a few people begin to clap and as the first verse reaches a crescendo ('Our God you reign forever…'), some people begin to lift their hands in praise. After this song, another

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[32] Analysis of local statistics later reveals that the ethnic make-up of the congregation is fairly representative of the (97% white) population of Jackfield, Brackley and Long Ebberly.

man called Anthony who is part of OCF's oversight team formally welcomes everyone and invites us to join him in reading out loud some verses from Psalm 24. Matthew leads us in another song and then it is time for the weekly 'Family Slot' before the children go out to their groups. This is followed by the church notices in which Gordon, another member of the oversight team, draws our attention to various items from the notice sheet. He also updates us on a situation that OCF members have been praying for: A girl in India who had been kidnapped has now been released. This is greeted with a round of applause. Gordon then encourages us to pray for OCF members who are 'out and about' this week – either serving in other local churches, undertaking short-term mission trips, or working as missionaries abroad. As a retired couple from OCF are about to go on a month-long mission trip to India and Nepal, OCF members are invited to gather round this couple and commission them with the laying on of hands.

By now the time is 10.45am and James, OCF's senior pastor, comes to deliver this week's talk.[33] OCF has recently begun a series on Colossians and this week's passage is Colossians 1:13-20. Drawing on these verses, James speaks on "the uniqueness of Jesus" for forty minutes. He begins with the assertion that to believe in the uniqueness of Jesus is not popular today. Our multi-faith secular society, he suggests, asks us to dumb down or dilute who Jesus is because it believes that intolerance is the biggest sin. James then goes on to provide a detailed verse-by-verse exposition of the Colossians passage, making references to the writings of popular theologians C.S. Lewis and Tom Wright along the way. As he begins to conclude, James quotes extensively from a worship song called 'It's all about you Jesus'. This, he suggests, encapsulates the message of the passage. He then challenges us to think about what "total allegiance to Jesus" means for our own lives. He suggests that for individual Christians, there is an "evangelistic challenge" of finding ways to communicate the truth of who Jesus is "without being obnoxious". For OCF, he also identifies a "church and community challenge" of creating pockets of society or "micro climates" that are characterised by Jesus' rule and reign.

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[33] There was normally a different speaker every week. Across 31 services attended, I counted 16 different speakers. 14 of these were male and 2 were female.

At the end of the talk, Anthony then comes to introduce a twenty-five minute period of (sung) worship in response to James' message. This includes popular charismatic anthems I remember from the 1980s such as 'Majesty', as well as more recently written worship songs. During this block of worship, the singing is punctuated by various interjections from the congregation. After one song, a man in his sixties speaks in tongues in a loud and impassioned voice for about a minute. This is then followed, pretty much immediately, by another man offering an interpretation of this inspired utterance.[34] During another interlude, James shares a prophetic word along the lines that "Jesus doesn't need our permission to be Lord" and the man who had earlier spoken in tongues delivers another impassioned message. Anthony then encourages us all to "receive from the Lord as we continue to sing". The singing continues until around 11.50am, which is when the service is due to end, and Anthony leads us in a closing prayer.

The midweek house group *(January 2012)*

As explained in Chapter 2, I started attending one of OCF's midweek house groups two months into the study period. The group I joined met every week on a Thursday afternoon at the house of Malcolm and Helen, two older members of OCF living on the Jackfield estate. The group was led by Karl, a member of the OCF staff team. Eleven people (in addition to me) attended the group during the study period, four men and seven women. Six of the members lived on the Jackfield and Brackley estates, while five travelled in from further away. Everyone in the group apart from me was over the age of 50. The meetings typically lasted for an hour and a half and followed the same outline pattern. They began with informal conversation over tea and coffee, followed by welcome and notices (from Karl), worship songs, a Bible study or discussion, and prayer. As the following snapshot demonstrates, however, unexpected developments sometimes disrupted this schedule.

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[34] This interpretation echoed the sentiment of a previous song to the effect that Jesus had "taken the fall" on our behalf.

It is just before 1.30pm on a Thursday afternoon in late January (nearly five months into the ethnographic study) and I am driving through the Jackfield estate to Malcolm and Helen's house. I have been attending the house group that meets in their home for the past two and a half months. Malcolm opens the door, and after I have removed my shoes, he offers me a coffee. I then make my way into the living room. Malcolm and Helen's home is a three bedroom Council house and Helen later tells me she has lived there for over thirty years. The living room reminds me of the houses of other retired working class couples I have been in over the years. It is neatly presented, impeccably clean, and there are trinkets, ornaments and photos of relatives on the mantelpiece. Amongst the various pieces of furniture, there is a large riser recliner chair because Helen has mobility problems.

As well as Malcolm and Helen, four other people are already there. There is Karl (who leads the group and lives on the estate), Thomas (who also lives on the estate), Mary (who lives six miles away), and a woman I have not met before who is introduced to me as Annette (she has attended the group in the past, but not for a while due to health problems). Five others soon join us – Christine, Denise, Moira, Tim, and Yvonne. While Malcolm is getting everyone a drink, there is some friendly banter between Karl and Thomas; other members catch up on news. Karl then gives a few brief notices (it is our group's turn to serve tea and coffee after church on Sunday) before handing round the 'Songs of Fellowship' chorus book we use most weeks. Tim, who has a good strong voice, leads us in the unaccompanied singing of a Charles Wesley hymn and a Graham Kendrick song from the 1980s. Then Mary leads this week's Bible study on the story of Abraham.

After the Bible study, Mary signals that we are going to move on to a time of prayer. She asks if we have any prayer requests. Karl says he has an important work meeting next week and Mary asks us to continue to pray for her mother who is recovering from an operation. Denise, who has only recently joined the group, then mentions a local meeting being held that evening about establishing a new community forum for the Jackfield, Brackley and Long Ebberly estates. She asks if we can pray for this meeting. Before we can pray, however, a seemingly innocuous comment from one member of the group (about needing a lift to a meeting) provokes an animated reaction from Moira, who is normally extremely quiet. Moira is obviously angry and

begins to voice her frustration about various aspects of church life. Much of this centres on the fact that despite being in a church full of people with "big houses and big cars", she often struggles to find someone to give her a lift to church meetings. However, it seems this is only the tip of the iceberg as she also expresses frustration about other times she has been left feeling hurt and disappointed by experiences at OCF. Moira then angrily leaves the room and is soon followed by Karl and Helen who try to talk to her. The rest of us remain in the living room and at first we do not know what to do or say. After a while, someone begins to talk about their experience of struggling with depression and anxiety (it seems they are saying this to indicate that they identify with Moira, who we also know has had mental health problems). This seems to prompt two long-standing members of the group to share some words of encouragement with another member of the group who has been struggling lately. Eventually, the conversation turns to prayer. We pray both for Moira (who is still in the kitchen with Karl and Helen) and the various other situations for which people have requested prayer.

By the time we have finished praying, it is 3.00pm and time for us all to go home. Moira is somewhat calmer now and Mary gives her a lift home. As I drive away, I speak into my Dictaphone, recounting and reflecting on this afternoon's events. For me the incident with Moira has provided a fascinating insight into Christian community in action. On the one hand, it vividly illustrates how people in a church community can easily "rub each other up the wrong way" and points to some underlying tensions at OCF. On the other hand, however, it also points to the significance of the house group as a safe place in which people can be open about their difficulties and frustrations, and both give and receive informal support.

OCF's Community Outreach Activities

During the ethnographic study, I participated in and observed many different community outreach activities organised by OCF. A brief description of some of these now follows, before we move on to consider how this material relates to our three central research questions.[35]

The community drop-in

Of all the community activities at OCF, the one I participated in most regularly was the midweek drop-in. Two mornings a week, OCF's shop-front premises were open for people from the community to be able to come in for a hot drink and a chat. The main worship area was set up in a café-style layout with five large tables (each with the potential to seat around eight people) positioned around the room and hot drinks served from the hatch. No charge was made for the drinks but there was a donations box. On each table, there were biscuits, a Christian newspaper, and various leaflets about OCF, including one offering prayer. In another part of the room, several tables were set aside for the women who attended a local craft group that used the drop-in as its weekly meeting place.

During the study, I attended the drop-in on eleven occasions. I found that the drop-in was attended by a mixture of established OCF members, fringe members, and people from the wider community. There were not huge numbers of the latter,[36] and on occasions OCF members expressed disappointment and frustration about this. However, attending the drop-in provided the opportunity for me to engage in extended conversation with the various OCF members who attended regularly, a significant proportion of whom lived on the estate. Such conversation covered a variety of issues (ranging from current affairs to internal developments at OCF) and some OCF members also shared their (conversion) testimonies with me. The drop-in also enabled me to observe various forms of informal support that OCF members provided for people experiencing mental health problems and unemployment.

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[35] Other activities, which there is not space to consider here, include a church service for adults with learning disabilities, a Christmas lunch, and the use of OCF premises by community groups.

[36] At the midway point of a fairly typical morning at the drop-in during March 2012, I counted 3 established OCF members, 2 fringe members, and 6 people I did not recognise who I presumed to be members of the wider community. There were also 9 women attending the craft group.

Older people

Every week, OCF members visited and provided activities for older people at three local institutions – a residential care home on the Jackfield estate and two 'extra care' housing schemes. The precise format varied between locations, but in each of these contexts, there was a regular 'Songs of Praise' activity alongside one-to-one listening and conversation. I visited each of these activities and was impressed by the level of care and attentiveness that OCF members displayed. The longevity of OCF's involvement was also a striking feature. In two of the three institutions, OCF members had been visiting for around fifteen years.

Children and young people

OCF's outreach to children and young people included a weekly toddler group, a 'Kids Club' for primary school children, and activities in the local secondary school. The timing of these activities prevented me from getting substantially involved, but on two occasions I was able to attend events organised by the Kids Club leaders. One Saturday in December 2011, I attended the Kids Club 'Christmas Special' as an observer, and watched as around 20 children (a mix of 'church children' and children from the estates) participated in seasonal activities organised by OCF volunteers. Several months later (after I had been CRB-checked), I then participated as a helper at OCF's Easter holiday club. This whole-day event included more explicitly Christian content than I had witnessed at the Christmas special. Alongside games and craft activities in small groups, the programme included four front-led sessions combining Christian songs, dancing and Bible stories. As indicated in Figure 2, the Bible stories were based around the theme of "Mountain Rescue":

Figure 2 - Extracts from OCF Easter Holiday Club Leaders' Programme

Stories: Mountain Rescue
(1) God gave us some rules to help us live well: Exodus 19 v 1,2, 16-19; 20 v 1-4 (Mount Sinai)
(2) God is very great and powerful in every situation and doesn't like it when we break his rules: 1 Kings 18 v 16-40 (Mount Carmel)
(3) Jesus who was God's Son and did no wrong, died in our place for the wrong things we have done and will do in future: Mark 15 v15, 20-28, 33-39 (Mount Golgotha)
(4) Jesus isn't dead now though, he is alive and in a special way is still with us: Matt 28 v 1-7, 16-20 (Mount of Olives)

Healing and acts of kindness

Every two weeks, a team of OCF members would spend a Saturday morning offering hot drinks, conversation and prayer to people at the Jackfield shopping precinct, while others picked up litter or planted bulbs. I attended 'Healing on the Streets'[37] on two occasions. The first time was just before Christmas and on this occasion the above activities were accompanied by carol singing and giving out mince pies. The second time I visited was on a more typical Saturday morning in April. On this occasion, I met with six other OCF members at 10.00am to pray for the morning's activity, before heading out to the precinct at around 10.30am. Four other OCF members then joined us. We put out a few tables and chairs outside the entrance to OCF, and hung up a large banner with the words: "God Heals – Free prayer here today". Each member of the team was also given some leaflets that could be handed out to passers by. On one side of the leaflet, the caption "GOD HEALS" appeared against the backdrop of a photo with a garden and a cross. The content of the other side is reproduced in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 – OCF 'Healing on the Streets' Leaflet

Are you ill?

We are the local Christian church and we would love to pray for you to be healed.

Recently we prayed for someone here at Jackfield who was completely blind in the left eye for 20 years. The next day he could see shapes, colours and movement for the first time since 1989!

We are here at Jackfield precinct most Saturday mornings, or we can visit you at your home at a time convenient to you. To arrange a time for us to visit, or find out when we will be at the precinct call us on [church office phone number].

We are members of Oakfield Christian Fellowship, a Christian Church. We hold meetings on Sundays at 10am and are also open for Coffee and a chat on Tuesdays and Thursdays 10am till 12pm.

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[37] In order to ensure the anonymity of participants, the location-specific name that OCF used to describe this activity has been changed to 'Healing on the Streets'. This is also the name of a particular model of evangelistic prayer ministry adopted by charismatic churches around the world (see http://www.healingonthestreets.com [accessed 12 October 2012]) to which the OCF approach broadly conforms.

Over the next hour and a half, some of the team handed out leaflets and tried to engage passers by in conversation, while others based themselves at the tables and gave out hot drinks. Others like me walked around the precinct, picking up litter with litter grabbers or clearing weeds from municipal flowerbeds. From this vantage point, I observed the interactions between OCF members and the residents of Jackfield, noting that while the leaflets and offers of a drink were often met with a polite "thank you", not many people seemed to want to engage in extended conversation. Afterwards I estimated that only six or seven people had stayed for a drink and a chat during the hour and half we were at the precinct. From where I was standing it was unclear whether anyone had been prayed for. Towards the end of the morning, as we were beginning to clear up, I overheard snippets of a lengthy conversation between an OCF member and a man who (it seemed) had a long catalogue of complaints against Christianity and God. At one stage, the OCF member offered to pray for him but this was met with a somewhat evasive response.

Practices and Structures

We now need to begin to consider what the preceding descriptions of OCF's Sunday worship, house groups and community outreach activities reveal about OCF in the light of our three central research questions. With relation to the first question (practices and structures), a superficial reading might suggest that we only need examine OCF's community outreach activities in considering the church's involvement in the community. In order to provide a deeper and richer account of OCF's practices and structures, however, we need to explore the connections between the inner life of the church community (Sunday worship and house groups) and the outward ways in which it engages with the locality (community outreach activities). With this in mind, six key themes (four practices and two structures) that emerge from participant-observation across all three contexts will now be introduced.

Practices

Care and support

Numerous instances of informal care and support within the congregation were identified. My house group, for example, seemed to provide a place of quiet care (Harris, 1995) and low level support for people with physical and mental health problems. There also seemed to be evidence of this care and support extending beyond members of the congregation. This was exemplified by the weekly drop-in which (like the house group) appeared to function as a place of informal support for various people from the estates who experienced mental health problems. Care and attentiveness were also recurring themes in the various other community outreach activities I attended. At a coffee morning in an 'extra care' housing scheme, for example, I observed that OCF volunteers clearly made a point of ensuring that they had a one-to-one conversation with every older person present. Two examples of sensitive responses to community bereavements were also noted.[38]

Word-based proclamation

Such care and support notwithstanding, virtually every community outreach activity also had some kind of evangelistic or explicitly Christian content. This was conveyed through a variety of media including singing, speech, and the written word. In terms of singing, the Christian faith was communicated through a diverse array of musical genres. These ranged from traditional hymns ('Songs of Praise' with older people) and Christmas carols to modern dance tracks with Christian lyrics ('Praise Party' at children's holiday club). Many of the community activities I attended also included short talks or gospel presentations. Finally, there was also a striking emphasis on the communication of the gospel through the written word (more so than in other charismatic-evangelical churches I have been a part of). Examples of this included distributing evangelistic tracts at community events (Christmas lunch), putting out Christian newspapers on every table at the drop-in, and the "God heals" signage at 'Healing on the Streets'.

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[38] One of these bereavements was within a church for adults with learning disabilities supported by OCF. The other occurred at an 'extra care' housing scheme where OCF members were assisting with funeral arrangements.

Prayer

Prayer was also an integral part of OCF's community engagement. In the weeks before Christmas, for example, the church notice sheet encouraged OCF members to be prayer-walking the estates:

> At the prayer meeting last Sunday evening, as we were praying for the estates, we felt the Lord emphasise the need to go out and pray on the estate, calling down God's light to break into the darkness.

Another incident that demonstrates the centrality of prayer for OCF members occurred on my second visit to 'Healing on the Streets'. Having arrived at OCF a few minutes early and found the church building closed, I eventually found Thomas, one of the members of my house group, walking around the Jackfield shopping precinct. The first thing he said to me (without prompting) was "Hello Andy, I'm just claiming authority". He went on to tell me that every Saturday morning before the start of 'Healing on the Streets', he walks around the precinct claiming authority in Jesus' name.

Working with others

Numerous signs of strong collaboration with other churches (and not only other charismatic-evangelical ones) were encountered during the study. Indeed, this was a feature of OCF that both surprised and impressed me. The examples noted included considerable collaboration with the local Anglican parish church (jointly organising a midweek communion service at OCF and engagement with a local sheltered housing scheme), the identification of four partner churches elsewhere in the city-region that OCF supports, and formal partnerships with wider institutional bodies (Diocese, Baptist Union, Church Army) in particular areas of ministry. Additionally, most weeks in the church notices there was mention of OCF members who were speaking or otherwise serving at other local churches, as well as requests for volunteers to help with other churches' outreach programmes. As we will go on to consider later, such a generosity with resources was linked to OCF's self-perception as an "Antioch church". Yet it is important to stress that this generosity did not extend to relationships with Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, or Spiritualists (all of which have

a presence nearby). There was also virtually no evidence of collaboration with other faiths, although that may say as much about the make-up of the area (97% white) as it does about OCF.

OCF's engagement with secular bodies was also quite limited. Although the study found some evidence of room hire by community organisations, positive relationships with local shopkeepers, and some (albeit limited) involvement with community forums, OCF seemed reluctant to collaborate extensively with non-Christian organisations. Despite this, however, I also found some evidence to suggest that at least some local organisations hold OCF in high regard. This is encapsulated by the following endorsement that I found in the local Tenants and Residents Association's newsletter:

> At our last meeting we spoke about donations that you endorsed to organisations that helped the people on our estate. So you will be pleased to know we have given Oakfield Christian Fellowship a donation for all the hard work they have done for the people that live on our estate. We just wish we could have given them more as the volunteers do a great job providing activities for the young and old alike.

Structures

Informal self-funded model

The structures for community involvement observed at OCF seemed to be relatively informal, self-funded and largely volunteer-led. As such, they represent a different mode of operation to more project-based, professional forms of faith-based social action. Rather than being delivered by salaried workers funded with external grants, most of the community outreach activities I observed were managed and organised by unpaid members of OCF. As a result, there was a relaxed family feel to many of the community outreach activities. For example, when I enquired about helping with the community drop-in, I was not given a volunteer role description or induction programme; I was simply invited to turn up and get involved. This is not to suggest that organisation and professional best practice were absent,[39] or that community

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[39] OCF seemed to have very well-developed procedures and processes for child protection.

outreach activities happened without the input of paid staff.[40] However, it seems the main function of OCF's staff and elders was overseeing (as opposed to delivering or managing) community outreach activities and equipping or releasing church members to participate in mission. This was exemplified by the elders' decision (announced mid-way through the study process) to begin to move away from the current system of house groups towards a model of "core communities" focused around locality based mission.[41]

Mix of commuters and indigenous locals

As we have already seen, only a small proportion (31%) of OCF members live on the estates immediately around the church; the majority of members commute in from more affluent areas. Within its public discourse, OCF presented such congregational diversity as a strength. This was reflected in statements like "I can think of no place other than the local church where there is such a rich variety of people" (sermon extract). However, the experience of participant-observation also revealed that this diversity could be a source of tension and ambiguity. This was expressed most vividly to me when I heard a woman who had lived on the estates for many years voicing anger and frustration about insider-outsider dynamics at OCF. She said that she felt some people at OCF looked down on people from the estate. Linked to this, she also suggested that some local people had told her they would not come to OCF because it was "full of outsiders".

Conversations with the elders suggested they recognised that such insider-outsider dynamics pose a major challenge for OCF's ability to engage with the local community. Yet it is also important not to under-estimate the significance of the relative minority of (mainly older) OCF members who have lived on the estates for most of their lives. As we will see when we compare OCF with the focus group churches, the presence of an older generation of 'indigenous locals' distinguishes OCF from other more youthful forms of charismatic-evangelical urban practice.

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[40] Indeed, a salaried Church Army evangelist played a pivotal role in many outreach activities.

[41] In a presentation to OCF members, the elders defined a core community as a small group (5-20 people) committed to growing in discipleship, community, pastoral care and mission together.

Aims and Motivations

Having outlined the practices and structures through which OCF is involved in the local community, we now turn to consider the aims and motivations that lie behind these activities.

Demonstrating God's love

Within both documentary sources and verbal discourse, "demonstrating God's love" was often presented as the overarching motif for OCF's community outreach activities. However, closer analysis of the data revealed significant ambiguity and tension concerning the meaning of demonstrating God's love. Here there seemed to be particular differences in emphasis between the aims and motivations articulated in documentary sources (which may correspond with OCF's espoused theology) and those apparently embedded in practice (OCF's operant theology).

The various documentary sources gathered seem to suggest that although evangelism is important to OCF, demonstrating God's love involves more than just telling people about Jesus. This is reflected in the following statements:

> We believe that people need to see the love of God in action, as well as hearing about the love of God. Indeed, our vision for [the church building] is that it will provide a venue for local people of all ages, a place where they can find help in practical, as well as spiritual, ways.
>
> (Extract from website prior to upgrade)

> We want… the location-based groups to foster a desire to show God's love in their chosen location and a desire to see Him move. So it starts with a challenge to our heart attitude, rather [than] figuring out what to do when. The first step is to pray about how the CC [core community] can affect the neighbourhood over the next few years, both individually and as a CC… That means starting to get involved in 'community' things and peoples' lives in the area to show the love of God….
>
> (Extract from Question & Answer sheet supplied by OCF elders regarding the transition to core communities)

While these and other extracts from documentary sources suggest strong practical as well as spiritual or evangelistic concerns, many of the field notes taken during the participant-observation process appear to indicate intentions that are primarily evangelistic. During Sunday services, the majority of references to mission (whether in sermon extracts, testimonies, prayers, or song lyrics) were expressed through the vocabulary of "witnessing", concern for "the lost", and people needing to "hear about Jesus". Within conversations in house group, mission also appeared to be seen as synonymous with evangelism. There were fewer explicit references to aims and motivations within the community outreach activities I attended. Nevertheless, it may still be possible for motivational themes to be inferred. In this regard, I suggest that despite the use of primarily evangelistic vocabulary on Sundays and in house group, the practice of OCF members in relating to people from the community reveals significant concern for their wider well-being, not just their eternal destiny.

