# The disconnected church:

# a critical examination of the communication of the Christian church in New Zealand

Michael Robert Crudge

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Primary Supervisor: Dr Frances Nelson
Secondary Supervisor: Dr Rosser Johnson

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|---|---|---|---|
| **Student ID No** | 0786185 | **Name** | Michael Robert Crudge |
| **Faculty** | Design and Creative Technologies | **School/Dept** | Communication Studies |
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          M R Crudge                              Date

# Acknowledgements

# Memorial

On 22 February 2011 there was a natural disaster in Christchurch, New Zealand, where I have lived since 2009: a very shallow 6.1 magnitude earthquake that devastated the city. This occurred during my work on this thesis, and has become a monument in time for me. I personally knew one of the 185 people killed: Dr Maysoon Abbas, my GP, who I had visited at the medical centre in the infamous CTV Building three weeks before it collapsed, killing her and 114 others.

Maysoon, I didn't know you well. In that last visit I remember we talked about research in general and you were very encouraging. For me, you are the face of those that died that day, and in this small way I remember.



Figure i: CTV Building, Christchurch, New Zealand, circa 2010
(photo from http://www.christchurchstar.co.nz)



Figure ii: CTV Building, Christchurch, New Zealand, 22 February 2011
(photo from http://asset.ninemsn.com.au)

# Ethical approval

This thesis reports on research involving humans undertaken in the form of interviews and focus groups. These were approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) as follows:

The ethics application number for the interview process was 08/224, approved by AUTEC on 10 December 2008. This is shown in Appendix A.

The ethics application number for the focus groups was 10/314, approved by AUTEC on 2 March 2011. This is shown in Appendix B.

# Abstract

The purpose of my research is to investigate if and why some people outside of the church do not see relevance in the church, and to investigate if and why the church does not see relevance in the point of view of these people outside of the church. This research project will explore the possibility that this is an instance of two separate groups of people who think they have the same concept in mind when they use the word "church" but may in fact hold entirely different ideas about what "church" is. In other words this research investigates the issues around communication and the church, and is therefore situated in the communication problem.

My research is based on the proposition that the Christian church in New Zealand is maladapted to contemporary society. By maladaptation I mean, specifically, that the church is failing to meet its own claim to be relevant, is failing to connect individual's spirituality with their profane daily lives, and exhibits a diminishing capacity to manifest good in the world. The purpose of this research is to use basic communication theory as the lens to identify and then prove this maladaptation, by first, in stage 1, seeking to discover how some people outside the church perceive the church.

I let the framework of critical studies guide my use of qualitative data gathering through in-depth semi-structured interviewing of people who have never had anything to do with the church, people I define as not being Christianised. In order to narrow down my sample group, I interviewed people who self-defined themselves as being spiritual. Through the process of thematic analysis nine "perceptions" of the church were uncovered, which were overwhelmingly negative. In stage 2, I presented these nine perceptions to a selection of church leaders through the process of focus groups, in order to discover their reaction to how some people outside of the church perceive the church. This identified a massive gap, or disconnect, in the way the people in each of these two research stages view themselves and each other. The church representatives in stage 2 expose strong ingroup tendencies which may be negatively affecting the

communication and work of the church. They also expressed the difficulty they face as they identify as Christians in New Zealand.

I suggest two new labels to define the church and its communication (mission) connection within society: firstly, the "disconnected church" which through its modus operandi fosters the historical connection to the past era and attitude I define as Christendom. A disconnected church (and disconnected Christians) struggle with the realities of how hard it actually is to be Christian, but they do not embrace the fact that many of the difficulties experienced through a negative response from society might actually be the result of how the church and Christians are *being* Christian.

My second new label is the "connected church", which describes a church through which its modus operandi shows evidence of understanding and appreciation of the current context it finds itself in. It therefore lives with the tension of both holding cultural change loosely enough to be able to evolve with changes such as leadership structures, community values, and philosophical influences such as post-modernity, as well as retaining theological and spiritual integrity in the essence of being Christian.

# Chapter 1: Background

## 1.1  Introduction: the maladapted church?

My research is based on the proposition that the Christian church in New Zealand is maladapted to contemporary society.  By maladaptation I mean specifically, that the church is failing to meet its own claim to be relevant, that it is failing to connect individuals' spirituality with their profane daily lives, and that it exhibits a diminishing capacity to manifest good in the world.  The maladaptation I have specified here has both affectively and effectively disconnected the church from its ability to be the answer when a person asks, "What do I do with my spirituality?"

This is not to argue that the church is invisible in contemporary society.  Indeed, it is almost certain that any adult who has been socialised in New Zealand will have some perception of the church, no matter how minimal, because there are things in this country that either publicly display the church or are bound historically to church tradition.  First, it is impossible to drive through a New Zealand town or city without seeing church buildings, although sometimes these are now cafes, restaurants, art galleries, shops, or houses.  Second, two of New Zealand's longest statutory holidays are focused around Christian traditions:  Christmas (the birth of Jesus), and Easter (now the death and resurrection of Jesus).  Third, significant events that cause the country to pause and ponder also show clear representation of the church, such as Sir Edmund Hillary's funeral in January 2008 – where prayer, homilies and other Christian traditions were observed either live or on prime-time news bulletins.  Fourth, almost 2.2 million New Zealanders watched on television the British royal wedding in 2011 between Prince William and Catherine Middleton (Fuseworks Media, 2011).  This royal event was centred on a formal and traditional Church of England church service.  And last, across the country, ANZAC Day dawn services now attract thousands of attendees who stand through a traditional church service with hymns, prayers, and homily.

The central issue, then, is not whether New Zealanders know of the church; rather, it is what meanings they make in connection to the church when they encounter "the spiritual" in their own lives.  Or, to put it another way, why would a person who might be expected to know of the church choose not to express their spirituality within it?

## 1.2  Individuals' spirituality & the Christian church: the "problem" of Sam

In order to explore this point, I posit a hypothetical person called "Sam," whom I envisage as a New Zealander, spiritual but never Christianised.[1]  Furthermore, I see Sam as someone who has journeyed into and found sustenance in her own spiritual exploration, but has never found Christian spirituality something she has considered helpful or has been drawn to.  My observation, based on my years as a pastor within the Baptist church in New Zealand, is that Sam is not an uncommon phenomenon in early twenty-first century New Zealand society and furthermore, that there is an increasing number of people like Sam.  The "Sam phenomenon" – that is, spirituality made manifest outside the church – is matched by another observation in New Zealand society: the decrease in Christian spirituality and affiliation to, and participation in, the Christian church (Guy, 2011; Ward, 2006).

I believe "Sam" is indicative of a steady decline in the relevance of the Christian church and Christian spirituality in New Zealand society, and that this loss of relevance is partly caused by the communication of the church into society.  Understanding Sam, therefore, could be the key to interpreting and making sense of the current situation the church finds itself in.  Sam, and Sam's sense of the Christian church, became therefore the logical starting point of my curiosity,

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[1] By Christianised I mean she has not been socialised or educated into Christianity or any church organisational subcultures such as going to Sunday School as a child.  "Sam" would therefore not have any *personal* experience of the church but be well positioned to explore her spirituality within it, should she choose to do so.  Sam could be either gender; I will refer to her as female throughout this thesis.

and led to the development of this research.  Figure 1.1 below has in the centre a person labelled "Ss" for Spiritual seeker: this represents Sam.
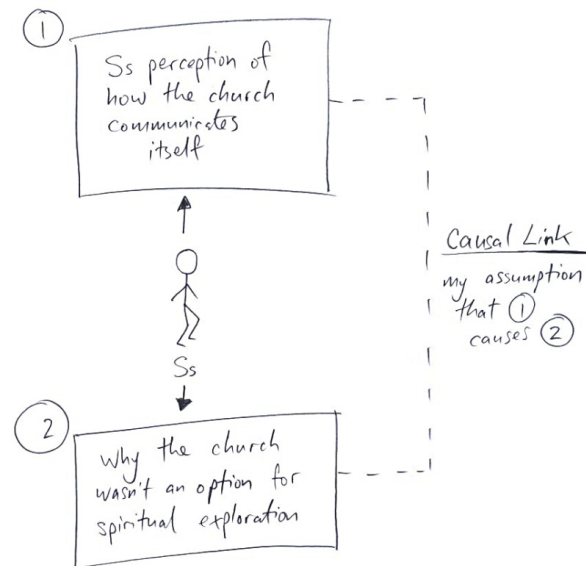


Figure 1.1: A causal link for spiritual seekers.

Here, Box one represents my assumptions about Sam's perceptions of both the style and content of the church's communication to the world.  Given that Sam would know of the church's existence as a possible outlet for her spirituality, I assume that she actively chooses an alternative outlet, at least in part because of the messages she has received about the church from a range of sources.

When considering the communication of the church, it is important to note that this could derive either from itself (directly) or from an independent source (indirectly).  Direct communication would include institutional or individual communication, such as church billboards, members of the clergy, Christian political parties, church members in public media, or from Christian people known by Sam, such as extended family members, friends, neighbours, or colleagues.  Indirect communication of the church would include things such as

media reports about the church or about the people of the church, or even representations of the church in popular culture.

In my projection of my assumptions about Sam, she is a spiritual person who has chosen not to explore her spirituality in the church.  Box 2 represents that the church was not an option for spiritual exploration and my research aims to discover why Sam did not make use of the church as a resource for exploring her spirituality.  Sam is a social artefact that I have personally encountered and have a professional awareness of and I therefore cannot help but have some informed but pre-existing ideas about why Sam would not choose to explore her spirituality within the church.  To declare myself in the research, then, I must declare that these pre-existing ideas are based on my own experiences of church: I do not believe the church does a good job of communicating itself in society and I have noticed that the media presents a predominantly negative view of the  church.  I also believe Christian people sometimes represent the church poorly within society.  As I begin the research, I do not know with certainty Sam's perception of the church or why she did not choose to explore her spirituality within it.  However, as Figure 1.1 demonstrates, I wonder if there is a causal link between Box 1 and Box 2, and my assumption is that 1 causes 2: that Sam's perception of how the church is communicated is the reason why the church has never been a place for Sam to explore her spirituality.

I find it helpful to present the objects of my research visually on a time continuum.  In Figure 1.1, the causal link between Box 1 and Box 2 shows my assumption that 1 causes 2.  Figure 1.2 below, however, shows 1 and 2 being quite independent of each other.  My research will seek to find out if there is any shared understanding and therefore common ground between Sam's journey and the church.  Figure 1.2 represents the same concepts as Figure 1.1, but shown relative to time:
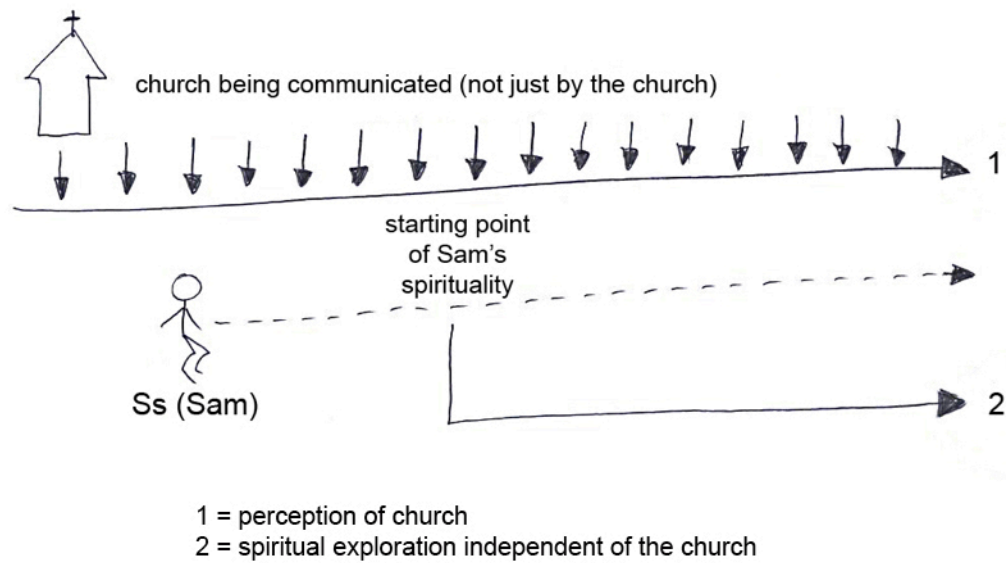
Figure 1.2: Spiritual seeker timeline.

The top solid horizontal line shows the time that the church has been communicating itself – or the communication of the church (Box 1 from Figure 1.1). Time is shown as moving from left to right. The church in New Zealand, shown in this diagram symbolically by a building on the left hand side, exists in time before Sam (person Ss), and so has a history of communication pre-Sam. The multiple downward-arrows from the church represent the church being communicated through time. The dashed horizontal line from Sam represents time for Sam, and the bottom solid horizontal line shows the point in time that Sam began her spiritual exploration independent of the church, which in reality may have been more of a process than a single point in time.

## 1.3  Exploring the problem: communication and "the church"

The problem that this research engages with is therefore fundamentally one of communication. In its most basic form communication is the establishment of common ground in terms of shared understanding. If there is no common ground, there is an inability to reach shared understanding, which means there will be an inability to communicate effectively. I will investigate if common

ground exists between some "Sam" representatives and the Christian church, and if any shared understanding exists enabling common ground, or in other words effective communication.  Depending on whether there is common ground or not, I will seek to discover if this is independent of the Christian church or because of it.  Sam and people like her will be the starting point of this exploration.

I have so far used the word "church" without defining it.  By "church" I mean the universal organisation of all Christians regardless of any particular tradition, denomination or doctrine, Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant.  I am aware that the church is represented in many different ways throughout the world.  Jinkins (1999) describes it well when referring to the original expressions of the church:

> …we do not find a single homogeneous or monolithic "community of faith."  On the contrary, we find a polymorphic cloud of witnessing communities whose shapes change with the times and locales, the winds, and other atmospheric necessities, a plurality of communities in different contexts, bearing sacred traditions often at variance with other communities of faith.  (pp. 3-4)

At this point of this thesis I want to make it clear that I appreciate that the word "church" will mean different things to different people, especially between those who are inside the church and those who look at it from the outside.  As Jinkins describes the situation: "the church exists in irreducible plurality and particularity… the church possesses a complexity that defies easy answers and clear definitions" (1999, p. 5). My interest in Jinkins' plurality of concepts is quite parochial: I am concerned with the current Western expression of the church, with specific attention to New Zealand.

Sometimes I will talk about the church specifically as an institution: a large and powerful organisation.  The history of this institution shows a considerable outreach into social life in New Zealand through the influence of British colonial rule.  This influence was about the formation of a societal system based on a particular model: the British colonised New Zealand, the British were

Christian influenced. Christian missionaries were a significant strand of the pre-Treaty of Waitangi (pre-1840) European population and there were several church-related settlements initiated in the nineteenth century such as the Presbyterian Church scheme in Otago and the Church of England scheme in Canterbury (Guy, 2011). Much of the social contract in New Zealand originated in the institution of the church.

At other times I will refer to the "classical church" by which I mean standard and "authoritative," within the context of Christendom, a concept I will develop in detail in chapter 2, as opposed to new or experimental. I take most expressions of the church in New Zealand to be what I define as classical church regardless of how "contemporary" they might appear. In this thesis, I will also sometimes use the phrase "Christian-faith-community" as a way of describing church when the connotations of "classical church" are not desired. I have arrived at Christian-faith-community as a description of church because ultimately it is an expression of community facilitated by people with Christian faith or spirituality.

The place of the church in New Zealand has changed significantly in the last 150 years. In the 1926 Census 73.3% of the population indicated affiliation with Anglican, Presbyterian, or Methodist churches (Ward, 2006), this had declined to approximately 27% in 2006 (New Zealand Government, 2006). Regular church attendance has never been high in New Zealand. The first census in 1881 showed that approximately 20% of the population attended church weekly. Attendance figures peaked in 1896, when approximately 30% of the adult population attended church weekly. In 1999 denominational returns indicated that approximately 10% of the population attend church weekly (Ward, 2006). Knowing that church attendance has declined to a regular attendance that is probably a third of what it once was, I am even more fascinated by the perception people in New Zealand society have of the church. I position myself inside the classical church and believe that one of the

objectives of the church is to offer a welcoming, hospitable presence of Christian spirituality.

Despite the church's belief that it welcomes all, I have noticed, as I have already said, that  Sam and people like her find and explore their spirituality outside the church.  My observation, from inside the church, is that many people within the church organisation would consider that Sam's lack of engagement with the church is a problem, but that the problem lies not with the church, but rather with Sam, created by her situated in her.  My insight, or the hunch I have entering into this research project, is that Sam's avoidance of the church is, in fact, caused by something the church does or does not do and is not an independently occurring phenomenon.  From Sam's point of view the church is simply not relevant.  From my personal point of view, I wonder if the church has a communication problem and whether miscommunication is fuelling Sam's view that the church is irrelevant in the post-secularised context  that is New Zealand society (Davidson & Lineham, 1995).

It is not difficult to find examples of the kind of communication that I suspect may increase the irrelevance of the church.  For instance, when I visit Auckland I use a university office on the seventh floor of a building that overlooks Aotea Square in the heart of the Central Business District.  On Saturday mornings at 11.30am a group of about eight people arrive in the square with a guitar and have a sing-along for half an hour.  They sing church songs, while jumping around and waving their hands in the air.  I have never talked to them so I do not know their reason for this public display of what might best be described as a particular type of in-house church behaviour.  They do not appear to be busking, even though they stand where many buskers perform.  It does not appear to be a performance, but rather a statement: I suspect they want to show the public that they enjoy singing church songs, that they believe the words they are singing, and that they want the public to hear these words.  I personally find this odd and embarrassing, that they are representing the church publically as a stereotypical happy-clappy sing-along.

Second, within one week in February 2013, I had two pairs of Asian students stopping me on the streets near the university campus asking if I would help them with a "short survey" they were doing for their study. Being a researcher myself, I am often willing to help others as they gather data so I agreed to help these students. They had an iPad and told me I just needed to watch a short video they had made, so I agreed and they pressed play. The opening title on the professional looking video was "Introducing the Bible". I had been conned. I watched the first 30 seconds to confirm my suspicion that they were Christians getting me to watch an evangelistic video trying to convert me to their faith. I could see the video was five minutes long, and I was not interested in watching it so excused myself. Maybe their "research" was gauging the reactions of people to their video, but I suspect they were intentionally tricking people into watching their version of church propaganda. I felt cheated, that my goodwill and intelligence had been taken advantage of.

Third, in May 2012 a private members bill was put forward called the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill. There has been a noticeable Christian voice in the media against the support of same-sex marriage (Davidson, 2012), but it turns out that only about 14% of a population sample opposes both same-sex marriage and also claims to be religious or spiritual,[2] and this number are included in the 31% of people who do not support the change. The bill passed in April 2013, and was followed by comments such as that of Conservative Party leader, and Christian, Colin Craig saying the gay marriage vote is "a failure of democracy" (MediaWorks TV, 2013). With the regular church attendance in New Zealand being approximately 10% of the adult population,[3] in a post-secularised social context, the church voice is a minority of New Zealanders. I personally feel democracy has been well played

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[2] Of the 31% who do not support same-sex marriage, 47% of them identified with a religious or spiritual group. 47% of the 31% is 14.57% meaning just over 14% of the total sample were religious or spiritual and did not support same-sex marriage (Colmar Brunton, 2012).
[3] A graph showing the extrapolation of church attendance can be seen in chapter 5.

with this new bill, and much of the public church voice on this matter has been out of touch with reality.

Fourth, the one church in New Zealand that constantly features in the media is the Destiny Church led by Bishop Brian Tamaki. Media exposure usually appears when something counter-cultural to New Zealand society occurs. One example of this was in 2009 when 700 men in the church swore an oath of allegiance to leader Tamaki and paid $295 each for a covenant ring (Tahana, 2009). Quoted in the New Zealand Herald newspaper, Peter Lineham criticised Destiny:

> There's huge amounts of social control going on. The oath creates a community where you don't have to think for yourself. At its heart it makes it difficult for anyone to raise concerns about the direction the movement's taking. There's no room to hold him [Bishop Tamaki] accountable, and that's the scariest thing. (Tahana, 2009)

When the general public read about this or see it on the television news, I suspect their opinion of it would be similar to mine, which is to cringe at the cult-like nature of the church being represented, but to, perhaps, assign those characteristics to "the church" in general.

Last, many people living in New Zealand would have noticed church signs or billboards, often advertising events like the Alpha course, and sometimes displaying pithy one-liners or puns that suggest the reader of the sign is a sinner going to hell unless they go to church on Sunday. There is one Anglican church in Auckland known for its controversial pre-Christmas billboards: St Matthews-in-the-City church in the Central Business District. The controversy is normally only within other factions of the church, because the images are usually aimed at the debate around traditional Christian beliefs. For example, in December 2012, the billboard showed a picture of baby Jesus in a crib with the words "It's Christmas. Time for Jesus to come out." There was a halo around the baby's head in the form of a rainbow. This was a clever play on words because it is very common in New Zealand at Christmas time for the decorations in shops and homes to have symbols from the Nativity scene, such

as wise men, shepherds, animals, and a baby Jesus in a manger. So just as all the other Christmas decorations, such as lights and tinsel, get dusted off, so too, baby Jesus might literally come out of the closet.

But in contemporary New Zealand society, it is also common knowledge that the words "to come out" are used to mean someone expresses publically that they are gay. The church has traditionally been opposed to homosexuality (Yip, 1997) and much of it still is, and so the Christian opposition to this billboard was the abhorrence that anyone might think Jesus was gay. In actual fact, the Bible does not say anything about Jesus' sexual orientation. On the internet many comments from the public can be seen about this particular billboard, including on St Matthews-in-the-City's own facebook page (2012). The point of the billboard was to provoke discussion about sexual orientation. Reading through online comments about this, it seems the public see the humour, but the reaction from other church groups, such as vandalising the sign, along with protests around it, are, I suspect, seen by the public as parts of the church missing the satire, and lacking an ability to engage in discussion with a contemporary issue.

There are, of course, many other examples of church communications that are much more in-house, such as sermons, church newsletters, and church websites. For the purposes of my research, these are less important because Sam is hardly likely to come across them. Of the five examples above, I suspect Sam would see the point of the St Matthews-in-the-city billboard, and appreciate the provocative nature of it, but her observation of how some of the other churches respond to it would confirm a lack of common ground. I suspect the other four examples would simply give evidence of a lack of shared understanding.

Notwithstanding my criticisms here, I do not necessarily doubt the sincerity of the Christian beliefs underpinning the communication I am taking issue with: I am sure that if I were to have open conversations with the Aotea Square

Christian sing-along group, the Asian student Christian survey-tricksters, Colin Craig, or Bishop Brian Tamaki, they would all have well-intentioned reasons backed with passionate commitment to the cause of each of their interpretations of the Christian church and tradition. My question is: Why does it seem that such well-intentioned expressions of communication from and about the church seem to be accepted so poorly by people like Sam? The nature of these communications is, in my opinion, through my own observation and understanding, at odds with the kind of communication that could be successful with Sam, or at least done in a way that shares common ground and understanding.

## 1.4 Purpose of research

If there is a communication problem, I believe it is contextual to two things: first, the phenomenon that is Sam, and second, the phenomenon that is the church. My research is situated in the communication problem. The purpose of this research is to investigate if and why Sam does not see relevance in the church, and to investigate if and why the church does not see relevance in Sam's point of view. This research project will explore the possibility that this is an instance of two separate groups of people who think they have the same concept in mind when they use the word "church" but may in fact hold entirely different ideas about what "church" is. In other words this research is to investigate the issues around communication and the church.

My research starts in stage 1 with society's perspective on the way the church is communicated. My starting point is to define the church as being a sub-set within society that believes it has something to offer both to its members as well as to society. The church communicates to society, to those outside of its sub-set, in various ways, for example, by actual speech, by physical presence, by reputation, and through its representatives (Christians). Those within this sub-set of society perceive this communication in a particular way. I am interested in how this communication is perceived by Sam and others like her who are outside this sub-set. My research will continue into a second stage, which is to

gauge the reaction of those inside the sub-set of the church to these outside perceptions. If there are communication problems, including miscommunication, I would expect these to show up through the engagement with these two separate groups of people. If this provides insights that could affect Christian praxis within the church, these ideas will shape my conclusion.

## 1.5 Research questions

I am going to address my research in two stages: in the first stage I am going to find and interview some people who represent Sam. I will discuss spirituality and the church with these "Sam" representatives in order to gain an understanding from them as receivers of the communication of the church in New Zealand. The question that relates to this stage of my research is:

> *What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?*

Stage 2 will involve taking the perceptions of the church from the "Sam" representatives back into the church by running some focus groups with church professionals or leaders as representatives of the source of the church's communication. The question that relates to this stage is:

> *What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and perceptions discovered in question one?*

These two questions together will allow me to achieve the purpose of my research by examining one dimension of the communication process that is occurring between the church and Sam. If Sam does not see relevance in the church, this examination should expose why that might be. If the church does not see relevance in Sam's point of view, this examination should expose that also. My data will be presented in two distinct sections due to the clarity of purpose of each of the two research questions. In question one I define the

New Zealand context as being post-Christendom as a way of signposting my own interpretation and understanding of early twenty-first century New Zealand society. Many writers, see for instance, Frost & Hirsch (2003), Kimball (2003), Murray (2004a), Trebilcock (2003), embrace Christendom as a paradigm or long period of time that is now over and this fact becomes significant in how churches maintain, construct, or evolve their identities. Post-Christendom will be discussed in detail in chapter 2.

## 1.6 Theoretical underpinnings

Communication consists of transmitting information. Lasswell (1948) described an act of communication as answering the following questions: who (says) what (to) whom (in) what channel (with) what effect (p. 216). Dance (1970) presented fifteen conceptual components that made up the plethora of definitions of communication at that time, as a way to show there were many meanings for the term. It is interesting to look at a few of these components as I begin to introduce the concept myself. The first of Dance's components was "symbols/verbal/speech", and he used a definition from Hoben (1954) to illustrate this: "Communication is the verbal interchange of thought or idea" (p. 77). The second component was "understanding", supported by a definition by Anderson (1959) "Communication is the process by which we understand others and in turn endeavor to be understood by them. It is dynamic, constantly changing and shifting in response to the total situation." The third component was "interaction/relationship/social process", with the following definition from Mead (1963) supporting this: "Interaction, even on the biological level, is a kind of communication; otherwise common acts could not occur" (p. 107). The fourth component was "reduction of uncertainty", using a definition from Barnlund (1962) to illustrate this: "Communication arises out of the need to reduce uncertainty, to act effectively, to defend or strengthen the ego" (p. 200). One final example, is Dance's fifth component: "process", where he uses a definition from Berelson and Steiner (1964) as illustration: "Communication: the transmission of information, ideas, emotions, skills, etc.,

by the use of symbols – words, pictures, figures, graphs, etc.  It is the act or process of transmission that is usually called communication" (p. 254).[4]

Dance (1970) examined ninety-five different definitions of communication to get his fifteen conceptions, and from there ended up with three main conceptual divisions: One, the level of observation; two, the presence or absence of intent on the part of the sender; and three, the normative judgment (goodness-badness/successful-unsuccessful) of the act.  My reason for introducing the work of Dance here is to illustrate the complexity in defining "communication" and to give insight into its meaning.

Communication therefore occurs when one or more people send and receive messages that may be distorted by noise, occur within certain contexts, have some kind of effect, and provide an opportunity for feedback.  Figure 1.3 below illustrates a basic communication theory.  It is based on the popular transmission model first introduced by Shannon and Weaver (1948) and shows the communication process that occurs when two people talk to each other.

The "sender" speaks, so in this case, an encoded verbal message is sent through a transmission channel  to the "receiver", who decodes the message according to his or her understanding and commitment to the message.  At every point in the process, the message is subject to noise, which Shannon (1949, p. 11), defined as "statistical and unpredictable perturbations".  Shannon's work has been extended to cover any form of interference or distortion that could alter the integrity of the message, and is now most commonly conceptualised in three ways.  First, physiological noise covers such things as, for instance, a lawn mower or screaming baby, and second, psychological noise refers, widely,  to the inability to concentrate on the message.  The third common form of noise is

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[4] The remaining ten components identified by Dance are: transfer/transmission/interchange, linking/binding, commonality, channel/carrier/means/route, replicating memories, discriminative response/behavior modifying/response/change, stimuli, intentional, time/situation, and power (Dance, 1970, pp. 204-208).

semantic: that interference to communication caused by misapprehended words and disputed meanings. Any message can engender feedback, which transforms the message receiver into a sender, and continues the communication process. In a spoken exchange, feedback might be either (or both) verbal or non-verbal, and both forms of communication are affected by ethnicity, distance, history, relationship status, and a host of other factors. All these factors are communicated and interpreted, creating perceptions and forming responses.
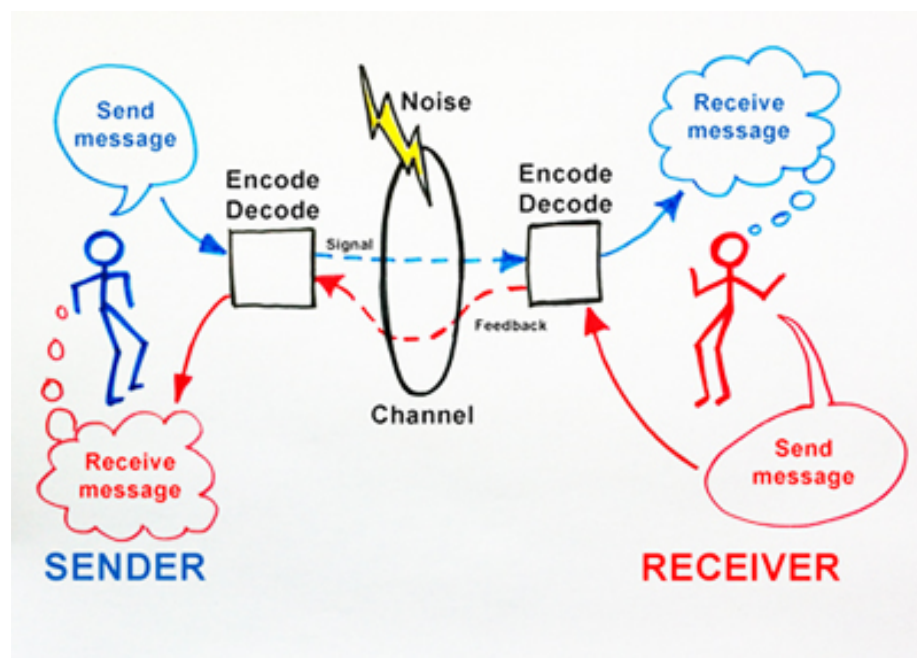


Figure 1.3: The Shannon-Weaver model of communication.

The seminal scholarship (Dance, 1970; Lasswell, 1948; Shannon & Weaver, 1948) I have referred to in the discussion above shows the amount of work that has gone into defining what is often taken for granted as a basic human function, and shows that even such a seemingly straightforward activity as interacting with another person can be fraught with difficulties. Most people probably do not even think about how complex communication can be, but rather, follow

their habits of speech and non-verbal interactions without considering that their message may lose its integrity before it ever reaches its intended receiver, and this lack of mindfulness is the precise location of the research I want to carry out.

If the theoretical framing of this research exists on a continuum, the communication process is towards one end: it is simple and descriptive, but, as I have argued above, by no means unimportant to the investigation I want to pursue. My motivation for the research is to help the church I believe in, but in order to do so, I feel I must place my research efforts at the other end of the putative continuum, because I see my research in the critical paradigm. Deetz (1996) describes the discourse of critical studies as a process where the "research aims at producing dissensus and providing forums for and models of discussion to aid in the building of more open consensus" (p. 202), and I discuss this fully in chapter 6. I resonate strongly with this term "dissensus" which is used by Deetz to describe the researcher's relationship with the dominant social discourse: someone either tends to be in consensus with it, meaning they are in unity with it, or they are in dissensus, meaning they are in difference with it. The ultimate goal of this "paradigm" in Deetz's model as I see it, is that through the dissensus, forums for and models of discussion will occur that will aid the building and development of more open consensus. My own hope and goal is to help build and develop a more open consensus within the institution of the church in New Zealand because of and from my research.

This is the philosophical orientation of my research which has formed and guided the design of my research. The first of my research questions:

> *What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?*

is where my interviews with the "Sam" representatives will give me an opportunity to explore what might be a dissenting view of the church: this is

the hypothesis I bring to my research born out of my own dissension. Equally my second research question:

> *What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and*
> *perceptions discovered in question one?*

will give me an opportunity to explore my own personal dissensus view of the church which emerges out of an intuitive feeling I have had since the late 1990s. This intuitive feeling influenced my decision to begin formal training in theology and pastoral leadership in the year 2000 to become a Baptist minister.

I have general questions about the internal functioning of the church and the current representation of Christian faith and lifestyle. These presuppositions of mine come from my own Christianised state within the organisation of the church. It is my concern about these things that prompt my research in this area: I ultimately care a lot about the future of the church. I believe my critical appraisal of the church from within it is an unusual position to hold, I am not trying to advance mainstream in-house classical church thought on the matter but rather introduce reflection from an alternative perspective. By acknowledging these presuppositions I hope to be able to approach this research openly without any hidden agendas or preconceived conclusions.

I am deliberately positioning my research outside of the academic theological field, because my experience within such a context, as well as my experience as a church practitioner, has highlighted to me the need for new insights to be offered back into this context from beyond it. Because my research dealt with the issue of communication, it made sense that I receive insight and guidance in this research from a school of communication studies rather than a school of theology.

The design of my research is in two distinct parts, and I have called them stage 1, and stage 2. I began this research with the "Sam" representatives in mind and it was the discovery of their perceptions of the church that ignited the

original concept of my research. The first of my two research questions was originally the only research question. As the analysis and discussion on this first stage was happening, it became obvious that my concerns and interest could not be contained in the original scope of my research. I needed to expand my research by taking the findings of stage 1 back into the church, which became what I have called stage 2, because I felt that the research would be only part of the picture without reflecting stage 1 back into the church. This is why I have ended up with two distinct halves, with stage 2 deriving from the research outcomes of stage 1.

The influencing theory behind my method of qualitative research is the concept of "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 3). Thick description as a guiding concept was a good fit for stage 1, and became a very good underpinning for stage 2 as well. The research process of stage 2, which was the process of mirroring back into the church what I discovered in stage 1, enabled a fuller, deeper, description and understanding of the communication situation as a whole. Thick description is about discovering meaning, and stage 2 of my research added an entirely separate but connected layer of meaning and discovery to my research.

## 1.7  Situating myself in the research

My own experience was growing up in New Zealand within the protestant and evangelical streams of the church, which in the last 20 years for me has been the Baptist context. I have been a fully registered minister of the Baptist churches of New Zealand since 2005. In February 2009 I began as the Assistant Minister at Oxford Terrace Baptist Church in Christchurch working half time. I would describe my theological views as open-evangelical[5]. My pastoral training has

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[5] By open-evangelical I mean I identify with the evangelical Christian tradition of the church, and I wish to acknowledge that parts of this tradition include people who have extreme right-wing political views, and people who have fundamentalist-like leanings, and that I do not identify with these parts, hence I would say I am open rather than closed with this identification. I would also use the word "spacious" to describe my appreciation of other parts

given me extensive exposure to five Baptist churches, and between 2004 and 2008 while I worked for the New Zealand Baptist theological college[6], my professional practice allowed me to develop a strong awareness of current cultural practices in many local Baptist churches around the country. This is important to my research because I bring to it a broad understanding and appreciation of at least one branch of the in-house church culture being investigated in the second research question. For myself I envisage a future within the church context helping develop and sustain Christian-faith-communities within and alongside current forms and expressions of church, with the hope that the cause of the church can positively progress into the future.

My interest in the communication of the church stems from my personal observations from within the church that have identified a disparity between what is intended inside the church and what is perceived outside the church. I believe I have a spacious rather than a confined or narrow view of why the church should exist which I have gained through experience and theological education. Reasons for the church existing are, in my opinion, positive social transformation of society and advocacy against injustices, as well as sustaining the spirituality of people who identify with the Christian faith or those who are exploring what Christian faith might mean for them. Robertson (2008) talks of the purpose of the church as being a "redemptive community", or at least working towards such a thing, which means having a positive effect in the neighbourhood (p. 184). Those former reasons have attached to them all manner of underlying motivations including those of politics and economics.

These issues cannot be isolated from Christian faith, but too often in my experience of church in New Zealand, there is not an engagement with these

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of the church who identify beyond the evangelical parameters that I place myself within. I also appreciate that the meaning and expression of "evangelicalism" can vary in different parts of the world.

[6] Carey Baptist College.

issues in a holistic way. Rather, they are often ignored, unknown, or unhelpfully isolated from the broader context of what I perceive to be the purposes of Christian faith. This unrealised expectation frustrates me, sometimes at what seems to be naivety of participants within the church, and at other times towards the leaders of churches who do not seem to address these issues well. As I ponder the dominant leadership model in New Zealand churches, I observe a hegemonic structure that has run out of ideas and is fighting against a religious recession, but is nevertheless struggling to perpetuate itself by repeating familiar patterns of behaviour. Writers in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the USA have noticed similar things (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003).

Drawing on my experience of Baptist churches, I have formed a generalised opinion of their culture and operations. I seek to know if their way of being is articulated and experienced by insiders differently from the way outsiders perceive it. I wonder if finding out the impressions of people outside of the church could inform the internal sense of being that the church has, and highlight whether there is a disparity between what is intended inside the church and what is perceived outside the church. I have already admitted that my experience of the church frustrates me, yet I am not pessimistic about its future, but rather I embrace it with care and optimism. If useful insights emerge from the process of examining some of the outside perceptions of the church and then reflecting these back into the church, my research may help to overcome the concerns I have for the church. I will then be satisfied that this research is a relevant, important, socially significant, and original piece of work.

I am not disinterested in my research. I intend to be living and working with my data, analysis, and findings as an ongoing journey beyond the scope of this doctoral research. My deep engagement with the research might attract criticism that my research is subjective. My stance on this is that while my engagement is personal, it is not biased or subjective. On this matter, I rely on the explication of my research design: much ongoing care has been taken to

find balance between myself as the inside professional church operative with a deeply personal concern for the topic being examined, and myself as researcher being guided by a sound methodological framework that encouraged objectivity. This design included regular supervision with senior academics who were not themselves personally or professionally connected with, or invested in, the church in any way, but rather they are communication and organisational specialists. I was careful to always be questioning my own motives as the researcher, and my supervisors actively shared this concern.

The kind of research I am doing is deeply personal because of my position within the church, and I believe this needs to be seen as a virtue. Axiologically, I subscribe to the notion that no research can be value-free (Littlejohn, 1992). As a researcher I choose what to study, and my choices are affected by personal as well as institutional values. I openly acknowledge the values I bring to my research and recognise the importance of being as transparent as possible with them. It is only because of the values I hold that this research has been undertaken: I doubt that anybody outside of the church would be interested enough to have undertaken such in-depth research about the communication of the church and its relationship with New Zealand society.

## 1.8 The structure of this thesis

Chapters 2 to 5 form a review of literature that informs the research questions by examining other research significant to the area of the perception and communication of the church. Chapter 2 concentrates on issues relevant to the changes taking place affecting the Western church and its connection or relationship to society, issues such as the historical and sociological period of Christendom and the recent shift into post-Christendom, and the consideration as to whether this is an actual paradigm shift or simply attitudinal. This chapter also considers the shift from modernity into liquid or post-modernity. Chapter 3 looks at literature that considers the perceptions of the church from both outside of the church as well as from some people inside the church. There is an inside critique of the church and of Christians. Chapter 4 looks at

what some writers consider the future might look like, in other words their future hopes and ideals.  Chapter 5 looks at Aotearoa New Zealand as the context for my research, specifically the history of spirituality and the church in this context.  This local consideration is needed because much of the literature surrounding my own research interest comes from overseas contexts such as the USA, the United Kingdom, and Australia.  These four chapters become a literature based critical analysis of the place of church in contemporary New Zealand society in relation to post-Christendom.

Chapter 6 provides the methodological underpinnings for this research beginning with the theoretical framework of critical studies and why I, from within the church institution, find myself drawn to research that "aims at producing dissensus and providing forums for and models of discussion to aid the building or more open consensus" (Deetz, 1996, p. 202).  "Thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 3) is then described as the influencing core qualitative concept behind my method of qualitative research using semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus groups and thematic analysis.  This chapter concludes with a transparent description of my fieldwork.

The structure of this thesis is slightly unconventional because the first of the two research questions needs to be answered (data collected, analysed and discussed) before the second question can be addressed (data collected, analysed and discussed).

Chapter 7 presents the data gathered following the method described in chapter 6 for stage 1: interviews of people outside the church, the "Sams".  The data is presented, analysed, and interpreted in this chapter including a discussion on the stage 1 research where I provide my answers to research question one: What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?  A list of nine perceptions is presented and discussed.

Chapter 8 presents the data gathered for stage 2: focus groups with church leaders. The reactions to each of the nine perceptions are discussed from across all focus groups, highlighting common and significant themes. This leads into chapter 9 where four major conclusions from the data are presented, one from the interviews in stage 1, and three from the focus groups in stage 2.

Chapter 10 concludes this research project. It will demonstrate where the research has direct implications for the church and its communication into New Zealand society. It will also highlight areas of further research including how this research project could be expanded. References and appendices follow chapter 10.

# Chapter 2: Something is different now

Over the next four chapters I will review literature that informs the two research questions presented in chapter 1. In this chapter and the following two, I do this by examining a body of knowledge in the area of the perception and communication of the church in the West. My angle of enquiry is to look at how things are different now for the church from how they have been in the past, mainly by making use of the notion of a paradigm change (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003). The paradigm change under discussion focuses on the shift of "Christendom" into "post-Christendom". The new paradigm of post-Christendom begins to broadly define the context in which the church finds itself in twenty-first century New Zealand. In the fourth of these literature chapters, in chapter 5, I look more specifically at the history of spirituality and the church in New Zealand.

## 2.1  Post-Christendom as a reference point

Murray (2004b) gives a useful definition of post-Christendom:

> Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses
> coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the
> Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express
> Christian convictions decline in influence. (p. 19)

As I begin my survey of the work of scholars and writers who engage with the concept of post-Christendom and the future of the church, I am conscious that I have tended to draw on the sources from my own local context, the New Zealand Baptist theological college.[7] I realise the debates in the Baptist world are not the only ones I could have engaged with: I might have canvassed the concerns of the Pentecostal, Catholic or Orthodox traditions. Even within the Baptist context in which I have chosen to situate my work, there is a range of

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[7] Carey Baptist College, which has an evangelical expression of Christianity.

influence, from the Anabaptist network (2013) through to post-evangelical thought (Tomlinson, 1995), but the point was never to interrogate different theological arguments, but rather, to investigate the idea that "something is different now" for the church in New Zealand. After due consideration, my decision was to remain within the context that is particularly relevant to my own work, experience, and history.

The scholars and writers I have engaged with have recently written about the Christian church, particularly the current state of the Protestant church or its future. Some of the writers are New Zealanders, and some have produced books that are more "popular" in their format than "academic", but most have drawn on their post-graduate or doctoral research. It is, perhaps, symptomatic of the state of "Christendom" that most of these writers are men, middle aged or older. I raise this issue to highlight a situation in which older men, rather than women or younger male church members, are critiquing, for example, male dominance. Of the scholarship I have reviewed, only one chapter within a book was co-written by a woman and man. While the gender mix is disappointing, it is not surprising, considering the current and historical church context in general. That is to say, men have dominated the church both in positions of authority and also in the explicit thought that produces dogma and material practice. The matter of authorship is a subtle indication that alludes to some of the issues these next chapters will highlight: even though these men are critiquing the church and writing about its future, it is a paradox that they themselves, in this respect, continue the legacy of what they are trying to leave behind.

When I analysed the literature about current opinions of the church from the post-Christendom perspective, it was clear that several key themes emerged. In this chapter, the first theme focuses on the fact that something is different now, and this difference is expressed by using the idea of post-Christendom as a reference point.

Discussions of Christendom and post-Christendom in relation to the church and its future entail consideration of missiology. Missiology is the area of theology that explores the mandate, message, and mission of the Christian church. Missiology is a multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural field of study incorporating, to name a few: theology, anthropology, history, geography, theories and methods of communication, comparative religion, and methodology. Morreau (2001, pp. 780-783) puts it this way: "Inherent in the discipline [of missiology] is the study of the nature of God, the created world, and the Church, as well as the interaction among these three". Examining the church through the lens of basic communication theory has motivated my own research, and one of my aims is that it will add to the greater body of missiological knowledge.

My examination of the literature that supports my contention that "something is different now" canvasses three main groupings of scholarly thought about the milieu in which the Christian church now operates. One group of scholars aligns with the view that there has been a paradigm shift into a new period or "way of being" called post-Christendom (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003). Within this first view, the scholars I have named do not necessarily argue from an absolute position: Murray (2009), for instance, acknowledges that using the term "Christendom" to cover the diverse cultures and political arrangements in Europe between the fourth and twentieth centuries is problematic and could be seen devoid of historical accuracy and focus, but he nevertheless finds the term meaningful and useful (p. 200). Another view is represented by Sutherland (2000) who feels that the concept of a paradigm shift is altogether too radical. Instead, Sutherland dismisses the notion of "Christendom" as a category to describe a state in society in which Christian faith and assumptions were a given. He says:

> Often this phenomenon is sheeted back to Constantine, with the implication that for 1600 years the Western Church has had a clear and relatively easy run. In the twentieth century, it is suggested, this edifice has crumbled and the Church now faces a missionary context of unprecedented difficulty. (Sutherland, 2000, p. 136)

Finally, I have considered the idea of secularism, beginning with Gilbert's (1980) argument that the degree of secularisation that currently prevails is the result of a brief but intense cultural revolution in the 1960s. Each of these views contributes to an overall understanding of the church's external environment.

## 2.2  The problem of paradigm

As the quote above shows, Sutherland (2000) argues against the notion of a total paradigm shift that has so affected western society that Christianity has become irrelevant to the point that it is moribund, maintaining that such views are based on a flawed analysis that ignores history and evidence. He prefers to limit the term "Christendom" to the medieval period in what is now Europe, where secular and spiritual power were fused for around three hundred years. In his opinion, the current discussions about Christendom/post-Christendom are unhelpful and possibly misleading, because culture is too complex to be defined by the kind of narrow definition suggested by a term like "post-Christendom". The temptation with simplistic analysis, in his opinion, is to provide equally simplistic responses that may discount the lessons that  past can teach.

When it comes to philosophical ideas such as "the Enlightenment" and "postmodernity", Sutherland again discourages the idea of a paradigm change because he feels it is an uncritical use of what he calls a "questionable theory of scientific change" (2000, p. 134). The conceptual framework of the "paradigm shift" model comes from Kuhn (1962), who suggested that science did not progress in a linear accumulation of new knowledge, but underwent periodic revolutions or "paradigm shifts." By the late 1980s the scientific community had begun to regard Kuhn's thesis as crude and simplistic (Sutherland, 2000), and Sutherland has adopted this strong critique in relation to the church:

> If it is a risky step to apply a questionable theory of scientific change to other disciplines, it is surely a giant leap to adopt it as a means of understanding the emergence and character of whole cultures and sub-cultures. (Sutherland, 2000, p. 134)

His point is to say "paradigm change" is not a sufficient tool for the analysis of cultural change, yet the paradigm concept is used, for example, when people use categories such as "boomers", "busters", and "Generation X" to define sub-cultures within wider Western culture. Sutherland, however, claims these terms are unsubstantiated, and constructed with little or no evidence (Sutherland, 2000, p. 135).

I appreciate that there is merit in Sutherland's view, but I am also seeing that from a practical and experiential point of view there is real utility in using the paradigm change concept as a way of describing that there has been considerable change in society and that something is different now. The paradigm shift that explains the social changes of post-Christendom does not depend heavily on the concept of secularisation, but secularisation is nevertheless an idea that is useful in extending and defining my proposition that "something is different now".

Gilbert's (1980) discussion of secularisation in Britain in the latter part of the twentieth century does not use the term "post-Christendom", but rather, "post-Christian" which is not intended to imply that there is no Christian existence or expression, but rather that Christianity has been marginalised. He describes post-Christian Britain as a place where it is normal to be irreligious, it is conventional to think and act in secular ways, and there is no status or social respectability dependent on the practice or profession of religious faith. In Gilbert's post-Christian Britain there are still people within society who find Christianity a profound and vital influence in their lives, but these people are situated outside the mainstream of social life and culture. Gilbert describes these Christians in post-Christian Britain in the following way:

> Like the early Christians in a pre-Christian, classical world, they became a 'peculiar people', anomalous in their primary beliefs, assumptions, values and norms, distinctive in important aspects of outlook and behaviour. They become a sub-culture. (1980, p. ix)

More than two decades later, in his book *the Death of Christian Britain*, Brown (2001) describes Gilbert's (1980) "post-Christian Britain" not just as a story of church decline, but as an end of the Christian construct that gave people a means to create their identities. Rather than subscribing to a long-term religious decline, Brown identifies a "short and sharp cultural revolution of the late twentieth century" (2001, p. 2), which started in the 1960s and he does not use the Christendom/post-Christendom paradigm concept, but rather, talks of the secularisation that was part of the 1960s. He contends that it was not the presence of churches or Christians that made Britain Christian, but the way that Christianity infused public culture and was adopted by people in the forming of identity, regardless of whether they were churchgoers or not. The loss of the framework is part of the process of secularisation. Brown locates secularisation "in the changing conditions which allowed previously regarded Christian and social 'sins' to be regarded as acceptable and moral" (p. 8). The phenomenon of secularisation is therefore another way to explain the argument of this chapter: that something is different now.

Taylor (2007) describes the result of secularisation as a society in which where people can engage fully in politics without ever encountering God, and goes on to state that "this [lack of encounter with God] would have been inescapable in earlier centuries in Christendom" (2007, p. 1). He contends that the encounter with God was inevitable because the functioning mode of local government was the parish, and the parish was primarily a community of prayer. Such social changes have now taken place that Christian faith is one human possibility among others, and, as he says (p. 3), "Belief in God is no longer axiomatic. There are alternatives… Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place".

The scholars who are proponents of the paradigm shift from Christendom to post-Christendom do not rely on secularisation theory to explain the changes that have occurred in Western societies in terms of religion and the church but what they argue sums up a similar outcome for western society: something is

different now.  The main difference between the discussions of Christendom/post-Christendom and secularisation is that the adherents to the concept of a paradigm shift tend to adopt a more optimistic view of the future of the church existing in what they call post-Christendom times than do the scholars of secularisation.

The scholarship on secularisation offers a different explanation of the changing context in which Christianity finds itself, and it is useful in that it shines a different light on the phenomenon of declining church attendance (Guy, 2011; Ward, 2006) and the sense that Christianity is no longer central to western social organisation.  However, for the purposes of this research, finding an irrefutable label for the reasons underpinning social change is less important than being able to place my data against the backdrop of the difference itself.

## 2.3  Exploring the difference

The word "Christendom" is so capacious that it includes the cultural sense of the worldwide community of Christian adherents, as well as the historical or geopolitical sense of countries where Christianity is or has been the dominant religion.  As well as this, Christendom could be said to encompass a cultural hegemony, especially evident in the West.  I acknowledge the multiplicity of meanings for the term, and in this section wish to focus on the concepts of Christendom being a particular paradigm and attitude.

Christendom is the term used to define the sacred culture that, according to many writers (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003), dominated European society from sometime in the eleventh century until the end of the twentieth century.  The roots of Christendom stem from the fourth century when the Roman Emperor Constantine allowed Christians the freedom to worship publicly.  Constantine's gesture had the effect of undermining all other religions in the empire because of the dominance of his imperial power and control.  The early history of Christianity has therefore caused many contemporary Christian writers to

consider Christendom as the 1600 years from Constantine into the twentieth century.

Frost and Hirsch (2003) consider Christendom to be the meta-narrative for western civilisation, much in the way Down (2003) sees Christendom representing the Christian religion, and also a geographic area, a state of mind, a theory, and a political polity.  During Christendom, the State and the Church were seen as the same body of people, but one involving a kind of dualism in which the State looked after people's bodies, while the Church looked after their souls.  From this point on in this chapter I use the term "Christendom" to refer to the several things I have outlined here: an historical epoch (eleventh to twentieth centuries), a geographical extension/location (Western Europe), and also as an attitudinal framework of influence.  This breadth is necessary because of the different connotations Christendom can elicit.[8]

Christianity changed with Constantine.  In fact some writers, such as Hirsch (2006), use the term "Constantinianism" when referring to Christendom.  Christianity also changed as Christendom gradually declined over the centuries as the State and Church drifted apart.  There are various suggestions as to when this drift actually began to occur.  Sutherland (2000) argues that the decline attributed to Christendom was over by the time of the Reformation, while McLeod (2007) argues that it was much later into the nineteenth century.  The end of the influence of "Constantinianism" meant that not everyone in the state was a Christian adherent.  The church, thinking that everyone should be

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[8] Murray (2009, p. 198) offers the following list to define Christendom:
- Christendom was a geographical region in which almost everyone was at least nominally Christian.
- Christendom was a historical era from the early fourth-century conversion of the Emperor Constantine I to the twentieth century.
- Christendom was a civilisation shaped primarily by the story, language, symbols and rhythms of Christianity.
- Christendom was a political arrangement in which Church and state provided mutual, if often uneasy, support and legitimation.
- Christendom was an ideology, a mindset, a way of thinking about God's activity in the world.

Christian, responded to the evident decline by focusing on attracting citizens to the institution, if not to the faith community.[9]  Current day classical churches would call this "outreach", an activity in which the people within the church will "reach out" to draw outsiders to church membership.  Outreach implies that for individuals to find God, they must first be brought into the church, and that somehow, therefore, God resides in the institution of the church.

Christendom also focused on buildings[10], and the legacy of building programs is visible today when people often refer to buildings as "the church", rather than the theological meaning being the gathering of Christian people or community[11].  Before Constantine, the Christian community gathered in small groups and often secretly because of the risk of persecution.  Constantine removed the risk of being Christian by allowing public Christian worship that emphasised a central focus provided to these gatherings through the ceremony and rituals.  Arranged seating became necessary so that as many people as possible could fit the defined spaces within buildings.  In other words, Hirsch (2006) says the practice of pews facing the front became normal in Christian worship, and in contrast with the gathering of smaller groups in the early church, introduced into Christian worship a divide between clergy and laity. The clergy became, officially, the people required to present the worship and rituals, and inevitably acquired all of the power this new role presented.  This new form of public church, supported fully by the state, therefore invented the role of church professionals and divested power to a "priestly" caste.  Before

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[9] This is what Israel as a nation in the First Testament of the Bible was called to do in the first place five or six thousand years earlier and repeatedly kept failing to do.

[10] Appendix Q holds a small case study that shows a unique opportunity in Christchurch post-earthquakes that is allowing the church to consider anew, building function and form, and the place of church buildings in post-Christendom New Zealand.

[11] In my own context of living in post-earthquake Christchurch, the church I work with had its 1881 church building destroyed on 22 February 2011 and at the time of writing we have turned it into a bare section of land covered in grass, and this is being used as a park.  People in the neighbourhood often say "the church is gone", when they mean "the church building is gone". In actual fact, the church, in terms of the theological sense, continues to exist as it did before any earthquakes.  As a gathering of people we now meet as a large group on Sundays in the primary school hall 450m away from where our church building used to stand.

Christendom, church leadership was more organic and egalitarian, as described in the writings of the early church in the New Testament of the Bible, particularly The Book of Acts which describes the formation of the "early church" in the time directly after that of Jesus (Hirsch, 2006).

A characteristic of Christendom was the maintenance of social order and social orthodoxy. A person was "born Christian" rather than the Christian faith being something they chose themselves. By observing certain forms of worship and practices associated with the church, people publically declared their belonging to an institution that was largely about controlling society.

The teaching of Jesus recorded in the New Testament shows that he spoke of the need to share his "Gospel", defined as a "mission" which was generally perceived as a mixture of lifestyle and doctrine. By contrast, within Christendom the "mission" of the church ended up biased towards the "worship" of God. Christian "worship" is the expression of adoration of God. Worship, whether personal or institutional, includes formal and informal rites as well as an expression of the lifestyle and doctrine defined in the "Gospel." The worship of God became almost the sole purpose of the church, and inevitably institutionalised God, such that for many[12] Christians, the most significant expression of their faith would have been through their attendance at Mass.

Attendance was also mandated by social norms to conform. The result was, eventually, the expression of Christian heritage and culture seen today in the classical church (Frost, 2006). Frost summarises the effect of Christendom as follows:

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[12] As the church developed there were differences in emphasis between Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox expressions of worship.

> The net effect over the entire Christendom epoch was that Christianity
> moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual
> movement to being a static religious institution with its attendant
> structures, priesthood, and sacraments. (2006, p. 5)

Christendom therefore represents a time where the governing bodies in society were devoted to the enforcement of Christian values, and the church was organised by these governing influences. Christian clergy held political authority so national politics and the church as an institution were strongly connected.

A discussion using terms containing the modifier "post", as in the expression "post-Christendom", seems to beg the question, "Is Christendom over, then?" Christendom still exists, of course, and one item of proof is the on-going emphasis on buildings: there are still new church buildings being erected throughout the country showing the existence of strong church communities. Arguably, however, the strength of the consistent influence the church once had over morals and social practice has diminished. This is not to say that church has no influence at all, and certainly I do not wish to argue that the church does not seek an official voice in national life, for example the dominant church voice in the recent same-sex marriage discussion showed this (Davidson, 2012; MediaWorks TV, 2013), but nevertheless, a shift in Christendom has occurred in twenty-first century New Zealand.

Writing about the Christianity of the 1960s, McLeod (2007) argues that his historical framework shows "the decline of Christendom" (p. 18), and contends that the gradual decline of Christendom is one of the central themes in the history of Western Europe and the USA during the last three centuries. He distinguishes four distinct stages of this decline:

> First there was the toleration by the state of a variety of forms of
> Christianity. Second there was the open publication of anti-Christian
> ideas. Third was the separation of church and state. The forth and most
> complex stage has been the gradual loosening of the ties between church
> and society. (McLeod, 2007, p. 19)

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According to McLeod, the final indicators of Christendom were being experienced in the 1950s when the majority of people living in Western countries were still nominally Christian. He describes what was occurring at this time:

> A small but influential section of the population had broken away entirely from Christianity, including many intellectuals, writers, and political radicals. There was a much larger section of the population, including a large part of the working class, whose involvement in the church was limited to participation in rites of passage. There was the growing tension between the sexual ethics taught by the churches and the messages which had been coming over several decades from literature and films and from the writings of psychologists; there was also a wide, and probably increasing, divergence, between church teaching and what people, including church-goers, were actually doing. (McLeod, 2007, p. 29)

For McLeod, then, the affluence experienced by most western countries in the 1950s created a crisis for Christendom because it created a new economic and social climate whose wide-ranging effects included a trend towards greater individualism which weakened the collective identities that had been central to the process of social freedom in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries.

A characteristic of Christendom was powerful ideologically-based subcultures[13] that had been a central feature of life in most Western countries at least since the late nineteenth century, and by the 1950s these seemed both oppressive and redundant. McLeod suggests high wages, full employment, and mass production of what had formerly been luxury items, fuelled the decline at that time. These lifestyle improvements changed people's thinking and behaviour in many different ways, sometimes directly, but very often indirectly.

It could be said that although Christendom no longer defined Western culture in general after the 1960s, Christendom in its multi-layered entirety remains the primary definer of the church's self-understanding (Frost, 2006). Churches

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[13] For example, the temperance movement, which in New Zealand was first formed in 1836 under the guidance of the Church Missionary Society (Guy, 2011).

functioning in Christendom mode today often presume that the church has retained its status as a powerful and respected social institution, while at the same time being aware of, and desperate about, the parlous state of their attendance numbers and finances (Frost, 2006). For instance, some conservative (often fundamentalist) groups within the church expect their opinions to be noticed and accepted in national policy making. Such assumed influence has been demonstrated recently in New Zealand with public discussion around the introduction of the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Bill in May 2012. There has been a noticeable Christian voice in the media against the support of same-sex marriage (Davidson, 2012), but it turns out that only about 14% of a population sample opposes both same-sex marriage and also claims to be religious or spiritual.[14] According to polls, about 63% of adults are in favour of same-sex marriage, with about 31% against (Colmar Brunton, 2012). The May 2012 ONE News Colmar Brunton poll showed support varies considerably across age ranges: 76% of those aged 18-34 are in favour, 66% of those aged 35-54 are in favour, and 46% aged 55+ are in favour. The voice of opposition coming from some parts of the church appears to be that of a minority, and an increasing minority considering those against same-sex marriage are predominantly from the older age group who were more likely influenced by twentieth century church culture.

These conservative fundamentalist people cry out against so-called "social engineering" unless it is done in line with Christian moral teaching. I personally have no expectation that the government will follow Christian teaching now that Christendom is over, because the church no longer defines western culture in the way it did in the past. I do not doubt the potential of the church to positively influence society, but I do believe this will need to happen in ways other than those practiced by the church throughout Christendom. For

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[14] Of the 31% who do not support same-sex marriage, 47% of them identified with a religious or spiritual group, meaning just over 14% of the sample were religious or spiritual and did not support same-sex marriage (Colmar Brunton, 2012).

example, furthering the same-sex marriage illustration above, rather than parts of the church expecting to politically influence social engineering around their belief of Christian marriage, I believe they would have greater influence by quietly demonstrating positive examples of marriage: if their models of marriage are as positive as they claim, this will not go unnoticed. If same-sex marriage ends up being as bad as they claim, this too will not go unnoticed.

With the death of Christendom, the traditional support for what Frost (2006) calls the culturally respectable, mainstream, suburban version of Christianity, or what I call the classical church, has largely eroded. Frost goes on to say that this form of church has ended up with a kind of façade, in which its version of Christianity is predominantly a "Sunday Christian" phenomenon where church attendance has very little effect on the lifestyles, values, or priorities expressed by such Sunday Christians from Monday to Saturday (p. 8).

When Frost (2006) talks of Christendom creating a Christian heritage and culture based around church attendance, he links that to the classical church expectation where many Christians have uncritically bought into the idea that their faith is primarily about attending meetings: Sunday worship meetings, weddings, funerals, prayer meetings, and so on. Even though Christendom is over, many Christians cannot separate the idea of Christianity from weekly church services, a mind-set that a post-Christendom church might wish to change or at least be fully conscious of. On this matter, Murray (2004a) also points out that worship was the highest priority for the Christendom church.

Another idea that informs the changes that have occurred in the church as a social institution is the comparison of the philosophies of modernity and post-modernity. The terms "modernity" and "post-modernity" mean different things to different people and I do not intend to define all of the possible options or theories here. Much of the Christendom/post-Christendom discussion from the writers mentioned in this chapter use the eras of "modernity" and "post-modernity" to defend and support their hypothesis.

My definition of modernity for this thesis is the period of time starting around the beginning of the eighteenth century with the inception of Western industrialisation, leading up to the end of the twentieth century (Toulmin, 1990). I will also include the early modern period which can be considered the time from the sixteenth century until industrialisation. A significant determinant in this period was the Enlightenment, particularly the philosophical contributions of Descartes where he articulated the notion that the guarantor of truth is no longer God but man (Briton, 1996). It is impossible to try to extrapolate the period of modernity all the way back to the start of Christendom, and I have not seen anyone try to do so. What I will show below is a stronger connection between the end of Christendom and the beginning of post-modernity, rather than any correlation at the Constantinian end of the Christendom timeframe.

I define "post-modernity" simply as the current period of time where the rigid and uniform restraints of modernity are held loosely, along with any other certainty. I do not personally hold strongly to the concept of post-modernism, but am happy to refer to it as a theoretical construct to help explain sociological phenomena. In reality I prefer to think that modernity is still the dominant force but it now has significant dimensions of what Bauman (2000) calls "liquidity". I like the way Bauman refers to this current period of time as "liquid modernity" where he calls modernity "solid" or "heavy" and identifies the changing, transient and flexible dynamics being experienced as "liquid", so we are in a state of "liquid modernity" (p. 25). As I apply the concept of liquid modernity to the church, I find myself drawn to the idea that Christian-faith-community need not be structured around congregation and a central weekly Sunday meeting, which Ward (2002) describes as "solid church" (p. 17). Ward's solid church overlaps with what I am calling classical church, where things such as attendance at church services equates to faithfulness, where the size of the congregation is the measure of success, and where church has become like an exclusive club in which organising the club has become an end in itself. Ward's alternative is what he calls "liquid church", where church is seen as a

series of relationships and communications, something like a network or a web rather than an assembly of people (p. 2). The ideal that the dominant expression of Christian-faith-community could change to become something intertwined organically and holistically into people's normal lives is something I find inspirational.

On the matter of change in the church over the last hundred years, Hirsch (2006) points out the decline of the church in most Western countries and how this time of decline matches the gradual emergence of what is called post-modernity in the latter part of the twentieth century. Gibbs and Bolger (2005) also tie the decline of Christendom and modernity together, claiming the 1950s as the transition period for both. They assert that this is the time when the church lost its privileged position in society and that the majority of current church practices are cultural accommodations of a society that no longer exists. In this sense the church still considers it has the position in society that it had pre-1950s, giving evidence that the church still considers Christendom exists. The unaccepted change in society by the church is why churches are perceived to be maladapted to contemporary society. Although the particulars of church change differ from country to country, in general I suggest New Zealand is ahead of other countries in terms of how the change has affected the church, largely because its settlement by the British was very recent. I will develop this concept further in chapter 5.

Trebilcock's (2003) definition of Christendom is "church in the modern era" (p. 17), which alludes to the passing of Christendom if one thinks modernity has passed. He focuses on post-modernity and draws a conclusion about how it works against the contemporaneous church, what I refer to as classical church. He does this with a series of "distrusts" inherent in post-modernity, the first being incredulity toward meta-narratives, causing a distrust of authority. Next he says there is a consensual worldview in post-modernity, causing a distrust of ideology. He suggests post-modernity brings with it a sense of deconstruction,

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which leads to a distrust of systems. And finally with post-modernity there is a hermeneutic of suspicion that leads to a distrust of motives.

Returning to the idea that Christendom is over, Trebilcock (2003) compares the change needed in this current time with that of the Reformation nearly 500 years ago, suggesting the church needs to evolve once more, this time by using post-modern praxis as the basis of a dialogue with modernity, which will free the church from its oppressive interpretation of the Christian faith. Trebilcock's view of the Reformation is that the society of the time was ready for the changes that Luther initiated, but Carson (2005) sees the Reformation as a change caused more by theology than culture. Carson's point is significant when juxtaposed to Trebilcock's argument that the church needs to change in the twenty-first century because of the cultural changes that have resulted in post-Christendom. Carson's effective debunking of the post-Christendom thesis is not without hope for the future of the church, but he does not put his hope in cultural exegesis as do those who favour the modernity/post-modernity connect to what they call the "fall of Christendom".

Both Trebilcock (2003) and Jamieson (2007) list "distrusts" inherent in post-modernity but it is fair to say that Jamieson is more optimistic. As he says:

> The nature of society is radically changing. In Western societies like New Zealand, the way of living and doing church as it was in the 1950s has largely gone because somewhere between 1960 and 1980 a 'new world' began to emerge. (Jamieson, 2007, p. 27)

This new world Jamieson talks of is post-modernity and he mentions some key changes that he suggests occurred with post-modernity. The first is a distrust of meta-narratives, where experts and authorities create a crisis of meaning, and this is the same as Trebilcock's first point mentioned earlier. Jamieson goes on to mention a loss of belief in progress that creates a crisis of hopelessness. There is a move away from institutions, which creates a crisis for identity and belonging. There is also a move from a production-driven economy to a consumption-driven economy, creating what Jamieson calls a crisis of debt.

Finally, an explosion of communication technology has created a crisis in the relationship of space and time. Jamieson's scholarship delineates society in general, but the same points can be applied to the church. He describes the situation for individuals and church as being increasingly caught up in this "liquid" world and uses a quote from John Maynard Keynes that usefully sums up the predicament that prevails: "The real difficulties lie not in developing new ideas, but in escaping old ones" (p. 32). For me Keynes' quote illustrates well the concept that Christendom is over, but that the church continues under its influence.

Another issue needing consideration in this chapter is the concept of oppression. The formal leadership structure of the church introduced from the time of Constantine resulted in church leaders focusing on maintenance of the institution and pastoral care. Before this time leaders had a focus on the broader "mission" of the church. That initial focus was no longer needed in the Empire as everyone was assumed to be Christian. Church became an oppressive hegemony (Hirsch, 2006). Hirsch suggests the oppressive nature of the church structure had the effect of pushing God out of the church. As he puts it, "in the classical church growth mode it became increasingly harder to find God in the midst of the progressively more machine like apparatus required to 'run a church'" (2006, p. 182).

Jamieson (2007) gives an example of oppression within classical church in the way that church leaders may focus on theological conservatism and ecclesiological control, as a response to the crumbling of the settled period of Christendom. They do this because with the departure of Christendom goes the structures and ways of church and the forms of faith that the Christendom model of church espoused, and so they feel the need to control the Christian faith at all costs in order to defend it. Jamieson describes this as some "church leaderships . . . circling the wagons against an increasingly chaotic and ever-changing culture" (2007, p. 107). Murray goes as far as defining the Christendom legacy as being oppressive because power has been like a poison

that has prevented the church from understanding the gospel, an idea he borrows from Morisy (Murray, 2004a).

Church after Christendom (in the western world) is shrinking. Murray (2004a) points out that nothing anyone has proposed to reverse the decline of church attendance and participation in the post-Christendom era has yet succeeded. He says some people in the church are in denial that Christendom is over, while others defend the current classical church structures and strategies. Others, he says, dissociate themselves from this analysis of Christendom altogether. More churches closed in Britain in the 1990s than opened. During the 1980s and 1990s in the United Kingdom 1.6 million people joined the churches and 2.8 million people left them, which explains why churches are shrinking: fewer people are joining than in the past, but also more people are leaving than in the past. Murray goes on to suggest that the proliferation of church denominations since the late nineteenth century has caused great fragmentation throughout the final decades of Christendom, that has generally been harmful to the church. One solution in the twentieth century was to plant new churches where there had not been any churches before, or at least any of a particular denomination/fragmentation. Church planting was simply a "mother" church reproducing itself by resourcing a "daughter" church somewhere else. Murray comments that "many newly planted churches were simply clones of existing churches, inadequately attuned to a changing cultural context" (p. 69), and therefore not a post-Christendom solution but rather an attempt at maintaining Christendom.

The discussion of Christendom/post-Christendom raises the issue of belonging and exclusion. Trebilcock (2003) maintains that the classical church sees society is a "hostile and distrustful mission field" and that those outside the church need to be brought into the church in order to become like those inside the church. The concept of hostile territory shows the divisions that exist between an ingroup (those people inside the church) and an outgroup (those who, logically enough) are outside the church. In other words, the classical church

appears to have a ring-fence drawn around itself, maintaining its membership, but excluding non-members unless they comply with certain conditions and become like insiders.  Difficult access for outsiders has both social and theological implications, and is occurring alongside the church's[15] expressed desire to draw people into its orbit.

One way to account for the difficulty some people have in entering the church and finding acceptance is to consider a concept from intercultural communication, where the term "otherness" (or "othering") is used to define outsiders, those who do not belong to a particular group (Rozbicki & Ndege, 2012).  Othering occurs when outside people are identified as falling outside the normal cultural pattern of the ingroup to whom these cultural patterns and systems are natural and common sense.  Rozbicki and Ndege put it this way: "The phenomenon of otherness thus involves two or more parties that do not share the assumptions crucial to functioning within their particular systems of reference" (2012, p. 1).  If cross-group functioning is desired, knowledge about the other's life and society, or culture, is not enough.  To successfully function within another group or culture, people need shared understanding.  My claim, supported by the concept of "otherness", is that in twenty-first century New Zealand society the church functions as a clearly delineated ingroup, to whom outsiders are "other", although this view depends on the standpoint of the observer.  Certainly, outsiders quite likely lack the knowledge and understanding they need to successfully engage with the church and its practices.  The contention of this research is that those inside the church may, equally, lack the knowledge and understanding of post-Christendom society to successfully function outside the church.

Rozbicki and Ndege call someone outside a group the "stranger", and in terms of understanding suggest that: "For the stranger, this calls for rising above his or her own, hitherto unquestionable way of life and system of reference" (2012,

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[15] Particularly the evangelical and Pentecostal/charismatic type of churches.

p. 1). While this is equally the case for both sides of my church and society discussion, my interest is in the communication of the church, and I therefore seek to find through fieldwork the existence or extent of ingroup/outgroup behaviour, or otherness in the church. Otherness proposes a kind of xenophobia (Licata & Klein, 2002), so that anyone who is different is treated with suspicion tending towards dislike, or fear and suspicion, which will ultimately lead to dislike. In my opinion, this ought to be of serious consideration for the church. My sense of the classical church is that it is built on otherness: that is, as I have already said, it operates as if a person can only find God within its buildings and operation.

Social identity theory (Sherif, 1966) is helpful in providing a framework for understanding the strength of the ingroups and outgroups associated with the classical church, because it explains how individuals' behaviour is affected by the nature and importance of membership in certain groups and forms their social identity (Tajfel, 1982a). Social identity is "that *part* of the individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). The development of social identity involves defining the self-concept according to the salience offered by membership of particular social groups (Spears, 2011). Thus, church membership may be the site at which individuals determine their sense of *self* by "doing church" in familiar and favoured ways. The *self* may fiercely defend itself and the practices of material religion on which it is formed by rejecting the strangers from the hostile territories beyond the borders of the church.

## 2.4  An image of hope

When disagreeing about the use of the concept of paradigm change, as mentioned earlier, Sutherland (2000) is not saying change is not needed, he is saying it is not needed on the basis of categories such as Christendom and post-Christendom. The writers (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003), who are embracing the paradigm shift idea by

describing a new and current time of post-Christendom, do so in order to emphasise the need for widespread change in the church.  The term "post-Christendom" does not imply, as Murray (2009) explains, the withdrawal of Christians or the church from the public realm, but rather, suggests that the nature of the church's involvement in politics, culture, and society needs to be renegotiated in light of changing circumstances.  The basis of my research is the need for change, and I base this on evidence I have seen that the church is failing people.

*The Church Faces Death* is an apt title for Jinkins (1999) to use as he approaches the topic of the declining church in Western Europe and the USA.  He talks of thanatophobia both afflicting and compelling the consciousness of the contemporary church, bestowing on death a power denied it by the biblical witness:

> The church has always, throughout its history, almost routinely faced death: as a human institution, as a group of persons historically conditioned and subject to the vagaries of population fluxuations, attrition, and changes of all sorts, subject to the march of ages and cultural factors beyond the control of the church… But wherever the church has faced death, the church has not faced death as those who have no hope… The church on occasion held life lightly because its life does not lie in its own hands. (p. 27)

He suggests the church continues to be liberated from the power of death so long as it is conscious of the power of resurrection, as the theological notion of the power to raise the people of God in their common life as a community.  If what I am identifying in my concern with the current situation of the church in New Zealand, and if what the Christendom/post-Christendom writers are actually identifying are signs of death, then Jinkins gives us reason to be hopeful.  He points out that as one form of ecclesial life diminishes and disappears from history, another surprises us by being raised to new life: "Resurrection is always historically unprecedented, indeed impossible, because it is not a possession of history; it is as unforeseeable as death is inevitable" (p. 28).  Powerful forms of the church have come and gone including what Jinkins calls "Constantinian Christendom" (p. 28).  He makes the current issues of post-

Christendom writers seem a possible natural course of events that need not be feared by those who are maintaining what I call classical church. In facing death, the church's attention may focus and its perspective may improve depending on the kind of death and the response of the church. Jinkins calls this process counterintuitive and counter-cultural, and just as humans can believe in strange spiritual phenomena surrounding their own death, so too Jinkins claims spiritual realities around the death and resurrection of the church. Murray (2009) suggests that the end of Christendom might open up a space for the recovery of authentic forms of Christian spirituality, and that post-Christendom might in fact be more Christian than Christendom, not less:

> As imperial Christianity in its various guises disintegrates and we reflect on the impact of the Christendom shift on our theology, hermeneutics, ethics, ecclesiology and missiology, what emerges might not only be contextually more appropriate in a changing culture but more authentically Christian, more faithful to our true heritage, and more hopeful. (p. 206)

## 2.5 Conclusion

Most of the writers reviewed in this chapter imply that a paradigm shift needs to be embraced to be church in this post-Christendom context, or as Murray (2004a) calls it a "whole-sale ecclesial restructuring" (p. 75). The majority of Christian churches are resisting this shift and continue to employ familiar tactics, "defending the old paradigm, denying its demise, dithering on the cusp of a new era or delaying their commitment to this new reality" (Murray, 2004a, p. 7). Whether Christendom is merely fading or is completely over and dead, and whether this is grieved or celebrated, things are never going to return as they were. Things are clearly much different now to the way they used to be when the church had a more secure and influential role in Western society.

This chapter and the following two review literature that informs the two research questions presented in chapter 1 by examining a body of knowledge in the area of the perception and communication of the church in the West. My angle of enquiry is to look at how things are different now for the church to how they have been in the past. In this chapter I have made use of the

paradigm change idea that there was once a period of time called "Christendom" which has now ended and been replaced by what is currently referred to as "post-Christendom." I concluded by suggesting that Christendom is an attitude that continues to influence inside the church, specifically expressions of church I refer to as classical church. This begins to broadly define the context in which the church finds itself in twenty-first century New Zealand. In the next chapter I will look at how this literature defines the perception people in the West have of the church in the twenty-first century from both outside and inside perspectives.

# Chapter 3: Perceptions of church: outside and in

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 review literature that informs the two research questions presented in chapter 1 by examining a body of knowledge in the area of the perception and communication of the church in the West. My angle of enquiry is to look at how things are different now for the church from how they have been in the past, initially making use of the paradigm change idea that there was once a period of time called "Christendom" which has now ended and been replaced by what is currently referred to as "post-Christendom" (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003). The new paradigm of post-Christendom begins to broadly define the context in which the church finds itself in twenty-first century New Zealand. Christendom was discussed in chapter 2, in this chapter perceptions of the church from those outside of it, as well as some critique from insiders is considered.

## 3.1 Perceptions from the outside: of church and of Christians

The second theme that emerged from my reading has to do with perceptions of the church from the outside. In other words, what are people who are not part of the church saying about the church and about Christians? There are two major studies in this area, one by Kinnaman and Lyons (2007), the other by Kimball (2007). Together this research is significant because of the diversity of their research methods and similarity of results, which were negative toward the church. Kinnaman and Lyons, through a research company called The Barna Group, completed telephone and online surveys of nearly 60,000 people in the USA between the ages of sixteen and twenty-nine.[16] Kimball did qualitative interviewing of young people in his local context including a

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[16] Between 1995 and 2007 there were twelve separate surveys that gathered quantitative data from 59,204 people in the USA, by either telephone or online survey techniques. There were two qualitative surveys that gathered data from 129 people from the USA, one by telephone in 2004, the other online in 2007 (Kinnamann & Lyons, 2007, p. 250).

university campus in the USA. Before I get into the detail of these two major studies, there is a recent detractor to this kind of research about the church: Wright (2010), who in particular does not like the way the results from quantitative research are presented.

Wright (2010) is an evangelical Christian sociologist in the USA. He critiques the research of such organisations as The Barna Group because, as he puts it, "Many of the statistics currently bandied about regarding the Christian faith in the United States are incomplete, inaccurate, and otherwise prone to emphasize the negative" (p. 14). He finds it no surprise that the media would want to emphasise the negative, but he questions why Christian leaders and teachers would want to do the same, suggesting they should be wanting to make Christianity look as good as possible. But Wright believes Christian pastors, teachers, and other leaders instead often use statistics to highlight the severity of a problem picking statistics for their usefulness rather than for accuracy. He says: "…the most useful statistics are often those that cast the church in a negative light" (p. 21), and suggests these may favour the sales of books and services from organisations that are intending to be provocative, such as The Barna Group. Likewise he highlights how the mainstream media favours statistics that are newsworthy, which usually means things that are unexpected, ironic, or tragic, and so whenever Christianity makes it into the news it is negative news. Wright compares some of the statistics used by Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) and compares them with statistics from other sources and shows some limitations and alternative ways that categories and numbers can be used from quantitative research. The fact that Kimball's (2007) qualitative results are so similar to the quantitative results from the Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) research, emphasises to me that at this point in my own research, Wright should stand as a warning rather than an authority on the communication of the church.