Modelling something different to the World

From much of the dominant discourse within Sunday services and house group, a generally negative view of the world seems to have been evident. Examples of this in Sunday services included repeated references (within a sermon series on Colossians) to the danger of adding to one's Christian experience things from the surrounding culture, and various negative references to contemporary secular society more generally. The instance that most vividly illustrated this was a sermon that ended with a PowerPoint slide of a child's drawing. The picture was of a young girl smiling while standing on a burning platform. Having shown this, the speaker concluded by saying: "The problem is that we don't see [being] 'in the world' as a burning platform". Such a negative view of the world was also reflected in wider congregational discourse. One Sunday morning, for example, there was a short interview with a couple that had recently joined the church. "It is lovely to be with people who love God", the woman began when invited to say what she appreciated about OCF, "it isn't like that when you're in the world". Further examples of this kind of discourse were also encountered in the house group I attended.[42]

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[42] As well as repeated references to "the lost", I also encountered phrases such as "coming out of the world", "the redeemed and unredeemed" and "these last days".

It would also appear than an idealised or "restorationist" (Walker, 1988, p. 30) vision of the local church informed much of OCF's activity. [43] There were numerous references to this in Sunday sermons that presented the New Testament ideal of Christian community in stark contrast to the perceived individualism of contemporary society. As has already been noted, the OCF elders also embarked on a change management programme intended to move away from house groups towards a new focus on "core communities". This appeared to represent an attempt on the part of the church leadership to move closer to what they perceived as the New Testament ideal of Christian community.

Yet for all this apparent distancing from the world, there were occasional glimpses of a more positive and conciliatory attitude. After a family carol service, for example, I commented in my field notes: "Overall, there seemed to be more references to God loving the world than before and a couple of explicit references to incarnation. Not as much anti-world rhetoric as other weeks." One week at house group, I was also struck by two things that Thomas (a long-standing OCF member and estate resident) had prayed for the local (secular) community forum. Reflecting on this incident, I noted firstly that Thomas had prayed "something about God being able to accomplish his purposes / get his will done regardless of whether it's through the church or through the world". Then secondly, when conversing with God about the non-Christian people involved in the community forum, he repeatedly used the phrase "they're good people… they're good people", before going on to ask God to bless them.

Being a church that reaches out locally and globally
It should also be stressed that OCF's vision of church went far beyond the immediate neighbourhood, extending into other parts of the city and surrounding region. It also incorporated global as well as local horizons. As we have already observed, each week in the notices there was usually a reference to OCF members who were serving in other places. This was linked to OCF's self-perception as an "Antioch church" (based on the example of the church in Antioch in the Acts of the Apostles) that

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[43] Most of the evidence of restorationism that was gathered came from statements by church leaders. There was less material on this from church members.

sends people out to support other fellowships in the UK and overseas. The church also felt that Isaiah 54:2 was a key "prophetic verse".[44] As one documentary source explained, for OCF this verse was about "strengthening the local church which will also enable us to continue to reach out and serve others, whether in other parts of this country or across the world". In some respects, this combination of local and global horizons at OCF mirrors the coexistence of indigenous locals and (mainly) middle class commuters within the congregation. As we have seen, such congregational diversity was sometimes a source of tension. Similar tensions, I suggest, may also arise from OCF's desire to be a church that reaches out locally and globally. As I explained to OCF members in my final feedback presentation, at various times in the study I found myself asking the question: "Does having a wider field of vision enhance or detract from engagement with the immediately local?"[45]

Perceived Impact

We now turn to consider OCF's perception of the impact of its community engagement activities. Far less material was gathered that was relevant to this question than our other two research questions. Prior to commencing the study, I had anticipated that given the popularity of testimony among charismatic-evangelicals, there would be no shortage of stories of dramatic impact. However, this was not the case at OCF where I heard very few testimonies relating to impact on the local community. In fact, there seemed to be more evidence available about impact overseas (e.g. stories and testimonies from missionaries abroad). Conversations with the church elders suggest that they think a lot of the local impact of OCF is unseen, or beneath the surface.[46] What follows is therefore based on the relatively limited amount of data that I was able to gather.

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[44] In the New International Version, Isaiah 54:2 reads: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes".

[45] In response to my presentation, several OCF members indicated that they recognised this tension. A number also indicated that they thought the (short) answer to my question was "both" – i.e. a wider field of vision simultaneously enhances and detracts from engagement with the immediately local.

[46] This may be particularly true of OCF's engagement with older people, adults with learning disabilities, and the local secondary school.

Impact on the congregation

There were frequent references to OCF being a (numerically) growing church. For example, two months into the study, the elders announced that OCF was considering acquiring additional premises because it was becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate increased numbers on a Sunday morning. This picture was reinforced through conversations with James (senior pastor) who said that over the nineteen years he had been at OCF, the church membership had grown from 90 to around 200 (including children). However, it is important to note that such reported growth does not seem to be a direct result of OCF's community outreach activities. When one of the elders enthusiastically told me he was very encouraged by new people joining OCF, I asked him where they were coming from. He replied: "with regret, it's mostly from other churches".

Nevertheless, there were still some signs of OCF's community outreach activities impacting the congregation, particularly in areas relating to the personal development of church members who live on the estates. As has already been noted, people from the estates account for a relatively small proportion of OCF's overall congregation. However, for some people in the community who have joined OCF, there seem to have been a number of positive benefits. These range from having the confidence to speak from the front of the church, to the experience of one local woman who, supported by OCF, was able to work in an orphanage in China for a year.

Evangelistic impact and favour with the community

The visible impact of OCF's recent evangelistic efforts in the local community seems to have been quite limited. Although some OCF members recollected with fondness the time in the 1980s when people from Jackfield and Brackley had come to faith at Billy Graham rallies, little evidence of more recent conversions was discovered. However, an area in which OCF members do see their efforts as having had some kind of impact relates to the local community's changing perceptions of the church. On a number of occasions. this was described to me as shift from suspicion to favour. One staff member, for example, reported that when OCF had first acquired premises on the estate, there had initially been a lot of suspicion in the community. Since then, OCF had spent time and energy building relationships and making the church known.

As a result, various OCF members suggested that at least some people in the community now hold them in high regard. Various signs of favour were reported including improved relationships with local shopkeepers (associated with regular activity at the shopping precinct as part of 'Healing on the Streets') and the commendation from the local Tenants and Residents Association referred to earlier. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that church members seemed to feel that OCF still had a long way to go in developing its standing in the community. This was reflected, for example, in comments about the socio-economic and cultural gulf between many OCF members and people from the estate.

Wider socio-economic impacts

During the study, I heard a number of stories of individual healing and transformation among people from the local area. Most of these relate to people who had over time become members (or at least fringe members) of OCF. One such person was Malcolm, a retired man in my house group who lived on the Jackfield estate. In sharing his testimony with me one morning at the drop-in, Malcolm told me that many years ago he had been an alcoholic but "God healed me from that". This, he explained, was linked to an experience of seeing God heal an OCF member he knew of a broken ankle and various other health problems. Thinking "I want some of that", he became a Christian soon afterwards and stopped drinking.

The story of another man's struggle with alcoholism, however, reveals a shadow side to stories of healing and recovery. Mid-way through the study, Gordon (one of the elders) approached me at the drop-in to say that he was keen to tell me about some of the ways people from OCF were having an impact on the community that were "beneath the surface". He then proceeded to tell me the story of a local man he was working with who was recovering from alcoholism. When they had first met, the man had been in quite a bad way and Gordon had prayed for him, as well as offering other practical and emotional support. Since then, Gordon told me, the man had (with one exception) not touched a drink for months. In sharing this story with me, Gordon suggested it was both an example of a miraculous answer to prayer and evidence of the church's unconditional support for a man who had indicated he was not interested in coming to church. However, the significance of this story took on greater complexity when (on sharing my interim findings with the OCF elders six months

after the formal end of the study) I discovered that the man Gordon had been talking about had committed suicide. The extent to which this should cause us to reassess and reinterpret Gordon's story is debatable, and we do not have space to consider this at length here. In brief, though, I would suggest that rather than necessarily undermining claims of healing and recovery (even if short-lived), this incident simultaneously exposes the fragility of such claims and the emotional demands of charismatic-evangelical urban ministry. Such an assessment of the substance-yet-fragility of claims of recovery is reinforced by my experience of being part of an OCF house group in which many of the members struggled with physical or mental health problems. Here I encountered evidence of recovery and claims of answered prayer, alongside signs of ongoing sickness and struggle.

In addition to these accounts of impact on individuals, I also encountered several references to some kind of wider change (for the better) in the fortunes of the estates. For some church members, this was attributable (in part at least) to OCF's involvement in the community and the activity of God. For example, two church members told me that since OCF had been doing "acts of kindness" on the estate (e.g. putting up hanging baskets and painting playgrounds), the local authority seemed to be taking more of an active role in the estate. They felt that OCF's activities may have been a catalyst for this. Another example, albeit from several years ago (uncovered through a review of documentary sources), was the story of a local man who had witnessed the decline of his estate over many years. According to the OCF member who told this story, this man (who was not a Christian) felt that since OCF had arrived there had been "a shift, a slowing out or bottoming of the decline".

Leaving OCF - Abiding Memories

The formal end of the participant-observation element of the study was marked by a final meeting with James (senior pastor), the invitation to say a few words to the congregation at my last Sunday service, and my final house group meeting. When I met with James, we discussed practical arrangements for sharing the research findings with OCF (once I had analysed the data) but he was also keen to hear some of my initial thoughts and reflections. In response, I said that I thought my

experience of OCF had broadened my understanding of charismatic-evangelical urban involvement. The model with which I had been most familiar previously was of middle-class young adults relocating to disadvantaged neighbourhoods (as exemplified nationally by the Eden Network,[47] and locally by some of the focus group churches). OCF, I suggested, did not conform to this model and I felt the presence of older indigenous locals in the OCF congregation pointed to a different form of charismatic-evangelical urban engagement. When invited to say a few words during my final Sunday service, I expressed my gratitude to the church leadership for agreeing to participate in the study and to the congregation for the way that had welcomed me and my family. I also indicated that over the coming few months I would be returning to my home church and taking some time to reflect on the experience before coming back to share my interim findings with OCF. I concluded by saying that "my hope and prayer"[48] was that out of the process there would come both "something that's helpful for you as a church" and "something that's helpful for me and my family" (by casting fresh light on our future decision-making).

My final house group meeting was also marked with prayer (for me) as well as with cake and a leaving card. From this, my final point of contact with OCF, there is an abiding memory which still comes to mind when I think about OCF. It is of looking around Malcolm and Helen's living room while we were having coffee and cake and seeing Helen sitting in her riser recliner chair holding a plastic box containing all her medication. I tried to count how many separate boxes and packets there were but I lost count (at a guess there were about 12). As I wrote in my journal later that day, there was something about this image that reinforced what I had been reflecting on with James earlier in the week. This concerned the way in which the OCF experience challenged "my prior presumption that the main way in which charismatic-evangelical churches engage with disadvantaged neighbourhoods is by healthy, energetic, middle class young adults intentionally moving into the inner city". Helen's experience of living on the same estate, in the same Council house for over thirty years, and maintaining her charismatic-evangelical faith despite major health problems seemed to be "completely the opposite of this".

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[47] See http://eden-network.org (accessed 23 October 2012).
[48] My decision to acknowledge that prayer has affected the way I have 'looked at' my research subject is informed by Swinton's discussion about the necessity of bias (2012, pp. 79-83).

3.2 Focus Groups

This section presents the findings of the seven focus groups with a further three churches that complemented the ethnographic study. Once again limitations of space have meant I have needed be selective in what I present. Guided by the purposes of the study, here I have tried to summarise the key themes emerging in response to our three central research questions.[49] We begin with a brief introduction to each of the three churches studied before going on describe practices and structures, aims and motivations, and perceived impact in turn.

Introducing the Churches Studied

The rationale for selecting the focus group churches was explained in Chapter 2 but here I provide a brief introduction to each of the three churches.

New Life is a relatively new (eight years old) 'fresh expression' Anglican congregation that meets on the site of a former pub on a social housing estate about two miles from the city centre. The area falls within the 1% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country (Office for National Statistics, 2012) and has been predominantly white working class, although new housing developments have begun to make the area more diverse. New Life has a core membership of around 50 people, three full-time staff, and various others in part-time roles. The various ways it is involved in the local neighbourhood include youth work (delivered in partnership with a national Christian organisation), activities for children and families, debt advice, healing and wholeness ministries, and a community café.

St John's is a large multi-denominational 'magnet church' based on a campus of former industrial units about a mile from the city centre. According to the church leader, it has around 1,000 regular attendees and a staff team of 35 (mix of full-time and part-time). St John's is located on the edge of an area of social housing but its engagement with disadvantaged communities is citywide in scope. The three main

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[49] I acknowledge that in opting for an approach of summarising, the description that follows does not allow the voices of individual participants to come through very clearly. We should, however, remember that focus groups were chosen as a supplementary research method alongside an in-depth ethnographic study. The thematic summary of the focus group findings in this section is therefore intended to complement the rich, thick description of Oakfield Christian Fellowship in the first part of the chapter.

strands to this activity are work with children, young people and families (delivered in localities across the city), the establishment of 'missional communities' (groups of Christians living and 'being church' within a particular locality), and various campus-based 'vulnerable people's ministries' engaging with people who have experienced homelessness, addictions or mental health problems. The St John's church leaders' focus group gave an overview of these activities while the members' focus group focused particularly on St John's involvement within one particular disadvantaged neighbourhood.

St Peter's is a relatively small (around 50 adults plus children) Anglican congregation and is the only one of the four churches studied to meet in a traditional church building. The local neighbourhood is socially, culturally and religiously diverse, as well as relatively deprived.[50] At the time of the study, St Peter's was in the process of formally joining with a neighbouring church, St Paul's. The church leaders' focus group was conducted with the joint staff team for St Peter's and St Paul's (across the two churches, there were six paid members of staff). The church members' focus groups involved only members of St Peter's. It is also significant that St Peter's was selected as an example of a church whose theological outlook might be deemed more 'open-evangelical' than 'charismatic-evangelical', and that it is the congregation of which I am a member. The ways through which St Peter's (and St Paul's) are involved in the local community include youth and children's work, activities with international women, a community café, prayer vigils, work with older people, and engagement with local pubs.

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[50] The St Peter's church building is located within the 5% most deprived lower super output areas in the country (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Other parts of the parish, however, are less deprived.

Practices and Structures

Having provided this summary of the three focus group churches' main community activities, key themes arising from analysis of the transcripts will now be drawn out.

Practices

Overt faith sharing

The churches studied mentioned a number of strategies they employed for sharing the Christian faith through community action. These included incorporating Christian worship into some activities – for example Christian songs at children's clubs (New Life and St John's) and conducting a short service as part of a lunch club (St Peter's). All three churches mentioned offering people prayer. There was also a strong emphasis on "being there" for people – building relationships and then responding to opportunities to talk about faith that come up naturally in conversation.

Somewhat surprisingly, the words "blatant" and "overt" (which are often presumed to have negative connotations) occurred frequently. Participants in all three churches talked about being either blatant or overt in their approach to faith sharing. There were, however, significant differences in emphasis here with some participants seemingly more deliberate or proactive in seeking out evangelistic opportunities than others. There was a marked contrast at New Life between church leaders' repeated references to being overt in exposing people to the gospel and the seemingly less directive approach reflected in the church members' focus group. At St John's, this pattern seems to have been reversed. Here church members appeared to have less reservations about being blatantly evangelistic than church leaders. So while a church member commented "we're quite blatant in that we say we do this because we love Jesus – we don't really try and hide that", one of the church leaders said he had found "the more blatantly evangelistic you come across…, the less well-received you are". Of the three churches studied, St Peter's appeared to be the least direct in its approach to evangelism. While acknowledging that "there is something about being openly Christian", both leaders and members were keen to distinguish between "being clear about our identity" and "forcing it on others". This is reflected in the following comment from a St Peter's member who helped to run a community café:

And I think the main thing is, they are not threatened are they? If they come in and people start throwing the Bible at them, putting it bluntly, then I would send them away and go out because I wouldn't want to be involved with it, because that's not the idea for it. But if people come and say, 'will you pray with me?', that's different.

Working with other churches and Christian organisations

Various types of collaboration with other local churches were cited across all three churches. This included collaboration in the provision of youth clubs, work in schools, and a conversation club for refugees and asylum seekers. What was most significant about the data gathered here was that all of the coded segments relating to collaboration with other churches came from the church members' focus groups. None of these came from the church leaders. A range of different interpretations could be offered as to why this was the case. In the light of my knowledge and understanding of the churches involved, my suggestion would be that it is not that there is no collaboration with other churches at a leadership level (and if they were asked about this directly, the church leaders would mention it). Rather, the fact that they have not chosen to talk about it suggests that collaboration with other churches may not be at the forefront of their minds. In this sense, the relative insularity of church leaders stands in contrast with the 'grassroots ecumenism' of church members.

There were also numerous reported instances of the churches collaborating with other Christian organisations operating at a national (and in some cases international) level, or adopting external models from other contexts. Figure 4 below summarises the main examples mentioned. Sometimes this collaboration involved partnership with an external organisation that provided additional people (e.g. Church Army, Eden) or other resources (Green Pastures). In some cases it involved adopting, and maybe adapting, a particularly approach that had been developed in other parts of the country or overseas (e.g. Simple Church, Metro Ministries, Godly Play). In other cases, collaboration with other organisations involved the utilisation of an established franchise or brand (e.g. Christians Against Poverty, Besom). The churches involved

(and particularly the church leaders) identified numerous benefits associated with this form of collaboration, and few disadvantages (only one reference to the perceived inflexibility of a particular model). The economic language employed within participants' descriptions of "buying in to" established models developed by "experts" from other contexts was particularly striking. Although it is unclear whether the buying referred to was literal or metaphorical (i.e. whether any money changed hands), such language (and the emerging Christian service industry it points to) poses interesting questions about the way charismatic-evangelical churches relate to the market economy.

Figure 4 – Collaboration with National and International Organisations

New Life	St John's	St Peter's
• Eden / Message Trust • Christians Against Poverty • Simple Church	• Metro Ministries • Christians Against Poverty • Green Pastures • Besom	• Godly Play • Church Army

Working with secular bodies

Church leaders across all three churches highlighted various forms of collaboration with public bodies. For example, the New Life leaders indicated that their church youth worker is part-funded by a local school to work with young people who are struggling to engage with formal education. St John's reported a strong relationship at a strategic level with the police and the local authority's Youth Commissioner. Collaboration with statutory bodies at St Peter's occurred through participation in multi-agency community safety meetings and engagement with local schools on a number of levels (e.g. church members serving as school governors and delivering 'Godly Play' as part of the school curriculum). However, church members were far less aware of this dimension than church leaders. It is also important to acknowledge that this data does not tell us what public bodies think of charismatic-evangelical churches.

All three churches also provided some evidence of collaboration with other voluntary sector organisations, although this was mentioned less at New Life than at St John's and St Peter's. The examples given included the provision of meeting space for other community groups, engaging with community forums, taking referrals from or referring people on to other third sector providers, and participation in multi-agency networks or working groups. One of the churches (St Peter's) had also been invited by a secular youth provider to take over the running of a youth club that they were no longer able to service. For all these signs of collaboration, however, the research process also identified a number of practices that suggest something of a tendency for going it alone and not collaborating with other organisations. For example at both St John's and New Life, there was reference to the church establishing "community groups" which, while organisationally separate from the church, appeared to be made up mainly or entirely of church members. Quite tellingly, there was also little mention of joining in with the activities of other community organisations (for example by serving on local committees), with only St Peter's providing any significant examples of this.[51]

Structures

Mode of operation

Community activity in all three focus group churches encompassed two contrasting modes of operation, that of 'service provider' and 'intentional community'. On the one hand, the churches functioned as providers of services such as youth work (all three churches), debt advice (St John's, New Life) and social care (St Johns, St Peter's). On the other hand, they also functioned as geographically focused intentional communities - small groups of Christians committed to 'being church' and 'doing community' together within a particular locality. At St John's, this was evident in the establishment of missional communities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods that were mainly comprised of church members who had relocated there. At St Peter's, some of the church members involved in youth work and

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[51] Of all the three churches, St Peter's seemed to be the most collaboratively engaged with other community organisations. While on one level, this might be considered surprising (on the grounds that St Peter's has fewer members living in the local neighbourhood), this might be explained by its more explicitly Anglican identity and historic presence in the area.

ministry to international families in one particular part of the parish had formed a small group that was meeting together regularly with a view to establishing a 'fresh expression' of church on the estate. At New Life, the vocabulary of intentional community was not explicitly used, although the descriptions participants provided of their church community suggest that this may also be a category that applies to them.

In all three churches, the more formal community activities mentioned (i.e. those that reflected a 'service provider' mode of operation) were delivered by a mix of paid staff and volunteers. There were also some instances of individuals combining dual roles (paid and voluntary) or moving from one to another. Church members at both St John's and St Peter's, however, seemed keen to stress that most of the activities were run by volunteers. While they acknowledged that some staff input was needed to make things happen, they suggested that most of the activity on the ground was led by volunteers. It is interesting to note though that all three churches had relatively large staff teams.[52] In this sense, community outreach activities may be more dependent on paid staff than some participants seemed prepared to acknowledge.

Moving on to consider how community activities were supported and resourced, participants' responses suggest that all three churches had relatively limited experience of external secular funding. Many (though not all) of the community activities they provided were either self-funded or supported by other Christian organisations. In this sense, charismatic-evangelical urban churches seem to be working to a different economic model to much secular third sector provision. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a continuum of positions regarding external funding. Towards one end of the spectrum, St Peter's seemed to be the most cautious, only applying for small one-off grants to cover equipment and activity start-up costs. St Peter's participants were also keen to contrast the "dependable service" they provided with the activities of other organisations that come and go on the basis of funding. St John's and New Life, in contrast, seemed to have more experience of obtaining external grants from sources like the local authority, police,

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[52] Even the two smaller churches (St Peter's and New Life) had several paid members of staff.

and the Big Lottery Fund (although still in relatively small amounts).[53] They also seemed to display a more pragmatic approach to decisions about funding. Such pragmatism was exemplified by the comment of one participant regarding the decision to accept Lottery funding: "we just wanted to see the money redeemed, that's the essence of it". Finally, it is also interesting to note that relatively little evidence was found of income generation through social enterprise activities. As this was not the main focus of the study, there was not the chance to probe too deeply around this, but once again there seemed to be a spectrum of different economic models at work. This was particularly evident in the difference between the cafés run by St Peter's and New Life. While the St Peter's community café was a volunteer-led activity that took place once a week, the café at New Life was a professionally run full-time operation.

Intentional relocation and outsiders coming in

One of the most striking themes emerging from the focus groups was that the majority of the church members engaged with disadvantaged neighbourhoods were not originally from those neighbourhoods themselves. They were outsiders coming in. Within two of the churches (New Life and St John's), this manifested itself in Christians choosing to live in a disadvantaged neighbourhood. The people who did this were mainly (though not exclusively) University-educated middle class young adults who had felt called to move to the inner city. This was often linked to the establishment of some kind of intentional community (an 'Eden Project' at New Life and a missional community at St John's). At St Peter's, in contrast, there was much less evidence of such intentional relocation. As one participant put it, "most of us live outside the parish or on the outskirts".

There were, however, a few notable exceptions to this dominant picture of outsiders coming in. This was particularly striking at New Life where two leading church members, who were also employed by the church, were originally from the estate. One of the St John's leaders also suggested that while much of the activity had been initiated by people coming in, it had developed to become "very rooted in that neighbourhood" so that many of the members now were "indigenous to that area".

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[53] My assessment of the relatively limited nature of these churches' funding experience is informed by my experience of working for secular charities that have accessed much larger grants.

Aims and Motivations

Before we describe the aims that participants said lay behind their community outreach activities, we firstly consider some wider motivational influences.

Types of influence

Five different types of influence on participants' espoused aims and motivations emerge from the data. Firstly, many participants identified strong personal drivers for their involvement in community activities that arose out of their understanding of discipleship and relationship with God. Sometimes, particularly among participants from New Life (staff and members) and St John's (mainly members), this was articulated through the vocabulary of calling. This was reflected in statements like "I came here because I felt called by God to work in a more deprived context". Some participants also described their community involvement as an act of worship or a response to God's love.

Secondly, in all three churches aims and intentions were articulated with reference to corporate vision statements, but there seemed to be significant variations in the authority and importance attributed to these. At New Life, the church leaders' focus group presented a clearly worded expression of the church's vision (based around Isaiah 61) and central aim (forming urban disciples of Jesus) but the church members' focus group made no explicit reference to this. At St John's, the pattern was reversed. There was no explicit mention of a vision statement by the church leaders but the church members shared in their focus group a vision statement they had developed for their particular missional community. At St Peter's, the church members also talked about vision statements more than the staff did. Here, however, they made repeated (and apparently deferential) references to the church vision statement as the Vicar's vision.

Thirdly, a variety of biblical influences were cited but the overwhelming majority of passages mentioned were in the Old Testament prophets and the Gospels. The most frequently mentioned verse was Luke 4:18 (following Isaiah 61:1): "the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (New International Version). Two churches mentioned Isaiah 58 and various other passages across Isaiah, Jeremiah and Hosea were also referred to. Other significant

New Testament passages included Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well (John 4:1-26) and the "person of peace" evangelistic strategy in Matthew 10 and Luke 10. Outside of the Gospels, nearly all of the other New Testament references came from Acts. Somewhat surprisingly for evangelical churches, there were few references to Paul's letters. Alongside the direct biblical references noted above, there were also references to a variety of other theological themes. All three churches mentioned incarnation, the kingdom of God, and darkness versus light. Furthermore, an emphasis on joining in with what God is already doing appeared to reflect implicitly the idea of *missio Dei* (the mission of God), particularly at St Peter's and New Life.

Fourthly, charismatic cosmology appeared to be particularly significant for participants from New Life and St John's. Both New Life focus groups contained phrases that may be intelligible only within a particular charismatic-evangelical framework. This was reflected, for example, in the assertion that God wants "everything the enemy [the devil] has stolen to be paid back". One of the church leaders also provided an extended description of a "prophetically discerned" insight that we are now living in "a time of acceleration":

> There is a season now where it's not about lots of sowing… Lots of sowing and lots of prayer has gone on over many decades. Now is a time for reaping.

Similar insights were also articulated, albeit to a lesser degree, by St John's members who talked about some of the "specific [prophetic] words" and "prophecies for the land" they had received. There was much less of this kind of language at St Peter's.

Fifthly and finally, it is significant to observe that within the various different types of influence noted above, there appears to be little acknowledgement of the particular local (neighbourhood) context. The New Life leaders did acknowledge that the specifically urban context meant that "the way we do it round here may be a bit different from the way they do it in… [affluent suburban areas]". Such statements, however, were the exception not the norm. Across the seven focus groups, there were few explicit references to sustained reflection on the local context playing a particularly significant role in informing and shaping community action.

Spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions

Within each focus group, there were clear and explicit references to wanting people in the community to become Christians. This was expressed in a variety of ways but with the desire that people "know Jesus", "find Jesus", "have Jesus in their life", or "follow Jesus" a strong recurring theme. Alongside such spiritual or evangelistic aims, a variety of wider socio-economic intentions were also articulated. These included providing wholesome and affordable food, advocacy or championing, health and wholeness, employability and enterprise, and including or welcoming the stranger. Participants employed a number of striking motifs to articulate how these two different types of intention (spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic) were held together. These included 'transformation', 'holistic', 'self-worth', and 'family-community'. Each of these will be briefly considered below.

Firstly, 'transformation' was a particularly prominent motif and was mentioned (to varying degrees) by leaders and members in each of the three churches. Transformation, we should note, is a particularly flexible and elastic concept (Furbey, 1999, p. 422) and was employed by participants in a variety of ways. One participant talked about wanting to see people transformed in every area of their lives, "from the spiritual right through to the social, mental, emotional, [and] physical". Another participant talked about the "transformation of the whole person, the whole family, [and] the whole community through the love of Jesus". For all the different ways in which 'transformation' was used, a perceived connectivity between the spiritual and the socio-economic was consistent throughout. As one participant put it, "spiritual change is an essential part of real long-term transformation".

Secondly, transformational language was also linked to the use of the word 'holistic'. This was particularly prominent among St John's leaders, who felt their church offered a "holistic look" in addressing the needs of the whole person (both spiritual and socio-economic). One St John's leader also referred to a picture he felt God had given him of a set of scales. It had 'Compassion' at one end and 'The gospel' at the other. While other Christian organisations had (in his opinion) got the balance wrong by emphasising only compassion, he felt that God had taught St John's to "level the scales" by combining practical service with "preaching the gospel".

'Self-worth' was a third motif that was frequently used to integrate spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions. Participants from across all three churches talked about communicating "God's value of each individual" (St Peter's leaders) and enabling people to understand "how much God is for them" (St John's leaders) and that "with Jesus in their life there's hope for the future" (New Life members). Fourthly, such an understanding of self-worth was also linked to a sense of creating 'family' or 'community'. At both St John's and New Life, the church was presented as a family or "recovery community" into which people who have had "dysfunctional lives or pasts… can come in, feel supported…, get healed up… and then [be] able to give back" (St John's leaders). At St Peter's, there seemed to be a somewhat broader understanding of community that also encompassed breaking down barriers between church and the wider (neighbourhood) community.

Finally, and before we move on, it is worth noting that there were also a few references to justice and liberation, but that these themes were far less prominent than those noted above. Indeed, there was a tendency among some (though not all) of the participants to see oppression in primarily spiritual or supernatural (as opposed to socio-economic) terms and to view poverty as a reflection of people's bad choices or moral deficiency (rather than as a matter of social injustice). This is an issue to which we will return in our engagement with urban liberation theology in the next chapter.

Despite the common themes noted above, there were also significant differences in emphasis between different types of participant regarding the relative importance of the spiritual-evangelistic and the socio-economic (and the extent to which the latter is considered valid in its own right). For example, some of the St John's members appeared to suggest that while socio-economic activities such as helping young people with their CVs are important, they are not "the ultimate" since "the main thing… [is that] for them to be totally transformed they need Jesus in their life". Among the St John's leaders, however, there seemed to be a subtle difference of emphasis, with greater value placed on unconditional love and service.

At St Peter's, there were also significant differences, with some members primarily concerned with evangelism and other participants (members and leaders) implying broader intentions than this. For example, one participant (a church leader) said that

while he had never lost the hope or desire that people in the community would "find Jesus", he saw activities such as serving as a school governor as a valuable use of his time. This was because providing "the most fertile educational ground" for local children and young people reflected a "big picture" understanding of God's Kingdom. Such themes were also picked up in one of the church members' focus groups when a participant indicated that even if she knew that none of the Muslim women she was working with would ever become Christians, she still thought that what she was doing was worthwhile. This she located in an understanding that "the kingdom values are to go and welcome the stranger… [W]hether or not that results in an actual conversion for me, it no longer matters so much".

Ecclesial intentions

We have focused at length on the relationship between spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions because this accounts for a large proportion of the data obtained around aims and motivations. Before we move on, however, we will briefly consider some issues of ecclesial outlook that have parallels with other motivational themes uncovered by the ethnographic study.

The tensions identified at Oakfield Christian Fellowship between local and global horizons find resonance in the varying conceptions of church within the focus groups.[54] This was particularly evident at St Peter's where there seemed to be a tension between the desire (of some participants at least) to establish contextually relevant expressions of church in parts of the parish and the desire to help church members (many of whom lived outside the parish) to live out their faith in their own communities and workplaces. At New Life, there was less evidence of a tension between such locally indigenous and dispersed conceptions of church. As a relatively new expression of church with an explicit neighbourhood focus, New Life seemed to have prioritised the locally indigenous over the expansive. The large size of the St John's congregation, meanwhile, seems to have enabled it to combine the establishment of locally based missional communities with the pursuit of citywide, national and even international ambitions.

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[54] Note that the assessment that follows has been informed in part by my prior knowledge of the focus group churches.

Issues concerning the relationship between church and world were addressed less explicitly in the focus group data than in the ethnographic study. However, we can begin to see a spectrum of positions if we reflect on the conceptions of the church-world relationship implicit in the varying approaches encountered concerning collaboration with secular bodies. In all three churches, a combination of counter-cultural and collaborative tendencies was identified (although the relative importance of each varied between churches). The former, it seems, reflects a strong sense of antithesis between church and world, while the latter is indicative of a more conciliatory view of the world.

Perceived Impact

We now turn to consider the ways in which participants perceived the impact of their community engagement activities. This begins with a brief discussion of some of the difficulties highlighted around assessing the impact before going on to consider three different types of perceived impact in turn: impact on the local neighbourhood, impact on the church, and impact on individual participants.

Issues around assessing impact

While the ethnographic study uncovered relatively little data around perceived impact, the focus group questions on this topic generated long and wide-ranging discussions. Much of the material obtained was in the form of stories and testimonies. While numbers were sometimes mentioned, it appeared that none of the three churches had developed particularly sophisticated systems for measuring and assessing impact.[55] This, it seems, was linked to all three churches having relatively little experience of external funding (beyond small grants) and the more rigorous expectations of monitoring and evaluation associated with large grants and contracts. Nevertheless, some of the churches felt the need to develop in this area. For example, while acknowledging that "we don't want to be people who are dictated or driven by facts and figures", one of the St John's leaders talked about the need to do more than provide anecdotal stories of transformation. This, he said, was particularly important in order to be able to demonstrate impact to public bodies like the local authority.

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[55] Here the approach of the churches studied stands in contrast to that of other (secular) third sector organisations I have worked with that have embraced more sophisticated approaches to impact measurement such as 'social return on investment'.

Yet it is also important to note that many of the participants' contributions around impact were (particularly at St John's and New Life) expressed in language that would be hard for a secular public policy audience to understand.[56] This was reflected, for example, in conversations about "ploughing the ground" and "planting seeds" while seeking to see an area "transformed for the Lord" (St John's members). Discussions around impact at New Life seemed to be set within the context of seeing the local area as a [spiritual] "warzone" or battlefield. Here positive impacts were attributed to God and negative ones to "backlash" from "the enemy". Interestingly however, and as we shall go on to see, other parts of the transcripts appear to provide quite strong evidence of significant engagement with individuals, communities and organisations in more accessible language.

Impact on the neighbourhood

Most of the examples of impact referred to across all three churches were overwhelmingly positive and encompassed both spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic dimensions. These ranged from impact on individuals and families through to impact on the wider community. As we will see, there was also a striking difference between 'dramatic' and 'mundane' accounts.

Impact on individuals was referred to far more frequently than impact at a family or community level and here a marked contrast between St Peter's and the other two churches emerges. New Life and St John's both provided numerous accounts of spectacular and sometimes 'miraculous' changes in the lives of individuals. For example, there were several dramatic 'before and after' conversion stories about people in the community who had come to faith. These included stories about young people who had moved from "not having a faith at all" to saying "if I've got a problem now, I turn to God" (New Life members), as well as adults from troubled backgrounds who had now become "the best evangelists in the world" (St John's leaders). Yet it is important to stress that the perceived impacts here were not solely spiritual or evangelistic. They also encompassed a variety of socio-economic

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[56] Here, however, we also need to acknowledge that this may be attributed in part to the fact that at least some of the participants were aware of my charismatic-evangelical insider status. If someone else had been asking the questions, they might have responded differently.

dimensions. Examples were provided of individuals in the community stopping self-harming or taking drugs, becoming debt free, breaking cycles of unemployment, and becoming "useful members of society". Participants also saw a strong link between spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic impact. Positive changes in the lives of individuals were frequently attributed to people making faith commitments or discovering that "God has a family for them" (New Life members). In some cases, such impacts were more directly attributed to God, for example in stories of people coming off heroin, being "healed from alcoholism" (St John's members), or "healed from deafness" (New Life staff).

At St Peter's in contrast, the stories about impact were far less dramatic. In terms of spiritual-evangelistic impact, there was less evidence of conversions but a greater emphasis on experiences, encounters and glimpses of the divine. For example, a number of church members talked about a recent open air prayer vigil for war-torn places around the world where Muslim children from the youth club had joined them in candle-lit silence. In talking about providing 'Godly Play' in local schools, another church member acknowledged:

> [While] I'll probably never see them in church, we're giving them an experience – a spiritual experience where they're engaging with the story and where they've got time and space to think about it.

Such an approach was also reflected in the more mundane way in which St Peter's members talked about socio-economic impacts. It was evident, for example, in the way a St Peter's participant described the experience of one of the regular attendees of the community café. The impact that this participant chose to emphasise related to the way a man who had recently "had a really tough time" knew "he could come and talk to us about it and know that we would listen".

As well as this primary emphasis on impact on individuals, there were also a few examples of whole families being supported. These were mostly mentioned by participants from St John's and New Life. They included examples of breaking "three generations of unemployment within a family", and seeing "marriages saved [and] children returned from care back into the family home". One New Life

member also noted less tangible, though nevertheless significant, changes in the life of a local family. This was encapsulated by the observation that "they all look like they're carrying less on their shoulders; they smile more, they laugh".

The third dimension of neighbourhood impact we shall consider here relates to impact on the wider community (beyond individuals and families). Various aspects of this were highlighted including: bringing together people of different backgrounds (St Peter's peace vigil and inter-generational, cross-cultural knitting projects at St Peter's and St John's); empowering local residents to voice concerns about a proposed housing development (St Peter's); environmental improvements to derelict gardens (St Peter's) and allotments (St John's); and reported reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour (St Peter's). Here, and in contrast to the perceived impact on individual and families, St Peter's seemed to provide more evidence around impact on the wider community than the other two churches.

Before we move on, it is also worth noting that few negative impacts on the local community were mentioned. The main one acknowledged at New Life was where some of the church youth team had moved into the area, built up relationships with young people, and then moved away somewhere else. This had left the young people feeing disappointed, let down, and less likely to trust the youth team members that remained. At St John's, the main negative impact reported had occurred when St John's had moved into a new neighbourhood. Local people and organisations had felt "upset that we had either missed what they were doing and not partnered with something really good… or not consulted with people who had been there for years". This was an experience that the church leaders were keen to stress they had learned from and addressed. Few explicitly negative impacts were reported at St Peter's, but a number of disappointments and areas where they would have liked to have more impact were acknowledged.

Impact on the church

Across all three churches, the main benefits for the church of involvement with the local community seemed to be associated with enhanced reputation, favour and trust. This was particularly prominent at St Peter's where it was felt that a once peripheral

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church had become a greater part of the community. This was also in evidence (to some degree) within the other two churches. Across all three churches, examples were provided of increased favour with schools, statutory bodies, community organisations and local residents. One notable example of enhanced reputation in the local community related to St Peter's being invited by another organisation to take over the running of a youth club. As one staff member put it:

> I think the fact that when the local community alliance could no longer service certain things in the community, the fact that they looked to us to see if we could, was a sign that the church had established a good reputation, at various levels in the area.

As with our preceding discussion of the impact on the neighbourhood, the impact on the church was presented in overwhelmingly positive terms. Few negative impacts were reported, the main ones being vandalism of the church building (New Life) and the risk of older members receiving less pastoral support as the church's energies are put into outward activities (St Peter's).

Impact on individual participants

Finally, we turn to consider the impact of community engagement activities on individual participants. Two dimensions to this will be examined here – personal faith development and understandings of mission and evangelism.

When asked whether the experience of engaging with their community had affected their faith and beliefs (see question 6 in Appendix 1), the prevailing view among many participants was that it had "increased" their faith. This was particularly common among participants from St John's (although there was also some evidence of it in the other two churches) and was often attributed to the experiences of praying for people and seeing those prayers answered. One of the St John's leaders, for example, talked about the experience of seeing God "spiritually and physically rescue" a woman who had been in "the worst state that I've seen somebody in for a long time". He reported that when he saw her recover, his faith "just went through the roof". Yet for some participants, the experience of increasing faith was also

linked to going through challenging and painful experiences that had tested and stretched their faith. Several respondents also mentioned that their involvement had brought them to a deeper awareness of God's love and their identity in Christ.

While there was some acknowledgement of personal faith being tested or stretched by the experience of engaging with the community, there were fewer references to beliefs being challenged or significant changes in theological outlook occurring. As one of the St John's members put it, "I would say it's added depth to my belief rather than challenged it". However, some of the participants from St Peter's did talk about the experience of their perspectives having broadened from originally quite narrow evangelical or Pentecostal outlooks (though it was unclear whether it was community engagement that triggered this). Across all three churches, there was also some evidence of new theological insights emerging, particularly around the idea that God was at work within the "ordinary, mundane, boring stuff" of life (St Peter's staff). One participant also talked about the experience of having his own theological understanding challenged by a member of the local community "articulating to me a much better understanding of God's grace than I could ever have articulated to them" (St Peter's staff). Another talked about being "constantly speechless" at the way God lavishes his grace in the lives of community members (St John's staff).

Finally, we turn to the question of whether the experience of engaging with the community affected participants' approach to mission and evangelism. While some participants felt that their experience had brought about a greater confidence in the gospel, for others it seems to have raised more questions than before. One participant, for example, talked about no longer being sure where conversion begins and ends (St Peter's members) and another raised the question: "How much of the gospel does somebody need to take on board to actually be a follower of Jesus?" (New Life staff). A number of people said they had needed to change the vocabulary they used when talking about faith with people in the community. They said they had become less reliant on external resources (like Christian DVDs) that seemed contextually inappropriate. Two participants (both St Peter's staff) also said their approach to faith sharing was now less about trying to give the right answer to challenging questions. "I don't need to defend God", one of them explained, "He's big enough to take it".

3.3 Descriptive Conclusions

We are now in a position to bring together the data from the ethnographic study and focus groups and ask what can be concluded about charismatic-evangelical urban churches' practices and structures, aims and motivations, and the way they perceive their impact. Extended reflection on the themes emerging from the preceding discussion has led me to identify a set of six tensions around which this section has been shaped. I describe each of these six tensions in detail later but, in order to introduce them briefly, they are summarised in tabular form within Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 - Tensions in Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Practice

Dimension	Tensions
1. Mode	Service providers versus Intentional communities
2. Orientation	Collaborative versus Counter-cultural
3. Intentions	Spiritual-evangelistic versus Socio-economic
4. Horizons	Locally indigenous versus Expansive
5. Self-perception	Heroic versus Mundane
6. Theological model	Applied versus Reflexive

As we will go on to see, an appreciation of these tensions will enable us to better understand some of the differences between the four charismatic-evangelical churches studied, and to begin to plot their contrasting positions. Yet it is important to stress that the six tensions identified should also be seen as tensions which are (to varying degrees) internal to each of the churches studied. They can help us make sense of differences between members of the same church and areas of inner tension and dissonance experienced by individual members. This section will begin by revisiting each of our three research questions in the light of the tensions typology. This then leads on to an attempt to consider how each of the four charismatic-evangelical churches studied might be positioned with relation to the tensions.

Practices and Structures

The themes highlighted in our earlier discussions around practices and structures correspond with the first two tensions from our typology.

1) *Service providers versus intentional communities*

As we have already seen, community outreach in the focus group churches encompassed two contrasting modes of operation, those of 'service provider' and 'intentional community'. Oakfield Christian Fellowship also shared some of these characteristics. It provided community services not dissimilar to those offered by the focus group churches,[57] and its emerging model of 'core communities' has clear resonance with the forms of intentional community highlighted in the focus groups. However despite these similarities, OCF's mode of operation appeared to be more informal and self-funded than that of the focus group churches. It was less inclined to play the role of (formal) service provider and seemed to operate primarily at the 'intentional community' end of the spectrum.[58] Nevertheless, it is significant to note that at a number of points during the ethnographic study, conversations with OCF elders and staff revealed some interest in moving towards a more formal service provider role by exploring potential opportunities for social enterprise.

2) *Collaborative versus counter-cultural tendencies*

Our examination of charismatic-evangelical urban practice has revealed a tendency towards strong collaboration with other churches and more limited engagement with secular bodies. This was common to all churches but both these tendencies were more prominent at OCF. Rather surprisingly for an independent church, OCF exhibited a higher degree of collaboration with other local churches than the three focus group churches (though there was less evidence of collaboration with national Christian organisations and franchises). At OCF, there also seemed to be less collaboration with secular bodies than at least some of the focus group churches. Consideration of the different churches' understanding of the relationship between

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[57] At OCF, however, there was no youth work with teenagers outside the church and a much greater emphasis on older people and adults with learning disabilities.

[58] St Peter's, New Life and St John's all combined neighbourhood-based involvement as 'intentional community' with some amount of externally funded service provision in a way that OCF did not.

church and world casts further light on their approach to collaboration with non-Christian organisations. The ethnographic study drew this out most clearly, vividly highlighting the tension between what was espoused (an idealised local church and an essentially negative view of the world) and operant (glimpses of a more conciliatory or positive view). Even within the focus group data, however, it is possible to discern a spectrum of approaches to the church-world relationship that mirrors the distinction between the 'collaborative' and 'counter-cultural'.