Wright (2010) summarises the argument of Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) as "non-Christians" holding negative stereotypes of Christians (p. 183). He

explains: "Stereotypes, and the prejudice and discrimination that accompanies them, are not based in reality. They reflect ignorance, not an accurate description of the world, and so changing reality may have no effect on stereotypes" (Wright, 2010, p. 184). Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) suggest Christians can respond positively to the negative perceptions they have discovered, with the aim of improving perceptions, but Wright suggests that if Christians rededicated themselves to living like "true Christians" in order to reverse negative stereotypes, this would probably make no difference at all. Wright says creating a better reality would have inconsequential effects on negative stereotypes. His view on prejudice and negative stereotypes is that the causes are often located in the person holding the prejudice rather than the group receiving it:

> …if some non-Christians hold negative stereotypes about Christians, perhaps we should view it as their problem and not ours. Trying to change their stereotypes by acting better seems, well, dysfunctional. In my opinion, we Christians should worry much more about our views of others than their views of us. We have control over our views – not theirs – and we are called to have a specific attitude toward others, i.e., love. (Wright, 2010, p. 185)

Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) suggest that any negative perceptions of the church from those outside of it, limit the church's place in society. Wright turns their argument around and says the limiting factor is the concern Christians have that those outside the church do not like them. Wright says: "the real problem may be our concern about the stereotype rather than the stereotype itself" (2010, p. 186). My own research will attempt to explore these ideas by investigating the perceptions of those outside the church in New Zealand, and then presenting these perceptions for engagement with people from inside the church. In my own data gathering and analysis, I will need to consider and look for this issue Wright highlights.

Wright (2010) mentions that a common analysis of Christianity is to judge it against perfection, and therefore any deviation from the ideal is cause for alarm. This is problematic, because according to Christian Scripture and tradition, perfection is an unattainable goal.[17] He suggests a better way to assess Christianity is to see the changes that occur, "Christianity can make a substantial difference in peoples' lives, but they can still be far from perfect" (p. 26). Wright raises a significant point and useful reminder, and something that needs to sit alongside my own future data collection and analysis. I have no expectation that the church should be perfect, but I do come to this research believing things could be different in positive ways as described in chapter 1.

Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) and Kimball (2007), who also position themselves within the church, have specifically investigated the outside perceptions of the church in the USA. They were inspired to do their research through their own experiences of seeing, knowing, and being aware of young people in the USA who were either not interested in church or Christian spirituality, or who had left the organisation of the church.

The research of Kinnaman and Lyons, and Kimball is significant because it exposes the breaking down of the institution of the church in Christendom. While they are critiquing the church, they also have a positive appreciation of Christian spirituality and the church, as well as hope for its future. There is an element of courage in their discovery and articulation of the information I present below, because they belong to the organisation they are critiquing.

Early on in the presentation of their results, Kinnaman and Lyons point out that: "Christianity has an image problem" (p. 11). They began by denying any internal problem with Christianity but their own research convinced them that their original position was wrong. They came to believe that perhaps the

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[17] The book of Matthew in the Bible says: "And he [Jesus] said to him [a rich young man], "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good."" (Matthew 19:17, New Revised Standard Version). Jesus is referring to God.

negative image of Christianity in the USA is a true representation of what lies beneath the image, meaning the negative image represents a negative reality.

Kinnaman and Lyons refer to people who are not part of the Christian church as "outsiders" (p.11). They acknowledge the issue of terminology in how to refer to people outside of the church, and while I do not warm to the use of "outsiders", I accept their use of the term in a text with a mostly in-house Christian readership. I have not come up with a better term. They at least do not call these people "non-Christians", which is as bad as, for example, calling an ethnic group "non-Europeans" rather than referring to their ethnicity when identifying them. For Kinnaman and Lyons, "outsiders" are those people looking at the Christian faith from the outside and are called this rather than "pagan, the lost, non-Christian, non-believers, seekers . . . [as this would be] derogatory" (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007, p. 17).

The "outsiders" mentioned by Kinnaman and Lyons have little trust in the Christian faith or Christian lifestyle. Apparently, their emotional and intellectual barriers go up when they are around Christian people and they reject Jesus because they feel rejected by Christians. The actions and attitudes of Christians have pushed outsiders away from the church because they are seen as unchristian. I describe these unchristian actions and attitudes of Christians in the following paragraphs. Kinnaman and Lyons suggest Christians have a responsibility to understand how outsiders perceive them. They add that most outsider perceptions are negative and then say: "…what people think becomes their reality" (p.13). They say: "…outsiders think Christians no longer represent what Jesus had in mind, that Christianity in our society is not what it was meant to be… [they have a] hard time seeing Jesus for all the negative baggage around him" (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007, p. 15).

Kinnaman and Lyons categorise people into different age groups as a way of defining generational differences: "Mosaics" are people born between 1984-2002, "Busters" are born between 1965-1983, and "Boomers" are those people

born pre-1965 and post World War Two. This can be a useful way of grouping how age and generational differences affect the way people see things and view the world. The image problem that Kinnaman and Lyons talk of is, they admit, also seen within the church by people in their 20s and 30s, because most USA Mosaics and Busters are sceptical of present day Christianity. Barna Group research in 1996 showed that a majority of people from the USA had a positive impression of Christianity's role in society. In 2007 the results were very different: nearly 40% claimed a "bad impression", they were frustrated with the present day expression of Christianity, and annoyed by Christians (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007, p. 24).

Not surprisingly, of the 50,000 USA "outsiders" quantitatively surveyed in the work of Kinnaman and Lyons, the three most common perceptions of Christians were, firstly, that Christians are anti-homosexual (91%), secondly, that Christians are judgmental (87%), and third, that they are hypocritical (85%) (2007, p. 27). These are part of the six main themes that came out of the 2007 research by Kinnaman and Lyons. All of the themes are interesting and worth mentioning here. This work from Kinnaman and Lyons, as well as that of Kimball (2007), which I mention soon, is the closest to any research done in the specific area of my own research interest about the communication of the church in society and the perceptions created by this communication. None of the themes coming from Kinnaman and Lyons was a surprise to me as they matched the hunch I had when first approaching this research project.

The first theme from Kinnaman and Lyons is "hypocritical": it is implied that people who go to church have higher standards than is actually the case. I notice hypocrisy in myself at times so will resist casting judgment on other examples of this that I have personally observed or experienced. Second, the Kinnaman and Lyons survey highlighted that church people are more focused on "winning converts" to Christianity than displaying integrity, suggesting Christians are insecure and are only concerned with conversion statistics. Kinnaman and Lyons suggest these two factors cause "collateral damage" and

come from a church myth that anything that brings people to God is worth doing. They argue that this is just not the case.

"Anti-homosexual" was the third theme from the research by Kinnaman and Lyons, and for me this is no surprise because it is an often-presented topic when the news media cover stories about the church. "Sheltered" is the fourth theme, where Christians are seen as boring, unintelligent, old-fashioned, and out of touch with reality. Christianity is seen to lack spiritual vitality and mystery. The fifth theme was being "too political", meaning Christians are primarily motivated by a political agenda and promote right-wing politics. The final theme was being "judgmental", meaning Christians are prideful and quick to find fault in others. According to the work of Kinnaman and Lyons, this is how those outside the church in the USA perceive Christians. They say it is because of these perceptions that modern day Christianity no longer seems Christian, but rather like a "bad photocopy", no longer pure in form, causing people to reject it (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007, p. 29). I believe this research from Kinnaman and Lyons is very significant because they have popularised issues of how the church is perceived by people outside of the church, in such a way that has prompted some engagement within parts of the church, for example, in New Zealand, their book has made it into theological libraries and onto the bookshelves of some pastors. Kinnaman and Lyons are asking whether or not these perceptions matter. There is also significance in this research because of the huge size of their survey sample: 50,000 people. While there are limitations with quantitative methodology in this type of research, what they have presented certainly helps in the understanding of the early twenty-first century church and society in the USA.

Kimball (2007) has also done a similar study in the USA but through qualitative rather than quantitative research. He is not surprised by the perceptions he heard, as they come from people living in what he calls a post-Christian culture. The surprise comes to Christians, perhaps, who still believe the dominant culture is Christian, or what I refer to as Christendom. Kimball (2007) says "If

this isn't realised by Christians, they might be too enclosed in their Christian network and subculture to fully see what's happening" (p. 29). He gives examples of this change in times, that church leaders are not respected by people growing up outside the church, that they are not sought out as people to turn to for advice, and they are not in the position of influence in communities they once used to be. At the completion of his research, he claimed that people 35 years and under have a growing misperception of what Christianity is, of what church is, and who Christians are. He summarises the perception of people outside of the church as "scary, angry, judgemental, right-wing finger-pointers with political agendas" (p. 32), which is very similar to the results of Kinnaman and Lyons (2007).

The problem, according to Kimball (2007), is that people outside of the church are concluding things that for the most part are not true but based on a few bad experiences. The title of Kimball's book, *They like Jesus but not the church*, comes from his experience interviewing students about what they thought when they heard the name "Jesus" – the responses were largely positive: that he was a good person who had some sort of spiritual insight. The Jesus of the Bible, however, is not always the same as the Jesus seen in either popular culture or in Christian sub-culture: "Christians may not think of Jesus in a trivial way, but looking at what we produce in the Christian subculture from the outside can certainly give that impression" (p. 54). Kimball suggests Christians have turned Jesus into a shadow of who he really is, but then present him in either two extremes: Jesus just loves us and forgives sin, or he is just angry and judgemental, having strong political and other views not expressed in the Bible. He introduces a variety of "Jesuses" on the church stage today to illustrate how churches are projecting whatever they like onto Jesus (p. 55). I have personally observed this in the way some Christians see Jesus as a socialist, while others clearly think he was a capitalist. As people project these political persuasions upon Jesus, they are used to support their own lifestyle choices. I believe this idea of Kimball's about the variety of "Jesuses", is more about the projection of

personal or organisational values onto the figure of Jesus, than biblical interpretation of the identity of Jesus in various contexts.

When Kimball (2007) asked his participants what they thought when they heard the word "Christian" or "Church", the response was usually negative which he sums up with the Mahatma Gandhi quote: "I like your Christ.  I do not like your Christians.  Your Christians are so unlike your Christ" (p. 37).  In general, the church these participants describe does not reflect the aspirations of Christian-faith-community described in the New Testament, but rather forms of Sunday morning church services they know of.  These people are defining church as a weekly gathering in a certain place.

Like Kinnaman and Lyons (2007), Kimball (2007) summarises his research data into several themes, six of which he calls the common perceptions of the church.  His first theme is "the church is an organised religion with a political agenda."  This is a negative perception because "emergent generation" people (equivalent to Kinnaman and Lyons' "mosaics" and "busters") claim they can relate to God without all of the unnatural structures that organised church imposes on them.  This means they see the church as a place that limits personal freedom, is unfamiliar, and unnecessary.  They do not equate church with spirituality.  Kimball goes on to say how this "organised religion" is perceived as being about hierarchy, power, and control with a political agenda:  "They feel that church leaders would box in how they express their spirituality, cluttering it with rules and strangling it with restrictions…  they don't want to be controlled in their spirituality" (Kimball, 2007, p. 76).  The "emergent generations" Kimball interviewed thought most churches are "right-wing fundamentalist Christians" trying to sway political leaders about things they are not comfortable with, such as perceived "moral wrongs" (p. 77).  These same people, under their perception of "organised religion", see the church as being made of leaders who function like CEOs who desire power and control. The perception that church is hierarchically-organised causes people to opt out of an organisational structure that strangles faith.

Kimball's second theme is about how the church is judgemental and negative and how Christians are known for what they are against rather than what they are for. His third theme is about how the church is dominated by males and oppresses females. He says church is known as "a boys' club for adults – where men dominate and women are stifled and held back" (p. 115). One of Kimball's interviewees said "I feel like the church is very sexist, yet I don't believe that Jesus was sexist" (p. 115). The fourth theme from Kimball is how the church is homophobic, and sees homosexuals as enemies. He points out a relatively recent change in society, particularly with younger people, that homosexuality is accepted as normal. Kimball suggests Christian leaders need to approach the topic of homosexuality with an appreciation of how society views it. The fifth theme shows that the church arrogantly claims all other religions are wrong. In society, younger people place a high value on respecting all faiths and expressions of spirituality. When Christians do not do this they seem "unintelligent, primitive, close-minded, and uncaring of people who hold different views" (p. 167). And lastly, the church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole Bible literally. In the USA context, Kimball stereotypes these types of Christians as being card-carrying Republicans who are pro-Israel, and credit God for using natural disasters to punish people for sin. These six themes from Kimball's research show how his participants see the church in a negative way.

There is another study similar to Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) and Kimball (2007) that looked at how people perceive the church, but the participants in this qualitative research were people I describe as being "Christianised". This research was commissioned by the Bible Society of New South Wales, Australia (2004), and comprised of six focus groups of people aged between 18 and 35. These focus group participants had all been raised in Christian households, and were "not actively rejecting Christianity but not currently engaging in regular religious practice" (p. 10). The overall aim of this research was to help determine the most effective way to use mass media to increase the extent of Christianity in Australia. The results in terms of the focus group participant's

perception of the church, could be described as negative. The research identified barriers associated with Christianity related to the following issues: There were perceptions of hypocritical behaviour of church leaders and people who stand for Christian beliefs, there were concerns about the involvement of churches in issues of paedophilia, there was a perceived intolerance of churches towards homosexual lifestyles, there was a perceived lack of equality in some churches to the role of women, and there were perceptions of Christian leaders as being intolerant and judgemental, which the participants thought were the antithesis of Christian values.

Some of these Christianised Australian young people still had expressions of Christian faith, but they felt they could be Christian and live positive expressions of Christianity without being involved in the structures provided by the church. Some participants thought it was more Christian to be independent than to be bound by formalised church structures. A similar comment to Kimball's (2007) book title (*They like Jesus but not the church*) was this quote from a focus group participant: "I believe in Jesus, but I don't believe in the church" (Bible Society of New South Wales, 2004, p. 21). These young Australians thought that the concept of being Christian and part of the church was to forgo independence, free thought, and individual responsibility, and therefore the church and Christians are not seen as a desirable group to be part of. It is significant to point out that these comments come from people who have grown up within the church community and know it well, unlike the "Sam" representatives in New Zealand that I am interest in.

A company called Market Access Consulting and Research undertook the Bible Society research. This company seems impartial to the research context and outcomes. In conclusion, when describing the implications to do with communication in terms of using mass media to market Christianity in Australia, they suggest that to attract people to Christian objectives, messages would need to distance themselves from any association with the church or with the practice of religion, perhaps even avoiding the term "Christian" or

"Christianity", and possibly avoiding reference to the Bible. They suggest that, "Changing people's perceptions of the church is likely to require a clear demonstration of evidence that the churches and their leaders have changed" (p. 32).

In 2002, the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand commissioned ACNielsen to conduct research similar to that commissioned by the Bible Society of New South Wales (Brown & Smith, 2002). I am unable to disclose the details the ACNielsen research, because the report is a confidential document intended for internal use of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa only. I do not feel it would be breaking confidentiality, however, to say that the overall finding was general negativity towards the church.

Three years after the publication of Kinnaman and Lyons' (2007) "unChristian", Henderson, Hunter, and Spinks (2010), friends of Kinnaman, published a DVD and book inspired by the findings in *unChristian*. They called this project "The outsider interviews", where they ran four events in churches in four different cities in the USA, where they had a live audience of church-goers in an Oprah-like interview setting. On the stage there was a mixture of four to six "outsiders" and "insiders", sitting on couches with the hosts. Parts of these interviews are presented on the DVD. One of the aims of this project was to put the faces of real people onto the statistics from the earlier Kinnaman and Lyons research, and the outcome is an accessible multimedia entry-point for Christians into the issue of how people outside the church perceive the church. Most of the "outsiders" interviewed appeared to be what I define as Christianised, for example, growing up in a Christian family, so unlike the "Sam" representatives in my own research. The main contribution of Henderson, Hunter, and Spinks in this area of research is offering a different way for people to access the Kinnaman and Lyons work.

Do perceptions matter? In the Bible there are words that recount Jesus as saying the "world" would hate those people who follow his way, for example, the Gospel of Matthew in chapter 5 verse 11. While Jesus said this, he was

responding to something different than people simply having bad perceptions. The church could use Bible examples such as this, as justification to ignore negative perceptions. However, what people think of Christians, or anybody for that matter, influences how they respond to them. Positive response is better than negative response in nearly every situation whatever the context. I therefore believe Christians should be concerned about how they are perceived, in fact, Jesus encouraged his followers to care for one another and that through this people would positively see they are his disciples (John 13:35). Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) note that what "outsiders" think about Christians should help Christians to be objective in terms of the big picture. They say what people think about Christians can change, and often what people think, is based on personal stories which have too often been based on bad experiences.

All of these negative perceptions show a big change from the first recorded descriptions of the church in the Bible.[18] When referring to the church in the book of The Acts of the Apostles, Robertson (2008) points out that the Acts church had a positive reaction from bystanders, who were filled with awe. The Christians enjoyed the favour of all the people. Robertson talks of the purpose of the church, then and now, as being a "redemptive community" (p. 184), or at least working towards such a thing, which means having a positive effect in the neighbourhood. The parts of the USA church referred to in the research of Kinnaman and Lyons (2007), and Kimball (2007) suggest the church does not have a positive effect in the neighbourhood.

I do not believe all Christians are perceived in the ways that have been described in this section. Some do transcend these descriptions and are well-regarded in their communities, but the image of the church in general is a major stumbling block to its purpose. Murray (2004a), one of the major post-Christendom scholars suggests that in post-Christendom, the language,

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[18] For example, in what is called the book of The Acts of the Apostles written by the physician Luke, who also wrote the Gospel of Luke in the New Testament.

symbols, and history of the church are typically perceived negatively by default. He says many people are not opposed to Christianity but rather to its expression through Christendom.

Kimball (2007) adds to an old evangelical Christian illustration which describes humanity's journey to God separated between two cliff-tops by a chasm called "sin". Humanity is on the cliff-top on one side of the chasm and God is on the cliff-top on the other side. In the traditional use of this illustration Jesus becomes the bridge over the chasm, meaning faith in Jesus is what bridges over "sin", and when this is illustrated diagrammatically a cross is literally drawn between the two cliff-tops creating a bridge over "sin". Kimball adds a second chasm between humanity and God which he says has been created by Christians and the church, by their "rhetoric and attitudes which have led people today to harbour negative perceptions of Christians and Christianity that prevent them from trusting them and being interested…" (2007, p. 236). The perceptions that have been described in this section are the things creating this new chasm, which continues to grow because Christians are in their sub-culture bubble ignorant of the harm they are doing to the credibility of the Christian faith and church. Kimball's point is: rather than helping to bridge the chasm, Christians are creating another.

## 3.2  Church Leavers

Another body of knowledge in the discussion about perceptions of the church comes from the research of Jamieson (2000), who carried out qualitative interviews with people who had belonged to the evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic stream of the church[19], but who, for particular reasons, had left it. His purpose was to find out why people leave the church. This research by Jamieson was the first of its type in the Western church and done in New

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[19] Jamieson describes the evangelical, Pentecostal, and charismatic (EPC) stream of the church as growing phenomenally across the world, but also having a wide open back door through which the disgruntled, disillusioned, and disaffiliated leave (2000, p. 16).

Zealand. Here are some typical comments from church leavers: "I believe the church has lost its way and its purpose", and "It does not meet real needs of people", and "I felt that church was negatively impacting my relationship with God" (Jamieson, McIntosh, & Thompson, 2006, pp. 15-24). There is a similarity here with the perceptions presented by the research of Kinnaman and Lyons (2007), and Kimball (2007).

Murray (2004a) claims that approximately 2000 people leave British churches every week because church no longer nurtures their faith or engages with their questions. People on spiritual journeys want to mature in their faith and leavers claim that the church is not helping them to do this. They also claim that they cannot "stomach the sinful attitudes, destructive behaviour and nauseating self-righteousness of their church" (p. 46). They talk of political manoeuvring, back-biting and institutional incapacity to handle conflict. The simplistic theology and pastoral support were seen as inadequate beyond the narrow Christian sub-culture. Furthermore, the demands of belonging to this sub-culture were so burdensome that many people left to avoid burnout. Murray concludes that when inherited forms of church do not work for Christians, they simply leave it. He goes on to describe why Christians in the USA context leave church: there is a growing distrust in the institutional integrity of the church, a lack of authenticity in relationships, utter boredom with church services, antipathy towards formulae and pre-packaged Christianity, disillusionment with hype, weariness with church programmes, rejection of prosperity theology, burnout, failure to find God in times of crisis, failure to resource spirituality in daily life, resentment at male-dominated church culture, and a lack of any sense of belonging (Murray, 2004). As the previous exhaustive list shows, many church leavers are simply worn out by church and all its baggage.

Jamieson (2007) argues that classical church has a "pre-critical" (p. 32) framework of Christian faith. Within the context of post-modernity and post-Christendom, and the changing external factors these bring to the broader

context of life, many Christians are moving beyond this "pre-critical" framework of faith, but the church is not moving with them. Jamieson refers to some research from the Barna Group that shows in the USA, in the year 2000, 70% of Christians looked to the local church for their primary means of spiritual experience and expression. They predict this number will drop to between 30-35% by the year 2025 if current trends continue, which means there will be many more church leavers from classical churches over the next two decades.

## 3.3 Communication and church

When considering the communication the church directs towards society, I start by defining the church as a sub-set within society. As an active subset of social activities, the church believes it has something to offer both to its members as well as to society. The church communicates to society, to those outside of its subset, in various ways. For instance, to name a few: by actual speech, by the physical presence of buildings, by reputation, and through its representatives, Christians. Those within the church sub-set of society are likely to perceive this communication in a particular way. I am interested in how this communication is perceived by those in the grouping of society outside of the sub-set of the church. Section 3.3 looks at particular issues the scholars in question for chapters 2, 3, and 4, either mentioned or alluded to, around the communication of the church.

The most common theme in this area is the use of language by the church and by Christians. Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) suggest that while Christians are trying to convey, according to Christians, the most important message in human history, something gets lost in translation. Kinnaman and Lyons are implying that Christians may have at heart the best interests of their audience, but that this simply does not come across. The church's "leader" Jesus was recorded as being an excellent communicator who made difficult concepts vivid and used the language of common people to help point them to spiritual depth (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007). It is unfortunate that the classical church seems to

have has lost sight of this. It appears to have no awareness of the way it is communicated into society or how it is perceived.

According to Frost (2006), what needs to happen to improve communication, is for the church and Christians to employ the language and thought forms of the people they intend to communicate with. Frost has in mind the example of what the church calls the Incarnation, when Jesus was embodied as a powerful form of the communication of God. By becoming human, Jesus embodied the language and thought-forms of certain people at a certain time and place. Drawing on the concept of Jesus as communication, Frost says that rather than theological or religious jargon being the common speech of the church, vernacular expression and stories need to be the form of language used. As Frost (2006) puts it, there needs to be a confidence that the message ("Gospel") "can be communicated by ordinary means, through acts of servanthood, loving relationships, good deeds" and so on (p. 55). He continues to define why he thinks the church has a problem with language and communication:

> I've come to discover that there is a whole world of professional Christians who live primarily in the church or the Christian academy, and who determine what is the so-called true and proper terminology or the correct biblical procedure for mission, but who never seem to embody the ideas that they describe. (p. 56)

Frost (2006) also refers to Brueggeman (1989) and his comments about the false image Christian and church language can portray, suggesting that too often the language used in-house by clergy, and those who lead church services, is loaded with hyper-real images and unlikely expectations, which lead to audiences slowly developing a sense of alienation because it does not relate to their real lives. He observes that public Christian discourse often concerns itself with happy Christian families, answered prayers, and parables with an obvious moral inserted into the punch line. Christians use phrases like "God turned up" but cannot explain what that means or why God seems to "turn up" for them and not for others. Frost concludes by suggesting it is more about what is not said that conveys so much in the public realm of speech, than what is said.

A characteristic of Christendom and the church's communication is that the church expects everyone to know its language and accept its cultural norms without doubts. The classical church speaks and acts authoritatively and then becomes discomforted when people choose not to belong, believe, or behave in approved ways (Murray, 2004a). Branson (2004) suggests that "conversations" (p. xiii) are the most remarkable instruments of the church, but they need to be worked on carefully if they are going to foster any life with and around the organisation of the church. He argues that it is the leaders of the church who are the definers and shapers of what and how things are talked about. The language issue gets even more complicated as it is not just an "insider" or "outsider" concern, as Jamieson (2007) points out, the people who are at different stages of faith development within the church put different meanings onto different terminology. He says: "It seems that they almost speak an incompatible language, so when those of pre-critical faith talk with post-critical faith people, the same words can have quite conflicting meanings and nuances" (2007, p. 108). This shows that not only are there communication issues between church and society, but there are also issues within the church.

When thinking of the church as a sub-group within society it is useful to consider the way in which individuals classify themselves according to the groups they belong to. Hoverd, Atkinson, and Sibley (2012) suggest that the practices of, belief in, and affiliation to religion are powerful forces that shape local intergroup dynamics and global geopolitics, and that religion is one of the major ingroups in which people seek self-validation. Early scholarship on in-groups and outgroups found that feelings of self-enhancement come from belonging to groups that are positively evaluated and, conversely, to not belonging to outgroups that negatively are evaluated (Tajfel, 1982b; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Ingroup members are likely to positively accentuate perceived similarities with other members of the ingroup and to negatively accentuate the outgroup differences in order to strengthen their own sense of self (Stets & Burke, 2000). Establishing and enhancing positive group distinctiveness will "protect, enhance, preserve, or achieve a positive social identity" (Tajfel, 1982b,

p. 24) which ultimately, leads group members to favour their ingroup above others because of their perception of the group's positive distinctiveness. Such perceptions of positive distinctiveness allow group members to overlook any negative ingroup characteristics, to the extent that even if they have more in common with outgroups, they will demonstrate significant ingroup bias (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Billig & Tajfel, 1973).

Intergroup behaviour can be defined as any perceptions, cognition or behaviour that is influenced by people's recognition that they and others are members of distinct social groups. Examples of intergroup behaviour are prejudice and discrimination such as authoritarian personal, dogmatism and frustration-aggression. In my focus groups I will be looking to see if some of these characteristics are evident. Ethnocentrism is a key feature of intergroup behaviour and this characteristic will be looked for in my church representative focus groups.

Social identity theory attempts to explain intergroup conflict and social change and looks at how groups and individuals can adopt a range of different behavioural strategies determined by their beliefs about the nature of relations between their own and other groups. The focus group process of my research acts as a focusing mechanism that may expose some of the beliefs the focus group participants have of the "Sam" representative interviewees. Other components of social psychology theory that look at intergroup behaviour support the construction of this them and us theme: the relative homogeneity effect explains the tendency to see outgroup members as all the same, and ingroup members as more differentiated (Hoverd, et al., 2012). Considering Christians and the church as a sub-group of society, and therefore an "ingroup", and how this affects communication and relationships, will be used as a framework in the focus group data analysis stage of my research.

Television, movies, and newspapers, are other ways the church gets communicated, not always on its own terms, but in representations perceived by others. One of the people Kimball (2007) interviewed thought pastors were

"creepy, [and] try to proselytize people to become right-wing Republicans that hate homosexuals" (p. 26). That interviewee knew no pastors personally, but had put together her impressions from stories read, things seen on television, street preachers, and encounters with Christians at college. Kimball is saddened that people who grow up outside of the church base their impressions of the church on the most vocal and aggressive Christian voices who are the minority. This minority include the people handing out the tracts, who tell others they are going to hell, and the fundamentalist protestors who stand outside concert venues in the USA holding hate signs. One reason Kimball (2007) gives for this vocal minority is the Christian sub-culture bubble that most Christians are stuck in. Hirsch (2006) also comments on how films often portray the Catholic church in oppressive ways. Frost (2006) mentions the success of Dan Brown's (2003) Da Vinci Code and how it cornered the market by tapping into a general distrust of religious and civic institutions. He says it leaves people, "…certain that the Christian church would stop at nothing to maintain its position of power and wealth in society today" (p. 72). Frost and Hirsch (2003) suggest, when talking of media, that in classical church the medium has often become the message, using the sermon and church buildings as examples of messages lost.

Other influential forms of communication of the church are through branding. As Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) write, "…to outsiders the word Christian has more in common with a brand than a faith" (p. 223). Just as some people are great fans of Starbucks, others hate the organisation for its alleged evil corporate greed and lack of social conscience, so too people form attitudes about the church. Further on the idea of image being part of communication, Frost (2006) comments on his experience of visiting Vatican City and how it was not spiritually uplifting as he had imagined it would be. The church buildings he saw communicated an expression of the church being a dominating power full of wealth. From this experience Frost suggests: "Many people outside the church, whether Christian or not… cannot equate the radical young Middle Eastern rabbi with the religion of wealth and power that claims him as their

leader" (Frost, 2006, p. 70). Murray puts it this way: "When the church becomes a powerful institution, a particular way of telling the story solidifies and attains normative status, marginalising alternatives. It can also function as a control mechanism, enhancing the church's status" (2004a, p. 161). Various "brands" of church communicate different things to different people.

Another area in society that relies on good communication as well as branding, is sales. In the next section I explore the perception that the church has become a product that is sold. I look at scholars who suggest the church and Christian spirituality are marketed like any other commodity in the marketplace, rather than being seen as a place for spiritual assistance and support. I include this section here because it shows another dimension to the topic of how the church is perceived. The selling of religion hooks into the reality of everyday life where we negotiate different transactions all of the time, many to do with buying and selling, and these are often taken for granted, resulting in various transactions being completed without any critical thought. I want to explore how this might be the case with Christian spirituality and the church.

## 3.4  Selling God: Church perceived as product?

> In the beginning the Church was a fellowship of men and women
> centering on the living Christ. Then the Church moved to Greece, where it
> became a philosophy. Then it moved to Rome, where it became an
> institution. Next it moved to Europe, where it became a culture. And
> finally, it moved to America, where it became an enterprise.
> (Dr. Richard Halverson, in a speech to the General Assembly of the
> Presbyterian Church circa 1995, quoted by Twitchell (2007, p. 20))

In the 1980s large segments of the church started applying business principles, metaphors, and language to the way they operated. If the Christian faith is supposed to be something organic and life-giving, business principles were the antithesis. Kimball (2007) refers to the introduction of business descriptors for titles in the church, such as executive pastor, senior pastor, elder board, and management team, as making sense to the Baby Boomer generation who were wanting their churches to be led smartly and efficiently, and claimed the Boomers valued churches functioning as corporations or businesses. But to the

generations below the Boomers, this can seem very unlike Jesus, "…since it equates the church with big business and only reinforces the idea that the church is organised religion" (p. 81), and this feeds a negative perception of the church.

The Boomer-led "business" flavour of some churches is not only a criticism from outside of the church, but from inside it as well.  Frost (2006) suggests that the church has imprisoned Jesus in a stained-glass cell and wants only to worship him but never follow him, he talks of contemporary churches having armies of church leaders resembling corporate executives that act as if the church is a global business, the result being, "…the subversive, radical nature of Jesus has been so domesticated that we find ourselves in our current position, with Christians living in ghettos and losing touch with the memories of the past" (p. 51).  What Frost is suggesting fits well into Ritzer's (2004) thesis on "the globalisation of nothing".  With a focus on consumption and its rapid spread across the planet, Ritzer defines the concept of "nothing" to mean "generally centrally conceived and controlled social forms that are comparatively devoid of distinctive substantive content" (Ritzer, 2004, p. xi).  Ritzer defines four types of "nothing", first, "non-places", for example, Westfield shopping malls and the Skycity casino.  Second, "non-things", for example, Barkers T-shirts.  Third, "non-people", such as the counter people at KFC and telemarketers.  And finally, "non-services", such as online banking and shopping.

The idea of "loss amidst monumental abundance" (Ritzer, 2004, p. xiv) occurs when there is so much "nothing" cunningly disguised in the form of  content, that an almost unnoticed loss occurs, which is the gradual degradation of "something".  "Something" is described as locally conceived and controlled things with distinctive content, which according to Ritzer's thesis disappears.  This loss is Ritzer's main point in his thesis.  While there is now, for example, an abundance of fast-food restaurants with reasonably priced food available to lots of people, what is lost are local cafes and eating places and the sense of

community that was associated with them (Ritzer, 2004). While the more easily understood examples come in the form of food consumption, these phenomena occur throughout society in most forms of consumption. When Frost (2006) suggests the subversive, radical nature of Jesus has been domesticated so that Christians have now lost touch with the memories of the past, I suggest this is an indication of consumerism in the church, and therefore an indicator of Ritzer's globalisation of nothing thesis being demonstrated within the church.

It is difficult to know if the two are connected, but since business methods have been introduced into the management of the church, the commodification of Christianity has become more connected to the consumerist nature of society. The current, classical church, according to Pagitt (2003) has spent most of its time and resources discovering the best use of marketing techniques in order to draw people in and make them stay. He also suggests the common assumption, that everything is a product that can be marketed and sold, including Christianity, which leads to the commodification of Christianity, is among the greatest threats to living a viable Christian faith. Hirsch (2006) reflects that the role of religion is to offer a sense of identity, purpose, meaning, and community, and wonders whether contemporary consumerism fulfils all these criteria as well (2006). He goes on to suggest that if this is the case, the church would then see consumerism as the competition, meaning that the church would feel the need to play the marketing game even better to gain people's allegiance, becoming little more than a vendor of religious goods and services, where "the end-users of the church services . . . easily slip into the role of discerning, individualist consumers, devouring the religious goods and services offered by the latest and best vendor" (2006, p. 110). This is another indicator that the classical church is trying to play the same game as big business. According to Hirsch, church growth experts in the latter part of the twentieth century told the church to mimic the shopping mall to create a one-stop-shop religious shopping experience. He connects the attractional dimension of sales to an ideological framework of the church:

> Christendom, operating as it does in the attractional mode and run by professionals, was already susceptible to consumerism, but under the influence of contemporary church growth practice, consumerism has actually become the driving ideology of the church's ministry.  (Hirsch, 2006, p. 110)

Hirsch backs this up by pointing out that 90% of Sunday church attendees are passive, and therefore consumers.  Certainly, although my own experience must be considered anecdotal, I do know that in most churches, much staff time is spent on creating appealing Sunday services for a largely passive congregation, and that work attracts associated costs in the budget.

Marketing and consumerism issues are significant in some current expressions of classical church, most notably in the USA.  These are real issues, and these perhaps come from the evangelical church's desire for evangelism, or in other words: spreading their message of the gospel with great intensity.  Just as the church latched on to the printing press when Gutenberg invented it in the fifteenth century, when much of the early advertising was to sell Bibles (Einstein, 2008), so too has some of the church latched on to contemporary models of sales and marketing to advertise their message.

Some consumer church scholars (Einstein, 2008; Hoover, 2006; Moore, 1994; Twitchell, 2007) appear to critique, in my opinion fairly, the sales and marketing angle of the church, but with little response, reflection, or suggestion as to how Christian-faith-community could actually exist beyond the obvious market and consumer driven expressions they critique.  Einstein (2008) suggests that religion in itself has become a product and the marketing of this product has had massive effect on how people engage with the church:

> …as people are increasingly prone to shop, religions will not only have to increase the level of marketing and promotion in order to be heard among so many competing forces, but they will also be increasingly prone to creating a product that religious consumers will buy. (p. xi)

The more marketing the churches do to promote or sell themselves, the more likely their desired consumers will be to compare and hold them up against other competitors in the church market.  Einstein's acceptance that marketing

communication is the basis of society means if any organisation does not market themselves, no one will know who they are. Moore (1994) extends this competition beyond just the church market to the general market of other cultural commodities, many of which have been trying to break free from what he calls religious disapproval. He argues that culture itself has become an industry, so it was not just religion, but technology, industrialisation, class and gender formation, urbanisation, and immigration, that competed for consumer attention, he says "…all these things created bewildering complexities that demanded adjustments" (Moore, 1994, p. 11). Adding to this is the role that the media has taken through these changes, particularly with religion, as Hoover (2006) points out:

> …media and religion have come together in fundamental ways. They occupy the same spaces, serve many of the same purposes, and invigorate the same practices in late modernity. Today, it is probably better to think of them as related than to think of them as separate. (p. 9)

He suggests that today it is the media that is the main source of attractive and salient symbols, and while the media might not create the symbols, they decide which ones to promote in the creation of ideas and values in contemporary life. They reproduce and circulate these symbols "under conditions that are defined by economic, social, and political arrangements" (Hoover, 2006, p. 13). The result is that what we see and hear of religion in contemporary society is often through the lens and filter of the media.

Einstein (2008) argues that the message of the church, particularly through books and televangelistic programming, has become the marketing, and the Sunday church service has become the product that church leaders are trying to sell. This has had a cumulative effect of changed and increased expectations from people who might respond to the marketing and end up going to a church service. If people turn up to a church service and it is not like the marketing suggests, they will leave. Einstein suggests that in order to marry the product with the marketing, churches have learned to create church services based on demographics and consumer appeal, and this has added increasing amounts of

the secular to their presentations. Secularization theory was the idea that as societies became more industrialised they will become less religious. Einstein suggests that as society in the USA has become more secular where religion has a declining relevance, in some cases rather than sliding down a path of disappearance, churches have become more secular, she says, "In order not to lose out to the broader culture, organized religion changes to accommodate the culture within which it exists, taking on the trappings of secular institutions out of fear of becoming marginalized for not having done so" (Einstein, 2008, p. 17). This seems to be working for some large and successful churches such as the USA mega-churches, but this could be at the expense of the smaller churches that are unable to put on the extravagant large-scale performances the mega-churches have resources to create, which means the religious consumers are either leaving or avoiding the churches that Einstein suggests are not accommodating the culture within which they exist. While there is growth and success in some larger churches, there is still an overall decline of organised religion, but not, as Einstein puts it, the elimination of the human impulse to appreciate the sacred. In the New Zealand context this supports the already mentioned "churchless faith" phenomenon described by Jamieson (2000).

The concept of the church needing to match its message to the marketplace in order to attract religious consumers, means the church needs to make its message more easily palatable to people who might not actually be interested in what the church is trying to sell. Religious consumers might not actually be after traditional Christian expressions of spirituality. Einstein (2008) notes that in this case the message needs to become simple and easily digestible in a short period of time, and then, perhaps her most significant point, which she poses as a question: "…is selling a diluted form of faith in order to attract an audience worth possibly diluting the practice overall?" (p. 66). These ideas connect with my critique of what I am referring to as classical church or Christendom expressions of church, that are trying to survive into post-Christendom times. In chapter 4, I outline some of the values and hopes post-Christendom aware writers have of post-Christendom expressions of Christian-faith-community,

and they do not include diluting the faith in order to remain attractive. While Einstein (2008) suggests the church service has become the product, I suspect most mega-church pastors would deny this and claim lives transformed through Christian commitment would be the ultimate aim. In fact Einstein mentions this as being the justification mega-church pastor Rick Warren gives, but she finds this hard to align with the marketing machine Saddleback Church has become. Einstein discusses church courses such as the Purpose Driven Life course and book by Rick Warren of Saddleback mega-church in California, and the Alpha course from the Holy Trinity Brompton Church in England, and admits that the long-term goal of these might be "changed lives and belief in Christ, God, and so on", but suggest this is still presented like a product, with the short-term goal simply to get "bodies in the door" (2008, p. 119).

Twitchell (2007) asks some questions that highlight the nature of consumer success of some churches compared to others that are more traditional in their expression:

> Does the small church on the corner operate like the gas station? What about the megachurch out there by the interstate – is it like a big-box store? How come the church downtown with exactly the same product is in shambles? (Twitchell, 2007, p. 2)

In the small town of Motueka, New Zealand, where I grew up, when superstore The Warehouse came to town many of the friendly family-run shops on High Street went out of business and closed down. The only obvious expansion in the town since The Warehouse appears to be junk food franchises, cafes and restaurants, and travel agents: things that do not appear to be on The Warehouse radar.