Aims and Motivations

Within the data obtained about aims and motivations, the third tension from our typology (spiritual-evangelistic versus socio-economic intentions) was particularly pronounced. However, as we will also go on to see, reflection on the material presented earlier in this chapter has also led to the identification of a further motivational tension - locally indigenous versus expansive horizons (tension 4).

3) *Spiritual-evangelistic versus socio-economic intentions*

Across the three focus group churches, a variety of motifs like 'transformation', 'holistic', 'self-worth', and 'family-community' were employed to articulate how spiritual and socio-economic intentions were held together. Yet the study also uncovered notable differences of emphasis between participants regarding the relative priority and relationship between the spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic. In this regard, there were differences of emphasis between church members within the same focus group (most notably at St Peters), between church leaders and members of the same church (particularly at St John's), as well as between the three churches. In a number of respects, the prevailing outlook at St Peter's stands out as different to that of the other two churches, with primarily evangelistic intentions less prominent and evidence of a broader understanding of the Kingdom of God. Our discussion around the meaning of 'demonstrating God's love' at Oakfield Christian Fellowship also highlighted the tension between spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions, though a far more complex and ambiguous picture emerged from this. While the various documentary sources gathered suggest that OCF's approach to the relationship between evangelism and social action is one of 'both-and' not 'either-or' (in a way that is broadly consistent

with the focus group data), the experience of participant-observation in Sunday services and house group revealed a tendency to view mission as primarily evangelistic. The practice of OCF members, however, reveals a significant degree of engagement with the community which appears to suggest a deeper concern for people's wider well-being that goes beyond narrow conceptions of evangelism.

4) *Locally indigenous versus expansive horizons*

A further motivational tension that arises from the data concerns the relationship between locally indigenous and expansive horizons. Again this came out most strongly in the ethnographic study but was also evident to some degree in each of the focus group churches. Two particular manifestations of this tension can be discerned. Firstly, it can be seen in a desire on the part of charismatic-evangelical urban churches to combine a commitment to their immediate locality with a wider field of vision that extends to other parts of their city and even overseas. Secondly, it can be seen in the relationship between indigenous locals and middle class incomers. Here we should also recall that although this relationship and tension was common to all four churches, there were a number of striking differences between Oakfield Christian Fellowship and the other three churches. While the approach of the focus group churches appeared to be based around (mainly youthful) outsiders coming in, the presence of an older generation of estate residents as a significant minority of the OCF congregation reveals a different dimension to charismatic-evangelical urban practice. Yet as we have seen, this also brings the tension between locally indigenous and expansive horizons into sharper focus.

Perceived Impact

The four tensions we have already observed in relation to 'practices and structures' and 'aims and motivations' were also present in the material around 'perceived impact'. Additionally, the material gathered in relation to this question reveals two further tensions.

5) *Heroic versus mundane*

From the different types of discourse about impact among the four churches, there emerges a distinction, and indeed tension, between heroic and mundane self-perceptions. On the one hand, the practice of recounting stories of dramatic transformation (particularly evident among St John's and New Life participants) may be indicative of heroic self-perception and identity. In contrast with this stands the more mundane vocabulary of occasional "glimpses" or "moments" (St Peters) and an appeal to impact that is "beneath the surface" (OCF).
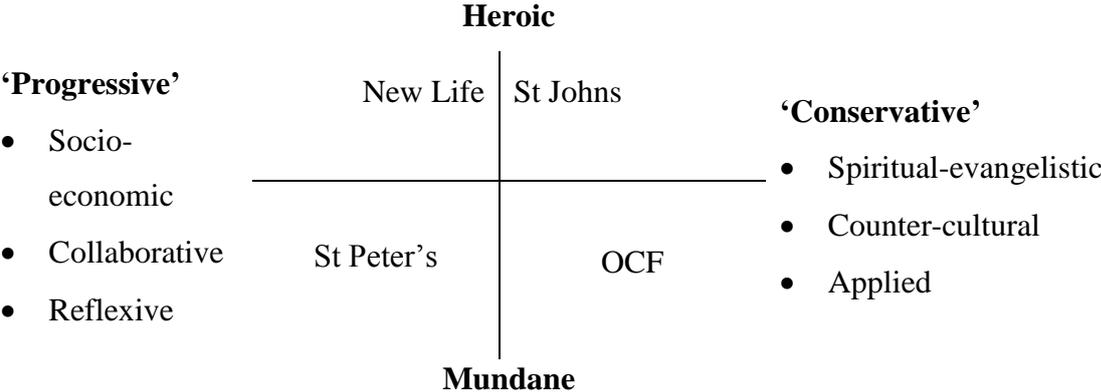
6) *Reflexive versus applied theology*

Responses to the focus group question 'Do you think your faith and beliefs have been affected or changed by your experiences of engaging with the local community?' revealed a continuum of positions that seems to indicate a tension between reflexive and applied theological models. The prevailing view among many participants was that engagement with the community had 'increased their faith'. This, I suggest, may be indicative of an applied theological model that is unwilling for a charismatic-evangelical worldview to be challenged by reflection on practice. A reflexive model, in contrast, is more open to new theological insights emerging from experience and practice. Such an approach was evident in the (more limited) evidence of 'rethinking my faith' among some focus group participants. Within the ethnographic study, there was not the opportunity to generate directly comparable material. However, my experience of interacting with OCF members over an extended period suggests a preference for an applied approach alongside an ongoing tension between espoused and operant theology.

Plotting Positions

Finally, we turn to consider where each of our four churches stands with relation to the tensions we have identified. Experimentation with different diagrammatic configurations has revealed that four of our six tensions are particularly significant in illuminating contrasting approaches *between* churches, while the remaining two relate primarily to internal tensions *within* each church. This has led to the formulation of the two diagrams that follow.

Figure 6 below represents an attempt to conceptualise the contrasting positions of the four churches studied. I have found that three of our tensions (spiritual-evangelistic versus socio-economic, collaborative versus counter-cultural, reflexive versus applied) can be loosely grouped together from left to right under the umbrella of a 'progressive versus conservative' axis.[59] Towards the more progressive end of the spectrum stands St Peters, with OCF towards the conservative end, and the other two churches in the middle. While this horizontal axis places St Peter's and OCF at opposite ends of the spectrum, a vertical (heroic-mundane) axis has been added that demonstrates their commonality. Here the predominantly heroic and dramatic emphasis of New Life and St John's stands in marked contrast with the more mundane or down-to-earth outlook we have observed at both St Peter's and OCF.

Figure 6 - Positioning the Churches Studied

Heroic

'Progressive'   New Life | St Johns
- Socio-   'Conservative'
  economic   - Spiritual-evangelistic
- Collaborative   St Peter's   OCF   - Counter-cultural
- Reflexive   - Applied

Mundane

Such a visual conceptualisation is admittedly over-simplistic. Although I have used it to draw out the apparent differences in approach between the four churches, it needs to be stressed that each of the tensions was also (to varying degrees) experienced internally within each church. The most significant internal tensions, however, are the two tensions in our typology that are absent from Figure 6. Each of the churches studied exhibited evidence of the coexistence of locally indigenous and expansive horizons and of two contrasting modes of operation (service provider and intentional

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[59] This has been informed in part by the typologies of Warner (2007b, p. 247), Miller and Yamamori (2007, pp. 28-31) and Edwards (Cloke, Thomas, & Williams, 2012, pp. 110-111). However, I go on to suggest in Chapter 4 that the progressive-conservative axis is over-simplistic and potentially problematic.

community). This is expressed diagrammatically in Figure 7 below. Within each of the four quadrants formed by two axes, I have provided examples of charismatic-evangelical urban practice from across all four churches. Admittedly, some of the churches may veer more towards some quadrants than others.[60] However, within their espoused theology at least, all four churches sought to keep conflicting priorities in creative tension.

Figure 7 - Internal Tensions Across all Four Churches

		Expansive		
Service provider	• City-wide youth work and vulnerable people's services (St John's) • Importing external models from national Christian organisations (St John's, New Life, St Peters)	• Most members living outside or on edge of area (St Peter's, OCF) • Church-planting in multiple areas across the city (St John's) • Sending missionaries abroad (OCF) • Recruiting teams through national Christian organisations (New Life)		**Intentional community**
	• Partnership working with secular youth work provider (St Peter's) • Participation in local multi-agency working groups (St Peter's) • Missional community accessing Lottery funding (St John's) • Professionally-run café (New Life) • Interest in acquiring new building and using it for social enterprise (OCF)	• Small communities of members formed around outreach activities (all churches) • Church members relocating (moving house) into the neighbourhood (St John's, New Life) • Long-standing estate residents as core members of church community (New Life, OCF)		
		Locally indigenous		

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[60] As we have already observed, formal service provision at OCF was limited.

CHAPTER 4:   DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

The previous chapter ended with the presentation of the study's descriptive conclusions in the form of an emerging tensions typology. This chapter seeks to interpret and reflect on these descriptive conclusions in the light of the two overarching purposes of this study. As we may recall, these were:

1. To enable greater understanding of the motivation and practice of charismatic-evangelical urban churches in engaging with disadvantaged neighbourhoods; and
2. To reflect theologically on such motivation and practice with a view to articulating a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic.

This chapter has been shaped around these purposes. With the first aim in mind, the chapter begins by comparing the descriptive findings presented in Chapter 3 with the findings of other studies of faith-based urban involvement and charismatic-evangelical Christianity across a variety of (largely) secular disciplines. This represents an engagement with the gaps in the literature from the top half of the quadrant on page 2 (Figure 1). Here we will be considering whether our six tensions have identification and resonance with the findings of other comparable studies. The second part of the chapter then goes on to reflect more explicitly on the theological significance of the descriptive findings and the tensions identified. This corresponds with the second of this study's purposes and involves a series of facilitated dialogues between charismatic-evangelical urban practice and established bodies of literature in the bottom, more theological, half of Figure 1. In the light of these conversations, the third and final part of the chapter will then attempt to construct, in outline form, a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic that enables charismatic-evangelical churches to respond to the tensions we have identified.

4.1 Interpreting the Descriptive Findings

In comparing the experience of the four charismatic-evangelical churches described in Chapter 3 with the findings of other relevant studies, this section will be moving from left to right across the top half of the quadrant in Figure 1 on page 2. This will take place in three stages. Firstly, our findings will be compared with those of other UK studies of faith-based social action. Secondly, we will consider the findings of previous studies of evangelical and charismatic faith-based practice. Here we will engage with the (relatively limited) UK literature, before going on to consider the parallels with other international studies. Thirdly, we will engage with other more sociological studies of evangelical and charismatic Christianity. The section will then conclude by summarising the extent to which the tensions from our typology have identification and resonance with the findings of other comparable studies.

UK faith-based social action

Over the past ten to fifteen years, there have been numerous studies of faith-based social action across the disciplines of voluntary sector studies, urban studies, social policy, and public policy. This is reflected, for example, in the work of Farnell at al (2003), Baker and Skinner (2005), and Furbey et al (2006).[61] The key text with which we will be engaging here to consider the parallels between the experience of charismatic-evangelical churches and other types of faith group is a recent article by Rochester and Torry (2010) that helpfully draws together the findings of other recent studies.

In terms of organisational form, Rochester and Torry identify three different kinds of organisational arrangement through which congregations contribute to social welfare. The first is the kind of quiet care that arises from informal relationships nurtured within the congregation. The second relates to slightly more formally organised activities that remain wholly 'owned' by the congregation, and the third involves the establishment of separate organisations with their own constitution and bank account. Implicit in this typology is a spectrum of positions from the informal to the formal that has parallels with our tension between intentional communities and service

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[61] See also the recent reviews of previous research provided by Jochum et al (2007), Payne (2009), and Jawad (2012).

providers. Interestingly, however, virtually all of the data presented in Chapter 3 appears to be within the first and second of Rochester and Torry's three categories. There was little evidence of the establishment of separate organisations that function outside the governing framework and control of the congregation. In this sense, charismatic-evangelical engagement in service provision may be seen to be relatively limited compared with other forms of faith-based voluntary action. Given, however, that much previous research of faith-based voluntary action has focused primarily on the more formal 'service provider' end of the spectrum, our findings help to provide a richer and more complex understanding of the coexistence of different organisational forms within a congregation.

Consideration of the findings of previous quantitative studies then leads Rochester and Torry to comment on "three salient characteristics" (Rochester & Torry, 2010, p. 122) of faith-based voluntary action. These are its scale and reach, dependence on volunteers, and a predominant focus on children and older people. Our findings suggest that, broadly speaking, charismatic-evangelical churches share these characteristics (although it is interesting to note that only two of the four churches appeared to be significantly involved with older people). A further characteristic of congregations identified by Rochester and Torry is their relatively limited experience in accessing external (largely governmental) funding. This they attribute not so much to a lack of capacity but to deep-rooted differences in values, behavioural norms and practices (Rochester & Torry, 2010, p. 125).[62] Once again, these insights resonate quite strongly with the experience of charismatic-evangelical churches and the tension between 'service provider' and 'intentional community' modes of operation. Rochester and Torry also suggest that while the investment of congregations in faith-based social action has had the effect of supplementing and complementing public sector welfare provision, it has been driven largely by congregations' own agendas, not by public policy goals (2010, p. 123). This is another characteristic that charismatic-evangelical urban practice shares with other forms of faith-based social action. The resonance begins to diminish, however, when Rochester and Torry go on to describe such congregational agendas primarily in terms of meeting needs and a

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[62] In this regard, Rochester and Torry (2010, p. 125) suggest that the rules by which funding bodies expect the organisational game to be played may not be readily compatible with the associational norms of a congregation where leadership is informal, relationships are characterised by mutual trust, and roles are shaped by those who occupy them.

"theological imperative of giving service" (Rochester & Torry, 2010, p. 130). Although meeting need and giving service form part of charismatic-evangelical aims and motivations, they do not represent the whole picture. As we saw in Chapter 3, the socio-economic is intimately connected to the spiritual-evangelistic in charismatic-evangelical urban practice.

This apparent mismatch between charismatic-evangelical churches and other types of faith groups becomes even clearer when we consider the findings of a study of Anglican church-based social action conducted by Cairns, Harris and Hutchinson (2007). Along broadly similar lines to Rochester and Torry, these authors highlight the gulf between the rhetoric of government policy and churches' theologically informed motivations. Churches' motivations, they suggest, are encapsulated by the phrase "sharing God's love" (Cairns, Harris, & Hutchinson, 2007, p. 413). Although this vocabulary is similar to that used by the churches in our study (particularly OCF), Cairns et al observe that for their participants a holistic view "did not extend to converting people to Christianity" (2007, p. 417). Instead they describe a "widely accepted theological approach" in which service to others was seen as "an outward expression of personal faith, compassion and solidarity, rather than as an evangelically inspired approach to 'soul-winning'" (2007, p. 422). As we have already seen, the experience of charismatic-evangelical churches suggests a relationship between the spiritual-evangelistic and the socio-economic that is simultaneously more integrated and more complex.

UK evangelical faith-based urban practice

In comparing our findings with those of previous studies of evangelical and charismatic faith-based practice, we will begin by engaging with the (relatively limited) UK literature, before going on to consider other international studies. While there has been little research on UK charismatic-evangelical church-based social action, a number of recent studies and articles have examined issues relating to evangelical faith-based urban practice more generally. In this regard, the work of Exeter-based human geographers Paul Cloke, Sam Thomas, and Andy Williams is particularly significant and to this we now turn. In a recent joint article on the changing landscape of Christian motivation, Cloke, Thomas and Williams highlight

the differences between 'evangelical' and 'liberal' forms of Christian social action. They also go on to document shifting evangelical perspectives on social action. This they describe as a shift away from traditional evangelical suspicion of the social gospel and towards a transformational approach embracing Christian virtue ethics and new eschatological insights on the Kingdom of God (Cloke, Thomas, & Williams, 2012, pp. 107-113). In engaging with their work in more detail, I will now bring the descriptive findings from Chapter 3 into dialogue with recent studies by Williams (2012) and Thomas (2012) of two contrasting types of evangelical urban practice.

Williams' study of a Salvation Army Drug Treatment Programme (Williams, 2012) represents (within the terms of our tensions typology) an examination of a faith-based organisation playing the role of service provider. For our purposes here, what is particularly significant about this study is Williams' description of the experience of evangelical Christians working alongside people of other faiths and none. This seems to have led to the emergence of more dialogical expressions of faith sharing, even among hard-line evangelicals. There are also interesting parallels here with Greg Smith's description of the diversity of people volunteering in a Salvation Army Community Centre (Smith G. , 2010). Within such a context, it seems the tension between spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions is 'resolved' by the prohibition on proselytization placed by statutory bodies (Baker & Beaumont, 2011, p. 40). However, as Baker and Beaumont (commenting on Smith's work) observe, this is not simply about the suppression of religious identity:

> While the core identity and mission values of the Salvation Army couldn't be more explicitly Christian (including the importance of evangelization), its commitment to social justice as part of its core mission means its tempers this *explicit* religious identity in order to be able to provide public services to the widest possible groupings in society… Thus a more *implicitly* religious identity is at work. (Baker & Beaumont, 2011, p. 40).

A further dimension of the drug-treatment programme observed by Williams is the way the experience of working alongside atheists, humanists, and people of other faiths led to a more self-questioning belief among faith-motivated staff (as well as

transformations in secularist views). For Christian staff, "[f]aith came to be less talked about in terms of 'naked truths' and interviewees felt a sense that they were approaching faith in a very different way than some of the church-contexts they were used to" (Williams, 2012, p. 21). This description resonates with the shifts in theological understanding identified by some of the St Peter's participants, though there was less evidence of such a shift occurring within the other three churches. This casts further light on the 'reflexive versus applied' and 'collaborative versus counter-cultural' tensions we have identified. It may be that tight-knit charismatic-evangelical church communities are less conducive to the kind of theological reflexivity promoted in spaces where secular and religious people can collaborate.

While Williams' research highlights evangelical involvement within a large faith-based organisation providing public services, Thomas (2012, p. 243) focuses on "convictional communities" in which evangelical Christians serve as neighbour rather than as volunteer or worker. Here there are also parallels with Anna Thompson's research on the Eden Network (2010; 2012). Taken together, the work of Thomas and Thompson illustrates the significance of an 'intentional community' mode of operation as an under-researched form of faith-based urban practice.[63] It also finds resonance with many of the other tensions from our typology. Thomas, for example, highlights the co-existence of spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions within convictional communities. He also discusses some of the ethical issues around this. While many secular critiques of evangelical activity deem all acts of proselytization arrogant and immoral, Thomas (2012, p. 254) draw on Thiessen's philosophical defence of ethical proselytising (Thiessen, 2011) to challenge such assumptions. It is necessary, he argues, to take a more careful look at what is being shared and how it is being shared.[64] Thomas also draws attention to two dimensions to the meaning of 'community' for the convictional communities he studied. It involves both joining an existing (neighbourhood) community and creating (Christian) communities in and of themselves (Thomas, 2012, p. 252). This

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[63] Note, however, that the categories of 'intentional community' and 'service provider' are not mutually exclusive. Thomas and Thompson both point to examples of members of intentional communities moving into service provision. This includes the establishment of a health centre (Thompson, 2010, p. 124) and young people's media project (Thomas, 2012, p. 259).

[64] This leads Thomas to examine the practice of faith-sharing within an 'Eden' community in Greater Manchester. Here, he concludes, "faith is not coercively presented in the form of a proselytising force but as a connective set of performative enactments that give a 'family feel' and generates an atmosphere of respect and tranquillity" (Thomas, 2012, p. 259).

distinction has parallels with the tension we have identified in charismatic-evangelical urban practice between collaborative and counter-cultural approaches to engaging with secular others.[65] A further theme that arises from both Thomas and Thompson's research on Eden is its focus on being 'incarnational'. In this sense, Eden exhibits a strong commitment to being locally indigenous. However, the tension we have identified in charismatic-evangelical urban churches between locally indigenous and expansive horizons also seems to have resonance with Eden. As well as seeking to be locally rooted in particular neighbourhoods, Eden is also a national network and brand with very expansive horizons.[66]

Thomas' work does not significantly address the tensions uncovered in charismatic-evangelical practice with relation to 'reflexive versus applied theology' and 'the heroic versus the mundane'. These themes are more prominent in Thompson's work. Drawing on interviews with Eden team members, Thompson (2012, pp. 49-50) draws out two different journeys undertaken by (evangelical) Christians who have relocated to disadvantaged urban areas. The first is a journey of faith development from a received narrative to a locally constructed personal authenticity. This has clear resonance with our tension between applied and reflexive theological models.[67] The second journey undertaken by Eden participants concerns a shift in self-understanding from missionary to neighbour. Here there are striking parallels with our tension between the heroic and the mundane.

International perspectives

As there have been few UK studies of charismatic-evangelical church-based social action, various other international studies will now be considered for comparative purposes. Here we will be bringing our UK findings into dialogue with studies of urban social engagement among 'conservative' white evangelicals in a North

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[65] It is unclear, however, whether Thomas' convictional communities experienced this two-fold meaning of community as a tension. From Thomas' account, it seems they exhibited a higher degree of collaboration with secular others than the charismatic-evangelical churches in my study, but that they were able to maintain a strong sense of Christian distinctiveness at the same time.

[66] See http://eden-network.org (accessed 23 October 2012).

[67] Eden members, it seems, have experienced a move towards the reflexive but yet, as Thomson's engagement with post-modern and post-evangelical perspectives demonstrates, a tension remains. Thompson sets Paul Lakeland's claim that post-modernity must reshape the Christian narrative in tension with Eden's insistence that team members have been able to combine biblical faithfulness and personal authenticity (Thompson, 2012, pp. 57-58).

American context (Elisha, 2010; 2011) and an emerging body of literature on 'progressive' forms of Pentecostalism (Miller & Yamamori, 2007; Flory & Miller, 2012). As we will see, this simultaneously reinforces the significance of the progressive-conservative spectrum introduced at the end of the last chapter and suggests the need for a more complex understanding of it.

The American anthropologist Omri Elisha has conducted extensive ethnographic research on urban social engagement among conservative white evangelicals within suburban mega churches in Knoxville, Tennessee (2010; 2011). Elisha (2011, p. 10) draws on Woodberry and Smith's definition of Conservative Protestants as self-identifying Christians who "emphasize a personal relationship with Jesus, believe in the importance of converting others to their faith, have a strong view of biblical authority, and believe that salvation is through Christ alone" (Woodberry & Smith, 1998, p. 26). Within this umbrella category, he distinguishes between moderate 'evangelicals' and ultra-conservative 'fundamentalists' (Elisha, 2010, p. 254). Although we need to be sensitive to differences between the two contexts, Elisha's description of the ambiguities of urban engagement among American evangelicals has striking resonance with some of the tensions we have observed among UK charismatic-evangelicals. Elisha locates the origins of such ambiguities in historical tensions within American evangelicalism, suggesting that at a local level "evangelical pastors and churchgoers wrestle with ambiguities they inherited from a mixed legacy of engagement and retrenchment, of worldly accommodation and renunciation" (Elisha, 2011, p. 17). Here it seems, there are strong parallels with the 'collaborative versus counter-cultural' and 'socio-economic versus spiritual-evangelistic' tensions from our tensions typology. The former is evident in Elisha's description of the "clash" between sectarian impulses to withdraw from the affairs of the world and an imperative towards worldly activism (2011, p. 18). With respect to the latter, Elisha suggests that evangelical scepticism about the politics of social reform stands in conflict with an abiding optimism about the perfectibility of society (2011, p. 10). Further light on such tensions is cast by Elisha's acknowledgement of "the awkward coexistence" (2010, p. 244) of contrasting eschatological visions of the Kingdom of God. On the one hand, a prevalent premillennial dispensationalism leads to the world being viewed through a narrative of moral and spiritual degeneration. On the other hand, attempts to re-imagine urban neighbourhoods as microcosms of

the Kingdom of God reflect a desire to take part in an unfolding drama of socio-economic renewal as well as religious revival (Elisha, 2011, p. 65).

Although Elisha's research focuses on the urban social engagement of evangelicals who are sometimes labelled 'conservative', his findings caution us against the over-simplistic use of the terms 'conservative' and 'progressive'. Rather than seek to isolate shifts to the right, left or centre in American evangelicalism, he argues that it is necessary to recognise "the coexistence of coterminous, yet competing impulses active within evangelical communities" (2010, p. 253). With this in mind, we now turn our attention to recent studies that appear to point in a different direction by designating particular forms of Pentecostal and evangelical social engagement 'progressive'. The term 'Progressive Pentecostalism' arises from Miller and Yamamori's wide-ranging study of Pentecostal social involvement across (what is sometimes labelled) the developing world (Miller & Yamamori, 2007).[68] However, Flory and Miller (2012, p. 25) have recently suggested that there are also new forms of North American Pentecostal and evangelical urban involvement that look increasingly similar to 'Progressive Pentecostalism'. In examining these claims, we will focus particularly on Flory and Miller's description of the 'Dream Center', a large-scale Pentecostal social outreach ministry and church in Los Angeles.

Flory and Miller's description of the way that 'Godly Love' (see Lee and Poloma [2009], Lee and Yong [2012], and Cartledge [2012]) is expressed at the Dream Center has both resonance and dissonance with the tensions encountered in UK charismatic-evangelical urban practice. They describe the Dream Center as a "spirit-infused" organisation in which all participants (whether staff, volunteers, or service recipients) are "encouraged to think broadly about how God wants them to live their lives" and "reach the dreams that he has given them" (Flory & Miller, 2012, p. 15). This idea of serving others to reach their goals, they suggest, reaches into all segments of the Dream Center, and virtually every conversation is "peppered with the word 'love'" (2012, p. 18). Although this resonates to some degree with the vocabulary of 'demonstrating God's love' among UK charismatic-evangelical

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[68] Miller and Yamamori identify 'Progressive Pentecostalism' as one of four main orientations within Global Pentecostalism (alongside 'Legalistic & Other Worldly', 'Prosperity Gospel' and 'Routinized' forms). Progressive Pentecostalism, they suggest, began to emerge in the 1990s and is particularly associated with the 'integral' or 'holistic' gospel (Miller & Yamamori, 2007, pp. 28-31).

churches, it appears that explicitly evangelistic or conversion-oriented intentions figure less prominently at the Dream Center than in the UK churches studied. Instead, there is a greater focus on helping people achieve their God-given dreams.

Flory and Miller also suggest that the Dream Center represents "a twenty-first century expression of Pentecostalism that is both Spirit-animated and socially engaged with the world, rather than being other-worldly and inwardly focused on spiritual perfection" (2012, p. 12). This assessment seems to imply that rather than experiencing a tension between the collaborative and the counter-cultural, the Dream Center has chosen the former over the latter. Any suggestion, however, that the Dream Center represents an essentially 'progressive' form of Pentecostalism may be challenged by Flory and Miller's acknowledgement that the moral agenda of the Dream Centre is quite "conservative" (2012, pp. 23-24). This, in my view, exposes the limitations of simplistic left-right distinctions between 'progressive' and 'conservative' approaches to social engagement. It also highlights the need for a more complex understanding of internal tensions within evangelical, charismatic, and Pentecostal congregations.[69]

Sociological perspectives

Finally we turn to consider whether charismatic-evangelical urban practice confirms or challenges understandings of charismatic-evangelical Christianity provided by sociological accounts of UK charismatic-evangelicalism. We begin with an overview of the presentation of evangelical and charismatic Christianity in one recent edited volume (Woodhead & Catto, 2012), before engaging in more depth with work by Warner (2007a) and Walker (1988; 2002).

From the presentation of evangelical and charismatic Christianity by the various contributors to *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Woodhead & Catto, 2012) and other recent studies, four key themes stand out. Firstly, charismatic-evangelical churches are presented as churches which have succeeded, to some degree, in

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[69] For a critical perspective on Miller and Yamamori's 'Progressive Pentecostalism' thesis, see also Burgess' study of Pentecostal responses to street children in Nigeria. Burgess focuses particularly on (what might be termed) conservative Pentecostal churches that teach a doctrine of prosperity. Their experience, he suggests, "runs counter to Miller and Yamamori's assertion that prosperity churches restrict their social service provision to their own members" (Burgess, 2011, p. 207).

bucking the overall trend of UK church decline. Sometimes located under the generic umbrella of 'conservative', 'evangelical' or even 'fundamentalist' Christianity, the resilience of charismatic-evangelical churches is often attributed to their ability to combine a clear theological and moral message with creative adaptation to a rapidly changing social and cultural landscape (Guest, Olson, & Wolffe, 2012, pp. 65-70). Such adaptation has been entrepreneurial in character and, influenced by secular marketing and new technology, resulted in commodified and franchised forms of Christianity (Chapman, Shuruq, & Woodhead, 2012). Secondly, charismatic-evangelicalism is presented as an essentially middle-class phenomenon. Characterised by "detraditioned experientalism, therapeutic individualism, and autonomous consumption" (Warner, 2008, p. 34), its primary appeal is to "middle class people seeking moral guidance … [and] a refuge from the stresses of professional life" (Martin & Catto, 2012, p. 355). Thirdly, the strong authority of leaders and intense forms of voluntary commitment required of members are emphasised (Arweck & Beckford, 2012, p. 257). Fourthly, charismatic and evangelical churches are presented as having an essentially conservative political agenda that manifests itself in campaigns against abortion, pornography, and perceived legal discrimination against Christians (Arweck & Beckford, 2012, p. 357).[70]

The findings of our study of charismatic-evangelical urban practice simultaneously confirm and challenge the picture of contemporary charismatic-evangelicalism presented by such accounts. Although our study uncovered forms of franchised Christianity, middle-class culture, deference to (mainly male) leadership, and social conservatism, it has also provided a far more complex picture. This is particularly evident with relation to social class. The presence of 'indigenous converts' from working class backgrounds as a significant minority within the OCF congregation (and also to some degree in the other three churches) challenges any depiction of charismatic-evangelicalism as solely middle class. Furthermore, the 'journey downwards' undertaken by middle-class Christians who have intentionally relocated to disadvantaged urban areas suggests that there is more to charismatic-evangelicalism than therapeutic individualism and autonomous consumption.

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[70] Recent survey evidence, however, paints a more complex picture of evangelical social attitudes (Warner, 2008, pp. 47-50; Evangelical Alliance, 2011).

Charismatic-evangelical engagement with disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods can perhaps better be understood as an example of the "urgent, insistent, enthusiastic pursuit of experiments in the re-imagining of church" described by Warner (2007a, p. 195). Warner sees such ecclesial experimentation as indicative of a pragmatic commitment to cultural engagement that makes charismatic-evangelicals increasingly indifferent to the detail of traditional evangelical theology and open to doctrinal reflexivity (2007a, p. 195). Yet while our study uncovered some evidence of a shift from 'applied' to 'reflexive' theology, it also found signs of the enduring influence of traditional evangelical theological concerns.

Further light on another of the tensions from our typology (collaborative versus counter-cultural) is cast by Andrew Walker's seminal study of the House Church movement (Walker, 1988) and his subsequent reflections on the transformation of 'House Churches' into 'New Churches' (Walker, 2002). Walker's original study employed the concept of 'Restorationism' as a Weberian ideal type to describe the radical Christianity of early House Churches that saw themselves as restorers of the New Testament church. In his later work, Warner goes on to suggest that rather than simply being a matter of rebranding, the move from 'House Church' to 'New Church' represented a significant ideological shift away from fundamentalist security and towards greater catholicity (Walker, 2002, p. 63). Such a description resonates strongly with the experience of Oakfield Christian Fellowship (OCF) which locates its origins in the House Church movement but exhibits a highly collaborative approach in relating to other churches. Walker observes that an increased openness to others among churches that embraced the 'New Church' ethos undermined the ideological purity of the House Church movement (for which sectarian distinctiveness was part of its original appeal). This insight may be helpful in enabling us to better understand some of the tensions experienced by OCF's middle-aged and older members who had lived through the early days of the House Church movement. On the one hand, OCF clearly exhibited a conciliatory approach to other churches and (albeit to a much lesser degree) was willing to engage with secular bodies. On the other hand, in the ethnographic study I also encountered considerable suspicion of the world and the enduring influence of the (Restorationist) view that the Church needs to be restored to its charismatically ordained pristine form (Walker, 2002, p. 64). This suggests that there are historical reasons why the tension between

collaborative and counter-cultural tendencies may be experienced particularly acutely by charismatic-evangelical churches with origins in the House Church movement.

Reassessing the tensions typology

In bringing the experience of the UK charismatic-evangelical churches described in Chapter 3 into dialogue with various other bodies of literature, we have found that each of our six tensions has "identification and resonance" (Swinton & Mowat, 2006, p. 47) with the findings of other relevant studies. However, perspectives from the other studies we have considered also lead us to a more complex and sophisticated understanding of each tension.

Firstly with relation to mode of operation, our engagement with the work of Rochester and Torry (2010) and Williams (2012) has suggested that charismatic-evangelical engagement in service provision is relatively limited compared with other forms of faith-based voluntary action. Although we have found evidence of both 'service provider' and 'intentional community' modes of operation, charismatic-evangelical churches' desire for activity to remain under the control of the congregation may limit their ability to engage more fully with mainstream service provision. With relation to the second tension, our understanding of the relationship between collaborative and counter-cultural tendencies needs refining in the following ways. Elisha's description of the tension between contrasting understandings of the Kingdom of God in North American evangelical churches alerts us to the significance of eschatology and the inadequacy of simplistic 'progressive versus conservative' typologies. Walker's attentiveness to the particularly acute way that former 'House Churches' experience the tension between the counter-cultural and the collaborative also suggests the need for greater sensitivity to denominational difference. Thirdly, our understanding of both 'the spiritual-evangelistic' and 'the socio-economic' needs to be developed further. On the one hand, our discussions about dialogical faith sharing (Williams, 2012) and ethical proselytising (Thomas, 2012) highlight the need to be sensitive not only to whether faith is shared evangelistically but how. On the other hand, our conceptualisation of the socio-economic needs to take account of an emerging

distinction between a 'sticking plaster' approach to social problems and one that advocates systemic structural change (Miller & Yamamori, 2007, pp. 43,213).[71]

Fourthly, our engagement with a variety of sociological perspectives requires our conceptualisation of the tension between 'indigenous locals' and the 'expansive horizons' of middle class incomers to take greater account of the significance of social class. Fifthly, Thompson's juxtaposition of the concepts of 'missionary' and 'neighbour' in describing the self-perception of Eden participants has potential to complement and enrich our understanding of the tension between the heroic and mundane. Sixthly and finally, our conceptualisation of the relationship between 'the reflexive' and 'the applied' needs to be more sensitive to the micro and macro context (Osmer, 2008, p. 12) in which charismatic-evangelical urban practice occurs. At a micro level, it may be that tight-knit church communities are less conductive to doctrinal reflexivity than less explicitly ecclesial contexts like a Salvation Army Drug Treatment Programme. At a macro level, the tension between the reflexive and applied needs to be understood in the wider context of UK evangelicalism's attempts to adapt to a rapidly changing social context.

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[71] Our findings suggest that UK charismatic-evangelical churches appear more inclined to a 'sticking plaster' approach to the socio-economic.

4.2 Theological Conversation Partners

We now turn to the (more explicitly) theological task of bringing the experience of charismatic-evangelical urban churches into dialogue with formal theology. In keeping with the aims and purposes set out in Chapter 1, the main conversation partners we engage with are key voices in the fields of Christian social ethics, urban theology, and political theology. This section begins with an attempt to facilitate a conversation between charismatic-evangelical urban practice and three influential theoretical models from beyond evangelicalism, before going on to engage with sources from (formal) evangelical theology.

Selecting conversation partners

A number of writers have developed typologies attempting to map out the various different positions represented within UK Christian social ethics, urban theology, and political theology. Four such typologies of potential conversation partners for the facilitated dialogue in this section are presented in Figure 8 below. Consideration of the relative merits of each of these typologies had led me to structure the facilitated dialogue that follows around an adapted version of Wells' three-fold model. This was chosen on the grounds that each of the three broad strands Wells identifies within Christian ethics (universal, subversive, ecclesial) has a counterpart in approaches I have encountered in contemporary urban practice. Having three conversation partners is also more manageable than having five (Shannahan, 2010) or six (Sedgwick, 2012), and allows for greater complexity than two (public versus ecclesial). Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that Wells' three-fold model risks over-stating the incompatibility of the three strands and under-stating the diversity of positions that occur within any particular 'camp'. It also risks ignoring perspectives that do not fit nearly within the chosen scheme.[72] Yet despite these qualifications, Wells' three strands serve as helpful lenses. Each represents a different archetypal way of seeing the relationship between church and urban context, through which a dialogue with charismatic-evangelical urban practice can be constructed. The analysis that follows will examine charismatic-evangelical practice through the lens of each of these three perspectives in turn.

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[72] For example, within the limitations of this three-fold model, I have not been able to significantly engage with Catholic social teaching or urban black theology.

**Figure 8 – Typologies of Potential Conversation Partners**

Public versus Ecclesial approaches to: • Urban theology (Graham & Lowe, 2009, p. 2) • Political theology (Bell, 2007) • Christian ethics (Brown, 2010; Biggar, 2011)	**Three broad strands** in contemporary writings on Christian ethics (Wells, 2010, pp. 23-25): • Universal • Subversive • Ecclesial
Five 'camps' within urban theology (Shannahan, 2010): • Urban liberation theology • Urban black theology • Reformist urban theology • Globalisation urban theology • Post-religious urban theology	**Six main strands** in British public theology (Sedgwick, 2012, pp. 28-32) • Sagovsky (and others) - holding together Augustine and Rawls • Atherton and Baker - dialogue with other theorists • Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy and the 'red Toryism' of Blond • Hauerwas and Wells - centrality of the Christian narrative • O'Donovan and the Kirby-Laing Centre - conservative, centre-right • Bretherton – hospitality and broad-based organizing Plus Malcolm Brown's unusual dialogue position

Dialogue with (universal) public-reformist social ethics

According to Wells (2010, p. 23), a universal approach to Christian ethics is principally concerned with finding common ground with other nonreligious approaches in addressing questions and dilemmas in the public sphere. Historically, such concerns have been exemplified within the Christian realism of Reinhold Niebuhr, the middle axioms of William Temple, and the public theology of the Church of England (Brown, 2010, pp. 82-95). Of the various writers who operate from within this tradition, the work of John Atherton will be considered as illustrative of a public-reformist approach. This will draw particularly on his *Public Theology for Changing Times* (Atherton, 2000) and the more recent joint volume *Christianity and the New Social Order* (Atherton, Baker, & Reader, 2011). The importance of the church partnering with others is one of the central themes running throughout Atherton's work. It is reflected in both an emphasis on Christian

collaboration with governmental and non-governmental bodies, and the incorporation of methods and insights from secular disciplines. Within the terms of our tensions typology, this approach may be seen to particularly emphasise the socio-economic, collaborative and expansive as represented in Figure 9 below.

Figure 9 - Locating the Public-Reformist Tradition
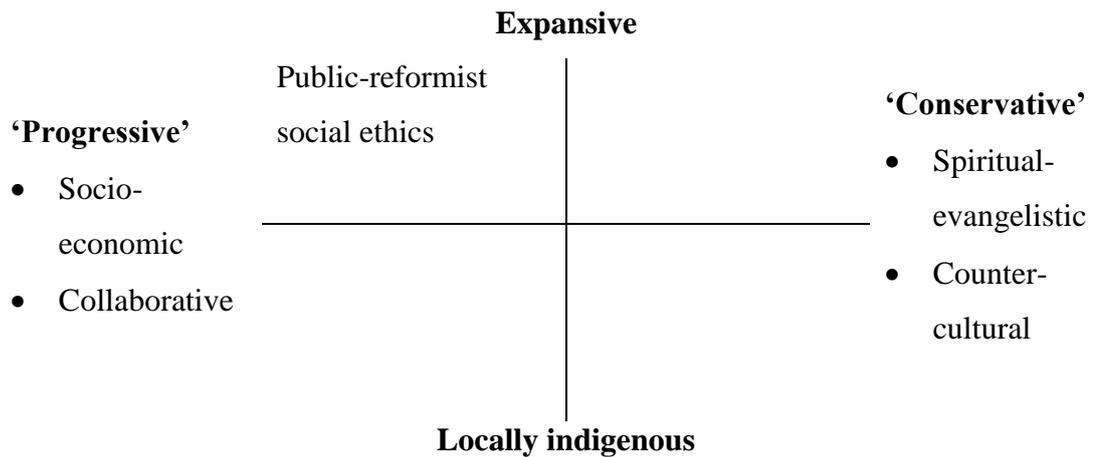
So what might the public-reformist approach to social ethics represented by Atherton and charismatic-evangelical urban practice have to say to each other? Perhaps one of the first things a public-reformist theologian might say is that while the various forms of charismatic-evangelical collaboration with secular bodies noted in Chapter 3 are a step in the right direction, they do not go far enough. They might even suggest that charismatic-evangelical churches have a tendency to collaborate with others only when there is something in it for them. In reacting to such a critique, our charismatic-evangelical urban churches might respond somewhat defensively by asserting that the public-reformist search for common ground with secular partners risks under-stating the importance of Christian distinctiveness. Echoing Stephen Cox's critique of the Archbishop Commission on Urban Life and Faith's "coyness in speaking about Jesus" (Cox, 2006), a charismatic-evangelical response might accuse public-reformist urban theology of neglecting the task of proclaiming the gospel through words as well as actions. Our charismatic-evangelical churches might also justify their own approach in terms of the need for evangelism to ensure the church's continued existence. Suspicious of an overly-optimistic view of the world, they may argue for a more critical or discerning view of partnership.

I have painted this initial exchange in deliberately simplistic and antagonistic terms in order to highlight some of the areas of tension between public-reformist social ethics and the world that charismatic-evangelical urban churches inhabit. However, we will now go on to consider some potential areas of common ground that might provide the basis for a more constructive conversation. In doing so, I will be drawing on the work of Nigel Biggar (2011) and Malcolm Brown (2010) whose unusual dialogue position (Sedgwick, 2012, p. 32)[73] with respect to liberal-communitarian controversies may also be instructive for charismatic-evangelicals. In the light of Brown's suggestion that the case for dialogue beyond a tradition must be made within the tradition itself (Brown, 2010, p. 130), the concept of the kingdom of God may provide a helpful starting point for (re)considering the relationship between charismatic-evangelical churches and the wider world. While there are various factors internal to charismatic-evangelicalism that make churches of this tradition reluctant to collaborate with secular others, many charismatic-evangelicals also appear to recognise (or at least pay lip service to) the idea that God's kingdom is wider than the church. Although they may sometimes need to be reminded of this and the implications need to be worked through, the suggestion that God might already be at work in the world seems to open up the possibility of dialogue with secular others and people of other faiths.

Following on from this, two helpful distinctions from Nigel Biggar appear to offer further potential for partnership with others. Firstly, Biggar (2011, p. 8) distinguishes between integrity and distinctiveness, arguing that while a concern for the theological integrity of Christian ethics may be quite proper, this does not always necessitate distinctiveness. Secondly, Biggar distinguishes between "the World" (capital W), denoting that which is hostile to the Church, and the "actual world" (lower case), which is not always hostile. "As the world is not always the World", actual churches should not always be distinct from it (Biggar, 2011, p. 9). Some evangelicals may still want to challenge the notion that public consensus should be a determinative object of social ethics (Doherty, 2012, p. 240) or continue to critique the public-reformist tradition's apparent disregard for evangelism. However, it still seems that there is much about seeking "the welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:7

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[73] This is a phrase that Sedgwick uses to describe Brown's work but which I think could also be applied to Biggar's.

[Revised Standard Version]) that charismatic-evangelicals could learn from the public-reformist tradition. These insights will be incorporated within the practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic that is developed at the end of this chapter.