The Warehouse superstores are an example of what Ritzer (1993) called "McDonaldization", after analysing the habits of production within the fast-food industry, specifically the McDonalds hamburger restaurants considering their success and reputation as a global phenomena. McDonaldization can be summed up with four points: First, systems rely on efficiency, where the best

way to do everything is discovered. Second, there is an emphasis on calculability, this means quantity is emphasised and quality is de-emphasised and this is shown in McDonaldized products which are usually mediocre. Third, McDonaldized systems are highly predictable. Customers feel safe in a fast-food restaurant which has employees acting the same way every time they visit with the same menu and seating arrangements. And fourth, there is a tendency in McDonaldized systems to exert control over people usually through the use of nonhuman technologies (Ritzer, 2002).

Ritzer concluded that McDonaldized systems have a negative effect on the environment and dehumanise the world. Nonhuman and antihuman activities are the result and Ritzer sums these up as being a reconceptualisation of rationalisation. The McDonaldization of society occurs all over the world as the characteristics of fast-food restaurants are copied in other forms of consumption. I am suggesting that The Warehouse super stores that have spread throughout New Zealand over the last thirty years, are an example of McDonaldization, and my home town analogy is intended to parallel The Warehouse superstores with mega-churches. In Twitchell's quote earlier he refers to some churches being in a "shambles", in my home town example the "shambles" refers to the small shops on High Street that have failed due to the success of The Warehouse. Problems might come for The Warehouse if consumer need changes for whatever reason to, for example, a preference for quality rather than cheap, or New Zealand made rather than Chinese imports. Until there is reason for consumers to make those changes, The Warehouse will thrive. Likewise, with the consumers of mega-churches who might not have reasons to change their consumer habits now, but at some stage this might come, for example, from a desire for more authentic and organic expressions of spirituality and other post-Christendom values.

Of the post-Christendom writers mentioned earlier in this chapter, and in chapters 2 and 4, none of them embrace the sales and marketing strategies exposed by the writers in this section about church as product, but they do,

however, acknowledge it. What I refer to as "classical church", Hirsch defines as being in "the modernist-Christendom mode" (2006, p. 42), which he says derives from a consumerist model. He complains that the vast majority of church adherents in the West simply consume services. He goes as far as calling the church a "feeding trough" (p. 43), and suggests this is not what Jesus suggested for his followers: "The church has become both a consumable and a service provider, a vendor of religious goods and services. But this 'service-provision' approach is the very thing Jesus didn't do" (Hirsch, 2006, p. 44). Jesus often provoked people by challenging them about their attitudes and lifestyle.[20] The post-Christendom writers are in fact calling for what could seem like the opposite to marketing and consumerism: more holistic and authentic expressions of Christian spirituality, none of which appear to be the priority of the Christian marketing machine mentioned by the consumer church writers. I would therefore categorise televangelists, mega-churches, and other church expressions that connect into marketing and consumer aspects of society, as classical church or Christendom expressions of church, that are doing all that they can to survive in their Christendom-like existence. These relatively recent ways of so-called "selling God" are therefore still Christendom expressions of church.

## 3.5 Inside critique of church and Christians

Now that I have dealt with the perceptions of people from outside of the church, I want to highlight the thoughts of the writers I have examined who situate themselves within the church. In this section I look at what they are saying about the church, so this is their critique of the church and Christians. Their first concern is how Christians seem to have missed the importance of some of the societal changes that have occurred. As Patrick (2008) points out when referring to the death of Christian Britain, a lot has happened to the

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[20] For example, in the Bible, Matthew 19:16-30, Jesus has a conversation with a young man who is very wealthy. Jesus gives the man a challenge that is the opposite of embracing his comfort, in which the man appears to find difficult to comprehend.

church in the last 40 years: "…it took several centuries… to convert Britain to Christianity, but it has taken less than 40 years for the country to forsake it" (p. 288). While this comment is highly contestable in the sense that it has taken only 40 years, it comes from someone seemingly pining for the resurgence of Christendom and therefore seeing the demise of the church as a society issue rather than a church issue, it does highlight the rapid speed of changing times. When Patrick talks of the "demise of the nation's core religious and moral identity" (p. 288), he is likely to attribute this to changes in society whereas I would attribute it to the church not being aware of the change, and so being unable to evolve accordingly (or unable to return to its origins where it faced similar challenges in not being a dominant power or influencer). Frost (2006) notices the same societal change that Patrick does, but suggests the church is in a state of yearning for a return to the days where everyone used to attend church and Christian family values reigned. Frost thinks the church is largely hoping and praying that the ground will shift back to times past, and our society will once again embrace the values it used to share with the Christian community (2006). What Frost is describing is a Christendom mind-set that has no awareness that Christendom is over. He continues his critique by saying:

> The root of the problem of the church today, victimised by nostalgia and buffeted by fear, the church is focussed too much on merely holding the small plot of ground that it currently occupies to confidently reimagine a robust future. The result is a retreat into some fundamentalist us-versus-them model rather than an endlessly cunning, risky process of negotiation. (Frost, 2006, p. 9)

The result is for Christians to withdraw from society in the hope that they can avoid any contamination from the onslaught of what is referred to as post-Christendom (p. 82).

Ward (2004) and Fields and Lineham (2008a) when commenting on the current state of the church in New Zealand, suggest the decline is more to do with a general disenchantment with traditional voluntary organisations in the current society. Fields and Lineham say an "…unwillingness to get involved is a key reason for the decline of church in our generation" (p. 173), and that this social

phenomenon of disengagement is due to a more mobile society reducing scope for high levels of voluntary involvement, and heightened expectations in regard to standards for events which can make church activities seem "shambolic and styleless, insensitive to the 'real world'" (p. 173). Fields and Lineham suggest that appropriate patterns of church life need to be developed around these kinds of issues, and that the current state of the church is one that has evolved to this point, and will surely evolve further in the future. Fields and Lineham do not address the fact that the evolution of the church they talk of could be due to continuing to operate within a Christendom mind-set, which might in fact be an evolving backwards or regression due to a lack of the church having begun to evolve with post-Christendom. Rather than settling for facts like a smaller commitment to voluntarianism in the twenty-first century, and deciding the church needs to work within this reality, my opinion is to suggest that if the meaning of Christian faith is no longer a radical transformative following of the Jesus shown in the New Testament, then it would be better to demonstrate and educate that the Christian faith has in fact lost its "edge", with its purpose and meaning being a diluted expression of the original. Would it not be better for the church to come to terms with this new reality and embrace it as fact? The task then would be an attempt to discover what could be done in a post-Christendom society to regain its "edge", rather than try to accommodate a Christendom church to work with fewer volunteers. I am not yet sure how best to go about this but some of the writers considered here have hopes and suggestions for the future which I will look at in the following chapter.

Robertson (2008, p. 176) breaks down the ministry of Jesus into three parts, and proposes that the church needs to be what he describes as a "redemptive community" modelled on these three parts. The first part is "Word", where Jesus talked about what Christians define as "the word of the gospel" which is the essence of the faith. The second part is "Sign", which includes the physically transformative or more super-natural dimensions of Jesus' ministry such as helping sick people. The final part is "Deed", referring to Jesus'

concern for the poor, marginalised and outcast, and his willingness to confront oppression from the powerful. Robertson shows how these three things together were elements of the early (first century) church and suggests they too need to be elements of the twenty-first century church. The problem he identifies is that the Protestant church has split into three groups along the lines of these three ministry parts:

> Evangelicals are most at home with the teaching of the word of the Gospel. Pentecostals delight in the power of signs and wonders, while Mainline churches are most comfortable engaging in deeds that express the values of the gospel. (p. 176)

For Robertson it is the separation of these three things that has caused the church to lose what I define as its "edge", which he puts down to theological understanding rather than societal or cultural shifts. I am personally drawn to this idea of Robertson's because it forms a possible place to start in redefining the church post-Christendom: using the three parts of word, sign, and deed, as the framework for a Christian-faith-community, rather than the classical church framework that is often about Sunday church services, worship genre, and leadership style.

Modernity still holds strong in the classical church, and has been a strong and recurring theme in the literature I have focused on. Specific examples of modernity seen in church, from Gibbs and Bolger (2005), are a dualistic, spiritualised, and interiorised understanding of Jesus, an embrace of the split between sacred and secular, a focus on the church meeting rather than community life, a spiritualised and powerful Jesus rather than a social and political one. They suggest modernity pushed the church to the margins of society where it had the task of being a religious provider, and in return the church let the rest of society inhabit the space beyond its domain which was everything secular. This separation meant that when the rule of modernity began to crumble, the modern church shared its fate. Gibbs and Bolger (2005) claim that: "…a desire for a holistic spirituality filled the culture, but the church found itself ill prepared for the task. Holistic Spiritualities formed to address

all of life, and the church found itself defending its modern ethos" (p. 87). Gibbs and Bolger's quote is another way of saying the church has not evolved from Christendom to post-Christendom.

A result of a modernity-influenced church, then, is one that excludes people and insists on certain conformity. An opposite of this would be a church that displayed the hospitality of Jesus: including and welcoming people who are different from themselves (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005). Due to innovations in things such as travel, communication, and science, the way we define community has changed. One problem with the classical church is the degree to which the thinking and practices of Christianity seem to have stubbornly stayed the same under the influence of industrial times (Pagitt, 2003). The classical church therefore gives the impression that it is ignoring new ways of defining community in society, it may not be, but there are signs of the past being held onto too tightly, which does not sit well with post-modern influenced people.

According to Trebilcock (2003), another modernist characteristic in the classical church is the drive for administrative simplification, particularly seen in denominational authorities. He says their preferred changes are toward simplification, which means selling, merging, and consolidating in order to conform to a standard that was effective in Christendom. When decline happens, denominational authorities will try to find a way to consolidate to the ideal modern church form. If several small churches are declining and not sustainable, the thought of the rationalist is to pull the plug on them and rebuild something new to cover up the history and decline. As Trebilcock puts it: "…every new building gives a sense of accomplishment and pride in the denomination (and its authorities) that masks the number of churches in survival mode or that are 'disappearing' by being amalgamated" (p. 34). This is one reason why I believe mega-churches are presented as being very successful: new, flash, and big make the headlines which help people to ignore the small, struggling, suburban churches that often became smaller and more struggling

due to the drift to the mega-churches, that have more resources to dedicate to the techniques of consumption.

Mega-churches, micro-churches, and para-churches are expression of church that Fields and Lineham (2008a) compliment but not without critique. They suggest that on their own they are not the real church. They would like to see them working together somehow in order to try to gain what each of them lack. In my experience mega-churches can lack "soul", and micro-churches often lack resources.

I return to a quote by one of the church leavers in an interview from the work by Jamieson, McIntosh, and Thompson (2006). It echoes much of the thought expressed around the internal critique of the church by the writers considered in this chapter: "I believe the church has lost its way and its purpose" (p. 15). This quote leads well into the next chapter: if many of these writers are implying the church has lost its way and purpose, what are they suggesting for the future of the church?

# Chapter 4: What might the future of the church look like?

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 review literature that informs the two research questions presented in chapter 1 by examining a body of knowledge in the area of the perception and communication of the church in the West. My angle of enquiry is to look at how things are different now for the church from how they have been in the past, initially making use of the paradigm change idea that there was once a period of time called "Christendom" which has now ended and been replaced by what is currently referred to as "post-Christendom" (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003). This begins to broadly define the context in which the church finds itself in twenty-first century New Zealand. Christendom was discussed in chapter 2, in chapter 3 the perceptions of the church from those outside of it, as well as some critique from insiders was considered, and now in this chapter, I look at what the same writers are saying about the future of the church. My observations in this chapter can best be divided into two sub-headings, first: "form follows function". In this section, I intend to examine how the future of the church might look or be. Second: "leadership", which could fit within the "form follows function" section but is handled separately because so much is said about leadership it seemed more logical to address the material in a discrete section.

## 4.1  Form follows function

This section heading refers to the twentieth century architectural principle where the shape of a building should be primarily based on its intended function or purpose. Sullivan (1896), an architect from the USA coined the phrase "that form ever follows function" (p. 407) and presented this idea at the end of the nineteenth century when he was developing the shape of the first tall steel skyscrapers in Chicago. He stated:

> It is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things
> physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman
> – of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul – that the
> life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This
> is the law. (Sullivan, 1896, p. 407)[21]

At that time, technology, taste, and economic forces were converging making it necessary to drop the established styles of the past. If the old pattern book was no longer going to define the shape of the building, something else had to determine its form, and for Sullivan this was going to be the purpose of the building. It became "form follows function" and no longer "form follows precedent". I use Sullivan's now common phrase as a heading because I feel the sentiments around its origins fit so well into the issues facing the church in the twenty-first century, and the need to now consider what the church could be like in the future. What if the form of the church followed its original and hoped for function, rather than following evolved Christendom-favoured precedent? I will now interact with some of the future ideas for the church from the literature.

First is a rather obvious concern, articulated by Kimball (2007), as the need to define church as people rather than a weekend worship service in a church building. This might seem obvious, and most classical churches (or Christendom and modernity mode churches) would agree with this statement: it is biblical. But due to reasons mentioned in the previous two chapters, this concept is not generally enacted by classical church. Frost (2006) says the weekly meeting is only the tip of the iceberg showing a very small and visible part of a much larger body, this is said in relation to his own self-defined

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[21] Sullivan continues quite scathingly about suggestions this idea not be followed:
Shall we, then, violate daily this law in our art? Are we so decadent, so imbecile, so utterly weak of eyesight, that we cannot perceive this truth so simple, so very simple? Is it indeed a truth so transparent that we see through it but do not see it? Is it really then a very marvellous thing, or is it rather so commonplace, so everyday, so near a thing to us, that we cannot perceive that the shape, form, outward expression, design – or whatever we may choose – of the tall office building, should, in the very nature of things, follow the functions of the building – and that where the function does not change, the form is not to change? (Sullivan, 1896, p. 408)

"emerging church". He suggests "churching together" should be seen as a web of relationships rather than a singular event, and that "churching together" is seeking the rhythm of a community together (2006, p. 276).

Kimball (2007) suggests that people in post-Christendom culture have a desire to participate and to ask questions. He has concluded that learning best occurs, not in one-way lecture formats, but through a mixture of teaching and discussion. This becomes a big challenge to the classical church, which is so focused around a sermon in a weekly meeting. The people Kimball interviewed, who were under the age of 35, showed a strong bias against big meetings and a desire to hear from multiple voices. In big meetings where few voices speak, people easily become passive listeners. Active participation is more welcome and possible in smaller meetings that embrace more voices. Ward (2004), suggests the majority of New Zealanders under the age of 40, "are not going to be attracted into the kind of social institutions that existing forms of church represent, however contemporary that packaging may be" (p. 7), simply because it is not their social world.

Some scholars (Murray, 2004; Taylor, 2005) refer to the people who are catalysing the future of the church as "emerging" Christians or churches. Taylor (2005) suggests that in response to the changes of popular culture, emerging Christians remix what is given to them, that, "…they pull existing forms from their external world to create distinctly new ways of following Jesus" (p. 38). Taylor suggests the activities of the faith community should emerge organically rather than programmatically, which is a very post-Christendom mind-set to have.

Fields and Lineham (2008b) suggest churches will need to discover their own niche markets and identities in order to survive. They claim that part of this will probably lie in the different ways the denominations are able to accommodate minority groups. They say, "The church will make breakthroughs in mission only when they are able to respond to the quest for

spiritual depth and life which is apparent in the spiritually starving secular West", (Fields & Lineham, 2008b, p. 350). Frost (2006) claims that valuing diversity and difference are needed rather than conformity and uniformity. He also thinks the church needs to be recognised in all sorts of different expressions, alluding to the liquidness of modernity, or what he refers to as post-modernity. Ward too embraces the need for many new expressions, and expects:

> Some will wither and die very quickly, some will doubtless become non-orthodox or heretical, but among those that thrive are likely to be found new social groupings needed to contextualise our faith into the new world of post Christian, postmodern and post secular New Zealand. (Ward, 2004, p. 7)

Hirsch (2006) acknowledges that the classical church does think about the future of Christianity in the West, but he believes its proposed ideas are generally little more than revisions of past approaches and techniques, in other words, they are Christendom techniques. Hirsch says "What we need now is a new set of tools. A new 'paradigm' – a new vision of reality: a fundamental change in our thoughts, perceptions, and values" (Hirsch, 2006, p. 17). This new paradigm he talks of is post-Christendom as described in chapter 2.

On the post-Christendom church, Murray (2004a) lists some of the desired characteristics[22] he believes are needed. These characteristics derive from the

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[22] Here is a list of desired characteristics for the future church from Murray (2004): A church that can listen (as opposed to the dominant Christendom church which was often arrogant), a church that is respectful, a church that is resourcing; a church where God is at the centre, rather than the minister, programme, or growth targets, a church where authentic friendships are nurtured rather than insipid "fellowship" or institutional belonging. A church that is self-critical, alert to destructive interpersonal dynamics: working towards healthy community practices. A church where adults are treated as adults and not spoon-fed, where dialogue is fostered rather than monologue, and participation rather than performance. A church that welcomes questions, avoids simplistic answers, and affirms the dimension of mystery in authentic spirituality. A place that encourages expressions of doubt, anger and lament, as well as joyful certainty. A church that is attuned to the pressures of daily life, where no unrealistic demands are placed on people. A church that engages creatively and sensitively with contemporary culture and social issues, which equips people beyond the church's gatheredness, and a church that embraces an holistic understanding of the mission of the church (Murray, 2004a, pp. 53-56).

idea of a member-centric church rather than an organisation-centric church (for a full list of Murray's points, please refer to the footnote).  I particularly warm to Murray's use of the concept of symbiosis when referring to the church that we have inherited from Christendom and any churches that emerge out of Christendom, because this shows value and respect for what has been, and also acknowledges that a positive future relies on change.  The implication is that the two expressions of Christian-faith-community, past and future, need to interact together for the benefit of both, and he refers to this as being the brightest hope for church after Christendom.

Some of the scholars I have reviewed critique the way the classical church constructs and practices the corporate worship of God.  For example they criticise singing together for long periods of time, or what Murray (2004) calls extended times of repetitive singing.  When considering what post-Christendom corporate worship might be like, Murray suggests as a starting point, a reconnection with the worship practices from past centuries, such as "Celtic" spirituality (Early Middle Ages), the music of Taizé (which includes chants and icons from the Eastern Orthodox tradition), and the contemplative tradition (such as the practices of John of the Cross in the seventeenth century).  On the other hand Gibbs and Bolger (2005), on worship, suggest that any future church worship should be based around producing rather than consuming:

> Consumerism teaches people to be passive spectators, objects, receivers.
> Emerging churches, in their efforts to resemble the kingdom [of God]
> create space for all members to act as producers in their gatherings.  As
> each person brings his or her world to worship, the sacred/secular split is
> overcome. (p. 172)

An example of producing worship would be to create content suitable to the present context.  The opposite of this is worship that is predictable and packaged.

Murray (2004a) believes the church after Christendom does not have to be uniform and the structure, or to use Sullivan's word, "form", of the church is less significant than its ethos, or to quote Sullivan again, its "function".  He

suggests the future of the church needs to be simple and sustainable, but not simplistic, and that this would release time and energy for "being" as well as "doing" (pp. 218-226).  Murray says:

> …the primary task of the church after Christendom [is] to offer hope
> humbly, graciously, gently and winsomely.  Hope must be realistic – not
> triumphalistic, sensitive to the pain and disorientation of the present as
> well as confident in God's future. (p. 232)

This quote describes what Murray means by the future of the church being simple and sustainable.

Murray (2004a) says that post-Christendom people, at least in the affluent West, are in a culture less concerned about guilt and more interested in life before death than after it.  The implication of this is that personal salvation is not the confining climax to Christian faith, as it has been in classical church, but rather, that the motivation for church membership becomes the on-going social transformation arising out of the Christian story seen through Jesus.  Post-Christendom church will therefore not be satisfied with a reductionistic, individualised and privatised message or outworking of Christian faith (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005).  This also means:

> They no longer feel that they need to argue for the faith.  Instead, they
> believe their lives speak much louder than their words.  They do not
> believe in evangelistic strategies, other than the pursuit to be like Jesus in
> his interactions with others.  They do not target or have an agenda . . . [but
> rather] hope for a life change ahead of a belief change. (Gibbs & Bolger,
> 2005, p. 134)

While classical church would make similar claims to those articulated above by Gibbs and Bolger, it seems that the problem, seen by post-Christendom people, is that too often the classical church just claims this, without any real substance or demonstration.

According to Jamieson (2007), rather than building an institution, the future church should be supporting individuals.  Institutional thinking has fitted into Christendom church, but it is not a desired characteristic of post-Christendom

church. Jamieson suggests that in some church contexts, a "Bed and Breakfast" proprietor's mentality would be better than that of an institution builder. In other words, hospitality that also allows for transience (p. 105).

In this section, under the heading "form follows function" I have examined some of the issues that scholars see as important for the future of the church in post-Christendom. They have largely focused on people and community rather than the institution. The next section looks specifically at the future of leadership in the post-Christendom church.

## 4.2 Leadership

Leadership after Christendom is perhaps the issue needing the biggest change. Christendom had the effect of emphasising the leaders rather than the communities. Murray (2004a) suggests that leaders in post-Christendom churches need to operate accountably in a team context whose skills and perspectives are different from their own. His view is that the purpose of leadership should be to empower rather than to perform, to develop processes to sustain the community and equip people in their faith. With this understanding of leadership, team leadership would supplant solo leadership, but Murray warns that skilled leadership teams can still disempower communities, so "team" does not automatically equal post-Christendom. He suggests how leadership could be reconfigured and de-emphasised to work in a post-Christendom church, by rotating leadership, by not all being full-time and paid, by rejecting professional and hierarchical models, by being more relaxed, relational and consensual, the rejection of patriarchal models, so, for example, women's leadership skills are valued, and where networking and equipping others may become more significant than preaching or public leadership. People organising corporate worship would be "curators" rather than "leaders" (pp. 192-193).

Gibbs and Bolger (2005) add to this by saying a new culture (post-Christendom) means that new organisational structures are required. They highlight that

twentieth century hierarchical and rationalised church became like Henry Ford's hierarchical assembly line, which resulted in dehumanisation and disempowerment. They further link this to the characteristics of McDonaldization, a term first coined by Ritzer (1993), and later applied to the church by Drane (2001). Gibbs and Bolger say, "It does not take long to identify the predictable, the calculated, the efficient, and the controlling aspects of McDonald's that are mirrored in today's church" (p. 21). They are appealing to Boomers who are the last generation to be happy with it. Gibbs and Bolger continue by saying that the hierarchical and controlling understanding of leadership represented in the classical church, has resulted in a growing restlessness among many younger leaders who represent a culture of networking, permission giving, and empowerment. They suggest a kind of servant leadership is required as modelled by Jesus in the Bible (2005). Servant leadership comes from the idea in the New Testament, recorded in the book of Matthew, where Jesus was talking to his disciples about a new type of leadership hierarchy:

> You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-28, New Revised Standard Version)

Servant leadership operates for the benefit of all so that people can all realise their full potential. It does not disempower or inhibit, it must always benefit those who are being "led" rather than enhance the power and prestige of a few. Again, it is located in a team, not by controlling but by connecting, so it works at bringing people together (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005). These are probably things that some Boomer church leaders would wince at because servant leadership opposes the efficiency and order loved by Boomers, which are values of modernity and Christendom rather than of the Christian faith.

Kimball (2003, p. 229) lists some very useful (in my opinion) comparisons of the "modern leader" versus what he calls the "emerging church leader": where the

modern leader says "look to me, I have the plan", the emerging church leader says "I'll lead as we solve this together". He says the modern leader is a CEO/Manager, while the emerging church leader is a spiritual guide and fellow journeyer. Power is concentrated in the modern leader, and power is diffused with the emerging leader. Modern leadership is hierarchical, emerging leadership is interconnected. The modern leader is goal-driven, the emerging leader is relationship-driven. Modern values uniformity, emerging values diversity. Kimball suggests for a modern leader their position and role give them the right to lead, whereas trust and relationship give the emerging leader the right to lead. He says that modern leaders enact by talking, whereas it is done by listening with the emerging leader. I find these comparisons of Kimball's useful because they highlight the stark contrast between the "modern" and "emerging" leaders.

Jamieson, McIntosh, and Thompson (2006, pp. 67-69) similarly provide a list of desired leadership characteristics[23] gleaned from the people Jamieson interviewed who had left the church, and these are very personal and relational attributes (for a full list of the characteristics Jamieson, McIntosh, and Thompson define please see the footnote below). They suggest leaders also need to be spiritually and psychologically mature, open to questions, able to listen well, able to show empathy and understanding, being curious, searchers and risk-takers, able to provide direction and help for people's faith journeys, being able to open up issues for people, being willing to show weakness and fallibility, with an understanding of their own shadow side. While this is an exhaustive list from Jamieson, McIntosh, and Thompson, it expresses the kind

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[23] Jamieson, McIntosh, and Thompson's list of desired leadership characteristics: honesty, integrity, pure motives, being "real", having an interest in people, an attitude of servanthood, having an adherence to biblical principles, and being lead by God's Spirit rather than their own ambition. His list continues, with accountability, having good people skills, having an educated understanding of co-dependency, not needing to have all the answers, having charisma, enthusiasm and vision, and having had training (theological and pastoral). And finally, having a sense of mutuality, Christ-likeness, being in touch with secular reality, and not having an "us and them" mentality (2006, pp. 67-69).

of "vibe" people moving beyond the Christendom, classical church, are seeking in church leaders.

## 4.3  Conclusion

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 have reviewed literature that informs the two research questions presented in chapter 1, by examining a body of knowledge in the area of the perception and communication of the church in the West.  My angle of enquiry has been to look at how times are different now for the church from how they have been in the past, initially making use of the paradigm change idea that there was once a period of time called "Christendom", which has now ended, and has been replaced by what is currently referred to as "post-Christendom."  This has begun to broadly define the context in which the church finds itself in twenty-first century New Zealand.

When I reviewed my reading notes, it was clear that four main themes were present, and I have based the content of these three chapters around those four themes.  Firstly, in chapter 2, the idea that something is different now, so looking at post-Christendom as a reference point, and this became like an umbrella that sat over everything else.  Secondly, in chapter 3, perceptions of the church: outside and in were considered.  In other words, what are people not part of the church saying about the church and about Christian people?  Chapter 3 also looked at the perceptions of a group described as "church leavers", as well as how the communication of the church is being perceived beyond itself.  Chapter 3 finished by looking at an inside critique of the church and Christians, what these writers who are still part of the church are saying about the church.  Lastly, in this chapter, I looked at the future: what might the future of the church look like?  Where I considered the ideals and hopes that these writers have of the church.

My concluding opinion on the material covered in these three chapters is one of cautious hope and excitement as I myself attempt to explore the possibilities that lie ahead in the future of the church, from both an academic position

including the research in this thesis, and one of practical hands-on trial and error. The church does have an image problem, which is an issue of communication, but it also has an internal organisational problem. Christendom is over, but there appears to be an attitude of Christendom that lingers on, an attitude that most of the church seems unaware of. In the following chapter, I look at the history of New Zealand in terms of spirituality and the church. This will help bring the focus to the local context in which I answer my research questions.

# Chapter 5: Aotearoa New Zealand: context and spirituality

The purpose of this research project is to investigate, in New Zealand, the perception people outside the church currently have of the church, and to assess whether these perceptions have any effect on the place of the church in society. In order to understand the background to this thesis, it is necessary to appreciate the effect of Christendom in the making of Aotearoa New Zealand. This thesis is not about theology, biblical studies or church history; it is not about philosophy, religion, or any particular church or Christian belief systems. It is about the communication of the church through its Christendom expression. The history of the church in New Zealand shows from its start until the current time that Christendom has shaped the church's communication in society. This will be explored in this chapter.

The first missionaries to New Zealand brought the Christian faith in a Christendom package. The result was a transplanted church that in many ways looked, smelt, and tasted like the centuries old expressions of church in Europe. New Zealand has a strong Christian religious and cultural heritage, therefore if someone is part of, or inside the Christian church, they might expect spiritual exploration in New Zealand to be done within the church. In the problem described in chapter 1 where Sam is a person who had some kind of spiritual epiphany but never chose to explore it in the Christian church, my question in this chapter is: Why would we presently think Sam would explore any sense of spirituality in the Christian church? In the past the cultural significance of the church in New Zealand society was the default that would have most probably meant Sam would have explored her new sense of spirituality in the church, but not any more. The following sections will piece together the back-story of Christendom and the making of Aotearoa New Zealand.

## 5.1 Māori and their spirituality

The first human colonisation of this land dates back to around 800 years ago, by the Māori people (King, 2003). These first human inhabitants were a migrant people who left their ancestral Pacific home to journey to Aotearoa (Cadogan, 2004). They had always been a highly spiritual people (King, 2003), with what I describe as a holistic spiritually because it was informed by every part of their lives. At the centre of this Māori spirituality were the *atua* or gods. Belief in these gods joined the natural and the supernatural worlds together as one. A person's spirit was called *wairua* and could leave the body and go wandering. In everyday life there were various rituals, such as when people went fishing they would throw their first catch back to *Tangaroa*, the god of the sea. Likewise, the first bird caught was offered to *Tāne*, the god of the forests, and the first *kumara* (sweet potato) was offered to *Rongo*, the god of cultivated food. The Māori natural world teemed with gods and required thoughtful navigation (Keane, 2011; Royal, 2009).

In the Māori worldview people are closely connected to the land or *whenua,* and to nature. This connection is expressed through a concept called *kaitiakitanga,* which means guardianship and protection, it is a way of managing the environment that sees humans as a part of the natural world. Land, therefore, has both emotional and spiritual relational significance for the Māori, and this forms a major part of their value system (Keane, 2011).

The Māori pantheon and spiritual connection to nature, in particular the land, which I define as a holistic spirituality, shows the complexity of the spiritual framework underpinning the Māori way of life, and this had likely been occurring in Aotearoa for 600 years before another group of people arrived to this land. When the Europeans arrived and observed the Māori way of life, they considered them uneducated with a simplistic view of the world (Cadogan, 2004).

## 5.2  Christendom arrives!

The first evidence of Christianity in New Zealand is on Christmas Day 1814 when Anglican chaplain Samuel Marsden from the New South Wales prison colony landed in the Bay of Islands with a group of lay missionaries (Lineham, 2011).  The already existing spiritual identity of the Māori people enabled a receptivity to consider and discuss the new religious issues brought to *Aotearoa* by the Europeans (King, 2003).

Māori spirituality was not well received by the British colonisers and evangelisers who thought "they were encountering a nation of savages without intelligence, laws, politics or religion, who based their lives on superstitions" (Cadogan, 2004, p. 29).  On the contrary, as already mentioned, the Māori people's spirituality, including their relationship with the land or *whenua*, was very deep and complex (Cadogan, 2004), with a common identifier for Māori being the term *tangata whenua* or people of the land.  This strong and spiritual identification with the land quickly became a defining marker of New Zealand's history because of the opposing beliefs held by *tangata whenua* and settlers.  The different beliefs still cause division 200 years on.  For Māori, land is more than an area of ground that can be measured and traded as an economic resource: rather, land is the origin of their life (Cloher, 2004), or as Carley (2004) puts it "As the tangata whenua, Maori belong to the land (whenua), not land to the Maori.  How can one sell one's mother?" (p. 241).  This begins to explain the vastly different world views encountered between the local indigenous people, and the new European migrants, and needs to be kept in mind as the spiritual backdrops of Aotearoa or New Zealand are considered, which from 1814 included Christianity expressed through the institution, or at least the attitude, of Christendom.  Christendom can be described as a society where there are close ties between church leaders and secular leaders, where laws appear to be based on Christian principles, where Christianity provides a common language, and where most people are assumed to be Christian (McLeod, 2007).

Christendom-influenced missionaries made up a significant part of the initial European population and so it can be said the church played a crucial role in the founding of colonial New Zealand (Guy, 2011). Some of the nineteenth century missiologists[24] from Britain believed that the indigenous people needed to be civilized before they could receive the gospel, and this civilization was identified as being the British way of life (Davidson & Lineham, 1995). Missionary activity was fast and successful and by the end of the period 1835-45 two-thirds of all Māori were attending Christian church services. The missionaries played a significant role in guiding Māori thinking towards the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 (Guy, 2011; Orange, 2012). The Treaty of Waitangi is pivotal in the European migration to New Zealand story and showed good will from the original migrants to Aotearoa with the new, powerful and technologically advanced second wave of migration by the British. Many missionaries committed themselves to defending the Māori and the treaty and were sometimes considered opponents to the settlers by the New Zealand Company that was acquiring land for settlement (Lineham, 2011).

In those early European settler days the Catholic Church was part of the Christian migration to New Zealand and was conceived as a missionary church, meaning it was to be formed with new converts. It actually developed into a settler church, meaning it largely became a community for Catholic settlers (Laracy, 2002). Before the colonial land wars of the 1860s Māori were positively responsive to the missionary church invitation, but the wars caused a lack of trust in European desires including their new religion. The Catholic priests who came for missionary work were called away to minister to the increasing number of European migrants and the Catholic work with Māori lapsed for a couple of decades (Laracy, 2002). At this time two-thirds of Māori were attending Christian services of worship so this change of focus for the Catholic

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[24] They may not have used the term "missiologist" in the nineteenth century, what I mean is people who considered missionary theory, who in the twenty-first century could be called missiologists.

church was significant: from being focused outwards to new converts, to being focused inwards on settlers who were already part of the institution. The original intention of the Catholic church was diverted and the Catholic missionaries ended up serving migrants, with the result that a church long established in Europe quickly took on some of the characteristics of an established New Zealand church, although there has never been a church or religion officially recognised by the state in New Zealand. Their original intentions seemed to become too difficult (for a time at least), and so by default they went back to what they knew: shepherding Catholics who were migrants. This example encapsulates the way the Christian church came to New Zealand: the strong Christendom model of church defaulting to the known European way of being church. Perhaps it was too difficult to do anything else, perhaps creative alternatives were beyond the imagination of the church missionaries and leaders. I highlight this point because I wonder if nothing has changed in 200 years in terms of how the Christendom church engages with society.

There also needs mention here of the range of independent churches that developed in New Zealand in the nineteenth century, such as the Salvation Army and the Churches of Christ. While these independent churches never experienced being a state or "established" church anywhere in the world, I would describe their expression in contemporary New Zealand as having what I am referring to as the attitude of Christendom.

During the 1860s land wars many Māori formed into a new part-Christian part-traditional religion called Pai Marire meaning Good and Peaceful (Lineham, 2011). A prophetic tradition emerged with preacher politician-like Māori who challenged British sovereignty and were often treated harshly by the police. The greatest of these leaders was Ratana, who in 1918 felt a divine call to redeem his people (Lineham, 2011). In 2006 the Ratana Church had 50,565 members in 127 parishes (Newman, 2011). The creation of the Ratana Church as well as its continued success shows the existence of a strong Māori cultural connection within that particular church and in what that church stands for. Its

political association and spiritual expression have provided an alternative for those Māori who feel isolation from the other less Māori-culturally-embracing expressions of Christianity. While I would define the Ratana Church as being influenced by the attitude of Christendom, it also shows a strong connection with indigenous culture that cannot be ignored.

It would be hard to suggest the first Christian missionaries that came to New Zealand lacked sincerity or motivation to offer the Māori people their understanding of a better future both spiritually and physically. They believed in the Christian salvation of souls, in their eyes they saw noble savages, they wanted to offer to them the eternal gift of their faith in God. What they did and the way they did it were legitimate missionary activities of the nineteenth century. They would have represented the church, and communicated the church, in the ways they knew from Britain. The Christianised settlers would have also represented the church, and communicated the church in various ways and this would have been affected by both individual and communal commitment and understanding.

Upon the existing canvas of spirituality in Aotearoa emerged, with the nineteenth century British missionaries and settlers, a largely pro-establishment organisation of Christendom: the Christian church. Just as it is impossible to imagine European history without Christendom, it is also impossible and fruitless to imagine Christian-faith-community arriving in nineteenth century Aotearoa without the drive and organisation of the Christendom shaped church.

## 5.3  The loss of Māori identity

War over land, and the resulting confiscation of land from Māori contributed to a loss of identity for Māori including their spiritual identity (Cadogan, 2004). Considering the Māori pantheon and spiritual connection to nature, in particular the land, which I define as a holistic spirituality, landless Māori became disconnected Māori. I connect the issue of the loss of Māori identity

with their spirituality, because at the same time Māori identity was being challenged: the country was being set up as a colonised establishment, largely influenced by the attitude of Christendom, in terms of social and moral law. I am suggesting that the loss of identity of Māori was partly due to the influence of this Christendom attitude. One of the biggest steps towards reconciliation of this disconnectedness was instituted in 1975, 135 years after the Treaty of Waitangi, with the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal.[25] Over 2000 claims have been registered with the Tribunal varying in size from specific grievances by individual Māori to comprehensive claims by large *iwi* or *hapu,* or tribal groups. It is possible that all historic and generic claims will be prepared by 2017 (Waitangi Tribunal, 2012).

## 5.4  Kiwi spirituality

A connection to the land is not just a Māori characteristic. Darragh (2004, p. 2) points out that being a New Zealander is "not just a matter of nationality but of belonging to places that are irreplaceably the hosts and holders of our personal and communal identity." A contemporary and very domestic interpretation of a connection with place and land is given by Bluck (1998) when he says many New Zealanders are living out their lives through their gardens, where it is the things of beauty and mystery, and the process of change and growth beyond our understanding, that inspires people and connects them to the spiritual realm. Bluck suggests that gardens have become the new chapels and shrines for present-day New Zealanders. Bluck is describing a New Zealand spirituality occurring outside of Christendom and the church, and the significance for highlighting it here is to show a contemporary form of spirituality in New Zealand with a connection to the land, different but with similarities to the Māori spirituality encountered here by the first settlers.

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[25] The Waitangi Tribunal is a permanent commission of inquiry charged with making recommendations on claims brought by Māori relating to actions or omissions of the Crown that breach the promises made in the Treaty of Waitangi (Waitangi Tribunal, 2012).

## 5.5  Formalizing a New Zealand Christian church

I return now to discuss further the journey of Christian spirituality in New Zealand as it was by far the most dominant of the new spiritual expressions brought with the British settlers.  As Julian (2004) puts it, non-Māori New Zealanders have inherited their spiritual traditions from elsewhere, because as the migrants arrived in the nineteenth century, so too did the spiritualties they carried.  In the first hundred years of settlement, the Christian churches were one of the major institutional strands in the fabric of the country (Guy, 2011).  Two dominant expressions of the church arriving in New Zealand were Anglicans from England, and Presbyterians from Scotland.  They arrived with dominant Christendom mind-sets that saw the church and nation interlinked.  From this mind-set it is natural for the church to speak into the life of a nation.  Guy refers to these church-oriented early settlers to New Zealand as having "old-world-church mindsets" (p. 11), and the question back then was whether these mind-sets would be reproduced in this new land as they existed back home.  However, many of the new settlers were not actually pro-church as an establishment, especially if they had to pay for it (Lineham, 2011).  In 1841 the British government appointed an Anglican bishop, George Selwyn, who planned to develop a church that was not subject to the state but recognised by it: an independent branch of the Church of England (Lineham, 2011).