Dialogue with urban liberation theology

Subversive ethics, according to Wells (2010, pp. 23-34), protests at the way mainstream accounts suppress alternative voices, excluded for reasons of gender, race, or other factors, and seeks to make those voices heard. Here we shall consider UK urban liberation theology as illustrative of a subversive approach to social ethics. As Shannahan explains, UK urban liberation theology expresses an old but often marginalized stream of radical Christian faith that asserts a preferential option for the oppressed as a necessary faith response to a God who is biased towards the oppressed (Shannahan, 2010, p. 101). Rooted in an overwhelmingly economic and political understanding of oppression, it utilizes contextual theology to validate the experience of the oppressed as a point of theological departure (Shannahan, 2010, p. 102). As such, it may be seen to particularly emphasise the socio-economic and the locally indigenous as expressed diagrammatically below.[74]

Figure 10 - Locating Urban Liberation Theology

Expansive

'Progressive'
- Socio-economic

Urban liberation theology

'Conservative'
- Spiritual-evangelistic

Locally indigenous

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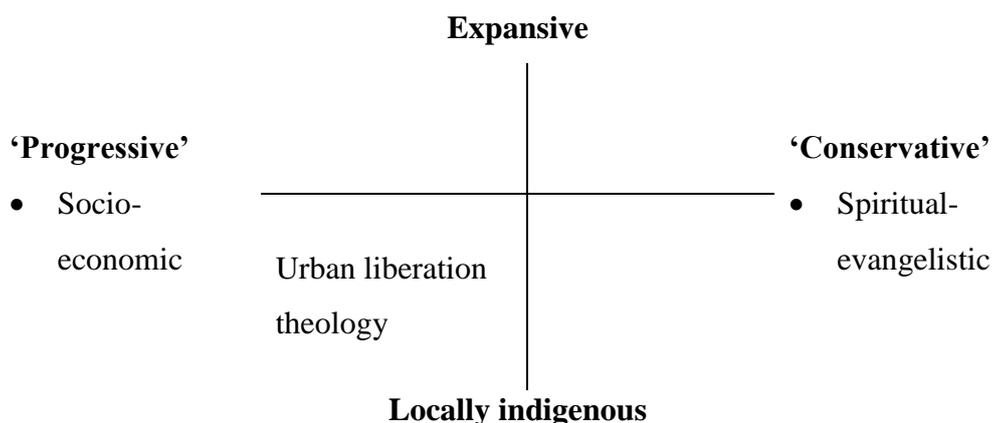
[74] Note, however, that Bosch (1991, pp. 438-439) cautions against any simplistic equation of liberation theology with progressive 'liberal' theology.

Key voices associated with this movement include John Vincent, Kenneth Leech, Laurie Green and Andrew Davey. Here particular attention will be given to Vincent's approach (Vincent, 2004) on the grounds that he has been a foundational figure in the development of British urban liberation theology over the past four decades (Shannahan, 2010, pp. 101-103). So what might Vincent and the movement he represents say about the way charismatic-evangelicals engage with disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods? Firstly, it might be said that the emphasis on incarnation and relocation to the inner city among some of the churches studied has certain parallels with the 'journey downwards' advocated by Vincent. Secondly, however, it seems that charismatic-evangelical churches may have quite different understandings of the meanings and implications of 'incarnation' to Vincent and other urban theologians in the radical liberal tradition. Furthermore, the 'superhero Jesus'[75], worshipped by charismatic-evangelical Christians, appears poles apart from Vincent's 'Radical Jesus'. Thirdly, I think the area in which UK urban liberation theologians would take greatest issue with charismatic-evangelical motivation and practice relates to understandings of poverty, oppression and injustice. As we have already briefly noted, issues of social justice (moving beyond social action and charity to engage with structural issues) received little attention within the churches studied. Furthermore, where poverty was mentioned, it was sometimes spiritualised or interpreted through (what appeared to be) an essentially conservative 'culture of poverty' thesis. Such sentiments, I suspect, would be met with anger and indignation by urban liberation theologians accustomed to interpreting poverty through the lens of Marxist class analysis. Fourthly, and following on from this, a liberationist critique would most likely suggest that despite the deliberate relocation to the inner city by some charismatic-evangelicals, much charismatic-evangelical urban practice still essentially reflects a colonial theology of the suburbs. As such, it may be considered guilty of failing to give voice to the experience of the poor and oppressed.

In response to such critiques, charismatic-evangelical churches might employ similar arguments to those already levied against public-reformist social ethics. Urban liberation theology, they might argue, is guilty of over-stating the socio-political dimensions of oppression and liberation, and of under-stating the spiritual. While

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[75] This phrase is derived from the children's song 'Jesus, you're my superhero' which was sung at the Oakfield Christian Fellowship Easter Holiday Club.

urban liberation theology does not necessarily share public theology's coyness in speaking about Jesus, charismatic-evangelicals might also take issue with the Jesus presented by urban liberation theology, suggesting that it has been shaped by ideological prior commitments as much as by engagement with Scripture. A further response might be developed along similar lines to the challenge to liberation theology posed by global Pentecostalism – that "while Liberation Theology opted for the poor, the poor opted for Pentecostalism" (Miller & Yamamori, 2007, p. 12). Within a UK context, it might be suggested that since its heyday in the 1980s, UK liberation theology has failed to adequately acknowledge and respond to the changing character of a UK urban Church that now includes significant numbers of charismatic-evangelical congregations.

That said, there is much that charismatic-evangelical urban practice could learn from urban liberation theology. Indeed, while it is often contended that liberation theology is merely a variant of the 'liberal theology' of which many evangelicals are suspicious, evangelicalism and liberation theology may have more in common than one might initially presume (Bosch, 1991, pp. 438-440).[76] Notable examples of previous evangelical engagement with liberation theology can be found in the writings of David Sheppard (1983), René Padilla (1985) Greg Smith (1991) and (from a Pentecostal perspective) Eldin Villafañe (1993). Building on their work, I would suggest that one of the areas in which urban liberation theology has the greatest potential to enhance charismatic-evangelical urban practice is its attentiveness to the socio-economic (as opposed to merely spiritual) nature of oppression. This requires the confrontation of structural (as opposed to merely personal) sin. Rooted in an understanding of the (present) reign of God (Villafañe, 1993, p. 195), urban liberation theology may therefore provide a much-needed corrective to a tendency among UK charismatic-evangelical churches to see poverty and oppression in primarily individualistic and spiritual terms.

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[76] Bosch (1991, p. 439), for example suggests that liberation theology can (like evangelicalism) appear naively religious and even biblicist.

Dialogue with ecclesial social ethics

Wells follows his description and critique of the universal and subversive strands of Christian ethics with an outline of a third ecclesial strand in which his own work is located.[77] In contrast with the universal approach which (it is claimed) fails to do justice to the particularity of the Christian tradition, and the subversive approach which privileges the particular experiences of the excluded, ecclesial ethics sees the key location of theology and ethics as being in the traditions and practices of the Church (Wells, 2010, pp. 24-28). The two most prominent figures within the ecclesial strand are Stanley Hauerwas (1983; 2010) and John Milbank (Milbank, Pickstock, & Ward, 1999; Milbank, 2008). Although care must be taken not to over-emphasise the commonality between Milbank's radical orthodoxy and the church-centred theological ethic of Hauerwas (Smith J. K., 2004, pp. 233-235), their respective approaches can be seen as different aspects of a single trend. It is held together by the shared conviction that it is the theology of the Church which provides the key to Christian ethics, not some agenda thrust by secular society (Brown, 2010, p. 100). With relation to the horizontal axis of Figure 11 below, ecclesial social ethics may be seen to be more counter-cultural than collaborative (although neither Hauerwas nor Milbank rule out collaboration).[78] With relation to the vertical axis, however, it is harder to locate because of a persistent tension between "Church-as-it-is" and "Church-as-it-is-called-to-be" (Brown, 2010, p. 104).

Figure 11 - Locating Ecclesial Social Ethics

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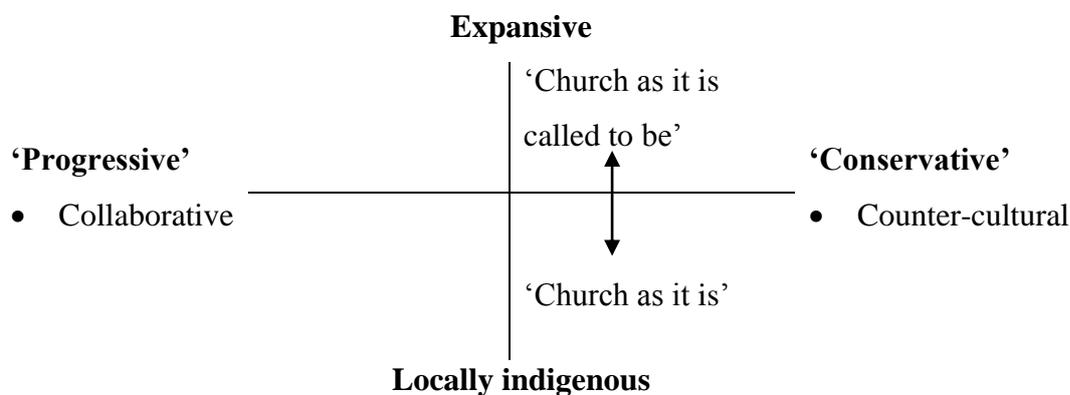
[77] See particularly Wells (2000; 2003; 2004) and Hauerwas and Wells (2006).

[78] As Bretherton observes, Hauerwas calls for discriminating engagement rather than complete withdrawal (Bretherton, 2010, p. 190).

Of the three contrasting approaches to Christian social ethics we have considered, ecclesial ethics appears to be the strand with which charismatic-evangelical urban practice finds greatest resonance. There are clear parallels, for example, between the attitudes to church and world encountered at Oakfield Christian Fellowship and Hauerwas and Milbank's description of church as a counter-cultural contrast society.[79] Furthermore, various writers have commented on the popularity of Hauerwas among evangelicals (Coffey, 2009, p. 3) or found common ground between Pentecostalism and radical orthodoxy (Smith J. K., 2003). However, we also need to consider how theologians like Hauerwas and Milbank might respond to such comparisons and the questions they would ask of charismatic-evangelical urban churches. In considering this, it firstly must be stressed that the 'Church' Hauerwas and Milbank talk about sounds very different to the charismatic-evangelical churches studied. This is partly due to Hauerwas and Milbank's inhabitation of 'wings' of the Church that appear far removed from charismatic-evangelicalism. It may also be a reflection of their tendency to talk about 'the Church' in rather abstract broad-brush terms.[80] Secondly, in a recent interview with Morehead (2010), Hauerwas has expressed ambivalence at evangelical interest in his work. While appreciative of evangelicals' high regard for Scripture and Jesus, Hauerwas indicates that he wants to challenge their presumption of an unmediated relationship with God:

> I try to help them [evangelicals] recover a sense of the church that they don't have because they think that the church is a secondary reality to their immediate relationship with God… It's as though they don't receive Christianity through the gifts of 2,000 years that have made them possible (Hauerwas in Morehead, 2010).

In the light of this and other critiques,[81] it would seem that the central challenge posed by ecclesial social ethics to charismatic-evangelical urban practice relates to the case for a more robust and tradition-formed ecclesiology, one in which narrative, liturgy and sacrament play a greater part. In response, charismatic-evangelical urban

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[79] Although ecclesiological concerns were less prominent within the focus group data, here too the overall sense was of charismatic-evangelical Christians attempting to model something different from secular society and draw others into that new community.

[80] See Biggar (2011, pp. 94-95), Swinton (2012, pp. 71-72), and Brown (2010, pp. 109-110).

[81] See also Milbank's description of modern evangelicalism and the 'Fresh Expressions' movement as decidedly "stale" (Milbank, 2008).

churches might present the counter-argument that ecclesial social ethics needs to pay closer attention to contemporary ecclesial practice. While I have sympathy with this counter-argument and develop it further in Chapter 5, this does not provide grounds for failing to take seriously the legitimate challenge posed by ecclesial social ethics. In order to move beyond the "fad-driven, one-dimensional spirituality of modern evangelicalism" (Walker & Bretherton, 2007), [82] charismatic-evangelical urban practice needs to be rooted in a more fully developed ecclesiology that sees at least some continuity with the preceding two thousand years of Christian tradition. Such a suggestion finds resonance with James K.A. Smith's call for deeper Pentecostal engagement with liturgy and sacrament (Smith J. K., 2003) and Christopher Cocksworth's imaginative description of "catholic evangelical worship in the Spirit" (Cocksworth, 2007).

Dialogue with evangelical theology and ethics

Having explored the relationship between the empirical data and Wells' three strands of Christian ethics, we now go on to consider how charismatic-evangelical urban practice relates to more formal evangelical perspectives on the relationship between evangelism and social action. Although (social) activism is one of the four historic characteristics of UK evangelicalism (Bebbington, 1989), the story of evangelical social involvement has been an "on-off relationship" (Smith D. W., 2009, p. 246). There is not space here to provide a full account of the twentieth century loss and recovery of the evangelical social conscience, [83] so here we will be particularly focusing on developments associated with the Lausanne Movement (1974; 2011).

The 1974 International Congress on World Evangelisation at Lausanne represented a key watershed moment in the development of evangelical perspectives on social action. The resulting *Lausanne Covenant* expressed penitence for "having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive" and went on to affirm that "evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty" (Lausanne Movement, 1974). However, it is also important to stress

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[82] This quotation is taken from Walker's series preface on an unnumbered page at the beginning of *Remembering Our Future* (Walker & Bretherton, 2007)

[83] On this, see Chester (1993) and Smith (1998).

that the Lausanne Congress and Covenant both reflected an essentially 'two mandate' approach that conceived of mission as 'evangelism plus social responsibility' and upheld the primacy of evangelism (Bosch, 1991, p. 405).[84] Subsequent evangelical consultations over the following years went on to challenge the 'two mandate' approach (which was considered guilty of driving a wedge between evangelism and social concern) through the vocabulary of 'integral mission'. Bosch therefore points to the emergence, from the early 1980s onwards, of a new spirit in mainstream evangelicalism that sought to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action (Bosch, 1991, pp. 407-408). More recently, similar sentiments were expressed in the Lausanne Movement's *Cape Town Commitment*. This articulated an understanding of "mission in all its dimensions", encompassing a variety of evangelistic, social and political concerns (Lausanne Movement, 2011). In more popular contemporary evangelical literature, however, the relationship between evangelism and social action remains contested. At what might be termed the more 'conservative' end of the evangelical spectrum, writers like Tim Chester and Steve Timmis stress that "the greatest need of the poor, as for us all, is to be reconciled with God and escape his wrath" (Chester & Timmis, 2007). Meanwhile towards what might be seen as the more 'progressive' end, writers like Steve Chalke place much greater emphasis on the validity, and indeed necessity, of socio-political involvement in its own right (Chalke, 1996; 2001).

So how does the experience of the charismatic-evangelical churches studied relate to more formal evangelical pronouncements on the relationship between evangelism and social action? Firstly, it is significant to note that within most of the churches studied, the vocabulary of 'social action' was conspicuous by its absence. Secondly, however, our preceding discussion around the meaning of 'demonstrating God's love' (ethnographic study) and the relationship between spiritual and socio-economic intentions (focus groups) has considerable resonance with historical and contemporary debates within evangelicalism concerning the relationship between evangelism and social action. Thirdly, while much formal evangelical theology on

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[84] While the Lausanne Congress is sometimes credited with having decisively clarified the relationship between evangelism and social action, even at the time it provoked contrasting reactions from prominent evangelical leaders. Some like Carl Henry felt it did not go far enough in promoting political liberation. Others like Peter Wagner expressed concern about attempts to confuse evangelism with social action (Ruble, 2012, pp. 142-143)

evangelism and social action has tended to see evangelism and social action as two discrete (yet mutually interdependent) strands that need to be coordinated (Tinker, 2009, p. 147), the relationship between them in practice is far more complex. Fourthly, however, we have also observed something of an emerging spectrum of approaches among the four churches concerning the relationship between spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic intentions.

A further area that I now want to explore concerns the way the Bible informs charismatic-evangelical churches' community outreach activity. Comparing participants' responses to Question 5 of the focus group schedule[85] with more formal evangelical perspectives on social responsibility (Grant & Hughes, 2009) and missional ethics (Draycott & Rowe, 2012) reveals significant differences in the way the Bible is handled. While the various (mainly evangelical) contributors to these volumes often adopt an approach of beginning with biblical exegesis and then applying it to contemporary situations, the treatment of the Bible by focus group participants appeared far less systematic and more anecdotal or imaginative. Such differences are obviously in part a reflection of varying contexts (writing a chapter for a book is quite different from answering a question in a focus group) and the different types of people involved (academic theologians and theological educators as opposed to church members). However, these differences may also reveal something quite significant about the contrast between charismatic and (traditional) Evangelical approaches to the Bible.

As Tidball (2005, pp. 260-261) observes, recent articles in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* have debated the distinctive way in which charismatic-evangelical Christians read and interpret the Bible. In contrast with other evangelical groupings, charismatic-evangelical approaches give greater credence to the role of the Holy Spirit as interpreter. For charismatic-evangelical Christians, therefore, reading the Bible is a more dynamic experience that involves the emotions as well as the mind.[86] Tidball argues that the contrast between charismatic-evangelical and older evangelical approaches here is mostly "only a difference of degree" (2005, p. 261).

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[85] This question was: 'Are there biblical stories, characters or themes that you feel particularly inform what you're doing in this community?'

[86] This description finds resonance with parts of the focus group transcripts and my observation of approaches to the Bible at Oakfield Christian Fellowship.

Other scholarly perspectives, however, suggest that the charismatic and Pentecostal emphasis on experience exposes more fundamental tensions within contemporary evangelicalism. Not only does this distinguish charismatic and Pentecostal approaches from conservative or rationalistic forms of evangelical theology (Smith J. K., 2003, p. 110), it also reveals that Pentecostalism shares unexpected common ground with other more liberal theological traditions (Yong, 2010, p. 89). To the extent that charismatic-evangelicalism is a hybrid between Pentecostal and traditional Evangelical influences, UK charismatic-evangelical churches might therefore be conceived as a site in which the tension between rationalist and experiential approaches becomes particularly apparent. In the next section, we begin to consider how a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic might respond to this and the other tensions we have identified.

4.3 Towards a Practical Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Social Ethic

The first section of this chapter compared the descriptive conclusions from the previous chapter with the findings of other relevant studies. The second section then went on to construct a series of facilitated dialogues between charismatic-evangelical urban practice and key voices from Christian social ethics and evangelical theology. We are now in a position to begin to consider how charismatic-evangelical urban churches might respond to the preceding analysis. This will take the form of an attempt to construct a practical charismatic-evangelical (PCE) urban social ethic. In seeking to respond creatively to our six tensions, this will root charismatic-evangelical urban practice in a wider social ethic that is appreciative of other traditions yet consistent with charismatic-evangelical convictions.[87] It will also be informed by my own reflection on personal and professional practice. With this in mind, the section begins with a description of my standpoint and position with relation to each tension. This will then lead on to an attempt to sketch out the conceptual components of a PCE urban social ethic, before concluding the chapter with an assessment of this model.

Living with tensions – my standpoint and position

The move from the primarily 'descriptive' and 'interpretative' to the development of a more 'normative' (Osmer, 2008) PCE urban social ethic requires me to firstly acknowledge my own standpoint and position. Here I will briefly describe how the model I propose has been shaped by my own experience of the tensions from our tensions typology. This will be structured around consideration of my position with relation to the two pairs of axes that were developed in Chapter 3.

Figure 12 below represents an attempt to describe shifts in my personal and theological outlook over the past fourteen years. With respect to the horizontal axis, something of a leftward shift has occurred away from what might be termed a 'conservative' outlook and towards a more 'progressive' one. This may be indicative

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[87] Later in this section, I go on to argue that the model I propose is consistent with the four historic characteristics of UK evangelicalism identified by Bebbington (1989) and with Spirit-infused charismatic insights.

of the fact that I am no longer as immersed in charismatic-evangelical subculture as I was in 1999 and a result of "blurred encounters" (Baker, 2009) with secular others and people of other faiths. In some respects, however, I find the left-right continuum and 'progressive versus conservative' typology over-simplistic and highly problematic.[88] While there is a sense in which I may have shifted 'leftwards', I think that over the past two decades I have often sought to hold together (what for the sake of simplicity might be called) 'progressive' and 'conservative' insights. Rather than seeing progressive and conservative perspectives as mutually exclusive, I prefer to see them as helpful and necessary correctives (Brown, 2012) to one another. For me, therefore, a PCE urban social ethic needs to simultaneously be socio-economic *and* spiritual evangelistic, collaborative *and* counter-cultural, reflexive *and* applied.

Figure 12 - Charting Shifts in Personal and Theological Outlook
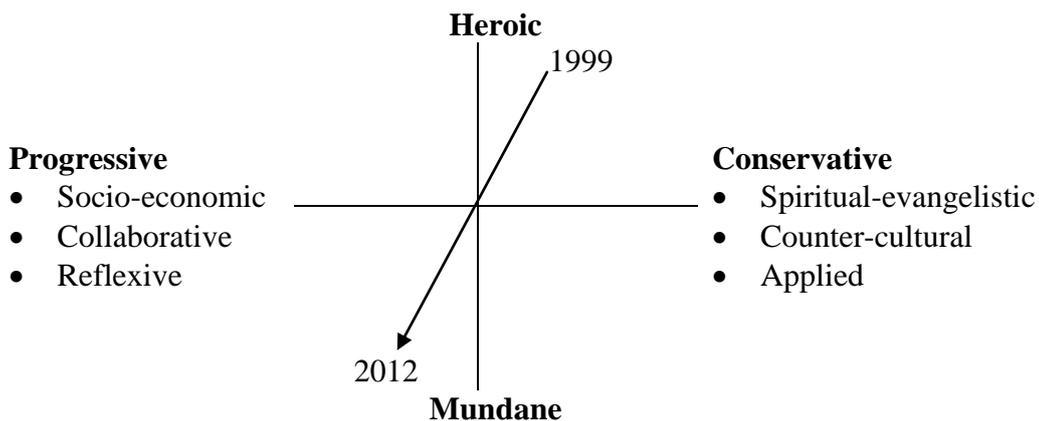
With relation to the vertical axis, I sense that there has been a stronger and more decisive shift in me from the heroic to the mundane. This shift may be partly a result of growing older (being 35 not 22). However, a changing ecclesial context (moving from a large 'successful' suburban church to a much smaller inner city church) has also played a part. Such a shift inevitably has a bearing on the PCE urban social ethic I articulate. Although it seeks to retain some of the energy and enthusiasm that comes from charismatic-evangelicalism's heroic tendencies, my PCE urban social ethic is less concerned with the spectacular. It seeks to prioritise depth over the dramatic.

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[88] I think the grouping together of three pairs of tensions under the banners of 'progressive' and 'conservative' (terms that are far from value-neutral) risks over-simplifying lived complexity. See also the work of Elisha (2010; 2011) which we discussed in Section 4.1.

We now turn to the second pair of axes developed in Chapter 3. These emphasised the internal tensions experienced within each of the churches studied. In keeping with this, Figure 13 below is not about shifts in my position and standpoint over time. Rather, it seeks to illustrate how the two sets of internal tensions identified have stretched my personal and professional practice across four different types of arena.

Figure 13 – Internal Tensions in Personal and Professional Practice

	Expansive		
Service provider	Fundraising and consultancy for urban churches	'Being church' through dispersed social networks	**Intentional community**
	Coordinating a 'Good Neighbour' project and serving on a church centre management committee	Exploring community housing and intentional community	
	Locally indigenous		

As I have written at length about these experiences elsewhere in my portfolio, I do not intend to describe them fully here. Instead, I will provide some brief reflections on each of the axes in Figure 13, informed by the work with which I have been involved. The relationship on the horizontal axis between church as service provider and church as intentional community has been a source of tension for me throughout much of my adult life. Indeed, this was evident in the provisional research questions with which I entered the professional doctorate five years ago.[89] Although at times I have been sceptical, and maybe even dismissive, of the service provider model and tried to pursue an alternative vision of intentional community,[90] over time I have come to see these two contrasting modes of operation as mutually complementary. The PCE urban social ethic that I develop therefore recognises the legitimacy and appropriateness of these contrasting modes of operation and tries to ensure that the tension between them is a creative one.

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[89] My year 3 *Reflection on Practice* (Portfolio) elaborates on this.
[90] Such suspicion of the service provider model has been due in part to concern that it forces the church to become incorporated within "the market-state" (Bretherton, 2010, pp. 94-95).

Finally, my perspective on the vertical axis of Figure 13 (locally indigenous versus expansive horizons) has been shaped by my experience of trying to be committed to the inner city neighbourhood in which I live at the same time as being exposed to a variety of influences that take me away from the local. These include dispersed social networks, diverse professional interests and membership of an inner city church where many of the members travel in from homes outside the neighbourhood. I acknowledge that in some ways these expansive horizons are a reflection of my privilege, social class, and unwillingness to embrace downward mobility. However, I also contend that an idealisation of the purely local is problematic on other grounds as well. As I go on to argue later in this section, a PCE urban social ethic needs to hold in tension the challenge that charismatic-evangelical urban churches need to become more locally rooted and indigenous (particularly in relation to leadership and power) with social, political and theological imperatives that require them to look beyond the local.

Conceptual components of a PCE urban social ethic

Having located within personal and professional practice the origins of the particular approach I propose, we now turn to consider the conceptual components of a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. Six key concepts will be introduced here, each of which relates to one of the tensions from our typology. As we will see, this section of the thesis has been particularly informed by the missiology of David Bosch (1991) and the eschatological virtue ethics of Tom (N.T.) Wright (1999; 2005; 2010; 2012), as well as by our earlier conversation partners.

i)   *Mission as God's turning to the world: collaborative and counter-cultural*

The first of the concepts I propose relates to understandings of the church's role in the world that lie at the heart of the 'collaborative versus counter-cultural' tension. In response to this tension, I suggest a PCE urban social ethic needs to be informed by a missiology that views mission as "God's turning to the world" (Bosch, 1991, p. 376). Theologically, this can also be expressed through the vocabulary of *missio Dei* (the mission of God). Here "[m]ission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in

which the church is privileged to participate" (Bosch, 1991, p. 392). In the last century, this understanding of mission came to be embraced by virtually all Christian traditions, including many evangelicals (Bosch, 1991, p. 390). Within some accounts, *missio Dei* has also been used to describe God's involvement in human history beyond the activities of the church. This has often been expounded "pneumatologically" (Bosch, 1991, p. 391) in descriptions of a Holy Spirit who is already secretly operative in the world and blows wherever 'he' wills. Although such suggestions have been met with suspicion in some evangelical quarters (Tinker, 2009, p. 149; Rowe, 2012, p. 17),[91] they were implicitly (and in one case explicitly) affirmed by some of the focus group participants.[92] An understanding of mission as God's turning to the world would therefore seem to provide some grounds for charismatic-evangelical collaboration with organisations beyond the church in a way that is not inconsistent with charismatic-evangelical convictions. Further work, however, is still needed to clarify the theological basis, scope and boundaries of this.[93]

That said, a charismatic-evangelical social ethic will also resist what might be seen as over-optimistic perceptions of the world that rob the gospel of its soteriological depth (Costas in Bosch, 1991, p. 382). This will necessitate retaining a robust sense of antithesis with the world, but without confusing 'counter-cultural' for 'anti-cultural' (Smith J. K., 2009, p. 35). Here the distinction between 'World' and 'world' (Biggar, 2011, pp. 8-9) may be particularly instructive in enabling charismatic-evangelical churches to negotiate the tension between the collaborative and the counter-cultural. Echoing Malcolm Brown's suggestion that 'liberal' and 'communitarian' approaches to Christian ethics should see themselves as correctives to one another (Brown, 2012), a PCE urban social ethic needs to be both collaborative and counter-cultural.

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[91] It is important to note that *missio Dei* is a contested concept that encompasses a variety of theological positions, some of which may be mutually exclusive. As such, some have come to regard the concept as a "Trojan horse" (Rosin cited in Bosch, 1991, p. 392)

[92] Examples include the vocabulary of "joining in" with what God is already doing in the world.

[93] In clarifying the nature of God's turning to the world, potential topics for further reflection extend from the creation of all humans as bearers of God's image (Genesis 1:27) to the New Testament vision of the reconciliation of all things (Colossians 1:19-20). While I share some evangelicals' concern that particular versions of *missio Dei* risk describing the Spirit's activity beyond the church in a way that runs counter to the New Testament, I think the church needs to be humble enough to acknowledge that it does not have a monopoly on God's mission. It needs to be open to the possibility that God may be working through those outside the church.

ii) A holistic vision of God's Kingdom: spiritual-evangelistic and socio-economic

Following on from this, I suggest that it is within a holistic understanding of the Kingdom of God that the tension between the spiritual-evangelistic and the socio-economic can be most creative. As we have already seen, concepts of the reign of God from urban liberation theology have the potential to challenge, widen, and enrich charismatic-evangelical understandings of the Kingdom which are at times overly-individualistic or other-worldly. In highlighting the social, economic and political nature of oppression, they also draw attention to the importance of addressing structural (as well as individual) sin. From this perspective, a focus on mission as (socio-economic) liberation and a quest for justice (Bosch, 1991, pp. 400, 432) may be seen as a vital corrective to the tendency of many charismatic-evangelicals to privilege the spiritual-evangelistic.[94] Such a focus may also help to widen conceptions of the socio-economic among charismatic-evangelicals who, in focusing primarily on meeting individual needs, are often less attentive to systemic issues of social justice.

This is not to say that the spiritual-evangelistic is now unimportant. Indeed, a social ethic that does not incorporate conversionism, "the belief that lives need to be changed" (Bebbington, 1989, p. 3), will not be authentically evangelical. Rather, I have particularly emphasised the socio-economic dimension to the Kingdom of God because it is this which was most under-developed in the charismatic-evangelical churches studied. In this regard, it may be particularly helpful to reflect on contrasting eschatological visions of the future. If it is imagined that the world is going to burn when Christians are transported 'up' to heaven,[95] then the socio-economic becomes unimportant, or at least secondary to telling people the gospel. If on the other hand, the Christian telos or goal is conceived as the renewal of creation (Wright, 1999; 2010), then Christian living in the present involves practices and habits that correspond with the way things ultimately will be. As Bauckham and Hart argue:

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[94] Such a tendency is contrary to the multi-dimensional view of mission emerging from some of the formal expressions of evangelical theology we have considered (Lausanne Movement, 2011).

[95] For an illustration of this, see the description of the 'burning platform' illustration from the account of an Oakfield Christian Fellowship Sunday service in Chapter 3.

> [Christians are] called to identify and become involved with God's Spirit in all that he is doing to fashion a genuine presence of the new within the midst of the old, drawing it into self-transcendent albeit partial anticipations of what will ultimately be (Bauckham & Hart, 1999, pp. 70-71).

iii) Faithful improvisation: reflexive and applied

In response to the tension we have observed between reflexive and applied theological models, a PCE urban social ethic will seek to combine critical reflection on practice with faithful indwelling of the biblical narrative. This might be described as a faithful improvisation that simultaneously requires greater attentiveness to context and to Scripture.

On the one hand, I suggest that charismatic-evangelical churches need to become better at reflecting on context and practice. In this sense, they may have something to learn from more contextual approaches to practical theology at the reflexive end of the applied-reflexive spectrum. Although charismatic-evangelical leaders like Mike Breen have developed and employed variants of the hermeneutical cycle that acknowledge the need for reflection (Breen & Kallestad, 2005),[96] my experience of seeing the way such frameworks are used in practice suggests that the types of reflection encouraged are often rather superficial. I would therefore suggest that the 'observe' and 'reflect' stages of charismatic-evangelical frameworks like Breen's could be strengthened by a more critical engagement with models of theological reflection that encourage a deeper exploration of macro and micro context (Osmer, 2008, p. 12).

On the other hand, an evangelical engagement with the various versions of the hermeneutical cycle within practical theology is also likely to ask challenging questions about the way the Bible and Christian tradition are used. For example, John Colwell suggests that the proper question is not that of "how Scripture and the Christian tradition might aid me". Instead it is that of "how I, as someone being shaped within the Church through its tradition and stories, respond to… particular

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[96] In a model that will sound strikingly familiar to practical theologians, Breen and Kallestad (2005) propose a six-stage learning circle for learning from and responding to 'kairos events'. This is based around the biblical injunction to repent (observe, reflect, act) and believe (plan, account, act).

dilemma[s] in a manner that is coherent and consistent, trustful and faithful" (Colwell, 2005, p. 216). Colwell then goes on to propose a "rather different hermeneutical cycle" that begins not with a critical reflection on praxis but a "transformational indwelling of Scripture's Story" (2005, p. 222).

These two contrasting approaches (critical reflection on practice and faithful indwelling of the biblical narrative) are both essential if our PCE urban social ethic is to be genuinely practical and authentically evangelical. Although there is sometimes a tension between the two, a number of theologians have employed 'dramatic' analogies that suggest they are not incompatible. Within Wright's five-act drama model (Wright, 2005, pp. 89-92),[97] for example, Scripture is authoritative not in the sense of providing a prescriptive blueprint for every area of life, but in outlining the first four acts of a narrative to which actors in the subsequent fifth act must be faithful. Here faithful Christian practice requires a high degree of improvisation. To insist on the need for improvisation, however, is not the same as implying that 'anything goes'. Rather, "[t]hose who live in the fifth act have an ambiguous relationship with the previous four acts, not because they are being disloyal to them but precisely because they are being loyal to them" (Wright, 2005, p. 90).[98] Along broadly similar lines, Wells (2004) also employs the improvisation motif and suggests that the church needs to be faithful to ecclesial tradition as well as Scripture. With this and our earlier conversation with Hauerwas in mind, a PCE urban social ethic cannot jump straight from the pages of the New Testament to the present day. It needs at least some continuity with the previous two millennia of Christian tradition.

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[97] Wright (2005, pp. 89-92) proposes a 'five-act' hermeneutic which locates contemporary ecclesial practice within the final act of a five-part drama (creation, 'fall', Israel, Jesus, and church).

[98] The 'faithful improvisation' that I have proposed still needs to be more fully developed and may benefit from further engagement with the work of Vanhoozer (2005) and others who have employed the dramatic analogy. In briefly clarifying the concept, however, I suggest that Scripture is normative within a faithful improvisation in that it requires the church to root its practice within the biblical narrative. As an actor in the fifth part of the play, there needs to be deep continuity with what has gone before and consistency with the anticipated culmination of the story (the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21). In keeping with this, I also suggest that the way in which the Bible is interpreted and 'applied' must adapt to new contexts. There needs to be a fusion of horizons between Scripture and context as the church seeks to discern what the Spirit is doing in each new age. Interestingly, one of the focus group participants suggested that a biblical precedent for such an approach may be found in the story of Peter's vision and the centurion in Acts 10.

iv) A Spirit-infused virtue ethic: from the heroic to the mundane

Linked to the concept of faithful improvisation, I suggest that conceiving Christian discipleship as a Spirit-infused virtue ethic will be particularly helpful in responding to the tension between the heroic and the mundane. This, I believe, necessitates being open to 'the supernatural' but resisting the accompanying temptation to pursue the spectacular and dramatic independently of inner transformation. Here the work of Wright (2010) in *Virtue Reborn* is particularly instructive. While charismatic-evangelical Christians sometimes have a tendency to see the transformation of character as something that can only happen through the spontaneous work of the Spirit, Wright argues that virtue within the New Testament is "infused" and "acquired". It is "*both* the gift of God *and* the result of the person of faith making conscious decisions" (Wright, 2010, p. 170). Such a conception of virtue, Wright suggests, is integral to Christian mission in that the only way for mission to become second nature is for the virtues to become second nature as well (Wright, 2010, p. 214). This, it would seem, requires the practice of habits of heart and mind that may be regarded as more mundane than heroic. Or as Wright himself puts it, the Christian virtues (unlike the classical virtues) "are designed to produce, not grand isolated heroes… but integrated communities, modelling a life of self-giving love" (2010, p. 188). Such sentiments are also echoed by Wells (2010, pp. 34-37) who contrasts Aristotle's concept of the hero (who is always at the centre of the story) with the New Testament description of Christians as saints. The saint, Wells suggests, may be almost invisible, easily missed, quickly forgotten, and must expect to fail. Such a description, I suggest, provides a much-needed corrective to the sometimes excessive heroism of charismatic-evangelical urban practice.

v) Church as oikos-polis: intentional community and service provider

Turning now to the tension between church as service provider and church as intentional community, my view that these two contrasting modes of operation are mutually complementary is informed by a conception of church as *oikos-polis*. As Bretherton (2011, pp. 229-230) observes, in New Testament passages such as Ephesians 2:19-22, the Church is envisaged as a community that includes aspects of both the household (*oikos*) and the political realm (*polis*). Wannenwetsch argues that such a deliberate combination of these previously unreconciled language worlds has

radical (yet often unrecognised) conceptual significance for Christian political ethics. "[T]he first urban Christians described their common life not only in terms of family-language (as was usual for religious communities) but also in terms of political language" (Wannenwetsch, 1996, p. 279). Charismatic-evangelical Christians, I suggest, have a tendency to conceive of church primarily in terms of *oikos* and this lends itself to a primarily 'intentional community' mode of operation.[99] They are less likely, it seems, to acknowledge the inherently political character of church. Although a description of church as *polis* may not always necessitate churches playing the role of service provider,[100] it does suggest that they need to engage with the political realm. Involvement in the provision of public services is one of a number of potentially valid ways of doing this. A hybrid conception of *oikos-polis* would therefore seem to affirm the legitimacy of each of our contrasting modes of operation. Such an assessment is also supported by the work of Steven Croft, whose distinction between "small transforming communities" and the "public-institutional" church (Croft, 2002, pp. 79,94) has parallels with the vocabulary of 'intentional communities' and 'service providers'.

vi) A comprehensive Christological framework: locally indigenous and expansive

While much urban theology has emphasised the incarnation (leading to a privileging of the locally indigenous), I suggest that a PCE urban social ethic needs to be informed by a more comprehensive Christological framework.[101] In keeping with Bosch, I suggest that the "*totus Christus* – his incarnation, earthly life, death, resurrection, and parousia" (Bosch, 1991, p. 399) are indispensable for church and theology. To this list, I would also add Christ's ascension and sending of the Spirit (O'Donovan, 1994, p. 13). A comprehensive framework like this may be helpful in enabling charismatic-evangelical urban churches to recognise and respond to the tension between locally indigenous and expansive horizons. While a focus on

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[99] This assertion is informed in part by the fact that a number of my charismatic-evangelical friends in different parts of the world have established church communities named 'oikos'.

[100] In this regard, it is significant that both Bretherton (2011) and Wannenwetsch (1996) emphasise the inherently political character of worship.

[101] Within approaches that extensively employ 'incarnational' language, the principle of incarnation is sometimes abstracted and universalised in a way that risks losing any real connection with the Jesus of the Gospels. As Wright's musical metaphor suggests, the gospels may be set in the "key" of incarnational Christology, but this is not their main theme. Their "melody is that of the kingdom and of 'Christology' in the much stricter sense of 'Jesus as Messiah'" (Wright, 2012, p. 240).

Christ's incarnation quite rightly affirms the locally indigenous,[102] this needs to be located as part of the wider "Kingdom-establishing work of Jesus and the Spirit" (Wright, 2010, p. 60) to which the cross and the resurrection are also central.[103] The cross, resurrection, and sending of the Spirit all open up more expansive horizons, though for charismatic-evangelicals a "pneumatological paradigm" (Villafañe, 1993, p. 163) may be particularly significant. This horizon-expanding character of the Spirit's work is encapsulated in the words of the resurrected Jesus to the apostles:

> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8 [New International Version]).

There are good theological reasons, therefore, why a PCE urban social ethic will seek to combine a commitment to the locally indigenous with more expansive horizons. To this I would add that a preoccupation with the purely local can be problematic on social and political grounds as well. As Ash Amin argues, it can be guilty of failing to acknowledge or adequately respond to the powerful global and national (as well as local) forces at work within any given context (Amin, 2005, p. 625). While some accounts of the urban reject the 'view from above' in favour of the 'view from below' (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 91-93), I think the complexity of the contemporary city necessitates a multiplicity of perspectives, both strategic and ground level.[104]

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[102] See Thompson's description of the significance of Christ's incarnation and Philippians 2:5-11 for Eden Fitton Hill (Thompson, 2010).

[103] On the centrality of both 'Kingdom' and 'Cross' in the Gospels, see Wright (2012). While "kingdom Christians" and "cross Christians" (Wright, 2012, p. 159) often place themselves in opposing camps, Wright argues for the integration of these themes.

[104] While de Certeau may have never intended to polarize the micro-macro relation, Soja (1996, p. 314) observes that his work has informed both the privileging of the 'view from below' and the repudiation of more 'elevated' perspectives within contemporary critical cultural discourse on cities.

Assessment

We conclude this section and the chapter with a brief assessment of the PCE urban social ethic I have outlined. Here we will examine the constituent elements of the phrase 'practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic' with a view to considering whether the model I propose is sufficiently practical, charismatic-evangelical, urban, and socio-ethical.

Practical?

In assessing whether my PCE urban social ethic is sufficiently practical, we need to clarify what we mean by 'practical'. This is because there seems to be a tension between the meaning of 'practical' within (academic) practical theology and the way it is used within charismatic-evangelical subculture. From the perspective of the academy, this thesis may be considered practical in the sense that I have used resources from practical theology to research and reflect on charismatic-evangelical urban practice. However, given practical theology's tendency to be critical of 'applicationist' approaches (Pattison & Lynch, 2005, p. 409), my suggestion that a PCE urban social ethic needs to be simultaneously reflexive and applied may be met with scepticism in some quarters. From the perspective of charismatic-evangelicalism, a wing of the church that is sometimes suspicious of 'the academic' and prefers its theology to be 'applied' (Cartledge, 2003, p. 3; Bennett, 2012, p. 479), my PCE urban social ethic risks being seen as too theoretical and not 'practical' enough. My response to such a challenge is that rather than providing prescriptive recommendations,[105] I have sought to provide a conceptual outline that can only be fully developed in practice (Rowe, 2012, p. 24). Admittedly though, with such a conceptual approach comes the risk that in operating at a primarily cognitive level, my approach fails to take sufficient account of affectivity (Smith J. K., 2009, p. 64). Therefore, in order to be able to have a greater transformative impact on practice, a more fully developed PCE urban social ethic may need to give greater attention to the development of "thick formative practices" (Smith J. K., 2009, p. 83).[106]

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[105] For an example of a more prescriptive approach, see Cartledge (2010, p. 179)

[106] Smith (2009, p. 83) describes these as habits that play a significant role in shaping identity and practice at a non-cognitive bodily level.

Charismatic-evangelical?

I have sought to articulate a way of responding to the tensions from our typology in a way that, while open to insights from other traditions, is consistent with charismatic-evangelical convictions. Each of Bebbington's four historical characteristics of evangelicalism (Bebbington, 1989, p. 3) is evident within the PCE urban social ethic I have proposed. Biblicism is reflected within 'faithful improvisation', crucicentrism is implicit within 'a comprehensive Christological framework', and conversionism and activism complement each other within 'a holistic vision of God's Kingdom'.[107] I have also sought to incorporate Spirit-infused charismatic insights. That said, I acknowledge that this model has been sketched out only in outline (Rowe, 2012, p. 24). As such, it may be difficult to fully assess its charismatic-evangelical credentials. While I have already begun to identify lines for future development,[108] the construction of a more fully-developed and theologically coherent PCE urban social ethic lies beyond the scope of this thesis.[109]

Urban?

Apart from the fact that it arises out of research conducted in an urban context, to what extent might the model I propose claim to be urban? Firstly, in its conception of an urban church shaped by a comprehensive Christological framework (incorporating both incarnational and pneumatological paradigms), my PCE urban social ethic represents a creative response to the tension between locally indigenous and expansive horizons. This ability to combine 'the view from below' with acknowledgement of 'the bigger picture' makes it well-positioned to reflect the complexity and fluidity of contemporary urban contexts. Secondly, in viewing the urban as a context in which the church needs to operate in missional mode as opposed to (or at least alongside) pastoral mode (Warren, 1996, pp. 10-27), it is arguably better suited to a post-Christendom urban context (Murray, 2004) than

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[107] Of Bebbington's four characteristics, I think crucicentrism is the feature of evangelicalism with which my PCE urban social ethic engages the least. The cross is implicit at various stages, particularly within 'a comprehensive Christological framework' and the recurring theme of tension that runs through this thesis. However, a more fully developed PCE urban social ethic may need to develop this further. In this regard, Wright's recent work on the integration of 'Kingdom' and 'Cross' in the Gospels (Wright, 2012) may be particularly instructive.

[108] In this regard, other footnotes in this section suggest various potential lines for further enquiry.

[109] In keeping with the title of this section, here I have been sketching and suggesting potential theological strategies *towards* a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. Further research is still needed to test and develop these strategies more fully.

accounts that suggest the Church still has an essentially pastoral role to the nation. Thirdly, in encouraging charismatic-evangelical churches to combine their counter-cultural tendencies with a willingness to acknowledge the activity of God's Spirit beyond the church ('mission as God's turning to the world'), it offers some potential for viewing the urban as a space for encountering and learning from others.[110] Fourthly, however, a significant weakness of this model is that it offers few resources to aid reflection on the significance of the urban as a multi-faith context.[111]

Social ethic?