Christianity did not have a strong start in New Zealand largely because of the settlers' reluctance to fund this church from England that had followed them from their homeland.  Attendance was low, and the Anglican church was on par with the other types of churches: Catholic, Protestant dissenter, Methodists, and Presbyterians (Lineham, 2011).  There were two geographic locations where there was a more focused establishment from the church: a Presbyterian (Scottish) sponsored settlement in Otago in 1843, and Christchurch was founded as an Anglican (English) settlement in 1851.  However, new arrivals into these church-sponsored settlements could not be restricted to like-minded members and by 1860, so 17 years after being founded, half of the settlers in Dunedin were not Presbyterian (Guy, 2011).  Sargent (2001) explains the

original intentions of the Presbyterian settlement in Otago as being two things, one, to become the Great Britain of the southern hemisphere, and two, to lay the foundation of the church. He goes on to say, "the reality of Otago was like the reality of most New Zealand settlements, a personal desire for a better life" (p. 4). Sargent suggests that for most settlers their utopian quest was ahead of goals for church or state. Regardless of the dilution of these settlements, Guy points out the influence the churches had in these settlements, for example restricting activities on the Sabbath in Dunedin into the 1880s. In Christchurch money was set aside from all land sales for churches and schools (Lineham, 2011).[26] Ellwood (1993) makes a comparison with the USA and says of Christian religion that New Zealand had nothing on a nation-shaping scale like the pilgrim fathers and Puritan heritage that established settlements that interpreted and set up their Christian religion as a paradigm of the whole society. He goes as far as saying of the Anglican and Presbyterian settlements in Christchurch and Dunedin that they built their church buildings, but apart from some individual cases displayed no more than token piety. I suspect if New Zealand had been colonised by the British 200 years earlier, due to the existence of an even stronger Christendom identity, the influence of Christianity in New Zealand could have been similar to that in the USA.

## 5.6  Christian affiliation, church attendance, and culture

I have compiled Figure 5.1 which shows religious affiliation data from New Zealand census results (Walrond, 2011), as well as an extrapolation of church attendance derived from a very small amount of largely approximated data available from Guy and Ward (Guy, 2011; Ward, 2006). The vertical lines

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[26] Jump forward in time 160 years and this mind-set still exists: In August 2012 I attended a meeting arranged by the Christchurch Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA) for Christchurch central city church leaders (ministers, pastors, priests) where there was an ecumenical turnout of about 50 people. Some land in the newly planned Central Business District is to be acquired from current landowners for different future uses – the government will buy it, and then eventually sell it. One man in the audience reminded the CERA presenter of the historical settler tax on land sales for the development of churches and seemed to be serious about asking if that could happen again. This shows the Christendom mind-set still in existence within some parts of the church in the twenty-first century.

indicate some significant historical events, such as the two world wars. The data is not detailed enough to be able to do anything other than speculate relationships between Christian affiliation or church attendance and significant events in history. It would be interesting to be able to have more data to allow this to happen because then it might be possible to make comments about the church in relation to significant issues that were happening in society. More so with church attendance than Christian affiliation because I would argue that regular church attendance has traditionally been an indicator of greater immersion to the church than simply Christian affiliation.
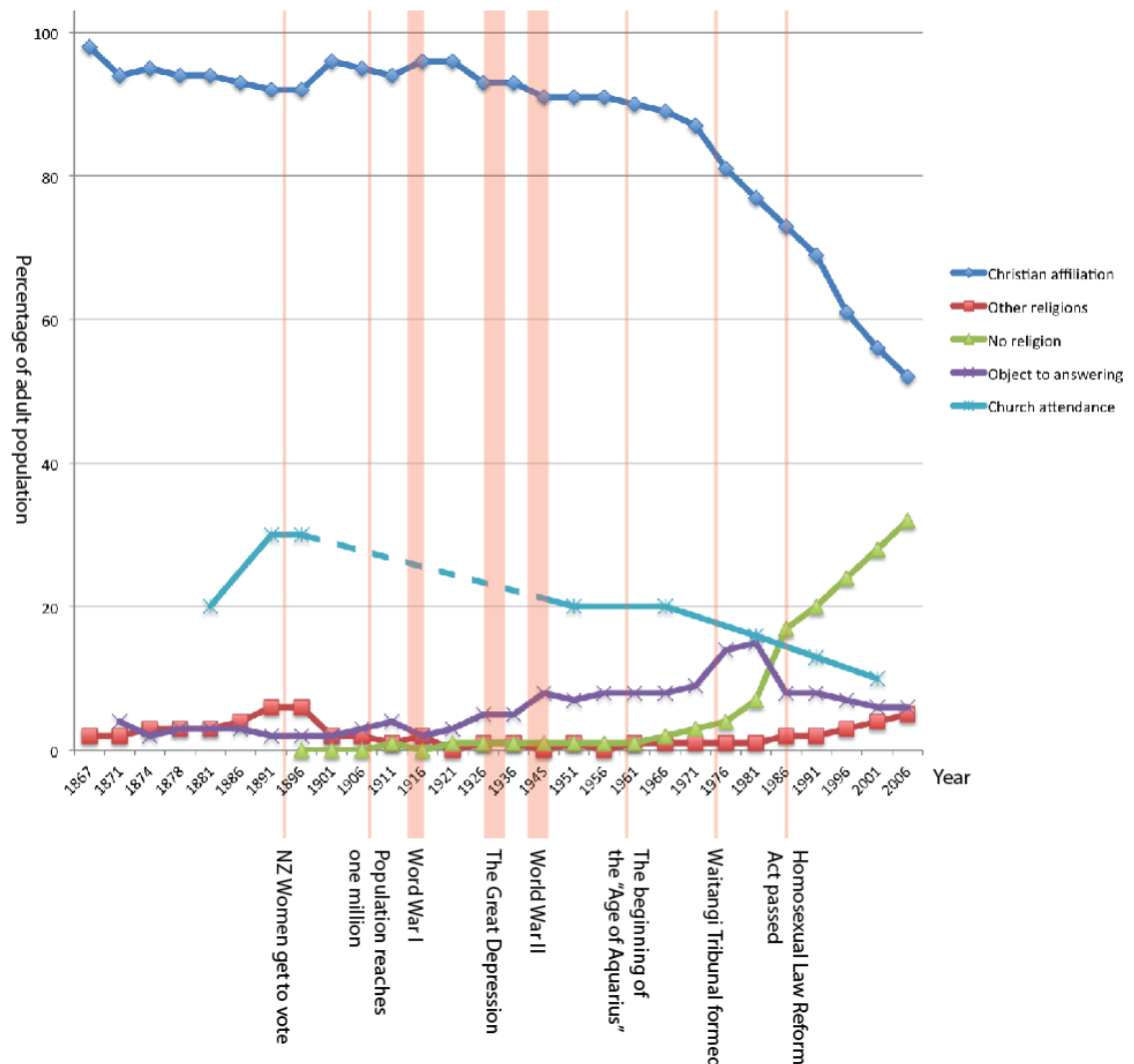


Figure 5.1: Religious affiliation and church attendance 1867-2006.

A few points of interest can be highlighted: at the end of World War I, the declining trend of Christian affiliation changed direction, perhaps war had delayed some people's drift from Christian association, so they affirmed Christianity for a bit longer. This same line plateaued through the period of the Great Depression, perhaps the social service or political agitation from the church delayed decline for a while.

The Christian church in New Zealand influenced a lot of the societal shaping in the first hundred years of settlement (Guy, 2011), but it never gained the traction enjoyed by mother-church in Great Britain. Nineteenth century New Zealand saw the peak in church attendance in terms of percentage of the population with around 30% of adults usually attending church services in the 1890s. Compare this to Britain in the same century, where the best source of national data is the 1851 Census of Religious Worship, and with various interpretations of the data, Bruce (2001) suggests that at the most 60% of the adult population of Great Britain attended church in 1851 (Bruce), with church attendance in Britain being in decline by the end of the nineteenth century. While there is a gap of forty years in my data comparisons here between Britain and New Zealand, the point I wish to make is the first British settlers to New Zealand had been part of a society with a very high church attendance, so they were used to an environment where lots of people attended church. The New Zealand settlement churches never got anywhere near the attendance support of their homeland which could indicate what the migrants coming to New Zealand were seeking, perhaps implicitly, independence from the church. However, the New Zealand figure is still significant because it is a large percentage of the population. Guy points out that this high New Zealand attendance figure of 30% in the 1890s "fuelled a common church claim that New Zealand was a Christian country whose legislation and behaviours should match that fact" (Guy, 2011, p. 13). It is significant to note, Guy says "church claim" and not a government or society acknowledgement because New Zealand has never officially been a Christian country (King, 2007).

There is a difference between Christian affiliation and church attendance, and that difference is similar to a love of rugby. A sense of identification with rugby is different from regular participation in the game as a sport. I liken Christian affiliation to cultural Christianity where it can be part of the strong social identity of a place. For instance, in nineteenth century Britain, to be British also meant to be Christian, because there was more than a millennium of church history in place. By extension, to live in a Christendom-shaped country meant to identify as Christian, which I suspect is the reason for the high Christian affiliation figures in New Zealand from colonial settlement until the mid-twentieth century.

Christian affiliation most likely means an understanding and some appreciation and acceptance of what Christianity is about in terms of basic rules, doctrine and practice. Below the surface level of cultural identity, Christian affiliation might not have a significant effect on one's way of being. In chapter 1, I mentioned the reasons for the church to exist, they are for positive social transformation of society and advocacy against injustices, as well as sustaining the spirituality of people who identify with the Christian faith or those who are exploring what Christian faith might mean for them. For a cultural Christian these purposes of the church might be a low priority. Ward (2004) links church attendance to "belonging", and Christian affiliation to "believing", and while he agrees that the two need to be separate variables, he seems optimistic that people ticking the Christian affiliation answer in the census do in fact have religious belief rather than simply historical association, and that they do not attend church because they are distancing themselves from the church as an institution to belong to. I am less optimistic because the "No religion" line on the graph in Figure 5.1 is rising in equal proportions to meet the falling "Christian affiliation" line, indicating perhaps that the historical Christian influence in New Zealand is phasing out but at a faster rate than the decline of the actual practice of Christianity which is perhaps more accurately reflected through church attendance.

Although church attendance was around 30% at its peak in the 1890s, affiliation with the Christian religion was much higher, with over 90% of the population identifying with one of the Christian denominations up into the 1960s in census data (Guy, 2011). When commenting about the early influence of the church in New Zealand society Guy says, "…people unwittingly inhaled Christian influence as part of the air of society" (p. 15), and there was a sense that New Zealand was a Christian country having its foundations based on the Judeo-Christian tradition. An example of this is the Christian-centric words and affirmations of what has become the national anthem[27], words by Thomas Bracken, with music by John Woods, this was first sung publically in 1876 near the peak of church attendance. This anthem comes out of a time where the church and the influence of Christianity were an integral part of society and there was respect for the church (Guy, 2011).

Ellwood (1993), admits that churches and Christianity in New Zealand were useful and greatly valued in the first few generations particularly in terms of creating links with home. He points out that religion does not define a New Zealander in the way Islam does an Arab, I would suggest that originally the high percentage of Christian affiliation in New Zealand meant that in the first part of British New Zealand history there was in fact some cultural identification with the church. Ellwood's opinion is that the church is not widely considered paradigmatic of the whole colonizing enterprise in New Zealand, and not thought to have much to do with being a Kiwi, I would agree that this has definitely been the case since the 1960s.

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[27] The New Zealand national anthem, "God defend New Zealand" verse one:
God of nations at thy feet,
in the bonds of love we meet,
hear our voices, we entreat,
God defend our free land.
Guard Pacific's triple star
from the shafts of strife and war,
make her praises heard afar,
God defend New Zealand.

## 5.7  Culture change and the decline of the church

Up until the 1960s the church had a privileged position in society, it was part of the ideological establishment and its views were easy to impart into society and were often embraced (Guy, 2011).  The gradual decline of the church through the twentieth century is said to have happened for various reasons.  Lifestyle choices changed due to competing alternatives to Sunday church services.  The emergence of the "weekend", a word that entered the English language in the 1870s shifting to five days of work from six (Guy, 2011).  A stronger sense of the importance of leisure and pleasure in the rhythms of life emerged, aided by technology such as modern transport enabling Sunday trips and weekends away.  Television became a major competitor from the 1960s, especially to Sunday evening church services which declined rapidly.  Guy puts it this way, "…church services ceased to be a positive way of filling in part of Sunday for the more loosely committed" (2011, p. 19), or what I would fit into the majority of the "Christian affiliation" category.

Ward (2006) links the accelerated decline of Christian affiliation in the 1960s to the years when the first baby boomer generation reached adulthood.  This then caused another drop in the 1970s as the boomers began having children, and this next generation of children were more absent from church than any other previously in European-settled New Zealand.  McLeod (2007, p. 29) calls this period of time "the crisis of Christendom in the 1960s" which was an effect seen across Western countries where nominal Christianity mixed with the decline of the socialisation of the younger generation into the church, alongside greater affluence in these countries, and an increased focus on individual rather than collective identities all turned people away from the church.  Brown (2010) comments on McLeod's (2007) "crisis of Christendom in the 1960s" as being broader than just a religious crisis, but something that was going on throughout culture that affected many secular institutions in a manner comparable to its effect on the church.  He suggests the outcome of this crisis for the church has been threefold:  First, as mentioned by Ward (2006), the church alienated young people which over the last five decades has plunged organised religion into

sustained decline. Second, this diminution in church attendance has separated church and popular culture. This is not to suggest the church has not imported popular culture, but Brown suggests the influence the other way has diminished with every decade since the 1960s. Third, there has been a surge with the remaining and increasingly isolated Christian culture towards more conservative and fundamentalist expression, and this has created even more alienation. Brown (2010) summarises the historical situation like this:

> None of these [three] trends was observable in the 1940s and 1950s. They arose as the legacy of the popular challenge in the 1960s to Christian hegemony in the culture of many Western countries. (2010, p. 479)

The events of the 1960s appear to be extremely significant in this discussion about the end of Christendom.

From the perspective of an historian, Guy (2011) has conducted a thorough investigation of what he calls the "voice" of the church, where he highlights some of the change that has occurred within society. He too talks of a significant change in the 1960s, and how that change saw the church divide into two streams in terms of its engagement with society. It either embraced the fast-changing world and focused on what Guy calls the "horizontal" dimension of humanity, which is the opposite of the "vertical" which would be to do with spiritual connection with God, implying that God is somewhere vertically above humanity, in other words, following the traditional cosmology that heaven is above us. Guy critiques the "horizontal" dimension by suggesting, "…the church might then become not much more than a benign Rotary club, full of goodwill but, "why bother if that is all it is?"" (p. 23). Guy refers to this part of the church as "liberals", who had a focus on social justice. During the 1970s and 1980s the liberal attention was supporting anti-militarism, pro-gay rights, pro-feminism, and anti-racism. The polar opposite were the "conservatives", who according to Guy rejected the fast-changing world and challenged other issues such as maintaining traditional values of sexuality. In the 1970s and 1980s the conservative voice became narrower in its area of focus on issues such as abortion, homosexuality and feminism. Guy points out that

one of the problems with the conservative activist voice was that it was, "…often not skilled at communicating effectively to an increasingly secular public world, relying as it did on otherworldly thought forms and biblical language" (p. 26), all of this increased the separation of the church from society.

Traction continued to be lost on the slippery slope on which the church found itself, because explicitly religious arguments were becoming more and more irrelevant in New Zealand society. By the start of the new millennium, because of the diminishing influence of the church, the church voice was heard less often (Guy, 2011). The communication issues Guy highlights appear to me to be part of a kind of lack of self-awareness within the church. Whether the denominations are liberal or conservative, it seems to me that there is a worsening disconnect between church and society. The growing divide that exists between wider society and the church does not seem to concern the parties who stand on opposite side of it: the church appears to be of little concern to society, and the divide seems not to be comprehended by the church. Because it is difficult to see the church's influence on society, for many Christian people their faith has shrunk back into their private lives and their church worlds, where Christianity addressed the inner world and not the ordinary world of society (Guy, 2011). The withdrawal of Christians and churches from society therefore added to the irrelevance of the church in society, and this evolution continues to this day.

The section on religion in the New Zealand Study of Values showed the growing irrelevance of the church in 1985 and again in 1989. The New Zealand Study of Values is part of a longitudinal international study to ascertain values in areas of social life such as leisure, work, life satisfaction, family, morals, religion, politics and finance matters (Webster & Perry, 1989). The 1985 results of the values study yielded information about the aging population in the traditional non-Catholic churches and increasing resilience and vigour among right-wing sects and the Catholic church. In 1985, only 12-15% of the population met the criteria to be classed as religious, and according to the

values study, the young and the well educated were less likely to be religious. Webster and Perry claimed, "The future appears therefore to be likely to be more secular" (1989, p. 142).

The 1985 survey explored the social, political and ideological views of religious people, and found that though religious people are conservative, their views were all but indistinguishable from those of general populace. Among the religious, only the evangelical churches were more than averagely right wing, and the only left-of-centre church was the Methodist denomination. Webster and Perry claim that:

> The area of clearest difference between religious people and others is that of conservative sexual morality. As a result religiosity is a morally traditional force in a secular society. It is also a disapproving voice in relation to those whose lifestyle 'threatens' social order. (1989, p. 142)

Webster and Perry conclude that the beliefs of New Zealanders have moved steadily toward secularisation, and that the church now finds itself with four options for its future. First, the church could choose "traditionalism" deriving from nostalgia for "civil religion" , but this option means being relevant to a dwindling number of people. The second option is "reaction": taking a world-denying stance that might include an aggressive moral and theological fundamentalism that is built on a claim to being the bastion of truth and purity in a world bent on evil. The church could also adopt a third course of action, which is that of "secular religion", which would translate religious principles have into social programmes of pluralistic respect, economic justice, equality and human fulfilment. The fourth option is "mysticism", an opportunity to focus privately on an inward-looking quest for individual perfection, with visions of an ideal human society (Webster & Perry, 1989). Webster and Perry believe that for religion to become part of the constructive development of society, it must reorder its priorities. As they say

> …it cannot hope to become the friend of the poor if, as some may think has been the case for 100 years in New Zealand, the church is dominated by moralistic people with more sympathy with money and business than with the working class. (Webster & Perry, 1989, p. 144)

In 1985, religion was being absorbed unintentionally into a secular value-creating process in New Zealand society. Their question was whether religion would become a willing and creative part of this process, or whether it would continue to insist that: "expert knowledge from another world is its special prerogative and is offered only through special agents to those who fulfil the necessary conditions" (Webster & Perry, 1989, p. 144). Their reflection on society's espoused values is that the church drives secular people towards an anti-religious stance, with the result that people who reject traditional religion are also likely to reject the values that derive from religion because of that association.

The second New Zealand Study of Values took place in 1989 and Webster and Perry (1992) published their review on the religious dimension of the research three years later. Their commentary was guided by the question, "What difference does it make being an active church-goer in late 20th Century New Zealand?" (p. v). They concede that church-going makes a personal difference to many people, but they wanted to know if there was anything more to be gained from church-going than personal wellbeing. Their analysis showed that most committed church people are out of step with informed opinion about materialistic individualism, competitiveness, women's rights, Maori rights, sexual lifestyles and issues of population and woman's choice. Webster says:

> Committed "churchianity" makes a difference all right, but the difference is such as to make the church an oddity in the modern world. Not only so, but where there ought to be a difference, say in regard to equality, support for economic justice and for the environment, the church people do not display a clearly different view from the majority. (Webster & Perry, 1992, p. 158)

Webster connects the problem to the church's preoccupation with the salvation of the individual soul and the separation of the spiritual from "real" life. Webster and Perry state that some churches and leaders are, "clinging on to a self-serving tradition and attitudes which seem to deny both modern thinking and social realities" (p. vii).

The New Zealand Study of Values exposed the issue of the church's place in modern New Zealand society, but the problem of relevance may have begun originated in the fact that the church in New Zealand was not Davidson and Lineham (1995) call a "transplant" of Christianity in New Zealand, and now what we have after more than 150 years is an

> … alienation of many Christians from their local communities, the evident weakness of the churches as a social force, and their apparent marginality from the concerns of most twentieth-century New Zealanders. Christians and the churches rarely seem able to communicate clearly to other New Zealanders on the issues which concern them or concern society. Despite their professed sense of responsibility for their society, they tend to be regarded either as disunited and sectarian, or as weak and irrelevant. (Davidson & Lineham, 1995, p. 352)

When considering Christianity as a transplant into New Zealand, and the current state of the church in relation to society, including its continued decline, it looks to me as if there is every opportunity waiting for new and organic expressions of a New Zealand Christianity, with some matching genetics from the original transplant, but with a new and emerging identity. There are some obvious signs of success that can be attributed to the original transplant two hundred years ago, but it has been on life-support with an ever-decreasing power supply since the 1960s. It appears that no one within the church is going to pull the plug, and as long as we acknowledge what is happening we need not intentionally euthanize the current church any more than has already been the case. I believe the future hope of the church in New Zealand lies both in the transcendence, or mystery that surrounds the Christian faith, as well as Christian people, the church, having an awareness and understanding of the church's relationship with society: an actual New Zealand expression of Christianity birthed from a two hundred year old parent. What this translates to for me is a church that understands its place in society, and due to this is able to communicate effectively in various New Zealand societal contexts.

## 5.8  Other spiritualties

While dominating the spiritual history of Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori spirituality and then the Christian religion form only part of the eclectic

spiritual story of this land. Other smaller alternative spiritualties also arrived with the nineteenth century migration ships. Ellwood (1993) suggests the nineteenth century colony in New Zealand was very receptive to new and unconventional spiritual movements. He highlights the mentality of the pioneering attitude and legacy in New Zealand, which pragmatically says "I'd rather do it myself in my own way", which has shaped many things in New Zealand including religion (p. 197). This seems particularly relevant when considering that the early migrants may have been hoping to leave the clergy-led established religion behind in Britain. This toleration of minor or new spiritualties did not extend to Māori spirituality, perhaps due to the way the Māori were perceived as uneducated with a simplistic view of the world (Cadogan, 2004). Another signal of inclusiveness in the early colonised New Zealand was the embracing of alternative spiritualties such as Theosophy and the Golden Dawn, as well as the confronting of Christianity by some high profile people who did not affiliate with Christianity. Sir Robert Stout was one such person, thirteenth Premier (Prime Minister) of New Zealand (in office 1884-1897) who was involved with the Rationalism movement. Stout was an outspoken secularist which gives an indication of the tolerance or indifference of New Zealand voters at the end of the nineteenth century (Ellwood, 1993).[28]

The alternative spiritualties such as Spiritualism and later Theosophy had an appeal and attractiveness over the conventional churches, the significant difference being gender equality. They were pioneers in terms of promoting religious gender equality, and frequently had female leadership (Ellwood, 1993). Nineteenth century Spiritualism claimed to be the most democratic of religions as mediumship was accessible to anyone regardless of education,

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[28] Another early prime minister, Harry Atkinson (in office fours times between 1876 & 1891), was a member of the first Theosophical lodge in New Zealand in 1888. Ellwood suggests that the large number of governors and prime ministers in the 1870s and 1880s who were involved with spiritualties alternative to Christian "could hardly help but impart a certain legitimacy to those movements, like Theosophy and the Golden Dawn, that had Masonic roots" (p. 5). Friendly Societies such as the Druids and the Odd Fellows were in New Zealand from the 1840s.

status in ecclesiastical hierarchies, or gender. Theosophy was small in popularity, but according to Ellwood stood out from the crowd by showing a visible example of engagement with many things the Christian church was struggling with in an age of doubt, Darwin, social change, and globalisation. Theosophy peaked in the 1920s-30s in New Zealand.

Theosophy is very small compared to Christianity in New Zealand, with about 1700 Theosophical members in 1993 compared to 5000 members in the USA at that same time. These statistics show in 1993 New Zealand had more than twenty-five times as many Theosophists per capita than the nation that founded Theosophy, in fact New Zealand had more per capita than any other country in the world (Ellwood, 1993). This could be another indication of tolerance and acceptance of spiritual diversity in New Zealand, as well as the "I'd rather do it myself in my own way" pioneering attitude and legacy in New Zealand (p. 197). Until the post-Second World War period Theosophy and Spiritualism were virtually alone as alternative faiths for the Pakeha (European) population. In the 1940s one of New Zealand's soon-to-be most famous people, Edmond Hillary, was a member of the Theosophical Society. The 1960s brought a new generation of alternative spiritualties to New Zealand, which Ellwood suggests was successful due partly to the pioneering role Theosophy played up until that time. Theosophy was the first voice in the country on behalf of drawing wisdom from the East as well as the West, karma and reincarnation, spiritual evolution and the role of masters (Ellwood, 1993).

The nature, according to Ellwood (1993), of alternative spirituality movements is that they come and go. They lack the institutional stability of mainline churches yet the ideas they possess have shown survival value, and the needs they meet are connected to what it means to be human. Ellwood believes the impulses that shaped them in the past will shape and reshape alternative spirituality in New Zealand in the future. He uses an analogy to describe this:

> …alternative, marginal spirituality is to the mighty institutional churches
> what the amoeba is to the whale, far smaller, more formless, yet in a real
> sense far more immortal. (p. 26)

This final statement from Ellwood seems to me a very attractive post-modern proposition for any form of spirituality – Christian or otherwise.  The "mighty institutional churches" have already lost their might: in twenty-first century New Zealand at least.  What this brief look into alternative spirituality shows, is that from the outset of European settlement there has been an acceptance and public place for different spiritualties alongside the dominance of the Christian church.  I would suggest that New Zealand never experienced the sort of full blown Christendom dominance that was present in Europe prior to Industrial Revolution times, nevertheless, the church's strength in New Zealand is largely due to the strength of its Christendom backbone and heritage from Europe.

## 5.9  Recent public opinion about the church

A recent religion in New Zealand survey (Gendall & Healey, 2009) showed that most New Zealanders (just over 50%) believe in God.  Half of these people have some doubts, and 20% do not believe in a personal God but believe in a higher power of some kind.  This figure compares favourably to the 2006 church affiliation census figure of nearly 50%.  According to the survey half of New Zealanders think that churches and religious organisations have about the right amount of power in their country, with 15% thinking they have too much, and 10% too little.  Sixty-five per cent agree that religious leaders should not influence government decisions.  This survey showed that the majority of New Zealanders believe in God, pray at least once a year and attend religious service at least once a year, and that New Zealand is a very secular country with relatively low levels of active involvement in religion.

In a protest on 29 May 2007 outside an international conference on religious tolerance at Waitangi, Destiny Church Bishop Brian Tamaki called for official recognition of Christianity in New Zealand (King, 2007).  A Research New Zealand survey that took place a week after Tamaki's statement showed that

58% of New Zealanders polled disagreed with recognising Christianity as the country's official religion, in the 15 to 29 year old age range 73% of people disagreed (King, 2007). New Zealand has always allowed freedom of religion, and there has never been any official religion. Tamaki and his supporters wanting Christianity upheld as something official in New Zealand is evidence of what I would describe as a shrinking minority. Tamaki's 2007 protest is one example of the explicit church voice communicating into society, with the Research New Zealand survey results showing a majority of society not embracing that church voice, at least in this instance.

## 5.10 Past, present, future

The decline in church attendance and Christian association in New Zealand is attributed to external influences such as an increase in alternative leisure activities (such as modern transport and television), the growing authority of science, identity changes from collective to individual, and to a lesser extent the exposure and accessibility of new and alternative spiritualties. All of these things appear to have happened externally to the church as an organisation within society. The voice of the church in the twentieth century was divided between liberal and conservative expressions, and would have communicated at cross-purposes. For example, the conservatives were activists for the prohibition of alcohol, and the decline in Christian morals, especially to do with sex, while the liberals had a more social service focus.

The place and influence of spirituality more broadly has changed a lot in New Zealand too. Bluck (1998) suggests that what he calls a "Kiwi spirituality" can include just about anything and anyone (p. 10). Now that the religious community is disconnected from the secular, and the old religious vocabulary does not engage with New Zealanders any more, new opportunities for spiritual seekers are everywhere. Bluck attributes this current state of spirituality as partly due to the traditional guardians of things spiritual in New Zealand having been better known for building metaphorical barbed wire fences rather than for opening gates. What he is saying can be encapsulated in

the broadest sense as the church having issues with its communication with, and interpretation of, society.

In chapter 1, the reasons I gave for the church to exist are, in my opinion, positive social transformation of society and advocacy against injustices, as well as sustaining the spirituality of people who identify with the Christian faith or those who are exploring what Christian faith might mean for them. There appears to be no doubt that Christian influence in New Zealand over the last 200 years has fulfilled these reasons to exist. It may have also neglected to show real proof that positive social transformation of society and advocacy against injustices can occur within rapidly changing contexts, and even sustaining the spirituality of people who identify with the Christian faith is difficult when the social context changes so rapidly. Had the communication of the church, or at least an understanding of the perception those outside its walls had constructed about it been known, considered and acted upon, perhaps the decline in popularity would have been critically identified, examined, and addressed, possibly reversing the trend and allowing a positive existence within New Zealand society.

What we have today is the result of a church with fairly strong beginnings in a new colony of Britain, which was also mostly on the back-foot from the very beginning. It was very influential while the state strongly respected it, but its influence waned as society was presented with new alternatives that offered identity-creating and sustaining possibilities such as weekends and an increasing appreciation of science. I would suggest the substance of the church (liberal or conservative) retains relevance to those who get the chance to understand it and choose to then accept it, but since at least the 1960s in New Zealand the church has poorly communicated its essence within a changing context that increasingly seemed foreign to it.

# Chapter 6: Methodology and method

This chapter covers the research methodology and method that have shaped my research. Following a brief mention of ethics, this chapter starts with an explanation of the theoretical framework and where I position myself in relation to the research I carried out. The chapter then outlines my chosen forms of data gathering and analysis. Here I draw on published scholarship. Finally the chapter moves into a transparent description of the details of my fieldwork relating to interviewing and thematic analysis.

## 6.1  Ethics

As I undertook my data gathering, I was aware of the importance of ethics. Fontana and Frey (2005, pp. 715-716) list three main points that must be followed when using interviews as a form of research, because the "objects of inquiry… are humans, and extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them." The three points are: "informed consent" where careful and truthful information is given, "right to privacy" where their identity is protected, and "protection from harm" which covers anything – physical or emotional, and I would add in the case of my research: spiritual. Fontana and Frey's most important ethic is to tell the truth (Johnson (2002) comments similarly). At AUT there are strict ethical guidelines which ensured this area was well considered and not left to chance. Appendix A and B show copies of AUTEC's ethics approvals for my research.

## 6.2  Theoretical framework

Early in the research process I found myself drawn to the paradigm representation of research orientations that was published by Burrell and Morgan (1979). These paradigms are best conceived as a map that helps negotiate a subject area as well as defining differences and similarities between the work of different theorists and their underlying frames of reference. This map is a tool that helps researchers to situate themselves in their research by

allowing them to determine where they have been, and where it is possible to go (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

Of the four paradigms in Burrell and Morgan's model: 1) functionalist, 2) interpretative, 3) radical humanist, and 4) radical structuralist, it is the last of these that I identify with the most. The radical structuralist quadrant is defined as having a focus on radical change, emancipation and potentiality, with an analysis that emphasises structural conflict, modes of domination, contradiction and deprivation. My research interest in how the church communicates itself to society fits into this paradigm because I am motivated by the desire for change. The hunch that led me into my research suggested there may be structural conflict in the classical church effecting its communication, and that there was potential for freedom from this conflict.
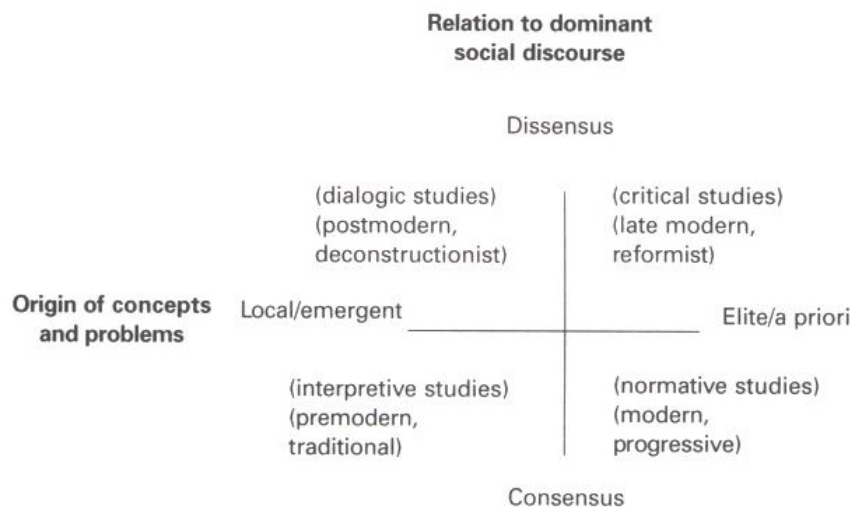
Figure 6.1: Deetz's "Contrasting dimensions from the metatheory of representational practices" (Alvesson & Deetz, 2000, p. 24).

Research frameworks need not remain static, and are therefore open to improvement. In the 1990's, Deetz (1996) presented an evolved and expanded view of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four-paradigm grid. Deetz was concerned

that the four-paradigm grid had cemented certain points of view too firmly and had ended up lacking the flexibility to allow crossover between paradigms. His preference was to focus on the continuums that define difference, rather than quadrants that tended to lead to rigid barriers between differences. The diagram in Figure 6.1 above shows the model Deetz presented:

I particularly like the vertical consensus/dissensus continuum which attempts to define whether researchers are happy working within a dominant set of social orders, and this would be described as consensus or unity, or if the researcher is happy working to disrupt these social orders, and this would be described as dissensus or difference.

Because I find myself on the dissensus side of this continuum, I wish to disrupt the prevailing social orders, in the case of my research, these social orders are to do with how I see classical church interacting with New Zealand society. This dissensus comes from my experience and participation within classical church over the last fifteen years. I believe "dissensus" describes the agitation I feel when I see the classical church's inability to perceive and respond to how it communicates with wider society. I do not believe the classical church is skilled in adapting its communication to the context it operates in, and I see it holding on to some irrelevant things too tightly. I would describe this dissensus as a motivating factor driving me to search for ways forward to help the classical church.

From my experience of being within the institution of the church in New Zealand I believe being in this position of dissensus with the church is relatively uncommon. Within the field of missiology, the scholarship ranges from very conservative through to revolutionary with no obvious middle ground. Because of where I situate myself on the Deetz model, I see myself not as a "revolutionary" but rather a "reformer". This is because in terms of the church, I am within it, I acknowledge and embrace the history, but I sincerely

desire changes for a positive future. Revolutionaries are more likely to discard the history and attempt to start something new.

The ultimate goal of this "paradigm" in Deetz's model as I see it, is that through the dissensus, forums for and models of discussion will occur that will aid the building and development of more open consensus within classical church as well as in New Zealand society. I often find myself critiquing the forms of domination and power in classical church structure and representation wondering how this affects the perception of the church in New Zealand society. My own hope and goal is to help build and develop a more open consensus within classical church as a result of my research. This is why I find myself in this particular paradigm, and for me this research is one step on a longer journey.

I find it harder to locate myself on the horizontal continuum in the diagram in Figure 6.1, but I can clearly plot myself in the area defined as critical studies. The goal of critical research is to unmask domination with cultural criticism and critique of ideology. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) discuss Brookfield's definition of critical social science as developing a specific form of critical thinking that does a variety of things. First, it identifies and challenges assumptions behind ordinary ways of perceiving, conceiving, and acting. Second, it recognises the influence of history, culture, and social positioning on beliefs and actions. Third, it imagines and explores extraordinary alternatives that may disrupt established orders and routines, and finally, it is appropriately sceptical about any knowledge or solution that claims to be the only truth or alternative. I find Brookfield's exposition of critical social studies encouraging in terms of how I approached my own research interests. In critical social research, Alvesson and Deetz (2000) describe the focus being on challenging rather than confirming established norms, disrupting rather than reproducing traditions and conventions, identifying and exposing tensions in language use and not continuing its domination, and encouraging productive dissension rather than being guided by surface consensus. All of this with the purpose of

emancipation, such as rethinking ideas and identities that are oppressive, and this too describes some of my desired research outcomes in relation to the church. Deetz (1996) defines research that focuses on the external relations of organisations to the wider society as being one of the suitable uses of the discourse of critical studies, this therefore matches my own research interest in how society perceives the communication of the church.

Alvesson and Deetz (2000) break critical research into three overall and overlapping tasks. The first task is insight, where hidden or the least obvious aspects and meaning of a chunk of social reality are highlighted. The second task is critique, where the problematic nature of these meanings is shown. The third task is transformative redefinition, which undermines the seeming robustness originally identified by encouraging alternative ways of constructing reality. I found this three-phase process helpful in identifying how to construct my own critical studies research framework, because the hunch I brought into my research required some uncovering to occur through investigation, followed by some critique, with the hope, in the case of the church, that its communication might be redefined in order for transformation to occur.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) define critical theory as being used to advocate, "…varying degrees of social action, from the overturning of specific unjust practices to radical transformation of entire societies" (p. 201). I like this definition because I find myself drawn to the activist nature of it. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), also inspire me with their description of qualitative research when done within the context of a critical framework where it can produce, "…undeniably dangerous knowledge, the kind of information and insight that upsets institutions and threatens to overturn sovereign regimes of truth" (p. 279). My own research interests are to do with the classical church, which could well be an example of a sovereign regime of truth.

More specifically on the area I position myself within on the Deetz diagram in Figure 6.1 (the dissensus end, on the critical studies side), someone in this "paradigm" is likely to have a suspicion of the current order and works toward a reformation of the social order, and may also associate more with a late-modern identity, as opposed to post-modernity (p. 199). I like the way Bauman (2000, p. 25) refers to this current period of time as "liquid modernity" (see previous discussion in chapter 2). This is what I believe Deetz means by "late modern" in his schema as opposed to "post modern", which he places in another "paradigm".

## 6.3 "Thick description"

The field of anthropology studies human societies and behaviour in an attempt to discover meaning in and to make sense of culture. One way of making sense of culture is to follow Geertz (1973) who borrowed the expression "thick description" (p. 3) from Gilbert Ryle. Geertz's use of the term describes a way of presenting data about cultures in such a way as to create an impression of lived experience. In summary, thick description is where a behaviour is examined and explained within the context that it occurred. The context is also explained making the behaviour more understandable to readers. Thick description can be compared to "thin description" which Littlejohn (1999) describes as just the behaviour being examined and explained without consideration of the context. The purpose of creating thick description is to gain an understanding of culture, or, at least, of an "interpretation of cultures" through the observation and use of signs or symbols (Geertz, 1973).

Geertz's "thick description" came as a challenge to the existing understanding of ethnography[29] which had been packaged into textbooks as being about

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[29] Littlejohn (1999) makes a connection between ethnography and the type of discovery Geertz is aiming for, and notes that: "Ethnography attempts to understand things that are otherwise foreign" (p. 211). When a researcher is observing a particular group of people and something is said or done that is not understood, the ethnographic task is to keep observing in an attempt

techniques and procedures that according to Geertz were too "thin" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6).[30] Thick description ethnography then, according to Geertz (1973) is processing the various complex conceptual structures that may be tied together or superimposed upon each other, as well as being strange, irregular, and inexplicit. He uses an analogy of trying to read a manuscript which is, "…foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sounds but in transient examples of shaped behaviour" (p. 10). This idea that ethnography is "reading a situation" resonates with my own research questions: I attempted to read the situations involving the personal stories of selected informants. My research is qualitative and used interviewing, which I investigate below, but I first need to situate my process within the concept of "thick description": I used thick description in the sense that I really wanted to get an examination and explanation of what people outside the church are thinking and feeling, but I did not use context in the way that would be used in actual ethnographic research.

For the context of my data I used the ideas around the paradigm and attitude of Christendom and post-Christendom, which means the context was not that of the interviews in the sense of their physical locations, but rather the philosophical location within Christendom or post-Christendom. The thing that is important in my research in terms of context is the identification of actual or believed existence of Christendom or post-Christendom and what this

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to find understanding through the interpretation of other things that are happening around the misunderstood actions.

[30] Geertz uses an example from Gilbert Ryle to introduce his theory on "thick description", which has become a popular analogy used to establish understanding of anthropological and ethnomethodological "thick description". The example is of a "wink" – the voluntary or involuntary action of a person closing and opening one eye. A "thin description" would simply be describing what was observed: the voluntary or involuntary action of a person closing and opening one eye. A thick description would be looking beyond the event, asking what it means in the specific context it occurred in, finding out the mood or condition of the person who did the winking, finding out who the wink was given to, and finding out what understanding that person (or people) had of the wink. Considering all of these things together gives a thick description of a wink in its cultural context (Geertz, 1973).

means. I therefore did not do anthropological work. I did not do ethnography. What I did was interviews and focus groups based on the theory of ethnography that uses the "thick description" concept from Geertz as a way to examine and explain behaviour in relation to a certain context, in my situation context being Christendom and post-Christendom.

## 6.4 Qualitative interviewing

Stage 1 of my research involved finding out the perceptions of the church from a group of people whom, in chapter 1, I called "Sam" representatives. This group was composed of New Zealanders who are spiritual but not Christianised. My inquiry with these people proceeded with interviews, and my goal was to answer the research question:

> *What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?*

In general terms, quantitative research might use questionnaires that force respondents to limit their answers to pre-defined categories. This could be described as gathering a "thin description." In comparison, qualitative research might use interviews not to gather information *about* people, but rather to understand them from the inside (Corbetta, 2003), and this approach is what Geertz (1973) would define as gaining a "thick description" of the people and their context, which matched the aim of my own research. Rubin and Rubin (2005) have written a book about qualitative interviewing with the perceptive subtitle "the art of hearing data". They define qualitative interviews as:

> …conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an external discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion,… each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share. (p. 4)

I particularly like the relaxed nature of this definition and find it fits into my own experiences of being a church minister where pastoral care of people – whether sick, grieving, or just wanting some counsel about life or spiritual things – often ends up being one-to-one, face-to-face conversations in which my pastoral skills rely on an intuitive sense of guiding the conversation and helping people talk about their own lives and experiences.  In the pastoral setting each conversation is also unique and sometimes sensitive.  While not all church ministers are good at one-to-one pastoral care, it is something I find myself drawn to, enjoy, and have been told I am good at.  It is this experience and other personality attributes that drew me to qualitative interviewing.  Seidman (2006) comments that accumulated events in the researcher's life can create an interest in interviewing as a method of research, and I can identify this as being true in my own experience.

Several writers point out that interviews and interviewers are not neutral tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005).  In other words, interviewers are affected by the context in which they live, their history, any conscious or unconscious motives they may have, or any desires, feelings of biases (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 696).  An interviewer is a person interacting with another person and when influences are honestly acknowledged, neutrality becomes less of an expectation in the interview process.  Johnson (2002) adds that "the researcher's own standpoint and place in the community, as well as his or her own self-understandings, reflections, sincerity, authenticity, honesty, and integrity" have a lot to do with the quality of the data gathered (p. 105).

Johnson (2002) acknowledges the lived experience of the interviewer in the area being studied as being a justifiable source of additional data that can work in conjunction with that gained through the interview process.  He goes on to say that the researcher's relationship to the member's knowledge of the context and their lived experience is also significant, as without it the researcher's ignorance will result in worthless data.  Johnson says: "Today there are many researchers

who use their investigations and interviews to explore phenomena about which they have prior or current member-based knowledge" (2002, p. 107). My own knowledge and experience of the classical church provided a useful backdrop to my interview experience – which I held onto loosely and was open to harsh and potentially offensive critique of something I am part of (classical church). These comments from Johnson helped me to justify my position within the research, and in the big picture of my theoretical framework remind me of the motivations for dissensus I also carry.

There are traditionally three main types of interviews that can be used in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005): structured interviews, where the interviewer asks all the respondents the same series of pre-established questions with little or no room for any variation in the interview process. The second type, semi-structured interviews, are guided but less controlled, and the third type is unstructured (or open ended) which are the most fluid of all three types and often have no framework at all. While different scholars use different terms to define similar methods, the label I have settled on for my own research, based on my understanding of the discipline of qualitative research, and as an attempt to clearly describe my intention is semi-structured in-depth interviews.

I like to imagine the three main interview types mentioned above along a horizontal continuum where at one end structured interviews sit with the purpose of capturing precise data of a codable nature, which is then used to explain certain behaviours in pre-established categories. At the other end of the continuum I put un-structured interviews, where the purpose is an attempt to gain an understanding of the complex behaviour of members of society without imposing any theoretical categories onto them that may hinder the data gathering potential. Semi-structured interviews sit in the middle of this continuum and I would place in-depth interviews somewhere between semi-structured and un-structured. I have illustrated this visually in Figure 6.2 below.
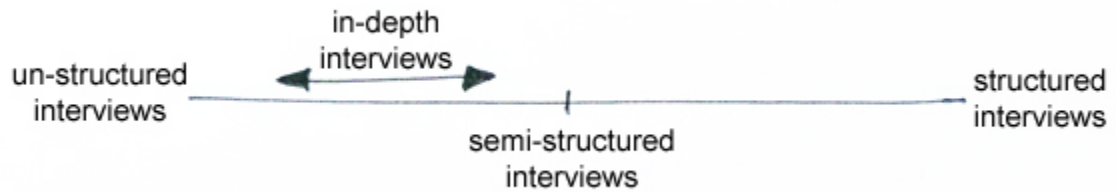
Figure 6.2: Continuum of interview types

The closer to the unstructured end, the more important becomes the human-to-human relationship between the interviewer and the respondent, and the greater the desire to understand the respondent rather than merely explain them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The in-depth interview is likely to involve a greater expression of the interviewer's self than other more formal or structured interview types (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Johnson (2002) talks of the "deep" information and knowledge striven for in the in-depth interview which I link directly to Geertz's (1973) "thick description", as do Rubin and Rubin (2005). Johnson comments, "To be effective and useful, in-depth interviews develop and build on intimacy; in this respect, they resemble the forms of talking one finds among close friends", but different in that the interviewer seeks to use the obtained information for purposes other than friendship. This "deep" information is the main feature of in-depth interviews over surveys or structured interviews, and "this information usually concerns very personal matters, such as individual self, lived experience, values and decisions, occupational ideology, cultural knowledge, or perspective" (p. 104). The aim is to uncover what is usually hidden from ordinary view. Deep understanding lets the interviewer grasp and articulate the myriad of views, perspectives, and meanings of the activities,

events, places, or cultural events in question. In the past in-depth interviewing was seen as an additional source of data gathering, whereas it has become more acceptable in the last decade to be the main or sole source of informant information. Depth, in many cases, is more useful than shallow breadth: depth is the purpose of in-depth interviewing.

The earlier discussion about anthropological research and Geertz showed that in-depth interviewing is not ethnography, the significance for my research is the idea of "thick description". Taylor and Bogdan suggest:

> …in-depth interviewing has much in common with participant
> observation. Like observers, interviewers "come on slow" initially. They
> try to establish rapport with informants, ask nondirective questions early
> in the research, and learn what is important to informants before focusing
> the research interests. (1998, p. 88)

The main difference between participant observation and in-depth interviewing lies in the settings and situations that the research takes place within. Participant observers do their research in natural field settings, whereas interviewers work in situations specifically arranged for the purpose of the research. "The participant observer gains firsthand knowledge of what people say and do in their everyday lives. The interviewer relies extensively on verbal accounts of how people act and what they feel" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 88).

## 6.5 Methods and techniques of semi-structured in-depth interviewing

The practical aspects that need to be considered in semi-structured in-depth interviewing starts with choosing the participants or "interviewees". The research question is the starting point that defines who needs to be talked to in order to flesh out any tentative theories and discover new facts. Interviewees need to be experienced and knowledgeable in the area of investigation. For my research I initially narrowed down the interviewees to people in a certain age group as well as a certain geographic location, who share certain historical features such as never being formally Christianised – the reasons for this are detailed in chapter 1.

Fontana and Frey (2005) define several technical areas of consideration when planning interviews and I will mention some of them now. The interviewer needs to be able to understand the language and culture of the respondents. For instance, certain jargon might either need to be learned, or avoided. For my own research of people who have not been Christianised, it was interesting to see if any classical church jargon was used or known by these people, or the way they might use terminology compared to how it is used within classical church. I was also very conscious of my own use of such language. Not having an awareness of language and cultural issues can hinder the depth of data gained. The use of language is also important in that it can create a "sharedness of meanings" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 713) that brings a closer understanding of the context for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Again, this highlighted the need to be conscious of my own experience of church where certain issues and terms are loaded with meaning, which often have different meanings for different people.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews depend on three types of questions: main questions, follow-ups, and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rubin and Rubin suggest working out about six main questions for any one interview with the expectation that only three or four will be asked. They point out that rushing through too many questions will not get sufficient depth on any of them. Follow-up questions (or secondary questions) are specific to the comments that an interviewee makes and are developed on the spot to explore particular themes or ideas introduced by the participant in order to obtain depth and detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Probes are standardised ways to ask for more depth and detail during the interview conversation, and are used to encourage or signal the interviewee to continue, such as "can you give me an example of that?" or "what happened next?" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 13 & 137). It is important to remember that semi-structured in-depth interviews are flexible conversations and too much dependence on structured plans will stifle the objective of the process (Johnson, 2002). There are many stylistic variations in the way interviews can be done, and no one way is the best or right way. Rubin

and Rubin suggest what works is a style that makes the person being interviewed feel comfortable, obtains the needed information, and works with the researcher's own personality. Every interview will be different as every person being interviewed is different, and each one comes with knowledge and experience differing from the rest.

When I was organising my interviews and the focus groups, I was careful to relate to my participants in a manner that equalised any kind of power relationship. Equalising any power distance was important because of the need to gain rapport. In, for example, feminist research theory, there is a concern about the power that exists between the researcher and the person being researched, the outcome of this concern being the expression of equal power in the relationship (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). This was a big concern for me, as the topic of my research was likely to bring up issues of power and control to do with the classical church. If this had caused bad experiences for the interview participants, I did not want to be replicating that power in the way I did my research.

Levelling power between the participants and myself as the researcher was also important in order to gain trust. Gaining the trust of the interviewee is essential to the success of the interview process, "and once it is gained, trust can still be very fragile. Any faux pas by the researcher may destroy… painfully gained trust" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 708). The speed of trust gained will also depend on the subject and topic. My own research covered the area of spirituality which is a personal topic for people, so I presented myself as sympathetic towards a spacious understanding of spirituality, which is true. Trust seemed to form quite easily for me with my interviewees. If, for example, the interviewer of my topic has been someone with a closed and narrow understanding that classical church Christianity was the only acceptable expression of spirituality, trust would most likely not have been formed.

As well as trust, establishing rapport is crucial to successful interviewing, and Fontana and Frey (2005) go as far as saying the researcher must be able to take the role of the people being interviewed and attempt to see the situation from their perspective. Understanding the interviewee is the priority and a close rapport will open doors to the interviewer. A risk for the interviewer to watch out for is becoming so involved or overwhelmed by the viewpoint of those being interviewed that the interviewer turns into a spokesperson for the group and the research loses its objectivity.

The things mentioned above are not a comprehensive list of practical considerations, and I had no intention of outlining a detailed "how to" list of interviewing as this would have stifled some of the potential for creativity within the general unstructured nature of the type of interviewing I did. Some other things to be mindful of with interviews are the effects of gender and how this can cause certain filtering to happen. Sexuality is another area that may need considered attention, particularly in my area of research where the classical church has traditionally been anti-gay. An important technical point is the recording of in-depth interviews, this is essential to be able to obtain verbatim records and as well as for any audible analysis that will take place post-interview, which will be described in the analysis section below (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002).

## 6.6  Focus groups

Stage 2 of my research involved taking the "Sam" perceptions of the church from stage 1 back into the church. This was achieved by running three focus groups with church professionals or leaders as representatives of the source of the church's communication. The question that related to this stage was:

> *What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and*
> *perceptions discovered in question one?*

Focus groups were a good way to gather data for this question because I wanted church leaders to respond together, or communally within their normal and familiar contexts.

Focus groups are collective conversations or group interviews, which according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005) can be any size, directed or non-directed, and are useful because, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 648) say, "Focus groups reduce the distance between the researcher and the researched.  The multivocality of the participants limits the control of the researcher over the research process".  This reduction of control is important because it reduces power distance between the researcher and the participants.  I particularly like how Sarantakos (2005) calls focus groups "loosely constructed discussion" (p. 194), which allow unique insights into the possibilities for critical inquiry in a way that is deliberative, dialogic, and democratic (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).  Focus groups engage participants in discussion of "real-world problems and asymmetries in the distribution of economic and social capital" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 887), and encourage self-disclosure among group participants in order to discover what they really think and feel about the topic or focus of the group (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

Focus groups allow scholars to "explore group characteristics and dynamics as relevant constitutive forces in the construction of meaning and the practice of social life" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 902).  It is the collective meaning-making attribute of focus groups that drew me to the use of them as I engaged with church leaders.  Church leaders within the same church often work in groups, or at least share information regularly in groups together, so I thought it would be useful getting them engaging with my stage 1 results as a group because this is a natural context for them.

Focus groups can promote synergy between participants that unearths information that might be difficult to retrieve from individual memory.  This can be described as facilitating the exploration of collective memories and

shared knowledge (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005).  Ordinarily focus groups can allow researchers access to in-group conversations and in-house terms and categories in the actual situations of their use (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001).  Focus groups are therefore useful for more than just gaining insight into how a group of people might react to a given stimuli, they can also be used to generate data on the group meanings behind collective assessments, such as exposing the process that leads the group to a particular assessment.

The theory of focus groups is important in the application of my research specifically because I am a church insider, someone in a church leadership position, so a possible temptation would have been to interpret the stage 1 analysis on behalf of the church from my own perspective.  Creating focus groups of church leaders facilitated a situation where I, as researcher, was able to listen to the attempts of others as they made sense of their lives in terms of the stage 1 content I provided for them to engage with.

## 6.7  Methods and techniques of focus groups

Focus groups need to have a few things set in place for them to work well: there needs to be a clear purpose, and the leader (or researcher, or moderator, or facilitator) needs to be clear about this purpose and have sufficient group process skills.  The required skills may vary between different group purposes, for example, one type of group might be set up to make decisions, while another might be to gain reactions (Krueger & Casey, 2000).  Focus group participants need to have something in common, and are in fact chosen because of a commonality that is required for the research focus (Krueger & Casey, 2000).  The environment that the focus group takes place in needs to suit the type of conversation required, for example room for everyone to be comfortable with minimal distractions such as noise, and arranged in order to facilitate eye contact (Sarantakos, 2005). Getting the group to sit around a large table will create a different dynamic to the group sitting around in a room full of couches.

The success of focus groups depend on both the group and the leader and most weaknesses of focus groups come down to one or the other of these two things not being appropriately arranged or organised. Some of the weaknesses can be in the relationship or position of the leader compared to the people in the group, for example, if the leader is of a higher position within the same organisation the group dynamics may be such that things are expressed in a more positive light in order not to affect things such as promotion or salary increases. Group members might offer a collective front for some reason to deceive the leader, or the group might not be representative (Sarantakos, 2005). The leader or researcher aims to encourage discussion among members of the group rather than being the central point that dialogue always returns to: the researcher should be a "facilitating observer" rather than an interviewer (Sarantakos, 2005, p. 195). This is what Sarantakos calls "the essence of the method" for focus groups (p. 195). The leader must be able to guide the discussion effectively and this is something that comes from experience. They must also be able to encourage involvement, control dominating participants and keep the discussion progressing in the intended direction. Being able to develop a warm atmosphere among the members of the group is a desired quality as well (Sarantakos, 2005). Focus groups should not be controlled or directed but rather facilitated, and they require extensive preparation and planning (Bloor, et al., 2001).

## 6.8  Analysing the data

Some of the critique of more unstructured interviews targets the lack of reflexivity in the interpreting process (which I believe is fair to say if the researcher claims to be neutral and unbiased), and that the data speaks for itself without any need for analysis (Fontana & Frey, 2005). I have already mentioned the validity of identifying what the researcher brings to the research, affirming the researcher's presence together with the participants, and acknowledging that I will be present in the data gathering and analysing processes. The goal of in-depth research however, is not to identify the self-awareness of the researcher, but to find out how the interviewees and focus

group participants understand what they have seen and heard, or experienced, and then through the analysis the researcher tells their version of their understandings (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The goal, then, of the analysis "is to understand core concepts and to discover themes that describe the world you have examined" (p. 245). This examined world will then shed light on the research questions and provide information and conclusions to form a thesis.

With the collection of data there was a concern to ensure my sources were reliable. I had no way to check their veracity, but I also had no reason to doubt it. My research participants offered themselves in sincerity, and I have confidence that my participants were reliable and fulfilled my participant criteria. The people interviewed or in focus groups need to be knowledgeable with the intention that their combined view will present a balanced perspective. And likewise in the analysing stage the process of analysis needs to be reliable. The research problem needs to be investigated thoroughly with an accurate presentation of what the interviewees and focus group participants have talked about. Where there are contradictions or inconsistencies they need to be acknowledged and explained. There will no doubt be noncomparable parts of interviews or parts of focus groups, but issues such as this are due to the nature of in-depth interviewing and focus groups, these issues pose no problem if addressed transparently (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Any reader of the research needs to be able to follow the systems used and see the attention to accuracy observed by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For the analysis of my interview and focus group data I used a type of thematic analysis to interpret and make sense of what my interviewees and focus group participants had spoken.

## 6.9  Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a process that can be used with many qualitative methods as a way of assisting in the quest for insight (Boyatzis, 1998). The method can be used in many theoretical or epistemological positions, and is a way to organise data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2008). The process involves

encoding qualitative information, such as an interview transcript, with an explicit code that may be: "…a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms" (Boyatzis, 1989 p. vi).  When coding, the researcher establishes themes by determining the importance of size, recurrence, or intensity of items within specific data sets and across all the data sets in the archive (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Thematic analysis requires "the ability to see patterns in seemingly random information" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 7) and so ( rather obviously and at its most simple) a theme is a pattern that emerges from the data,.  It might be something that describes and organizes observations, or something that interprets an aspect of what is going on.  As Boyatzis puts it:

> A theme may be identified at the manifest level (directly observable in the information) or at the latent level (underlying the phenomenon).  The themes may be initially generated inductively from the raw information or generated deductively from theory and prior research. (1998, p. vii)

A theme can also be considered as an element in the data  that captures importance and meaning in relation to the research question.

Boyatzis (1998) suggests that researchers using thematic analysis move through three phases of inquiry.  First, they must observe in order to understand; second, they must recognise important facets in the data in order to encode it and third, they must interpret the significance of the theme.  Boyatzis warns that what one researcher sees through thematic analysis might not be visible or significant to others working with the same data set, making the coding for recurrence, repetition and intensity especially important in establishing that a named theme is valid and reliable.

Braun and Clark (2008) warn that thematic analysis  is it not merely a collection of data extracts strung together.  They say:

> The extracts in thematic analysis are illustrative of the analytic points the
> researcher makes about the data, and should be used to illustrate/support
> an analysis that goes beyond their specific content, to make sense of the
> data, and tell the reader what it does or might mean. (Braun & Clarke,
> 2008, p. 94)

In my process of thematic analysis, I began by recording and transcribing my interviews and focus groups were recorded and then transcribed, and I analysed in an iterative process that entailed reading and re-reading the raw data. As I listened to the recordings and read through the transcripts, I mined them for the themes that appeared, taking notice of the context (Geertz, 1973) they appeared in. As themes were identified from the first interview or focus group I made a note of them on the transcript as "codes", usually recurring several times. I listened to see if these codes occurred in any of the other interviews or focus groups, and checked back as well.

Codes that occurred multiple times within the same interview or focus group were deemed significant to that particular interviewee or group of people. If these same codes then occurred multiple times in interviews or focus groups with other interviewees or groups of people, those codes became significant to the entire project. The significant codes were then investigated through the lens of my pre-determined theoretical framework.

An example of a code that may have occurred could be "arrogance" – perhaps the church was seen to be arrogant. "Arrogance" may appear in various ways in the transcript, from being explicitly mentioned, or in more implicit ways, such as an interviewee describing a feeling or intuition she had while being in the company of a church-going colleague at work. The task of coding would be to identify all of these instances of "arrogance" in a way that enabled grouping of them later on in the analysis process. I would then compare the occurrence of this code with other codes that emerged across all of the interviews or focus groups. Identifying the contexts that each code occurred in and the reasons for such observations or feelings associated with them, began to describe a perception of the church in society, from the viewpoint of the interviewees, or a reaction to the interviewees by the focus group participants.

This process of thematic analysis was a very detailed and time-consuming process where the rich and deep data was made sense of.

## 6.10 Method: What I actually did

The aim of this section is to be transparent about how I went about gathering and analysing the data. My research was stimulated by the contemplation of a hypothetical person I choose to call Sam (see chapter 1). Sam is a New Zealander, spiritual but never Christianised, meaning she has not been socialised or educated into Christianity or any church organisational subcultures. Sam has journeyed into and found sustenance in her own spiritual exploration, but Christian spirituality has never been something she considered helpful or drawn to. The first of my two research questions was:

> *What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?*

To answer this question I needed to find people like Sam, or "Sam representatives" to interview.

## 6.11 Interviews

At the start of the data gathering stage, as an attempt to narrow down the age demographic of my research to narrow its focus, I looked for Sam representatives who were in the 25-35 year-old age-range. This was because my own age was within this range, and I thought that would give me some prior understanding and appreciation of the New Zealand cultural context from which Sam shares her experience. I also had as a participant criterion that Sam had to have had a recent spiritual experience or "epiphany". By epiphany I meant a new realisation or intuition that there is something "spiritual" beyond themselves, perhaps that they sense there is something more to their physical selves than previously felt or sensed, or that there is something mysterious "out there". I did not intend to define what "spiritual" could be or mean any further

than that, as I did not intend to analyse Sam's spirituality, but rather circumstances around the exploration of this spirituality. By "recent" I meant within the last 5 years. An important thing about Sam was that she did not choose to explore this epiphany in the Christian church. For the purposes of this research I was not interested in how or where Sam did explore this epiphany – either formally or informally, but instead why the church was not an option used to help the exploration of this newly discovered spirituality.

I started advertising for research participants in February 2009, in Christchurch, as this was the city I had shifted to two months earlier because of a half-time employment opportunity in the central city Baptist church. I put an A5 sized advertisement up in local doctor's waiting rooms, in school staff rooms, in public places such as car parking building elevators and notice boards in places like public libraries, with the hope that people would email me interested in being research participants. However, after three months of advertising for research participants I had nobody who fulfilled my research criteria. I adjusted the criteria by lifting the age specifications to be any adult, and removed the requirement of needing to have a recent spiritual experience or epiphany, but rather simply insisted participants were "spiritual". Appendix C shows the advertisements used. Within days of changing the advertisements to the loosened criteria I had people getting in touch expressing interest. The first interview occurred on 18 May 2009, the seventh and final interview occurred on 6 August 2009. I offered to meet interview participants at a location of their choice suggesting either a café or bar where I would buy them a drink, or at their home if that suited them better, this was an attempt at power equalisation and rapport. Five of the seven participants chose local cafes or bars, one person chose an area in a public library, and one invited me to their home.

Before I started an interview with a participant, I followed the AUTEC process, and copies of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form are shown in Appendix D and E. Appendix F shows the guide I followed for every interview. Appendix O contains the interview transcripts, (and focus groups

under Appendix P). The preliminary information and signing the Consent Form at the start of each interview took about 10 minutes and worked well as an "ice-breaker" before launching into the interview proper. From the start of the interview proper the shortest interview was 39 minutes, the longest was 54 minutes. In total I ended up with 334 minutes of interview recording, and 50,159 words of transcript. The interview specifications are shown in Table 6.1 below:

| Interview | Date | Location | Time (minutes) | Transcript word count |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 001 | 18 May 2009 | cafe | 43 | 5172 |
| 002 | 20 May 2009 | bar | 52 | 7190 |
| 003 | 26 May 2009 | cafe | 49 | 7701 |
| 004 | 9 July 2009 | library | 50 | 7993 |
| 005 | 10 July 2009 | home | 54 | 6820 |
| 006 | 27 July 2009 | cafe | 46 | 8510 |
| 007 | 6 August 2009 | cafe | 40 | 6773 |
| | | | 334 | 50,159 |

Table 6.1: Interview specifications

After seven interviews the initial thematic analysis was indicating a sufficient repetition of themes between interviews so I decided to stop interviewing as the quantity and quality of data was more than sufficient.

## 6.12 Focus groups

Stage 2 of my research involved taking the perceptions of the church from the "Sam" representatives found in the stage 1 interviews back into the church by running some focus groups with church professionals or leaders as

representatives of the source of the church's communication.  The question that related to this stage was:

> *What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and perceptions discovered in question one?*

The way I selected the church leadership groups for my focus groups was to contact church ministers, pastors, or vicars, inviting them to participate, asking for 90 minutes of their time.  In Christchurch I belong to several networks of church leaders, and was therefore able to email the main leader of eight churches a one-page document that explained the purpose of my research (see Appendix G).  The eight invited churches were Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Salvation Army, Baptist, Pentecostal, Open Brethren, and Independent.  Five of the invited churches refused the invitation, and my sample, in the end, was one Baptist church, one Anglican church, and one Independent church, all of which I would describe as evangelical churches.

Each focus group followed the same format, which was to present each of the stage 1 perceptions separately and then to invite a discussion in which the focus group participants were encouraged to speak of their reaction and thoughts.

Instead of mediating my communication with the groups by using a data show, I developed a system to encourage full feedback.  At the start of each focus group I gave each participant a set of ten cards.  The first nine had a "perception" printed on it with lines for notes (there were nine perceptions, as presented in chapter 7.  These cards had two functions, first, they had the perception printed on them, so after I had read it out to them, they could refer back to it without needing to ask me for clarification.  Second, after talking about each perception as a group I gave the group one minute of silence for people to write anything on their card that they thought might be significant but that they did not get a chance to speak out.  The last card was for general feedback at the end of the focus group.  These cards were intended as a way to allow people to contribute who might not feel confident in the group to say all

the ideas they had about the discussion, this was a way of empowering those people. There was about a 25 percent buy-in to the use of these cards, which may not seem particularly high, but is very valuable if it means the people who did not otherwise have a voice were heard. The written comments are listed in the focus group transcripts included in Appendix P. There was one group in particular where there was a person who barely said anything in the discussion, I suspect due to personality type and natural response to a group setting such as this, but they wrote comments on the cards. I had not seen or heard of this card idea being used in focus groups before and would recommend their use.

I indicated to my participants that each focus group would require 90 minutes of their time and that I would stop at that point regardless of getting through all of my material. Every group wanted me to continue after the 90-minute point, and as they seemed very interested to hear what all of the nine perceptions were, I was happy to continue. The longest focus group lasted for 139 minutes at the insistence of the group, although this time included a short break in the middle for afternoon tea. In retrospect, I can see that ninety minutes was an optimistic time estimate for completion of all nine perceptions, but I was keen to respect the time of the participants. The church leadership groups which participated consisted of both paid staff and volunteers, and I was aware that some of the participants would probably have considered the focus group as paid work time. I was conscious of keeping each focus group moving through the material, but sometimes 10 minutes for each perception simply was not enough time for the discussion. When it became clear that the focus groups would run longer than ninety minutes, I decided that omitting a perception was better than suppressing good discussion but because each group wished to continue, all perceptions were in fact covered with each group.

The focus group specifications are shown in Table 6.1 below:

| Focus group | Date | Number of participants | Time (minutes) | Transcript word count |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 001 | 22 July 2010 | 5 | 114 | 16,090 |
| 002 | 7 January 2011 | 6 | 139 | 18,847 |
| 003 | 24 June 2011 | 7 | 107 | 17,322 |
| | | 18 | 360 | 52,259 |

Table 6.2: Focus group specifications

In the first focus group I used a Research Assistant taking notes from observations of participants that would not be noticed when listening to the recordings. This Research Assistant was a final-year undergraduate student who I paid to observe and note take. After transcribing the first focus group I decided to discontinue using a Research Assistant as I did not feel there was significant gain in having one. Appendix H contains the Research Assistant Confidentiality Agreement.

The sporadic and extended spacing of these focus groups in terms of dates is due to some unforeseen natural disasters that affected the Canterbury region: a series of earthquakes, the first occurring on 4 September 2010, with the most devastating happening on 22 February 2011 which killed 185 people. Straight after the September and February earthquakes I needed to put my research on hold as I worked full-time in my capacity as church minister (rather than the normal half-time). There was approximately six months during the initial earthquake recovery period where I was not actively working on my research. While there is some mention of earthquakes in the second and third focus groups, I do not believe there was enough specific engagement with this topic and the earthquakes needing it to be significantly noted in my data analysis.

The guide I used in each of the focus groups containing the content that facilitated engagement is included as Appendix I.  The Focus Group Participant Information Sheet is included as Appendix J.  The Focus Group Consent Form is included as Appendix K.  For all of the interviews and focus groups I did my own transcription as I felt the discipline of working with the data in this way helped me to get to know the data and this familiarisation aided the thematic analysis.  In total between the seven interviews and three focus groups there were 25 participants, 694 minutes of recording, which were transcribed into 102,418 words.

## 6.13 Thematic analysis of the data

I transcribed each interview and focus group into a template that had three columns across a page that was landscape-oriented (as shown in the transcripts in Appendices O and P).  The first column was for the time of each transition between speakers which created a time stamp reference for any quotes used in the following chapters.  The second column contained the transcribed text, and the third column was blank ready for me to add comments, thoughts, ideas, and to draw symbols of what I was picking up in the analysis, this formed my "coding" (as described in section 6.9).  I had hard-copies of each transcript, and read through each one several times identifying things of significance such as repetition of words, ideas, and attitudes. I highlighted words, drew arrows and lines connecting different parts together, and generally pulled the text apart while looking at it from many different angles.  I made interview thematic analysis process notes and after this process created a one-page summary for each transcript showing the things of significance from the notes, this would usually have five or six main themes with sub-headings.  The interview theme pages and analysis process notes for all seven interviews can be found in Appendix M.  Each interview was colour coded as I then worked on larger pieces of paper creating a map of the overall themes and ideas where grouping and cross-interview analysis was shown diagrammatically.  This was then collated into a three-page text document as numbered points under five main

themes, and this document is Appendix L. The same process was done with the focus groups and the documents showing this working are in Appendix N.

I had gathered a massive amount of "thick," deep data, and the thematic analysis process highlighted both a complexity and significance to my research purpose. The interview and focus group participants provided many stories from which to illustrate the ways they have created meaning, and these have enlivened my work with very quotable quotes, far too many to be used in the following chapters. I found the words of my participants so rich and moving that it would have been all too easy to compose a chapter that consisted entirely of quotes and stories. I found the data to be an excellent resource for my research and I thoroughly enjoyed working with it, to the extent that it was extremely difficult not to present much more of it verbatim in the following chapters than I have. The data gathered were extremely rich and consistent which enabled my own analysis of it to be extremely "thick" and rich as well.

## 6.14 Conclusion

I finish this chapter on methodology and method with similar thoughts to how I began it, with words from Geertz himself, on how thick descriptive ethnography can be successful. Now, however, I can overlay his philosophy onto the practice of semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus groups: it depends,

> …on the degree to which he [the ethnographer, and now I suggest interviewer and focus group facilitator] is able to clarify what goes on…, to reduce the puzzlement… whether it sorts winks from twitches and real winks from mimicked ones… to bring us into touch with the lives of strangers. (1973, p. 16)

Through my interviews and focus groups I have been able to get in touch with the lives of a few strangers, to discover something of their exploration of spirituality that has occurred beyond the local church (through the interviews), or something of their reaction to how the church is perceived (through the focus groups). My hope was that their stories and experiences would show me

something about the way the local church communicates itself to society. I believe this has been achieved, and the following chapters present and discuss this in detail.

# Chapter 7: Interview analysis and interpretation

This chapter presents the analysis of the data gathered using the method described in chapter 6[31]. The interview transcripts from which the data were obtained can be found in Appendix O. The data were originally organised as five themes (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2008), from which I eventually crystallised nine factors, each of which had an associated perception. The section following explains the process by which the five themes became nine factors and perceptions.

## 7.1  Analysis process

Once the interviews were transcribed, I identified the ideas that dominated each interview and made process notes that captured the repetition and passion within the ideas that were expressed by my participants. The exhaustive coding process revealed that five broad groupings of ideas dominated the data, as Figure 7.1 shows:



**Five themes**

| 1 Spirituality & experience | 2 Negative perceptions | 3 Stories of influence | 4 Church wealth & the pursuit of wealth | 5 Church communication |
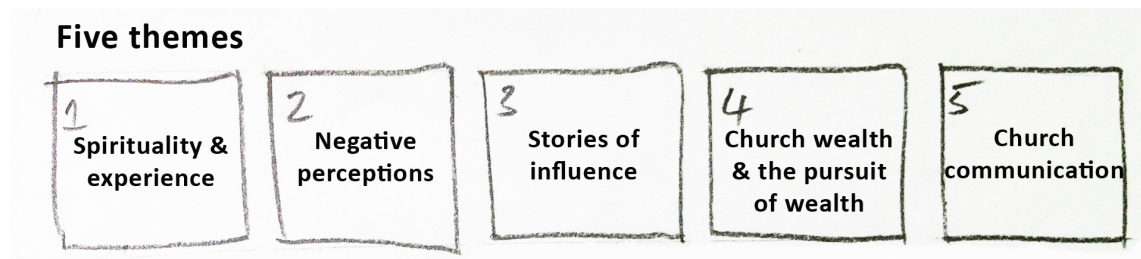
Figure 7.1: Five main themes from thematic analysis.

As Figure 7.1 shows, the five themes are broad. As a "first cut" of the data, for instance, "Negative perceptions" showed a powerful trend, but was too general to be really useful in formulating a theory of the way the church is perceived. I felt that the broad themes would yield more precise sub-groupings of ideas, and with this in mind, I conducted a second, more fine-grained analysis of the

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[31] Please see sections 6.9: Thematic analysis, and 6.13: Thematic analysis of the data.

five themes, which resulted in the identification of nine factors. When I coded the first time, I had kept a list of references that linked to important ideas within each interview transcript[32]. During this second coding phase, I used my summary sheets to locate statements in the interviews that clearly articulated the basis of each of the five themes, and captured the participants' own voices to include in the data chapter. This second phase of the coding broke the bigger, more general themes into smaller, more specific "factors", which I think of as sub-sets of ideas from within the themes. Figure 7.2 shows how the five themes yielded nine factors and perceptions:
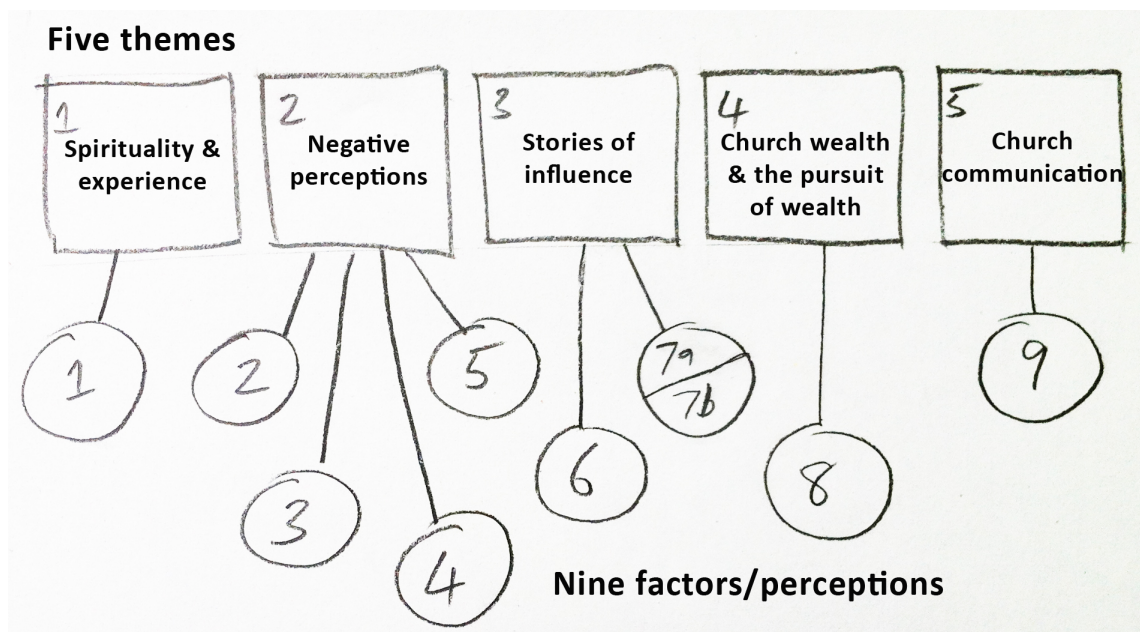


Figure 7.2: Five main themes from thematic analysis showing how nine factors emerged.

Each of the newly-defined factors is a category of data that describes what underpins, shapes and creates opinions held by the interview participants. The opinions were then articulated as the "perceptions" on which each factor is based. These perceptions are based on my interpretation of the participants' words, and so capture my own view of the participants' concerns. Each

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[32] Each interview generated five or six pages of process notes, and then the most significant points were summarised and colour coded. All of these pages are included in Appendix M.

perception can be traced back through the factors to one of the five themes. It would have been pleasingly symmetrical if there had been five themes and five perceptions, or five themes and twenty perceptions, but as it happened, there were five themes and nine perceptions as shown in Figure 7.2 and Table 7.1.

| | Factor | Perception |
|---|---|---|
| **1** | Spirituality is seen as being outside of religion and Christianity. | The church is not a spiritual place. |
| **2** | The church has a bad historical track record. | The church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused its control. |
| **3** | These people have high expectations for churches and Christians to be sincere and trustworthy. | The church and Christians lack integrity |
| **4** | These people see the church as emotive and manipulative | Free, independent thinkers don't need the church |
| **5** | The first reaction these people have when you mention church is negative | Church is oppressive |
| **6** | Christians let themselves down by their actions | Christianity is not seen as relevant or necessary |
| **7** | Everyone knows somebody (family, friend, or colleague) who is a church-going Christian and have stories to tell about them. People also know about prominent Christians and organisations through media exposure and have strong opinions to share about them | a. Most Christians are nutters<br><br>b. Some Christians do amazing good |
| **8** | People react negatively to churches and Christians displaying excessive wealth | The church is after your money |
| **9** | In general the church does not have a good public profile | The church? Who cares? |

Table 7.1: The nine factors and their associated perceptions.

These nine factors and their perceptions create clear points of entry for focus group discussion and for anyone wishing to engage with the analysis of my interview data.  In section 7.2 of this chapter I will systematically address each of the nine factors and perceptions.  I will begin each section by focusing on selected quotations, with the aim of demonstrating how interviewees' comments led to the formation of the nine factors.  These quotations also allow me to show a small sample of the participants' voices in a pure, unanalysed form onto the pages of this chapter.

As outlined in the previous chapter, I interviewed seven people who matched my definition of Sam as a spiritual person who has chosen not to explore her spirituality in the Christian church and who has not been Christianised.  My participants professed a wide range of belief systems as shown in Table 7.2 below:

| Code | Pseudonym | Age | Spirituality |
|------|-----------|-----|--------------|
| 001 | Alice | 40s | Nature |
| 002 | Hamish | 26 | Post-modern mixture |
| 003 | Dave | 30 | Astral traveller |
| 004 | Brenda | 50s | Buddhist |
| 005 | Evan | 73 | Buddhist |
| 006 | Katie | 40s | Spirit Channeller |
| 007 | Emily | 40s | New Age |

Table 7.2: Interview research participant codes, pseudonyms, age, and type of spirituality.

Each of my participants was assigned a pseudonym, and wherever possible, I used the participants' words[33]. The first participant was Alice, a woman in her 40s who, like Hamish and Emily, never labelled her own spirituality. I have described the spirituality of these three participants from the summary they gave of their spiritual identities. Alice appeared to be influenced strongly by nature and her ability to connect to certain natural environments, and although this is not the whole of her spirituality, I have labelled her spirituality as "nature".

Hamish, who was 26 years old when I interviewed him, described his spirituality in such terms that I ended up thinking of it as a selection of bits and pieces from a variety of known spiritual identities. For example, Hamish follows "Chiron Healing", which is defined as "a natural form of energy healing that aims to repair and balance the etheric and feeling patterns of our energy field" (International Association of Chiron Healers Incorporated, 2010); Hare Krishna, a religious movement established in 1965 based in Hinduism (ReligionFacts, 2013), and Zen, which is a school of Buddhism (Auckland Zen Centre, 2013). Hamish appears to hold this variety of spiritual identities together loosely in the formation of his own spirituality.