I have been seeking in this thesis to explore the connection between established theoretical perspectives from Christian social ethics and contemporary charismatic-evangelical urban practice. Implicit in this undertaking has been the two-fold conviction that Christian social ethics needs to pay greater attention to contemporary ecclesial practice and that charismatic-evangelical urban practice could benefit from an engagement with Christian social ethics. In view of these origins, the model I propose may appear different from established approaches to social ethics in the following two respects. Firstly, my PCE urban social ethic has a greater overlap with missiology than many other accounts of social ethics. This arises in part from the specifically evangelical character of this model. Although mission and ethics are often seen as separate, or even incompatible, I contend that they are intimately connected. Following Villafañe (1993, pp. 219-220), Wright (2010, pp. 210-214), O'Donovan (1994) and Rowe (2012, pp. 14-16), I suggest that effective mission needs to be rooted in a robust social ethic and that ethics itself needs to be missional. Secondly, my description of a PCE urban social ethic may appear relatively brief compared with other more detailed theological proposals and conceptual models (O'Donovan, 1994; Yong, 2010). In justifying my approach, however, I remind readers of the model of 'Theology in Four Voices' (Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney, & Watkins, 2010) referred to in Chapter 1. Throughout this thesis, I have been bringing 'espoused' and 'operant' theologies into dialogue with 'normative' and 'formal' theologies in a way that many other forms of Christian social ethics do not.

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[110] Admittedly, the potential for this may be more limited than within some models from the public-reformist tradition. See for example the post-secular "assemblage" of religious and non-religious actors proposed by Baker (2012, p. 8).

[111] This is partly due to the fact that some of my fieldwork was conducted in white-majority areas.

CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS

As we begin to near a conclusion, we now turn to consider the implications of the preceding analysis. Firstly, at an academic level, we summarise the contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes to the various bodies of literature that were introduced in Chapter 1. Secondly, we go on to consider the contribution of this thesis to institutional knowledge beyond the academy (Graham, 2009, p. 5), focusing particularly on the implications for the UK urban Church.

5.1 Addressing the Academy

In Chapter 1, I located the origins of this research in a perceived gulf between lived realities encountered in my professional practice and four established bodies of academic literature. In this section we will revisit each of these bodies of literature, summarising the contribution to knowledge made by this thesis and identifying priorities for further research.

Firstly, this research addresses the failure of many previous studies of UK faith-based voluntary action to pay significant attention to charismatic-evangelical forms of urban involvement. Our findings suggest that although there are continuities between the experience of charismatic-evangelical churches and other types of faith group, there are striking differences as well. This discontinuity is particularly evident in charismatic-evangelical urban churches' pursuit of spiritual-evangelistic as well as socio-economic intentions and their particular emphasis on engagement through intentional community (alongside some involvement in service provision). In view of these findings, future research on faith-based voluntary action needs to be more sensitive to theological difference within particular religions and denominations. It also needs to look beyond the confines of traditional models of faith-based organisation (Thomas, 2012, p. 259). As this is an under-researched area, there are numerous potential avenues for further research, but two particularly significant areas stand out. Firstly, there is the question of what secular bodies (within the third sector and public sector) and local residents think of the ways in which charismatic-

evangelical churches express their faith within disadvantaged urban contexts.[112] Secondly, within a multi-faith religious context, it is important to explore whether the contrast between charismatic-evangelical and other (predominantly more liberal) forms of social involvement within the Christian tradition has any resonance or parallels with the experience of under-researched types of faith group in other religious traditions.

Secondly, this thesis enhances knowledge and understanding of charismatic-evangelical Christianity in the sociology of religion, religious studies, and congregational studies. As we saw in Chapter 4, the findings of our study simultaneously confirm and challenge the picture of UK charismatic-evangelicalism presented by previous studies in these disciplines. This is particularly evident in relation to social class. In this regard, the significant involvement of people from working class backgrounds in at least some of the churches studied challenges any depiction of charismatic-evangelical churches as solely middle class. Additionally, the intentional relocation of middle-class Christians to disadvantaged urban areas suggests that there is more to charismatic-evangelicalism than therapeutic individualism and autonomous consumption. Future academic work on charismatic and evangelical Christianity in the UK therefore needs to be more sensitive to the subtleties and nuances concerning the relationship between UK evangelicalism and class. Further empirical enquiry, however, is still needed as this is an under-researched area.[113]

Thirdly, this thesis contributes to Christian social ethics, urban theology, and political theology, fields within which charismatic-evangelical perspectives have been marginal at best. As we saw in Chapter 4, the research findings challenge established theoretical socio-ethical models (whether public-reformist, subversive, or ecclesial) to pay greater attention to contemporary ecclesial practice in general and charismatic-evangelical urban practice in particular. More specifically, such a challenge can be reformulated to address each of our three conversation partners as

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[112] This is something that my choice of research methods (which arose from a primarily intrinsic focus) did not allow me to explore. However, the perspectives of other organisations and local residents are needed to provide a more rounded picture of charismatic-evangelical urban practice.

[113] In this regard, the preliminary reflections of Joanne McKenzie (2012) suggest various potential lines of enquiry for future research.

follows. For public-reformist social ethics (which has particularly influenced the social theology of the Church of England), the central challenge is encapsulated by the failure of the Archbishop's Commission on Urban Life and Faith (2006) to engage with evangelical perspectives and experiences (Kuhrt, 2010, pp. 16-17). Unless the public-reformist tradition can articulate a social ethic that combines its predominant emphasis on socio-economic and structural change with acknowledgement of the need for personal transformation, it will most likely continue to be ignored by evangelicals and fail to represent a significant proportion of the Church for which it claims to speak. For UK urban liberation theology, the challenge is similar but relates more specifically to the need to emerge from an entrenched tribal bunker (Shannahan, 2008) towards a more conciliatory relationship with new and emerging forms of urban practice from the charismatic and evangelical traditions. Such practice might be easily dismissed as 'suburban' by urban liberation theologians,[114] but is often deeply engaged in urban contexts. Given the striking resonance we have observed between charismatic-evangelical conceptions of the church-world relationship and the ecclesiology of Hauerwas and Milbank, the challenge to ecclesial social ethics is somewhat different. It may be that the experience of charismatic-evangelical Christians intentionally living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods could provide practical "case studies for Hauerwas' proposals for a resident-alien ecclesiology" (Yong, 2010, p. 190).[115] In order for this potential to be realised, however, theologians like Hauerwas and Milbank may need to become less concerned with 'Church' in the abstract and more engaged with contemporary ecclesial realities.[116]

Fourthly, this research addresses the failure of much evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal theology to significantly engage with issues of social involvement in general and urban involvement in particular. Our engagement with more formal expressions of evangelical theology concerning social involvement has revealed a tendency towards an 'applied' theological model. Such an approach, I fear, is

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[114] On the "occasional demonising" of suburban ecclesiology by urban liberation theology, see Shannahan. (2008, p. 3)

[115] Yong makes this suggestion with relation to global forms of Pentecostalism. Yet it may also be relevant to UK charismatic-evangelical urban engagement. See Baker (2005, pp. 81-83) on the parallels between Hauerwas and Milbank's ecclesiology and the Manchester-based Eden project.

[116] As Biggar and Quash both observe, there has been a general neglect of ethnography in ecclesial social ethics (Quash, 2010, p. 69) and a tendency to idealise the Church (Biggar, 2011, pp. 96,99).

inadequately equipped to engage with the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary urban mission. While theoretical speculation about the relationship between evangelism and social action may at times be helpful, their relationship in contemporary urban practice needs to be allowed to speak into such theoretical debates. In response to the tensions identified within charismatic-evangelical urban practice, I have begun to construct a practical charismatic-evangelical (PCE) urban social ethic. As this model has been sketched out only in outline, there are numerous potential areas for its further development. Conceptually, this model's six core components still need to be refined,[117] although further empirical study is equally important. One particularly significant potential line of enquiry concerns the relationship between UK charismatic-evangelical urban practice and an emerging international literature on evangelical and Pentecostal social engagement. Although our consideration of 'Progressive Pentecostalism' and 'Godly Love' in Chapter 4 briefly touched on this, further study is needed to explore this in more depth.

5.2 Addressing the UK Urban Church

We now turn to consider the contribution of this thesis to institutional knowledge beyond the academy. Here we will focus particularly on the implications of our findings for the UK urban Church. The audience I have selected here is complex and multi-faceted, ranging in scope from local congregations to national denominational bodies, parachurch organisations and infrastructure agencies. It also encompasses a wide variety of theological outlooks and approaches to urban engagement. Such diversity could be seen to challenge or undermine the presumption that there exists a singular UK urban Church. Underlying this whole research project, however, has been a concern on my part to facilitate greater appreciation and understanding between urban Christians of different traditions. It is this that leads me to locate the suggestions that follow in an appeal to an imagined UK urban Church.

In the light of my professional experience over the past fifteen years, I suggest that each of the three main approaches to Christian social ethics we have considered (public-reformist, subversive, ecclesial) has a counterpart within approaches to urban ministry promoted by institutional bodies in the UK urban Church. Outside

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[117] The footnotes in Section 4.3 suggest areas for further research and conceptual development.

evangelical networks, it seems a hybrid of the public-reformist and urban liberation theology approaches has often prevailed. This has been reflected at a national level within the particular approaches to urban ministry promoted by the Church of England and at a local level within the forms of social action encouraged by Church-initiated infrastructure bodies and projects. My experience suggests that these activities of the institutional Urban Church often fail to engage with charismatic-evangelical churches. This is because they do not articulate the case for urban involvement in a way that charismatic-evangelicals can relate to. A key implication of this is that institutional bodies need to recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' model of urban involvement to which all churches must conform. They need to become more adept at working with a wider range of theologies. As an urban practitioner, my sense is that such a shift might already be occurring in some quarters,[118] yet this needs to become more deeply embedded and sustained.

Having considered the challenge the research findings pose for the more institutional elements of the UK urban Church, we now turn to consider the implications for its charismatic-evangelical wing.[119] For me, the central challenge here is one of encouraging charismatic-evangelical Christians to move beyond the simplistic 'heroic' rhetoric of church-initiated transformation with which much charismatic-evangelical urban discourse abounds. This often carries with it imperialist overtones and expectations of success that do little to equip charismatic-evangelical Christians for the complexities and ambiguities of urban involvement. It is easy to be dismissive but rather than responding with self-righteous criticism or superimposing an alternative theological framework that feels alien to charismatic-evangelicals, I suggest that the key to the facilitation of more meaningful change lies in the cultivation of critical reflection skills. The PCE urban social ethic that I have articulated is a first step towards this. However, as I have already acknowledged, this can only be fully developed in practice.

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[118] This was demonstrated by the variety of perspectives I encountered among speakers and delegates at the Church Urban Fund's *Tackling Poverty* annual conference in Leeds on 18 April 2012.

[119] The audience I have in mind here includes national Christian organisations that support charismatic-evangelical involvement and local congregations like the ones I studied.

CHAPTER 6:   CONCLUSION

In exploring the motivation and practice of the UK charismatic-evangelical urban church, this thesis has sought to address lack of attention to charismatic-evangelical urban practice across four different bodies of academic literature (voluntary sector studies; the sociology of religion; Christian social ethics; and evangelical, charismatic and Pentecostal theology). In addressing these gaps, this study has worked towards two overarching purposes. Firstly, it has sought to enable greater understanding of charismatic-evangelical motivation and urban practice. Secondly, it has sought to reflect theologically on such motivation and practice with a view to articulating a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic.

My strategy for achieving these objectives was informed by Swinton and Mowat's four-stage model for integrating the use of qualitative research methods with theological reflection (Swinton & Mowat, 2006). In the light of issues encountered in personal and professional practice, I designed and conducted a multi-method programme of qualitative research in an attempt to uncover motivation, practice, and perceived impact within four UK charismatic-evangelical urban churches. Analysis of the descriptive findings led on to the development of a six-fold typology for conceptualising the tensions encountered in charismatic-evangelical urban practice. These descriptive findings were then assessed and interpreted in the light of the findings of other studies within voluntary sector studies and the sociology of religion. The task of (more explicit) theological reflection began with a series of facilitated dialogues between charismatic-evangelical urban practice and established theoretical perspectives from Christian social ethics. This then led on to an attempt to sketch out in outline form the conceptual components of a practical charismatic-evangelical (PCE) urban social ethic that is both consistent with charismatic-evangelical convictions and open to perspectives from other traditions. Finally with a view to formulating revised practice, the implications of the preceding analysis for the academy and the UK urban Church were explored.

Having provided this reminder of the overall architecture of the thesis, we now turn to summarising its main findings and contribution to knowledge. This will be structured around consideration of the study's two overarching purposes.

Increased understanding of charismatic-evangelical urban practice

In Chapter 3, we presented the findings of the ethnographic study and focus groups, describing charismatic-evangelical urban practice, motivation, and perceived impact in turn. Reflection on these descriptive findings then led to the identification of the following six tensions that were experienced by the four churches studied:

1. Service providers versus Intentional communities
2. Collaborative versus Counter-cultural tendencies
3. Spiritual-evangelistic versus Socio-economic intentions
4. Locally indigenous versus Expansive horizons
5. Heroic versus Mundane self-perception
6. Reflexive versus Applied theology

This was followed by an attempt to consider the position of each of the four churches with relation to these tensions. Tensions 2, 3, 5, and 6 were found to be particularly significant in illuminating contrasting approaches *between* churches (although there was also some sense of internal tension), while tensions 1 and 4 appeared to be primarily internal tensions experienced *within* each church. This enabled the position of each church to be plotted diagrammatically at the end of Chapter 3. In the first part of Chapter 4, we went on to compare our descriptive conclusions with the findings of previous research across a variety of disciplines. This revealed that each of our six tensions had a degree of identification and resonance with the findings of other studies although, in a number of respects, our findings challenged established understandings. As indicated in Figure 14 below, our engagement with wider bodies of literature also led us to a more complex and sophisticated understanding of each of the six tensions.

The implications of these findings for voluntary sector studies and the sociology of religion were then drawn out in Chapter 5. For voluntary sector studies, tensions 1 and 3 were shown to be significant in distinguishing charismatic-evangelical urban practice from other forms of faith-based social action. This thesis therefore represents a contribution to knowledge and understanding of an under-researched type of faith group whose activities in socially and economically disadvantaged

neighbourhoods have often fallen beneath the radar in previous studies. Various priorities for further research have also been identified. To the sociology of religion, our findings have brought increased knowledge and understanding of charismatic and evangelical Christianity. By illuminating charismatic-evangelicalism's influence within disadvantaged urban contexts, this thesis helps to provide a more complex picture of the subtleties and nuances concerning the relationship between UK evangelicalism and class. Given, however, that the relationship between evangelicalism and class was not the main focus of my study, we also need to emphasise the limitations of this contribution (as a preliminary enquiry) and the need for further research.

Figure 14 – Descriptive Conclusions and Interpretative Conclusions

Dimension	Tension identified (Descriptive conclusions)	Perspectives from other studies (Interpretative conclusions)
1. Mode	Service providers versus Intentional communities	Charismatic-evangelical engagement in service provision is relatively limited compared with other forms of faith-based voluntary action.
2. Orientation	Collaborative versus Counter-cultural	Greater attentiveness to eschatology and denominational difference is needed in understanding this tension.
3. Intentions	Spiritual-evangelistic versus Socio-economic	An understanding of the spiritual-evangelistic needs to be sensitive not only to whether faith is shared evangelistically but how. Conceptualisation of the socio-economic needs to take into account the distinction between 'sticking plaster' and 'systemic' approaches.
4. Horizons	Locally indigenous versus Expansive	In understanding this tension, greater consideration needs to be given to the significance of social class.
5. Self-perception	Heroic versus Mundane	The concepts of 'missionary' and 'neighbour' (Thompson, 2012, p. 50) provide an alternative vocabulary for conceptualising this tension.
6. Theological model	Reflexive versus Applied	Charismatic-evangelical responses to this tension need to be understood in the wider context of UK evangelicalism's attempts to adapt to a rapidly changing social context.

Contribution to Theology and Social Ethics

The second overarching purpose of this study was to reflect theologically on the motivation and practice of the charismatic-evangelical urban church with a view to articulating a distinctive practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic. In this regard, there are two dimensions to the contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes.

Firstly this thesis may be seen as an attempt to explore the implications of the "ethnographic turn" (Phillips, 2012, p. 97) for Christian social ethics. In encouraging public, subversive and ecclesial forms of Christian social ethics to pay greater attention to charismatic-evangelical urban practice (as well as contemporary ecclesial practice more generally),[120] it represents both a contribution and a challenge to established theoretical approaches. Secondly, the PCE urban social ethic that I have outlined contributes to evangelical and charismatic theology as well as Christian social ethics. As summarised in Figure 15 below, this represents a creative conceptual response to the six tensions found in charismatic-evangelical urban practice.[121]

Figure 15 – Components of a Practical Charismatic-Evangelical Urban Social Ethic

Conceptual component	Tension this relates to
i) Mission as God's turning to the world	Collaborative versus Counter-cultural
ii) A holistic vision of God's Kingdom	Spiritual-evangelistic versus Socio-economic
iii) Faithful improvisation	Reflexive versus Applied
iv) A Spirit-infused virtue ethic	Heroic versus Mundane
v) Church as *oikos-polis*	Service providers versus Intentional communities
vi) A comprehensive Christological framework	Locally indigenous versus Expansive

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[120] Although I suggest that there are particular reasons why established theoretical approaches need to acknowledge and engage with charismatic-evangelical urban practice, the more general point about attending to ecclesial practice (whatever form it takes) is also important.

[121] Once again, it needs to be stressed that this model has currently been sketched only in outline form. In Chapter 5, I identified a number of potential areas (both conceptual and practical) for its further development.

In summarising the contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes, I suggest that the breadth of its engagement is both a major strength and a limitation that needs to be acknowledged. In achieving its purposes, the thesis makes a distinct contribution to four different bodies of academic literature, as well as enhancing institutional and professional knowledge. Engaging with each of these disciplines has been necessary in order to achieve the objectives of the study and consider charismatic-evangelical urban practice from a range of vantage points. A limitation of this approach, however, is that I have not been able to engage with any one body of literature as deeply or intensively as I would have if conducting the research with a narrower disciplinary focus. This work should therefore be seen not as a prepositional thesis but a foundational one. As such, it opens up a new field of enquiry and sets out theoretical conceptions intended to provoke further scholarly enquiry and reflective practice.

APPENDIX 1 – OUTLINE OF FOCUS GROUP TOPICS

Focus Group Questions / Discussion Topics:
The motivations and practice of the charismatic-evangelical urban church in engaging with disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Introductions
- Welcome and Session overview
- Consent Forms

Opening questions:
1. **Please introduce yourselves by telling me your name, how long you've been part of this church and whether you have any particular role or area of involvement**

2. **Can you give me a brief initial sketch of the main ways that you as a church are involved in the local community?**
   - Who runs these activities? (Paid staff or volunteers?)
   - Are there other organisations you work with in running these activities?
   - How is your work in the community funded?

Aims and motivations:
3. **What are you (as a church) trying to achieve through these activities?** What would you say is the church's main reason or motivation for doing this?

Impact (positive or negative):
4. **How do you think what you're doing is having an impact on the local community?**
   - Do you have any stories or examples that illustrate this?
   - Are there areas where you would like to have had more impact?
   - Do you think that you as a church have changed as a result of your engagement with the local community?

SHORT BREAK

Theological Reflection:
In this final section, we are asking you to think about the connections between the Christian faith and your experiences of engaging with this community.

5. **Are there biblical stories, characters or themes that you feel particularly inform what you're doing in this community?**

6. **Do you think your faith and beliefs have been affected or changed by your experiences of engaging with the local community?** If so, how?

Conclusion
7. **Is there anything else you think we should know that you haven't had a chance to say?**

APPENDIX 2 – CODING SYSTEM

A simplified version of the coding system that was used for analysing the data from the ethnographic study and focus groups is provided below.

Ethnographic Study (Field Notes and Documentary Sources)

Main code	Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2
The research process (321)	Joining / settling in (14)	
	Critical incidents (11)	
	(My) emotional reactions (37)	
	Reflection and interpretation (209)	On OCF (141)
		On research process (52)
		Auto-biographical reflection (16)
	Church engagement with research process (35)	
	Phasing out / leaving (15)	
Practices and structures (851)	Congregational life (623)	Leadership (19)
		Membership (66)
		Services (79)
		Ecclesial identity (44)
		House groups and Core Communities (167)
		Community outreach activities (248)
	Key themes (228)	Care, support, attention (32)
		Approach to faith sharing (49)
		God-talk (11)
		Prayer (12)
		Working with others (60)
		Organisation & structure (21)
		Conflict, tensions & difference (14)
		Fresh expressions? (17)
		Other (12)
Aims, motivations, worldview (273)	Summary statements (45)	(Purpose statements; Calling; Perspectives on local area; Biblical inspiration)
	Key concerns (76)	Understanding of mission (50)
		Wider concerns (26) – growing closer to God; loving & caring for each other; discipleship
	Social ethic (107)	'The World' (29)
		'The Church' (14)
		Political outlook (41)
		Other (23)
	Theological motifs (45)	Salvation (12)
		The Church (10)
		Eschatology (7)
		Jesus (5)
		Other (11)
Perceived impact (80)	Type of impact (52)	On congregation (19)
		Evangelistic impact (9)
		Church's presence / profile in community (17)
		Wider socio-economic impacts (7)
	Wider themes (28)	Difficulties assessing impact (9)
		Numbers of participants (12)
		Impacts attributed to God (7)

Focus Groups (Transcripts)

Main code	Sub-code 1	Sub-code 2
Background (37)		
Practices / structures (373)	Types of activity (182)	Activity overviews (3)
		Activities with identified target groups (101)
		'Being community' (28)
		Other types of activity (47)
		Potential future activities (3)
	Cross-cutting themes (191)	Partnership with others (97)
		Approach to faith-sharing and discipleship (47)
		Background and roles of participants (19)
		Funding / financial model (14)
		Types of neighbourhood / locality (11)
		Long-term commitment (3)
Aims / motivations (276)	Sources & types of influence (154)	Personal drivers (33)
		Official (organisational) view (9)
		The prophetic (5)
		Other (5)
		The Bible (102)
	Spiritual or socio-economic (107)	Primarily evangelistic (26)
		Wider socio-economic (22)
		Both-and (59)
	What kind of church they want to be (15)	
Perceived impact (243)	Measuring / assessing impact (22)	
	On neighbourhood (97)	Numbers supported / involved (8)
		Positive (72)
		Limited (15)
		Negative (2)
	On church (53)	Positive (21)
		Negative (15)
		Organisational learning (17)
	On individual participants (71)	Faith development / theological outlook (47)
		Wider impact (24)
Wider socio-political outlook (26)	Understanding of poverty / oppression (18)	
	View of 'the secular' (4)	
	On political engagement (4)	

Notes
- The numbers in brackets indicate the number of times that a code or sub-code was assigned to a segment of text.
- There were 1,525 segments of coded text from the ethnographic data and 955 segments from the focus groups.
- Within parts of the analysis, up to seven levels of sub-code were used. For the sake of visual simplicity, however, only the first two levels are presented here.

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