My third participant was Dave, 30 years of age, a self-professed Astral Traveller. Astral Travelling is also called Astral Projection, and is based on the understanding that humans possess two bodies, the physical body that will eventually die, and the astral body, which at times can detach itself from the physical body and move away while remaining tethered (Webster, 1998). This can also be referred to as having an out-of-body experience.

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[33] When I quote from the interviews in the data chapter, a footnoted transcript code designates where the quote comes from. For example, (003-12) means interview 3, "Dave", section 12 of the transcript. "…"indicates that the transcript was edited to remove "um", "ah", pauses, repetitions and other verbalisations where their removal does not impede meaning. The transcripts are in Appendix O.

Both my fourth and fifth participants were Bhuddist: Brenda, a 50 year-old and Evan, who was 70. Both Evan and Brenda talked of their active participation in things such as visiting a Buddhist temple, and reading books about Buddhism.

The sixth interview participant was Katie, a Spirit Channeller in her 40s. Spirit Chanellers can also be called Spirit Mediums, and they communicate with the spirit world (Emmons, 2000).

Emily, a woman in her 40s, was the seventh and final interview participant. She did not specifically give a name to her spirituality, but I have defined it as "New Age", which can be described as drawing on Eastern and Western spiritual and metaphysical traditions, infusing them with influences from self-help, motivational psychology, and holistic health (Drury, 2004).

## 7.2 Factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church

Now I will identify the nine "factors" drawn from the collective data of my participant interviews. Each factor has been derived from the comments of multiple and sometimes all research participants, meaning none of the factors come from random or one-off comments, or from just one interviewee. After I have explained each factor, I will give the consequent "perception" of the church. Each perception is also derived from the interview data analysis. The formulation of these factors and perceptions is my attempt to synthesise the viewpoints of my participants and is, I believe, a reliable representation of what they have collectively articulated. Whether I as the researcher, or someone as a reader, agree or disagree with the factual truth of any of these presented factors or perceptions is not the point of this research. Everyone is likely to have their own factors that shape and create any perceptions of the Christian church. The point of this research is to present the "thickest" description possible from all of the people interviewed, in order to discover as much as possible about how those individuals, as spiritual people who have not been Christianised, perceive the communication of the church.

## Factor 1: Spirituality is seen as being outside of religion and Christianity

Brenda articulated a key issue for locating spirituality and religion and Christianity:

> …religion is about belief, and spirituality is about qualities, spiritual qualities like love and compassion and generosity… tolerance, forgiveness, those are spiritual qualities.  So if, if religious beliefs are the only things we focus on without the development of these qualities, then you get… negative things, you get all kind of fundamentalists pushing of the beliefs which is quite uncompassionate sometimes because they haven't got those qualities.[34]

Within the church to be Christian is considered to be spiritual, or, more specifically, to have a Christian spirituality.  The perception of my participants was contrary to this in-house church view.  They think of spirituality as being outside of religion or Christianity, in other words to be spiritual does not necessarily require a connection to church.  However, many of the ways these people define spirituality actually matches some characteristics of Christian spirituality, such as: a response to being in a certain place, which could be having a connection or orientation towards nature: being in situations where something moves you such as human-made buildings (churches): having an inner inclination or intuition towards love and peace: or having an interest in self discovery and development.  For example, Evan explained how he has changed over the past five to ten years because his spirituality has made him:

> …more at peace with myself, more becoming at peace with myself, and that I think is through the… Buddhist connection, through the… enjoyment I get out of going to the temple.[35]

It would not be unusual to hear a Christian person describe a similar experience of peace to that of Evan's, but replacing "Buddhist connection" with "Christian connection", and "temple" with "church".

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[34] (004-20).
[35] (005-8).

Spirituality, as defined by my interviewees, often relied on some kind of inexplicable personal experience. Spirituality aided positive transformation in life, it enhanced human interaction, and was a help in personal crisis, for example, Brenda talked of an experience as a young person, and what she now connects to her spirituality:

> I think I could have been suicidal at that age, except that I instinctively knew to turn to nature, that nature is healing… my [Buddhism] teacher says… that you should go into nature and that will… help us with our suffering… and I just instinctively knew that.[36]

Spiritual qualities were explained as love, compassion, generosity, tolerance, and forgiveness, whereas religion, church and Christianity were seen as having a focus on belief rather than spiritual qualities. This focus on belief was seen as a negative uncompassionate fundamentalist pushing of beliefs. Reassurance was given by the interview participants that spiritual people like themselves are normal mainstream people involved in society. There was evidence that some participants constructed their sense of spirituality around what they knew about at the time of their first experience or realisation of something spiritual, so if they had known about a positive Christian spirituality at their initial time of discovery they may have used the church to explore their spirituality.

## Perception 1:  The church is not a spiritual place

Factor 1 shows that there are many similarities between how participants define spirituality and Christian spirituality, such as the value of love, compassion and generosity, which both my interview participants and Christianity embrace. However, the interview participants have not been exposed to positive examples of Christian spirituality in any significant way that allowed them to see value or reason in the uniquely Christian elements, such as the ideal of social, physical and spiritual transformation occurring because of the existence

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[36] (004-6).

of the church in society.[37]  For this perception to be challenged or changed the interview participants and people like them, will need to have positive exposure to Christian spirituality.

## Factor 2: The church has a bad historical track record

Evan was very critical of the historical role of the church:

> …how can you justify the history, I mean this is another thing which appals me about how easily Christians can forget the past… especially the Catholic but also the Protestant… if you go out back to earlier times, the church has an appalling history, of… suppression and oppression… and persecution… it's not just the Jews: of heretics, of women, to be burnt as witches, people who were… within the church… whether it was a Calvinist or the Roman Catholic… they'd flee from one to the other and if they had ideas that didn't fit, they were murdered.[38]

This was a common issue for interviewees: they identified division, suppression, oppression, and persecution, of Jews, heretics, and women, and expressed considerable criticism of the church for trying to control people, and around the fear and guilt it put onto people.  They said Christians were not loving, happy or relaxed about life: Katie thought the way churches treat people, particularly those who do something wrong, can make them feel, "…disempowered and miserable and guilty and horrible."[39]  The church was described as a social construct that changed culture, but lacked integrity through processes such as altering the Bible and arrogantly wanting everyone to be Christian-centric, which included forcing missionary activity around the world.  The church's gendering of God and subsequent oppression of women was seen as historically contextual and the church has not moved on from there with society, which is systemic of a general delay in engaging with social issues such as euthanasia and family size: when commenting on the Christian worldview, Evan said, "…it's supposed to be good to have lots of children, in a

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[37] In the Bible Jesus refers to this as the present and future outworking of the "kingdom of God".

[38] (005-51).

[39] (006-49).

world which is groaning under the population problem."[40]  Due to the church
not keeping up with changing culture and society trends, interviewees argued
that a spiritual vacuum has been created, and had been filled by technology and
celebrity, which can also be seen as negative.  The church once had power in
society, it no longer does but acts as if it still does.  It was noted with disgust
how easily Christians forget their history.  Alice referred to census data as
evidence of the loss of power between the historical and contemporary church:

> I guess thinking… more historically, with the power that the church had…
> and was able to impose on people… but I don't know how really in a more
> contemporary sense… I don't think it has power…  Certainly when you
> look at the Census figures and see the number of people that have
> anything to do with the church, because the figures have fallen off so
> markedly.[41]

## Perception 2:  The church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused its control

The church was bad in the past, and it is bad now.  These people found it very
easy to negatively critique the church through their understanding of history.
Brenda referred to early missionary activity that forced Christianity onto people
whether they were interested or not.  She specifically mentioned Africa and
there being a lack of wisdom when seeing it from the African's point of view:
"the Africans aren't saying to them [the missionaries] "oh, we're not happy
with our… native religion, we're looking for something new, please tell us
about your religion.""[42]  Brenda uses Christian missionaries to Africa as an
example to show the power and control of the church in action.  Being aware of
the changes attributed to the evolution into post-Christendom, I can see that the
interviewees' critique is of the church's modus operandi during the
Christendom period, which lingers on.  Regardless of whether or not all
churches in the twenty-first century are stuck in the past with power and
control issues, this is the perception these people have.  For this perception to

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[40] (005-16).
[41] (001-36).
[42] (004-75).

be challenged or changed, these people will need to see a lot of evidence contrary to their perception.  This may mean some kind of acknowledgement by the church of its historical actions.

## Factor 3:  These people have high expectations for churches and Christians to be sincere and trustworthy

A local church would not let Alice's father be buried in the church cemetery unless the family had a Christian funeral in the church first, even though her father was not Christian:

> …so, yeah, we had a service.  And you did rather feel as though you were… not doing what was supposed to be done, we were… [breaking the] rules… what surprised me was that they were actually prepared to do it… as I say, buying your way in, that was the cost….  Because we wanted a humanist service… and they hadn't said… straight out that we would not be allowed to bury him there, they said that if we were interested in having him buried there we would have to have a service there.  And it was just this, they could overlook this lack of, I mean it wasn't as though he'd had… anything to do at all… with the church… so they were quite happy to turn a blind eye to that… if they could sort of get us in and have this funeral, which didn't seem to, there didn't seem any point in doing that… I could understand if they turned around and said, well no, not at all, we don't, you know, because you weren't sort of coming in and embracing anything for any future reference, it just didn't seem right.[43]

When participants experienced or identified a lack of integrity from churches or Christians they felt let down.  Even though strange negotiation terms and deceptive advertising is often commonplace in society, when it comes from the church or Christians it is deemed unacceptable due to an expected Christian moral code being broken.  The example that came up several times was the well known "love your neighbour", which most of the interviewees knew came from the teaching of Jesus as an instruction to his followers.  Most of the interviewees had seen examples of church-going Christians not loving their neighbours.  Brenda, as a Buddhist, described how someone could actually *be* Christian rather than just identify as one:

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[43] (001-26 & 28).

> It's going to impact on their life and they're going to be, you know, Jesus says "love your neighbour", and they're going to be, if they've got a problem with their neighbour, they will remember what Jesus said and they'll be trying to [figure out] "how can I do this? This person is so obnoxious![44]

## Perception 3: The church and Christians lack integrity

If, according to Kinnaman and Lyons (2007), one of the indicators of Christendom was judgemental Christians who were prideful and quick to find fault in others, people outside of the church who may have seen or received such Christian judgement now appear to have very low tolerance towards the church when Christians do something worthy of being judged. These people are therefore suspicious of the church. This perception is difficult to challenge or change as being Christian or part of the church does not make someone free from fault, pride, greed, and so on. Collectively for the church, issues around integrity may need to be given a higher priority to counter this perception.

## Factor 4: These people see the church as emotive and manipulative

During interview six Katie said about Christians:

> They're not loving, and they're not happy, and they're not relaxed, and they're not light, they're heavy by it all, so you know, I think that's not… a fulfilling life, living in God and living in love when you're full of… all of that guilt and fear.[45]

The church was talked about by the interviewees as being a crutch, full of hype, an escape from reality, un-balanced, drug-like, and an addiction. Dave talked about visiting his cousin in Australia who once had problems with money and gambling until she joined a large Pentecostal church which he thought brainwashed her:

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[44] (004-34).
[45] (006-36).

> …she didn't gamble once when I was there… but I think she replaced one addiction for another, gambling for another, instead of putting money in the pokies she put money in somebody's hand [the church collection plate], at least she would have won some money back from the pokies.[46]

Feelings and observations used to describe the church were: horrible, let down, guilt-ridden, stern, frightening, not loving, and not enjoyable.

## Perception 4:  Free, independent thinkers don't need the church

There was a sense that some people need the church to hide behind, for protection, to escape from reality somewhat like an alcoholic might drink to escape.  My response to this perception is to agree that free, independent thinkers may very well not need a Christendom-dominated expression of church.  But they might see value in a post-Christendom church seeking to be a redemptive community, challenging the form and leadership that my participants have critiqued.

## Factor 5:  The first reaction these people have when you mention church is negative

Emily clarified the degree to which the church can cause negative reactions:

> When I think of God I… just think of… indoctrination, dogma… patriarch, persecution, all really horrid stuff, and so for me to think of something that is spiritual, I cannot think of that word, because I immediately think of… oppression.[47]

Much like the negative thoughts participants had about the church's history, their dominant thoughts about the present church were negative too.  In terms of today's church they said: negative patriarchy, very powerful men using religion to control people, they do not want to let go of the power and use God as a vehicle for retaining it.  Katie commented on how some people in the church do not like change, are rigid in tradition and like the structure of the hierarchal system.  She suggested the church needs to be fluid and open to

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[46] (003-105).
[47] (007-16).

change, and that all organisations need to change and this does not mean values need to be lost: "…it doesn't mean you have to lose the core of the essence of your teaching, but you need to change the way you present it and how you are with it."[48]  Other words used by the interviewees to describe the present church were fear, indoctrination, dogma, and persecution, which lead to: God equals oppression.  Women are oppressed, seen as second class, are therefore not seen as equal, and there is a prejudice towards women in or for leadership roles.  Prejudice towards gay people was identified.  Issues like blackmail, power, money, and control were common, as Hamish put it: "…guidelines… rules… structure… you must, you must, you must… it's a big scare thing, it's all the man, it's all about the power, it's all about the money."[49]

## Perception 5:  Church is oppressive

The negative values these people mentioned are at odds with many of the values expressed in twenty-first century society, such as gender equality.  Some participants identified that change does not need to mean losing the core or essence of teaching or belief, but rather a filtering of universal laws for the present time considering historical context.  While the dominant Christendom church can seem arrogant, the perception that the church is oppressive could be challenged by post-Christendom church approaches such as those mentioned by Murray (2004a, pp. 53-56), listed in section 4.1 of chapter 4 (being a church that is self-critical, working towards healthy community practices, where dialogue is fostered rather than monologue, and participation rather than performance, a welcoming of questions, and where simplistic answers are avoided).  Adopting post-Christendom leadership characteristics would also challenge this perception, as mentioned by Jamieson, McIntosh, and Thompson (2006, pp. 67-69), listed in section 4.2 of chapter 4 (for example, honest, with pure motives, having an interest in people, an attitude of servanthood, accountability, and a sense of mutuality).

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[48] (006-47).
[49] (002-44).

## Factor 6:  Christians let themselves down by their actions

During her interview, Brenda said:

> They're not really involved, it's just like, well, part of their identity, to be Christian, and maybe they have got some sincere beliefs there, but… it isn't like a major part of their life.[50]

There is an expectation that to be Christian should mean a lot more than just having a particular identity, not just belief but something that affects their way of life, not just study and knowledge but practice.  People outside of the church have some understanding and expectations around what Jesus meant his followers to be like, for example: loving and caring.  In the interview with Emily, she said, as if talking to the church through me, a reminder of its purpose:

> …ok, you're teaching God, and you, you are a house for God and so therefore you have to be a place that welcomes people, that is open to people, that expresses love, that expresses support, that expresses the teaching, and lets go back to the core values and core teaching of the Christ, what was it about?[51]

Participants also observed people who identified themselves as Christian but did not live up to commonly understood expectations.  This was seen as hypocritical.

Participants had a lot of negative reflections on Christians: they are seen as naïve, exclusive, one-eyed, having a simplistic view on life and spirituality, and are not compassionate.  They are boring, strict, controlling, politically right-wing fundamentalists who focus on belief, but there was also acknowledgement of a political tension between some Christians as some participants knew of left-leaning Christians.  Emily mentioned some of her mother-in-law's Christian friends that did not fit her normal Christian stereotype: "…they are probably more of the, what I would call the alternative

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[50] (004-28).
[51] (006-49).

set…"[52] Some Christians, specifically from the Pentecostal church, are seen to be addicted to a contagious form of high energy self-empowerment that gives them regular hyped up experiences (religious highs), which was not seen as something needed by normal "together" people. Dave suggested that the affects of group dynamics might be a better way to define what some Christians refer to as the presence of God:

> …get a bunch of people together, with high spirits, and obviously they're passing energy around. Is it God?... I don't know if it is. I believe it's just people, in large numbers, very excited, very energetic, and very happy, and that's their Holy Ghost, their Spirit or whatever.[53]

## Perception 6: Christianity is not seen as relevant or necessary

These people see the practical outworking, or action, of the Christian belief structure used like a pick-n-mix optional extra, where action was less important than belief. The actions of Christians together are sometimes not understood and seen as embarrassing, drug-like, self-help positive thinking. Normal people outside the church see no relevance or necessity for this kind of action in their lives. This perception might best be challenged by assessing the self-awareness of Christians, asking them if there are any ways their actions as individuals or collectively are letting them down in the eyes of their critics, and if so, why might this be, and is it worth addressing? As a church "professional", I believe Christians should be able to clearly articulate why the church, their faith, and their expression of faith is relevant and necessary.

## Factor 7: Everyone knows somebody (family, friend, or colleague) who is a church-going Christian and have stories to tell about them. People also know about prominent Christians and organisations through media exposure and have strong opinions to share about them

Katie mentioned a friend of hers who she saw having a positive experience with a church:

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[52] (007-49).
[53] (003-51).

> She had gone through a separation and she was very angry, but at the
> church they had… a forgiveness study or group or something they did,
> and I just noticed a real shift in her from doing that… with being more
> forgiving and more accepting [of] things, so that was positive, and I was
> actually quite surprised that the church did something like that actually,
> you know, that they got involved with that, because to me that was more
> of a counselling thing, but it was really nice that they were able to bring
> that humanness into someone's real experience, rather than to preach of
> well "this is what the Bible says go off and do it."  They were actually
> given attention and care and support to work through some big issues in
> their life, so I thought that was a really positive thing, and it was a surprise
> for me because I didn't know that, I'd never heard of that before.[54]

By contrast, Emily talked about a high profile church person she sees in the
media:

> I don't know what religion he is, the chap who um… I tell you it's like one
> of these fringe churches, I assume it's Christian, where he takes lots of
> money off all his people and goes cruising around the world and things
> like that [laughs] I can't think of his name he's up in the North Island
> somewhere, so when I hear things like that I have- obviously I have a very
> negative… view of it… whether that's a true portrayal of him or not, that's
> the way the media are portraying him and his religion and it's abhorrent.[55]

A large amount of the interview data covers the negative personal experiences
and stories told by participants about people they know, often in their extended
families.  Such personal stories include Christian grandparents disowning a gay
grandchild, a parent being socialised by Christian tradition to get married, a
cousin swapping a gambling addiction with a Pentecostal-church addiction, a
father who used church as a quick-fix to regularly redeem his bad behaviour, a
child beaten at a Catholic school.  There were also stories with more remote
connections, about Christians who had been featured in the media, such as
Brian Tamaki of Destiny church and what was seen as his money-hungry brain-
washing con-man ways.

There were positive personal and remote experiences as well that lead to
juxtaposed positive perceptions, such as Christians committed to the practice of
their faith, a childhood friend in a Jehovah Witness family whose church

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[54] (006-32).
[55] (007-69 & 71)

community visibly supported one another practically, a friend who was physically healed through church involvement, sincere Christian people actually making a difference in people's lives, friends whose Christian faith seemed to sustain them through long-term traumatic family circumstances, Christians showing respect and generosity towards others, and the observance of good works.  Katie gave an example of a Christian couple she knew in her neighbourhood:

> Well I have met a couple of people… that were part of a church here in Sumner where I live, and… they're more respectful of other people… I find them respectful… generous, generous and appreciative of things in life… [they] have a greater sense of gratitude… [they] seem to treat their staff better, and their friends better, and their families better, so their values are really strong, from what I've seen.[56]

Positive stories with remote connections were few but mainly centred around the good work of the Salvation Army, how they care for the disadvantaged in society, focusing more on giving than receiving, and not having hidden agendas.

## Perception 7a:  Most Christians are nutters

Dave from interview three talked about his cousin's experience with a church:

> It affected my relationship with her [his cousin] that, I lost respect for her. Because everything that came out of her mouth I knew… wasn't true… she used to say, "talk in tongues", and I used to think "oh my God, anybody can talk in tongues they just go blah blah blah blah blah…" I just thought she was going crazy, she used to say that God talked to her, she'd seen angels, she woke up one morning and seen a devil lying on my… other cousin's chest…  I think she was losing it.  I seriously thought that you know she's going to wind up in a loony bin.  You know, to be seeing these things, to be doing the things that she'd been doing… and to me that's when I went "oh my God" man, I fully just went "church bar-hum-bug."[57]

The influence of family and friends who are church going Christians can facilitate a deeper exposure and understanding of Christianity and the church. Rather than hearsay, people are able to see positive or negative aspects of

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[56] (006-22).
[57] (003-99).

churchgoing with their own eyes.  Because the media is so prominent, any church or Christian exposure given is also picked up on.  People outside the church have seen or heard of a lot of crazy behaviour which they perceive as negative.  Hamish brought up the topic of how the media portray the church, and said this:

> Whenever Destiny Church does something, the extremists, or the skinhead party, or all these religious people that want to shut out the rest of the races and this and that and start their own towns[58] and, they're just trying to isolate themselves from the outside world.  Destiny Church… it's always Destiny Church on… [the] news.[59]

The way the interviewees tell their stories and give their opinions is most easily summed up by saying most Christians are nutters.  This perception could most easily be challenged or altered by people seeing an equal balance or domination of positive Christian activity, either first-hand or in the media.  This begins to be addressed by the following perception.

## Perception 7b:  Some Christians do amazing good

Dave, who was quoted above reflecting negatively about his cousin, later talked positively about his childhood next-door neighbours who were Christian:

> They were normal people, they were real grounded… they did not preach… and the communities, I mean if they wanted something done, the whole church would pitch in… like a new driveway or new garage.  And I actually thought… if anything should be… a church or a religion, this should be, cos to me it just seemed like it was more about the people, not about going to heaven, it's more about giving.[60]

Another example of an interview participant talking positively about the church was when Emily remarked:

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[58] Hamish's reference to "start their own towns" is about Destiny Church's 2009 plans to buy a large amount of land in Manukau City in south Auckland to develop their own community complex with facilities such as a school, accommodation, and television studio.
[59] (002-24).
[60] (003-129).

> Well yes they [churches] do a lot- I think… the institution creates a lot of good when they're in the community… the Salvation Army and… a lot of the charity organisations… they do a huge amount of good within the community, they… help to look after people, provide them food, clothing, housing… counselling services, drug and alcohol, so I think that side of it is quite positive.[61]

The Salvation Army do positive and transformative social work in the community and use branding and the media to their advantage, no doubt at a cost. None of the interviewees were negative about the Salvation Army, which was remarkable considering the negative tone expressed in all interviews. People sometimes have a tension in their mind as they juggle all the negative perceptions they have of the church, with a few stories that end up contradicting all the negative as if there might be something hopeful in the church after all. Fringe or alternative Christian friends who are not right-wing fundamentalists occasionally rattle and break stereotypes, which Emily explained like this:

> It's like anything within any organisation… there are always going to be people, people are always going to have different thoughts and feelings around whatever it is that they're affiliated to, and so… just because you belong to an organisation doesn't mean you take it all lock stock and barrel, you take bits of it possibly, that you think "that's ok, and I can just ignore the rest", and so I think the [Christian] people that I've met positively… don't swallow I guess all I would perceive as negative.[62]

Stories of transformation, healing, companionship and community are acknowledged sometimes with a sense of confusion. This perception transcends the Christendom/post-Christendom conversation and is something of which the church can be proud.

## Factor 8: People react negatively to churches and Christians displaying excessive wealth

Dave expressed a fairly strong opinion about money and the church:

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[61] (007-81).
[62] (007-57).

> Man wrote the Bible, on what they saw happen at a certain time in
> history… and people have taken that and exploited it, and made [it]… into
> a religion and… pay large sums of money.  I mean, I've seen people
> [church leaders] driving up in a nice big flash BMW, live in a nice big
> house, and in their sermons have… constantly mentioned you should give
> to receive, and you know, it's mentioned more than once, the plate is
> passed around more than once… I have a funny, I sort of have a little
> chuckle to myself when I see, people in churches with their hands up in
> the air, swaying, you see it on TV all the time and they['re]… very easily
> chucking money in, and… thinking that, you know, this is what God is
> asking you to do, when it's just the man.  A man with a very good sense of
> communication, and a very very [good] way of getting his message
> across… not anybody could do it.[63]

These people do not think church leaders should have lavishly accessorised
lifestyles.  The idea of church being commercialised and a pastor, priest or
minister having the persona of a businessman were condemned.  Examples of
such are connected to con-man like tactics fleecing money off vulnerable and
deceived church members.

## Perception 8:  The church is after your money

When people see church leaders driving nice big flash BMWs and living in nice
big houses they suspect the money has come from gullible church members.
Some would say money is all the church wants from its people.  Church
services that look like they belong in the theatre due to their flashy technology
and performances also provoke the sense that money is being used for the
wrong things.  Dave was surprised at how money was spent at the church in
Australia that his cousin attended:

> It was like… going to… Theatre Royal to watch a show, but it was
> church… so to me, that was commercial church… and I came up with that
> [term], how commercialised… they made this church…[64]

By the term "commercial church" he meant it was like a business franchise
because there were quite a few of that same type of church in Australia.  He
was clearly surprised at the set up and culture of this church:

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[63] (003-65).
[64] (003-79).

> The car park looked like the size of a car park in a mall, you know, and people would go up to this church and they would be wearing suits and ties, and like they'd dressed up to go out for dinner.[65]

Dave's cousin would go to this church three times a week which he thought was excessive and linked this to the business model used by the church: "they'd gone out of the… Bible, to commercialise this church, to make more profits, to grow."[66]  Social work in the community such as that done by the Salvation Army is perceived as being the correct way to spend church money.  People seem happy to give to the Salvation Army because they feel comfortable around them.  The institutionalisation of the church through Christendom and more recently the Baby Boomer appeal of business and management models of leadership set the stage for the abuse of money by people like Brian Tamaki.

## Factor 9:  In general the church does not have a good public profile

Emily talked about how negatively the church comes across:

> I mean obviously there's the communication through the good work that it does through charitable organisations… so from that point of view that's a positive… but… I'm not sure how far that reaches out to people generally, I mean obviously with having worked for charitable organisations myself and so… I've been immersed in it, whether ordinarily that would get out there or not I don't know really… but I mean in terms of what's been going on certainly within the Anglican church recently [gay ordination and women's voice being heard[67]] it's really negative I think, or the way the media's portrayed it, it's very negative.[68]

Apart from the already mentioned good works done by some of the church (which was a very small part of participant conversation during interviews but clearly created a positive impression), the communication of the church whether by the church, Christians, or external means such as the media, is not particularly noticed or cared about.  There was acknowledgement that the church has something to do with Christmas and Easter, and there were mixed

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[65] (003-81).
[66] (003-83).
[67] (007-59).
[68] (007-99).

reactions about church signage: from patronizing through to interesting. Alice commented positively about seeing the "Catholics returning home" signs: "…presumably… they haven't been excommunicated… they're still welcome to reconsider and come back, so no doors have been closed… it's inviting and open."[69]  Brenda also commented on church signs: "If I'm going past a church and they've got a board out the front with some little quote on it, I enjoy that, I always sortof read them and see what they've got to say."[70]  Katie was not so positive about church signs: "…I think sometimes things have seemed a little bit patronising, like "Jesus loves you" big signs out somewhere you know, that really puts me off."[71]  Other comments about the communication of the church included: understated, low profile, not very good, and in terms of the media: negative.  Emily said: "Well I mean it doesn't really communicate, that's what I mean when I say not very well, you don't really hear about it you know?"[72]

## Perception 9:  The church? Who cares?

These people do not spend time thinking, talking, or worrying about the church.  It is simply not on their radars and does not enter their minds.  When it does cross their consciousness the trigger generally appears to be something negative.  There are many ways the church could improve its public profile, such as carefully constructed marketing campaigns, which seems to have worked well for the Salvation Army because their marketing fits with the interviewees' expectation of what the church should be doing, for example, caring for the poor.

Considering the data gathered in stage 1 of this research, there appears to be two areas that Christians could focus on for the biggest impact on improving the public profile of the church.  First, if a majority of church-going Christians were practically involved both individually and collectively in transformative

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[69] (001-72-74).
[70] (004-69).
[71] (006-30).
[72] (007-101).

social activity in their local contexts, this would demonstrate that the motivation of their faith to love God and to love people, is an expression of their Christian Spirituality, for example, caring for people, such as those who are disadvantaged, poor, or lonely.  This kind of action is what the interviewees perceive the Salvation Army do in society, as presented in the Salvation Army television advertising, and this was seen as positive action.  This perceived work of the Salvation Army fits into part of how Robertson (2008) describes the purpose of the church as being a "redemptive community", or at least working towards such a thing, which means having a positive and transformative effect in the neighbourhood.  The interviewees do not see Sunday church services as practical expressions of the Christian faith in action, and as described in Perception 1, the interviewees more often see Christianity demonstrated as being about belief without the need for action, such as social transformative action.

Second, Christians appear to lack self-awareness both individually and collectively, meaning they do not appear to be intelligently assessing and responding to cultural differences, for example, the differences between in-house church culture and twenty-first century New Zealand culture.  An example of this is when Christians judge all of society by in-house church rules and standards, not being aware that this is not appropriate in post-Christendom, twenty-first century New Zealand, where the church represents a decreasing minority of society.

Considering the literature about both post-Christendom and the history and current state of the church in New Zealand, the Christendom driven classical church that dominates the expression of Christian spirituality in New Zealand, does not appear to be good at either of the two points described above.

## 7.3  A theological reflection

In the New Testament of the Bible there are references to Jesus saying that people who do not follow him will hate those that do, for example Matthew

10:22 "…and you will be hated by all because of my name", and in the first letter written by the apostle John, he says this, 1 John 3.13 "Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you…".  I anticipate some Christian readers who interact with my research will say, "…the Bible teaches that the world will hate us, why are we surprised when they do?"  Firstly, I am certain the factors listed above in my research are not reasons Jesus and John had in mind when they said people would hate Christians and the church.  That would mean the equivalent of interpreting these Bible verses in the following manner:

> And Jesus said "in time, Christians and the church, while having good intentions, will do lots of things that actually create perceptions in people that are contrary to my teaching, which will turn them away from me, for example saying they are my followers but ignoring the social needs in their world (aka loving their neighbour), and because of this, those outside the church will hate you."

I believe the hate referred to in the Bible is an evil kind of intolerance that was not evident in my research, examples of this kind of anti-Christian sentiment are the arson of church buildings, the distribution of threatening literature, publically burning Bibles, and verbal or physical abuse of Christians, particularly church workers such as priests, pastors, and nuns.  I believe this kind of hate exists in the world, but it was not present in the people I interviewed.  Secondly, my research does not conclude the people I spoke to hate the church, if anything it shows they have some kind of intuition of what the church and Christians should or could be like, which is currently not being realised.  From my own personal understanding and Christian worldview, I wonder if this "intuition" could be God or Spirit inspired.

Thirdly, a big driving and motivational force in the church are the words of Jesus referred to as The Great Commission recorded in Matthew 28.19-20 which say: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them… and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."  This sense of going, spreading, teaching, and sharing commanded by Jesus, when considering his ethos, what he commanded his followers to be like, are only

going to be positively achieved in the twenty-first century by working towards and implementing positive forms of communication (in the widest sense).

Overall, the perceptions derived in this first stage of my research show that current perceptions of the church are mostly negative, which I believe is in turn contributing to the decline of the church in the West. This combination can also be interpreted as the current church failing its "Great Commission."

## 7.4 Conclusion

It would be simplistic to draw parallels between the nine perceptions listed above and the Christendom expression of church in New Zealand. However, when considering the hoped for characteristics of post-Christendom expressions of church it is possible to see how the perceptions of my research participants could be changed if the dominance of Christendom classical churches was replaced by post-Christendom expressions of Christian-faith-communities. From my perspective, the purpose of the church, including its "mission", would be easier if the perception of the church outside of the church was positive. This first stage of my research has shown that people outside of the church who have not been Christianised (but who are spiritual) have an overwhelmingly negative perception of the church. The stage 1 data has therefore allowed me to draw the following conclusion:

> The Sam representatives' perception of the church is "overwhelmingly negative".

In chapter 9, this conclusion, along with conclusions from stage 2, will be discussed in full. The next chapter presents stage 2 of this research which addresses research question two:

> *What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and perceptions discovered in question one?*

In stage 2 focus groups are gathered made up of church leaders to discuss the nine perceptions.

# Chapter 8: Focus group data & discussion

This chapter presents the analysis of the data gathered following the method described in chapter 6.

In order to reflect the opinions of my "Sam" representatives back to the church, I held three focus groups with members of the leadership groups of different churches. A total of 18 people participated in these three groups, and the transcription from these groups totalled 52,259 words of raw data (to see the focus group transcripts please see Appendix P). I invited eight churches but only three accepted the invitation: Baptist, Independent, and Anglican. One of these focus groups occurred before any of the Canterbury earthquakes of 2010/11, one happened after the first 4 September 2010 earthquake, and one happened after the 22 February 2011 earthquake. Some of the invited churches turned down the invitation due to pressures caused by the earthquakes. It is important to note here that all three of the churches that took part in these focus groups would be what I describe as evangelical churches, or churches that follow the evangelical tradition. This needs to be considered when viewing their responses and the analysis because the attitudes and outcomes may have been very different had the focus groups come from churches that were not evangelical in their theological expression or tradition.

Each focus group followed the same format. I presented each of the nine perceptions derived from my interview data (please see chapter 7), one at a time, and invited discussion among the participants. The focus group guide and questions are shown in Appendix I.

The analysis in this chapter contains many quotes from participants. I have given focus group participants a pseudonym that reflects their gender, in which the first letter of their name matches the alphabetical letter given to them in the transcript coding, these are shown below in Table 8.1. References to transcript sections are footnoted after quotes. Quote references start with the focus group

number (1, 2, or 3), then the participant letter (A-R), and the number after the hyphen refers to a section in the transcript. For example, 2H-14 is Focus Group 2, person 'H' (Hans), segment 14 of the transcript. The pseudonyms are used throughout this chapter for ease of reading, and the footnoted references back to the transcripts are provided to aid further investigation if required. When a focus group discussed an issue, I have sometimes only footnoted a single reference to a particular person and transcript section which is a direct reference to the issue being discussed. If required, this single reference is to be used as a stepping stone into the transcript to see more discussion from the group around the particular issue. Where a quote is broken with "…" this is usually where I have edited and removed "um", "ah", pauses, repetitions and other verbal things that unnecessarily hindered the flow for presentation in this chapter.

| **Focus group 1** | | **Focus group 2** | | **Focus group 3** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Andrew | F | Fiona | L | Luke |
| B | Barry | G | Gareth | M | Marie |
| C | Catherine | H | Hans | N | Nathan |
| D | Daniel | I | Izzy | O | Owen |
| E | Earl | J | Jacqui | P | Pam |
| | | K | Kent | Q | Quenton |
| | | | | R | Rosa |

Table 8.1: Focus group participant pseudonyms

## 8.1 Perception 1: The church is not a spiritual place.

There is a strong contrast between Sam's and the church's perception of spirituality. Inside the church, it is considered that to be Christian equates to being spiritual: to have a Christian spirituality. The perceptions of the people interviewed were the opposite of the in-house church view. They thought of spirituality as being outside of religion or Christianity, and for them to be spiritual need have nothing to do with the church. They perceived spiritual qualities as active: love, compassion, generosity, tolerance, and forgiveness. On the other hand, they saw religion, church and Christianity as having a focus on passive belief rather than active spiritual qualities. For the interviewees, church was seen as negative, uncompassionate, fundamentalist[73], and based on the pushing of beliefs. In fact, the interviewees' definitions of spirituality had strong similarities with what I call Christian spirituality, but they had not been exposed to enough positive examples of Christian spirituality to see value or reason in the uniquely Christian elements.

When Sam's perception of spirituality was presented to the focus groups, some participants were surprised and a little defensive to hear how the interviewees perceived them[74]. Owen from focus group 3, said:

> I'm surprised people have got the nerve to make such a comment if
> they've never been in one [a church]… it sort of strikes me a little as…
> someone who probably would consider themselves an open-minded
> person… jumping to a conclusion about something which by their own
> admission, they actually don't know anything about because they've never
> ever been part of it… I don't actually know how they could make that
> claim one way or the other.[75]

Other participants were not surprised and showed an understanding or appreciation of how the interviewees saw the church, and these participants

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[73] Fundamentalist in terms of the form or expression of Christianity that upholds strict and literal interpretation of the Bible.
[74] Catherine in focus group 1, and Hans in focus group 2 (1C-6 & 21, 2H-4).
[75] Owen in focus group 3 (3O-7).

expressed some sadness about the situation[76]. All of the participants thought that what the interviewees see and know of the church is different from its reality (from their point of view). So, from the perspective of the focus group participants, Sam's first perception is an incorrect portrayal of the church. They sought to redeem the church by explaining why Sam's Perception 1 is incorrect.

The focus group participants identified a mismatch between their own and the interviewees' views and understandings of spirituality because they had confidence in their knowledge and experience of Christian spirituality which, for them, is a dominant, historical, and life-giving meta-narrative.[77] The focus group participants recognised that the interviewees did not embrace such a meta-narrative and they compared themselves and their church ideals with their interpretation of the interviewees' opinions. The focus group participants concluded that the interviewees saw spirituality as the presence of mystery, a connection with emotions, and a free and loose structure that is individualistic, ultimately undefinable. They could see that these ideas about spirituality would lead to the positive physical action-based responses that the interviewees favoured.[78] Focus group members[79] interpreted Perception 1 as the interviewees implying that the church and Christianity are the polar opposites of spirituality: in other words, that they contain no mystery, are rigid in form, intellectual rather than emotional, through the defining of beliefs and structures, and lacking in positive physical action-based responses. As Pam from focus group 3 said, "They misunderstand what the nature of church is… and they're actually ignorant of that, of the values and where they come from."[80]

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[76] Earl and Daniel in focus group 1 (1E-4 & 14, 1D-10 & 12).
[77] Catherine in focus group 1, and Rosa in focus group 3 (1C-6, 3R-6).
[78] Izzy, Fiona, and Gareth in focus group 2, and Rosa in focus group 3 (2I-15, 2F-19, 2G-9, 14 & 27, 3R-17 & 22).
[79] Gareths and Hans in focus group 2, and Pam and Rosa in focus group 3 (2G-3, 16 & 18, 2H-17, 3P-10, 3R-6).
[80] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-10).

The focus group participants attributed a lack of correct knowledge of the church and Christian spirituality to an individual and public lack of proper and positive exposure to contemporary church. They claimed that the interviewees saw the church merely as a building or as a regular event. The focus group participants did not deny that buildings and events are an obvious part of the structure of church, but they saw the identity of Christian spirituality originating in what they refer to as "the body of Christ", which is the people of the faith communal, who also have personal, individual, spiritual connections to the divine, which for the focus group participants is God.[81] Pam from focus group 3 said:

> I suspect a lot of people… from outside looking in suspect the church as a place of rules and regulations… this is what you adhere to, but really what it's all about is following Jesus.[82]

Focus group participants suggested that a lack of correct knowledge about the church comes from recent social and cultural evolution, in other words, they see New Zealand being more secular than it used to be, so that there is less inherent knowledge of church and Christianity in everyday life.[83] They also pointed out superficial portrayals of contemporary church through the media, citing pompous royal weddings on television.[84] The focus group participants did, however, concede that Christians are not good advertisements for themselves because the ideals of Christian spirituality are so high and that they are seldom achieved.[85]

While the participants generally believe Perception 1 is incorrect, they were able to see that it was a valid perception for the interviewees because they had only a misguided and superficial knowledge of the church.[86] There was hope that as

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[81] Catherine in focus group 1, and Rosa and Pam in focus group 3 (1C-6, 3R-6 & 22, 3P-10).
[82] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-20).
[83] Daniel in focus group 1 (1D-12).
[84] Quenton in focus group 3 (3Q-21).
[85] Earl in focus group 1 (1E-14).
[86] Daniel in focus group 1 (1D-10).

perceptions can change with experience and correct knowledge, positive representation and understanding of the church and Christian spirituality, could reverse Perception 1 for the interviewees and people like them.[87]

## 8.2 Perception 2: The church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused its control.

The interviewees' Perception 2 covers their sense of Christianity as a social institution grounded in Western history. The people interviewed commented negatively about the church's history. They identified division, suppression, oppression, and persecution of Jews, heretics, and women. They noted a lot of angst about the church because it appears to control people, because it imposes fear and guilt on people, with the result that Christians were not loving, happy or relaxed about life. The church was described as a social construct that changed culture, but lacked integrity through processes such as altering the Bible and arrogantly wanting everyone to be Christian-centric, which included forcing missionary activity on populations around the world. The church's gendering of God and subsequent oppression of women was seen as historically contextual and they think the church has not moved on, in the way that broader society has. For the interviewees, the church generally delayed its engagement with social issues such as family size and euthanasia, and had thus created a spiritual vacuum that has been filled by technology and the elevation of celebrity. The interviewees also believed that although the church once had power in society, it no longer does yet it continues to act as if it does. "Disgust" is not too strong a word to describe the interviewees' attitude towards Christians and their memory of history. They identified the church as being bad in the past, and they thought that, philosophically, not much has changed. Overall, the interviewees found it very easy to negatively critique the church through their understanding of history.

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[87] Andrew in focus group 1, and Kent in focus group 2 (1A-16, 2K-10).

When Perception 2 was presented to the focus groups, there was a general acknowledgement that such an interpretation of church history was possible, but they were not prepared to accept that this perception is the current or full story of the church. They acknowledged that church history has much abuse and evidence of control, and that scandals have been recently highlighted in the news media, but they responded by suggesting the media does not fairly or accurately represent the church or Christians. The focus group participants see that the media is very influential and feeds society a stereotype of church and Christians based on hate, violence, and a general discomfort from everyday modern life. One of the examples that was given was that the media emphasise a church teaching like "no sex before marriage" but that this teaching is poorly understood by outsiders. Focus group participants also suggested that Hollywood misrepresents the church by emphasising only the negative aspects of history such as killing Muslims in the Crusades, and generally making church seem, as Fiona from focus group 2 put it, that, "It's not really a cool idea right now."[88] The focus group participants claimed that the interviewees had formed their perception from one-sided stories in various media.[89]

The focus group understanding that the interviewees had not been Christianised formed one way they could make sense of Perception 2 by dismissing its validity. Their reaction was that the interviewees lacked correct knowledge and experience of church, Christianity, and why people are part of a church.[90] The focus groups pointed out the church is not usually given an opportunity to admit the negative past, to apologise, or to explain how things actually are today.[91]

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[88] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-40).
[89] Fiona, Izzy, and Gareth in focus group 2, and Marie in focus group 3 (2F-34, 2I-36, 2G-41, 3M-38).
[90] Kent in focus group 2, and Rosa in focus group 3 (2K-33, 3R-35).
[91] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-41).

The focus group participant's perception was that the church is mostly good and the interviewees are simply not aware of this present good or of any historical good. As Catherine from focus group 1 put it:

> …there are so many things that Christians started, whether it's nursing or, St Johns Ambulance, or… World Vision… a lot of compassionate things that are happening in the world that just don't even get on [the interviewees] radar.[92]

The focus group participants commented about Jesus being ahead of society in terms of liberating women[93], and the church leading social progress in issues such as the abolition of slavery.[94] The participants believed churches are quietly doing powerful good behind the scenes,[95] and they expressed sadness that such good is not seen.[96] Another feeling expressed was regret about the bad things in the history of the church, and embarrassment that bad things were still happening in some church contexts. Focus group participants were empathetic toward the anger of the interviewees at the abuse and control that has occurred, and suggested that specific churches could perhaps apologise publically for historical wrongs.[97] The focus group participants wanted to help overcome this perception. Some other solutions were, as Gareth put it, to find opportunities to challenge people by telling them that, "This is different from what we believe"[98], and to ask them, as Izzy put it, to, "Look at what God says about this"[99] in the Bible rather than what the church says because "the church is doing a dis-service to God at times, which is then making God look old fashioned and on a power trip".[100] It was acknowledged that Christians are not always loving in the way they communicate and are sometimes judgemental

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[92] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-57).
[93] Nathan in focus group 3 (3N-33).
[94] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-35).
[95] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-37).
[96] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-40).
[97] Fiona, Hans, and Gareth in focus group 2, and Pam in focus group 3 (2F-44, 2H-43, 2G-41, 3P-39).
[98] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-37).
[99] Izzy in focus group 2 (2I-38).
[100] Izzy in focus group 2 (2I-38).

and condemning.[101]  They did accept that in the past, Christians have sometimes behaved badly, and that they sometimes still do.  They acknowledged that any behaviour that is perceived negatively feeds an overall impression of the church.

The focus groups reflected on the time when the church was the dominant political movement in society, and therefore all that was wrong with politics and humanity was also wrong with the church.  They see that in modern New Zealand, the church has no political power, and therefore no significant presence in influencing the forming of legislation.[102]  Gareth showed that he was aware that insiders and outsiders see the status of the church differently:

> I'm amazed and impressed at how well non-Christians see our change in power status in society, that the church has not noticed [laughs] that we are no longer the ones in power, we don't have a podium on which to speak to society… we're not respected as part of society, so we need to change the way we communicate… churches don't always see that, or they don't want to see it… but I'm impressed that people know it, they know that we're now a minority in society, and… we'd do well to recognise that as well.[103]

Christianity seems oppressive to a society that no longer sees or wants an absolute truth.  It seems that although the church is no longer a big player in the shaping of culture, it is not well adjusted to being a minority group.[104]

Not all of the power and control mentioned by the interviewees was seen as negative.  For example, the focus group participants perceived that the church's attitude to issues such as euthanasia and abortion exist because the church cares about individuals and the social consequences that arise from social actions divorced from wide social concern.  The focus group participants, it seemed, thought it was acceptable for the church to put "rules" in place if people are

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[101] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-55).
[102] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-35).
[103] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-45).
[104] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-48).

selfish and lack a social conscience.  Under these circumstances this was
protecting people from harm.[105]

Within the focus groups it was thought that Christian confidence *could* seem
like control.  Daniel thought this confidence comes from the Christian message
which is powerful and convicts people:

> I guess in terms of trying to communicate the gospel to people, …because
> we're confident in our faith that Christ is the son of God… I guess that
> would… seem like we're pushing our faith, or like we're trying to control
> them, or like abusing the fact that we are confident, …I guess it has power
> because it's… in some way convicting to the people, …I can just think of
> the [Bible] verse that says… "the gospel is offensive to those who are
> perishing"… if people have… felt that… people have pushed their faith
> onto them, …maybe they have, and maybe they haven't done it lovingly,
> but… we could actually be convicting them to some extent, and that's…
> rebound off our message because it's offensive…  But they don't want to
> know that they're imperfect when they have these misconceptions…[106]

The response in the quote above from Daniel shows that he has reflected
theologically in his reaction to Perception 2, rather than, perhaps, emotively.

## 8.3  Perception 3:  The church and Christians lack integrity

Perception 3 has to do with the way that my interviewees saw the integrity of
the church.  People generally have high expectations that the church and
Christians will be sincere and trustworthy.  The interviewees identified a lack of
integrity in churches or Christians, and they felt let down.  When society in
general behaves without integrity, their reaction is not as strong as when a
Christian demonstrates poor ethics, because an expected Christian moral code
has been broken.  The interviewees had experience of Christians who were
quick to find fault in others and they had all received some kind of "Christian
judgment", and as a result, they had low tolerance of Christians who are not
blameless.  Perception 3 is about the interviewees' high expectations of
Christians' frequent failure to live up to their expectations, and the subsequent

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[105] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-51).
[106] Daniel in focus group 1 (1D-52).

and consequent decision that Christians, and by extension, the church, lack integrity.

The focus group participants agreed that the interviewees had some justice in their perception.[107] However, the focus group participants considered the impression to be very general based on a lack of correct knowledge, and on an emphasis on a small minority of bad Christian behaviour overriding a large amount of good, to the point that the Christian integrity that does exist is not noticed.[108] As Barry said, "A lot of Christians are amazing people, and they've lived lives of integrity… but it's others who have actually damaged it for the whole".[109]

The focus group participants held the opinion that the media give a lot of attention to anything bad to do with Christians or the church, such as pastors in the USA who steal money or have sexual relations outside normal Christian conventions,[110] and they suggested that when the media publish stories of priests abusing boys, the conclusion of the public is that Christians abuse boys.[111] The focus group participants thought that because the media limits church exposure to negative things, people who obtain their knowledge of the church only from the media will necessarily have limited and incorrect knowledge.[112] They also observed that people outside the church lump all Christians and churches together as the same big group, which is not an accurate representation of who Christians are and is unfair.[113] There was a desire to show that diversity exists in Christian and church expression.

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[107] Daniel and Andrew in focus group 1, Hans in focus group 2, and Nathan in focus group 3 (1D-64, 1A-65, 2H-70, 3N-53).
[108] Gareth in focus group 2, and Quenton in focus group 3 (2G-54, 3Q-72).
[109] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-76).
[110] Nathan in focus group 3 (3N-99).
[111] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-59).
[112] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-73).
[113] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-63).

In responding to Perception 3, the focus group participants expressed empathy: a lack of integrity was identified as a sense of being let down, or having a set of expectations not fulfilled, which the participants feel as well. There was agreement that any failure to live up to expectations, whether by a Christian or someone who is not a Christian, created disappointment, sadness, and a sense of betrayal.[114]

The focus group participants embraced the reality that humans do bad things: therefore Christians do bad things. They claimed that being a Christian does not make someone perfect, and all Christians are going to mess up at some point.[115] There was a sense of injustice that the interviewees do not appreciate this fact of humanity. The focus group participants believe that within the church every human behaviour is possible and even Christians find it shocking when Christian people lie, or fight, or hurt others. It is sad when it happens, but it is always going to happen.[116] Kent in focus group 2 remembered a quote from a song by a Christian pop band in the 1990s:

> I think it was… DC Talk, quoting Billy Graham maybe, who says "the single greatest cause of atheism in the world today is Christians who acknowledge Jesus with their lips, and then turn around and deny him by their life-style."

And then Gareth finished the quote:

> "that is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable", That's behind the perception I think… and it's true… to a certain percentage of Christians.[117]

They acknowledged the hypocrisy of Christians who have high expectations but do not follow them,[118] and that perhaps Christians should not be so

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[114] Rosa and Luke in focus group 3 (3R-54, 3L-67).
[115] Andrew in focus group 1, and Fiona in focus group 2 (1A-67, 2F-63).
[116] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-54).
[117] Kent and Gareth in focus group 2 (2K-64, 2G-65, 2K-66).
[118] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-69).

outspoken and judgemental since they may "fall".[119]  Fiona wrote on her feedback card:

> It seems a lack of tolerance breeds a lack of tolerance, a lack of acceptance breeds a lack of acceptance.  Perhaps if the church was more open/forward about accepting people for who they are, the unchurched world would be more accepting of the church.[120]

In terms of social and moral behaviour, the focus group participants thought that people outside the church had higher expectations of people inside the church than they do of themselves.  They agreed that such expectations were appropriate, and that it was positive that people outside would be aware of the ideals that the church seeks to follow.  However, the focus groups thought that because the bar is raised so high for Christians, they often, inevitably fall short.  Nathan said, "…they put us all up on a pedestal"[121], Pam followed this by saying:

> And therefore you're held to it, just like a traffic cop is held at this level [gestures with hand up high], so once you get a speeding ticket and you follow one who is speeding [others laugh] you get pretty angry because [laughs] they're meant to be upholding this standard that they don't – and they're human too.[122]

In summary, the focus group participants felt that Christians are held to a standard of perfection which is impossible to achieve, so that any immoral action will always be seen as hypocritical.[123]  Luke said, "The higher you are, the further you fall"[124], and because of this expected higher level of integrity, Andrew comments, "…it's a much harder road to be a Christian".[125]  There were comparative comments made about politicians, police, and doctors, and how the public places higher expectations on them than are put on digger drivers or the loader driver at the dump.  It was decided that if drivers

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[119] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-70).
[120] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-68).
[121] Nathan in focus group 3 (3N-58).
[122] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-59).
[123] Izzy in focus group 2 (2I-71).
[124] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-69).
[125] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-77).

displayed a lack of integrity there would be more acceptance than a doctor would get.[126]  These things were considered sad but a truth that would contribute to the creation of this perception.[127]

Some participants preferred a modest expectation than one that is easy to fail.[128] There was the suggestion that when compared to other organisations, the church was actually better and higher in terms of integrity, but it was seen as worse because of being judged against higher expectations.[129]

There were elements of confession in the participants' responses, such as Earl saying: "We don't measure up.  We should be better.  But we're not.  As a general rule."[130]  He gave an example of a Christian family 50 or 60 years ago who had a daughter living at home who became pregnant.  The family abandoned her for breaking a particular Christian moral standard, which seemed idiotic to Earl, lacking in grace and compassion, but is a strong example of the type of action that causes this perception.

The focus group participants expressed their sense of the unfairness of how this perception came to be, but they also showed some acceptance based on the Christian story.  Pam said this: "…we're a part of a religion where… Jesus' best friend betrayed him [several laughs], one of his key disciples denied him, and another one betrayed him."[131]  These examples given from the biblical account of the Jesus story show that a perceived lack of integrity, is as old as Christianity itself.[132]  The focus groups acknowledged many examples of high profile failures, and that this is the reality for an organisation that has as part of its communication hard to achieve ideals.[133]  They saw that the church is not

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[126] Andrew in focus group one, and Quenton in focus group 3 (1A-77, 3Q-68).
[127] Andrew and Earl in focus group 1, and Rosa in focus group 3 (1A-67, 1E-74, 3R-56).
[128] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-69).
[129] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-71).
[130] Earl in focus group 1 (1E-74).
[131] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-71).
[132] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-66).
[133] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-72).

perfect and often seems to talk more than it acts, but nevertheless, a suggested solution to this perception came from Catherine. She said, "…it's important that we don't make big noises about what we're going to do, we just quietly get on and do things, that reveal love and compassion, and integrity."[134]

## 8.4 Perception 4: Free, independent thinkers don't need the church.

Perception 4 comes from the interviewees' view of the church as emotive and manipulative. They felt that some people need the church to hide behind, for protection or to escape from reality somewhat as an alcoholic might drink to escape. The focus group participants reacted strongly to the concept and definition of "free, independent thinkers", with much discussion around their reaction to this label.

In contrast to the view of the interviewees, the focus groups identified themselves as "free, independent thinkers", but at the same time questioned what "free" and "independent thinkers" actually are, and if "free, independent thinkers" actually exist.[135] The focus groups eventually decided that there are no "free, independent thinkers" anywhere, and that all people are moulded by experience, culture, education, and belief systems.[136] They believe that the current operative forces in people's lives condition them, and no individual is without belief or a frame of reference. Everyone is a product of their environment and genetics, their family, society, and experience.[137] The focus group participants thought people who believe they are "free, independent thinkers" are probably actually dependent on those around them, and that their thoughts are shaped by different groups and associations, or by social

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[134] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-78).
[135] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-91).
[136] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-90).
[137] Earl in focus group 1, and Rosa in focus group 3 (1E-86, 3R-96, 3R-113).

formations such as scientific teachings. The conclusion of the focus groups was that "free, independent thinkers" are not so at all.[138]

Focus group participants thought that some of the greatest minds and intellects throughout history have been Christian,[139] proving that free, independent thought was not the exclusive territory of those outside of the church. One focus group thought that a lot of prominent thinkers and scientists who are not Christian are currently denouncing Christianity and faith, and that their influence has caused an imbalance of anti-Christian thought. The focus groups believe that this has led to Perception 4.[140]

The focus groups were conscious that New Zealand society can be stirred by cultural events outside the church, and gave the example of live rugby games and the moving performance of *haka[141]*. It was thought that society in general has emotive and manipulative influences at play all of the time. Giving an extreme historical example of emotional manipulation in a society beyond the church, Andrew and Earl in focus group 1 talked about Hitler and Germany.[142] Giving evidence of the lack of free, independent thought outside of the church seemed to be the focus group participant's way of proving this Perception 4 to be incorrect, as well as being their way of justifying the presence of thinking people like themselves inside of the church.

The participant's emotional response to Perception 4 was expressed with words such as "arrogant", "naïve" and "insulting". For example, Gareth from focus group 2 said, "…that perception just- seems so arrogant, because basically it's people saying, "well, I think, and… people who think… don't need the church,

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[138] Marie in focus group 3 (3M-93).
[139] Owen in focus group 3 (3O-97).
[140] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-82).
[141] Haka is a Māori dance with actions and rhythmically shouted words performed for various reasons at various occasions. A tradition of the New Zealand rugby team, the "All Blacks", is to perform a haka before the start of each game.
[142] Andrew and Earl in focus group 1 (1A94, 1E-96).

and therefore everyone who needs the church doesn't think.""[143] This quote shows defensiveness to the external critique of the interviewees.

The idea that people cannot survive on their own as independent beings was strongly supported by the participants: that we all need other people in our lives to function well. They presented the church as one way to provide useful community and support for people, and made the connection that community and support was a biblically recommended component of the Christian faith.[144]

Despite strong reactions against Perception 4, the focus group participants nevertheless admitted that there is some truth in Perception 4. They agreed that in some churches there are people who seem to be the opposite of free, independent thinkers, people who are very dependent and who want to be told what to do and believe. The focus group participants also knew of manipulative churches that play on people's emotions.[145] Some thought that churches acting in this way were not actually churches but sects, which often had people "following" a particular person, and that this was far from being "free".[146] Here is a quote from Rosa in focus group 3 that begins to show the frustration shared by the participants who see some churches behaving badly:

> …think about Destiny Church… you think about some of these places and we think about the Celebration Centre I mean, 'glory rocks' come off the roof, and "you must give this amount of money", and "I'm going to go and buy my rings" and buy my bloody big motorbike, I mean it's just horrific what goes on. But that's no different from a sect really I mean it's taking poor and vulnerable people who are very needy… taking advantage of their situation and abusing it.[147]

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[143] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-78).
[144] Earl in focus group 1, Jacqui in focus group 2, and Rosa in focus group 3 (1E-88, 2J-39, 3R-96).
[145] Earl and Catherine in focus group 1, and Kent in focus group 2 (2K-87, 1E-86, 1C-93).
[146] Owen in focus group 3 (3O-99).
[147] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-100).

The focus groups believe that the Destiny Church image is one that the media favours because it is newsworthy, and that it explains why outsiders hold that Perception 4 is true of the church.[148]

The focus group participants considered that the church's emphasis on belief and faith might contribute to Perception 4, because belief and faith are seen as beyond thought, and things non-thinking people need. The focus group participants wondered whether faith seems to belong to people who want to be told what to do, and this is seen as "dumb".[149]

Furthermore, as the focus group participants were aware, people who become Christian often change their behaviour to match the ideals of the church, and such changes could be taken as evidence that Christians did not think for themselves.[150] Earl told a story that shows his belief in his independence of thought:

> I think I am a free independent thinker! Because I decided to read the Bible, and my eyes were opened, so what was coming out… from the pulpit, and what the Bishops and the Pope all proclaimed, I said no, that's not right, and the more I read the Bible, the more independent I became.[151]

This quote shows Earl negatively critiquing some of the dominant institutional elements of the church, such as preaching and the leadership hierarchy, things that could be seen as contributing to the creation of Perception 4. Earl is saying he had disagreement with them, and therefore set off on his own to discover independently from the Bible.

In response to Perception 4, focus group 2 offered some biblical reflection that supports the truth of the perception, Kent said this:

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[148] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-101).
[149] Izzy and Gareth in focus group 2 (2I-79, 2G-82).
[150] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-81).
[151] Earl in focus group 1 (1E-86).

> [In the Bible] God talks about how… Godly wisdom seems like foolishness to the world…[and] Jesus said… he who has ears let him hear, and I think there are heaps of people who don't have ears to hear it… And that breaks God's heart, and it breaks our heart, but I know that there will always be those people… and we just have to let them have their perception and do our best to change that.[152]

This quote shows the tension that exists. On the one hand there is acceptance and understanding of Perception 4; and on the other, there is a desire to change it. At the same time, it also shows an interpretation of these biblical texts that put the interviewees into the category of dagger-twisting, church-hating enemies of the church.

## 8.5  Perception 5: Church is oppressive.

When church was mentioned, the first reaction of interviewees was negative, and they gave many reasons why this negativity was expressed, such as they see the church using hierarchal systems to control people through fear, they see the church viewing women as second class, and they see the church being resistant to change. Perception 5 shows a disconnection between the interviewees' sense of the values of the church, compared with their understanding of the values of New Zealand society in the twenty-first century.

The way some focus group participants reacted to this was to suggest Perception 5 existed because the interviewees are against Christians. Gareth in focus group 2 talked about this, and here is a quote from Earl in focus group 1:

> Those who are not Christian, are against Christians… the Bible says you're either for me or against me, and while those who are not for Christ don't appear to be against him, in actual fact they are, and so therefore they want to eliminate the Christian things. It's a subtle underplay all the time, so I think the world out there, the secular world, is actually wanting to get rid of Christianity, because they're against it! Even though they don't realise they're against it… but the Scripture would say they are against it.[153]

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[152] Kent in focus group 2 (2K-87).
[153] Earl in focus group 1, and Gareth in focus group 2 (1E-113, 2G-104).

Earl's words point to a possible difficulty for organised churches when faced with the perception that church is oppressive. There is a defensiveness based on a learned premise that people such as the interviewees wish to eradicate the church. In fact, no evidence emerged in the interviews that there was any such objective, leading me to interpret the focus group participants' response as a mechanism based on an unfair interpretation of part of the Bible, that prevents engagement with the reality of outsiders. They perpetuate a loop that interprets disagreement as intended eradication, which affirms a specific form of being Christian. This interpretation of Perception 5 means that, for church insiders, nothing needs to be done to change the interviewees' perception of church oppression because negativity against the church has been transformed into a biblical imperative and a deeply held truth. The way the focus group participants responded to Perception 5 could in itself be perceived as oppressive: they dismissed the reality of the interviewees without actual engagement, which is perhaps an aggressive defence through a learned blindness, or a lack of appreciation of a broader reality.

Alongside the focus group participant reaction described above, they also responded to Perception 5 in their own defence by again claiming the interviewees do not know what the church is actually about. The participants showed concern that the interviewees talk about the Christian faith but they have never read the Bible.[154] Some participants showed understanding as to how Perception 5 could exist but they did not believe it to hold any truth.[155] Others wondered how the interviewees were forming these perceptions in the first place,[156] while some participants suggested the interviewees were ignorant of the church's current positive contributions to society, both in current and historical timeframes.[157]

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[154] Nathan and Luke in focus group 3 (3N-116, 3L-118).
[155] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-121).
[156] Pam in focus group 3 (3P-119).
[157] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-108).

Some focus group participants for instance, thought that the interviewees did not appreciate the battle the church fought for freedom from poverty, and the support given by the church for health care, labour organisation, abolition of slavery, education, and women's rights.[158] The participants considered that the education system ignores the church's contribution to positive social reform, reinforcing Perception 5.[159] The focus group participants expressed surprise that the interviewees perceived gender inequality within the church considering history such as women getting the vote, Barry in focus group 1 said, "They don't know who started, fore fronted, that Kate Sheppard was a Christian woman who fore fronted the Christian vote in New Zealand… they don't know that!... it's ignorance".[160] Hans commented that, "…it makes sense that the county that produced Kate Shepherd would also be leading the way [in gender equality]".[161] Generally though, the focus groups could see that women had been oppressed in the past, they believed that New Zealand has moved past this period. Some participants considered New Zealand identity to be strongly defined by equality of the sexes giving as evidence that there are many women in leadership roles, and they compared the USA unfavourably to New Zealand. Overall, the focus groups felt that the church must be vigilant about maintaining gender equality, but did not accept that the current situation within the church is as bad as the interviewees perceive.[162]

The focus group participants were frustrated that the interviewees did not seem to notice that denominations are not all the same, especially in regard to, for instance, the "role of women". They pointed out that some denominations have a really strict philosophy that restricts what women can do, while others place no barriers for women.[163] Again, the focus groups were sad that the media

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[158] Andrew and Barry in focus group 1 (1A-106, 1B-108).
[159] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-109).
[160] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-108).
[161] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-103).
[162] Izzy, Hans, and Fiona in focus group 2 (2I-100, 2H-101, 2F-102).
[163] Andrew in focus group 1, and Gareth in focus group 2 (1A-106, 2G-104).

attention attracted by some denominations end up negatively affecting every church with regard to a subject like the role of women.[164]

Two of the focus groups dwelt on the concept of truth. The focus groups thought that contemporary culture is big on relative truth, the general acceptance that no one can know absolute truth. The problem, according to these focus group participants, is that because the church holds to absolute truth, it therefore seems oppressive to outsiders who do not accept that the church has the right answers to life's biggest questions: in this secularised age, any truth claim will be oppressive for "non-Christians".[165] The connection that the focus groups made between truth and rules was also diagnosed as a source of apparent oppression by the church. The focus group participants believed that the truth-rules nexus is a hard problem for the church as it publicly offers moral guidelines. These guidelines about topics such as sex, homosexuality, and abortion, are often promulgated. The focus group participants believe that New Zealand culture has now made these types of issues into private decisions, which also makes the church's view on such topics seem oppressive.[166] The participants thought that the church would always be out of step with everyday culture because its beliefs mean that it cannot be compromised to encompass "non-Christian" behaviours. The focus group participants accepted that the church will always, therefore, seem oppressive and old fashioned. The focus group participants did not find it possible to think of changing church doctrine in order to seem less oppressive.[167]

I believe that the focus group participants are good, well meaning people who understand that "outsiders" view them negatively. I could see, however, that many things causing outsiders to hold negative perceptions originate in the focus group participants' interpretation of their source of truth. Their

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[164] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-99).
[165] Gareth and Hans in focus group 2 (2G-97, 2H-98).
[166] Rosa and Luke in focus group 3 (3R-121, 3L-122).
[167] Gareth, Izzy, and Hans in focus group 2 (2G-104, 2I-105, 2H-106).

frustration with outsiders stems from a world outside, which has set aside the idea of a single source of truth. In other words, they still live within what I would define as the historical construct of an expression of truth supported and sustained by Christendom, and so their reaction to Perception 5 shows the increasing disconnect from living in a post-Christendom era in society with multiple sets of belief systems.

The focus group participants also believed that another factor contributing to the formation of Perception 5 was poor communication. They saw that; ultimately, any perceived oppression is just Christians standing up for what they believe. Daniel in focus group 1 thought the intention of Christians is good, but the practice is imperfect, and therefore communication about God is seen as oppressive. He said:

> I think a big part of it is… because we try and stand for what we believe is right, so, like, against homosexuality and stuff like that… but that comes across as condemning them… it just comes out wrong. We have good intentions but… we're communicating that God… doesn't approve of that, so we don't want them to do it, but then, obviously it doesn't link up with them because they don't really believe in God or believe that… there [is] benefit in following so, yeah. It's kind of lost in translation I guess if you could say that?[168]

This comment seems to encapsulate a desire to be better understood, but also shows resignation that the church's position may never be accepted.

The focus group participants also thought that Perception 5 may be caused by the emotional effect that church has on people. Luke described it like this:

> The church… touches sort of the deepest part of us… of who-our self identity and how we relate to the world and how we relate to God… it's got the potential to do the most damage… but it's also got the potential for doing the most good… we can go along … to a university and get an education from somewhere and we don't necessarily have to let it form and shape our innermost beings, it's a bit hard to engage in a faith

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[168] Daniel in focus group 1 (1D-115).

community without really being open to being challenged about some of the deepest cherished things.[169]

Following on from this was the idea that some of Perception 5 is caused by the interviewees own selfishness, "…projected out wide and they just don't like anybody, they don't like anyone that makes them feel guilty about what they've done and the choices they've made in their life."[170]  This comment shows the focus group participant's construction of judgment which may or may not be correct.

## 8.6  Perception 6: Christianity is not seen as relevant or necessary.

From their position outside of the church the interviewees see the church as being about belief, and most Christians not doing any practical outworking of their belief:  The interviewees thought that the collective actions of Christians were sometimes incomprehensible, and are seen as embarrassing, addictive, and about self-help positive thinking.  Examples that the interviewees gave were some forms of church service (see chapter 7 for further explanation of Perception 6).  The interviewees believed that normal people outside the church see no relevance or necessity for these sorts of activities in their lives, and questioned why anyone would voluntarily sign up to this thing called Christianity, that can involve such "crazy, weird stuff."

Somewhat surprisingly, the focus group participants thought Perception 6 was understandable from an outsider's point of view, but they also thought it was not true.[171]  In terms of "weird things" happening in church services, the focus group participants talked about there being a very small minority of Pentecostal churches in New Zealand that might act in this way, and they pointed out that most church services and Christians are very much more ordinary.  They

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[169] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-120).
[170] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-127).
[171] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-116, 2F-119).

wondered if the interviewees' perception had been formed by consuming USA Christian culture as depicted on television.[172]  Focus group 3 claimed that Anglican churches had no hype or anything weird in their church services, and Luke from this group jokingly said, "We take boring to a whole new level".[173]

The focus group participants offered the opinion that if Perception 6 did not exist, everybody would be Christian, or at least be interested in Christianity,[174] but that instead the interviewees created this perception in order to "illegitimise" the church.[175]  There was agreement that if life is going really well, for a lot of people not exposed to Christianity, church is probably not necessary or relevant for them.  On the other hand, if crisis occurs, someone who is not Christian might seek out a trusted Christian friend for prayer and support.[176]  The Apostle Paul was given as a biblical example as someone who initially did not see Christianity as relevant or necessary but was later converted.[177]

The concept was raised that not all Christians are actually Christian.  Daniel in focus group 1 put it this way:

> …a lot of… Christians that go to church are cultural Christians, and they don't really practice so much, and because often they just go to church and absorb some information and then go home and think… they're spiritual or whatever.[178]

This comment begins to express that on the church team, not all players are equal: some do not actually practise Christianity in the way these participants would desire.  One participant thought that only 10% of churchgoers are actually Christian, with the rest thinking they are but are not actually living

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[172] Andrew in focus group 1, and Luke from focus group 3 (3L-140, 1A-128).
[173] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-142).
[174] Owen in focus group 3 (3O-146).
[175] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-126).
[176] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-147).
[177] Nathan in focus group 3 (3N-151).
[178] Daniel in focus group 1 (1D-147).

how Christians should live.  The focus group considered that the "Christian, but not really" syndrome is the cause of Perception 6.[179]  Gareth in focus group 2 called these people "Sunday morning Christians":

> I am again stunned at how well non-Christians perceive… that… the Sunday morning Christian is not a Christian, that… dressing up and not working out [referring to the researcher's gym analogy] is not the right thing to do, they can see that and Christians can't [laughs], and it's like there's so many on the inside of the church who just don't see that what they're doing is not really what they say they're doing and on the outside they can see it so perfectly.  We need more sermons by non-Christians [laughs].[180]

This comment shows a church leader expressing his frustration about Perception 6, and also affirms the accuracy of the interviewees' perception. Izzy, also in focus group 2, wanted to know if the interviewees were aware that this perception was already a concern within the church, "Do they understand that church leadership is just as distressed with these… hypocritical Christians and, intolerant Christians…, people who say one thing and do another, do they understand that?"[181]  This shows that a desire to change Perception 6 already exists and indicates some frustration and impatience with the situation.

Some participants questioned whether it would make any difference to Perception 6 if all Christians began to live as the interviewees thought they should, by for example, helping the poor, not lying, and loving their neighbour.[182]  The focus group participants thought that "the difference" would depend entirely on how the interviewees measured being Christian: how much love and care would be enough to banish this perception?[183]  Gareth from focus group 2 summarised the dilemma for the church and Christians like this: "…they [the interviewees] eliminate the possibility of the ideal and then they

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[179] Earl in focus group 1 (1E-148).
[180] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-117).
[181] Izzy in focus group 2 (2I-127).
[182] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-120).
[183] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-145).

point to no one living up to the ideal and say it's rubbish."[184] Perception 6 raised further discussion about the unattainability of the Christian ideal and the fact that when Christians do live up to it, they can be labelled as radical and not taken seriously.[185] The perceptions of the interviewees show that Christians can never win, and for the focus group participants this did not seem fair.

The focus group participants spoke of the humility that prevents Christians from displaying their good works.[186] Izzy wondered if it was the job of Christians to scream even louder about their good deeds so that their voice would be heard among all the negative voices screaming from outside the church.[187]

Some other solutions to Perception 6 were discussed. One such solution is that the teaching provided at churches needs to be more earthed in how Christians should live rather than being just about knowledge and ideas.[188] Focus group 2 mentioned ways that their church was already trying to address this perception by providing opportunities for their people to serve and be involved beyond the church, but they commented that there is generally very little response, and it is easier for people to just show up to church on Sundays.[189] Fiona in this group also mentioned that at their church they are trying to foster a "come as you are…, none of us are perfect"[190] culture where they are trying to not appear to be something they are not. All of the focus groups expressed a desire to be seen differently from how the interviewees portrayed the church in Perception 6, and Catherine summed up their reaction by saying "I wouldn't want the Christianity that is perceived by them."[191]

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[184] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-123).
[185] Hans and Fiona in focus group 2 (2H-120, 2F-121, 2H-122).
[186] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-154).
[187] Izzy in focus group 2 (2I-129).
[188] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-154).
[189] Fiona and Hans in focus group 2 (2F-119, 2H-122).
[190] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-124).
[191] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-123).

The focus group participants mentioned, in response to Perception 6, that some Christians were only "Sunday morning Christians", and only 10% of churchgoers were as "real" Christians. Their discussion of authentic Christianity raises some questions for me: Who decides the criteria for authenticity? Would all these participants across the focus groups apply the same criteria to determine a "real" Christian? How much does biblical interpretation and cultural context influence the judgment process of the focus group participants? And then how does the biblical teaching of not judging others fit into this reaction by the participants? These questions highlight some of the ontological tensions within the Christian faith, questions that cannot be answered in the scope of this research.

## 8.7 Perception 7
### a: Most Christians are nutters.
### b: Some Christians do amazing good.

Perception 7 was formed by impressions of family or friends who are church-going Christians, enabling some understanding of Christianity and the church. However, because the media is a strong opinion leader, the interviewees also derive impressions of Christianity from television and other sources. The interviewees believed they had seen a lot of crazy Christian behaviour, and they labelled it negatively. The way they told their stories was most easily summed up by saying "Most Christians are nutters." An exception was made for the example of the Salvation Army, who visibly carry out transformative social work in the community, who have a strong brand and use the media to advertise. None of the interviewees said anything bad about the Salvation Army, which was remarkable considering the overall negative tone expressed of all interviews. Generally, the interviewees appeared to contradict themselves with a few positive stories juxtaposed against the majority of negative perceptions, and they did not mention this contradiction. The positive things that break the stereotypes are stories of transformation, healing, companionship and community. Interestingly, the contradictions are also

about scale: the last two positive points are counterpoised with good on a much grander scale, raising associations of Mother Teresa and others of her ilk.

The focus group participants accepted that outsiders might well think the church contained nutters, and expressed mixed feelings about them. Some people were sympathetic, because they understood the complex reasons for difference, such as psychological or mental health problems.[192] The focus group participants also understood that some Christians have poor biblical understanding, to the point that their whole way of life is affected, leading to unusual behaviour.[193] Other participants were not happy with the way interviewees put only Christians into the "nutter category", suggesting that all of human behaviour, both inside and outside the church, is placed on a continuum with nutter being an extreme at one end. The focus group participants thought it was unfair to assume most Christians are nutters just because some are. They suggested it would be much fairer to say *some* rather than most are nutters, and a few participants thought that Perception 7 should read that *most* Christians do amazing good.[194] These comments show a gap between how the interviewees see Christians as individuals and how the participants see themselves. Nobody wanted to be seen as a nutter, especially if that view did not match their own self-image. The focus group participants appeared to have a stronger reaction to Perception 7 than to Perception 2, when they were dealing with the perceived lack of integrity. Perhaps it was the vernacular nature of the term "nutters" that stirred this response.

The diversity of the people who make up the church, some of whom the participants agree could be described as nutters, was seen as a big challenge for the church. Andrew commented, "…you have people at all different stages… of Christian experience and, and with a whole range of belief… and… the

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[192] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-170).
[193] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-171).
[194] Hans in focus group 2, and Owen and Luke in focus group 3 (2H-150, 3O-185, 3L-187).

church is trying to… build community within that".[195]  Andrew here appears to be embracing the idea that there are nutters within the church and this is an acceptable part of the church because of the church's commitment to the values of inclusivity and diversity.

Gareth in focus group 2 reacted very strongly to Perception 7a:

> …they want to see Christians as nutters… they default to that because, they want to discredit the whole thing… they want to discredit Christians, they want a reason not to even subconsciously so, if they see two Christians being nutters and two Christians doing amazing good, they're more likely to come out with the reaction that Christians are nutters.[196]

Gareth's comment did not appear to be spoken with any anger or hostility, but it does, however, show a focus group participant taking a defensive position by turning Perception 7a around onto the interviewees and away from the church. Gareth said several times, "…they [the interviewees] want…" as if the interviewees had a clear agenda to discredit the church.  His reaction is offered in the form of an absolute truth and yet, is a simplistic interpretation of the interviewees' perception.  The scenario looks like this: two Christians are nutters, two are doing good, the interviewees look at the nutters and nothing about the people doing good is noticed.  Gareth's response shows a lack of appreciation of the complexity involved as the interviewees create meaning.

Fiona in focus group 2 suggested that Perception 7a is the result of societal trends and compared the dislike of Christians and anti-Christian stereotypes to the dislike of the USA and anti-USA stereotypes,[197] implying that she sees a fad that will not last.  This shows Fiona is aware of fashions in social perceptions and her hope that like any fashion, they change, and so in the future perhaps the interviewees will perceive the church in a different more positive way.

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[195] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-171).
[196] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-151).
[197] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-152).

The focus group participants wished that the Christians doing amazing good would get more positive publicity,[198] so that Perception 7a could be eliminated. This led to some discussion around issues of positivity, with Luke suggesting this:

> I think Christians should… do amazing things just in very ordinary ways… we always like to see the hero, in other people… we want… to celebrate the 'good sort' on TV and such like, but my spiritual walk is much more boring than that, very much more plain.[199]

This quote shows Luke reacting to the suggestion that while more positive publicity could indeed be the solution to Perception 7a, "ordinary" Christianity is not full of photo opportunities, because the Christian walk is an everyday one, not full of heroism. In connection with Perception 7, Luke's group also discussed how Christians need to live in such a way that their Christianity is not just about Sunday church services but rather, so their whole life reflects the values they subscribe to. The focus group felt that authenticity was what mattered, not positive publicity in the public relations sense.[200]

The focus groups discussed the Salvation Army at length, explaining the reasons that the interviewees had noticed the Salvation Army television advertising[201] and felt positive about it. Some focus group participants wanted

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[198] Nathan in focus group 3 (3N-184).

[199] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-194).

[200] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-197).

[201] Television advertising is about persuading, buying or selling a product or service, so whether the product being sold is a home appliance or the perception of a church, it is the sale of a commodity (please see chapter 3 for more on "selling God"). In terms of the Salvation Army advertising they are fundraising so want money, support, and the continuation of the work of their organisation. By turning themselves into something that is saleable the Salvation Army have allowed themselves to become commodified. These television advertisements are being used very successfully to sell their product which was probably intended to be their social service, but appears to have been, at least, a *positive perception* of their social service. It seems they have been commodifying themselves as a social service organisation rather than a church, and this can be interpreted by other church insiders as the commodification of the good of charity in the form of Christian social service with both positive and negative results, the positive being the perceptions of the interviewees, the negative being a possible disconnect between the social service and the Christian worship.

to know if the interviewees realised the Salvation Army is actually a church,[202] the question seems to imply the focus group participants thought that if the interviewees did know the Salvation Army is a church, their favourable opinion would decrease. At this point, the focus group participants appear to be giving a professional insider evaluation of the Salvation Army, showing some unease with their form of advertising. Some participants noted recent advertisement that mention that the Salvation Army also holds Sunday worship, and expressed the view that the addition is because their congregations are failing.[203] Luke commented that the Salvation Army social service is actually a small concern compared to other church social service groups who do not advertise their presence publically.[204] Luke also mentioned that the Anglican church had considered television advertising to promote Anglicanism, but he was uneasy with such a move, as it would be seen to be competing with the Salvation Army and that would be distasteful.

Some other comments about the media included how television corporations are happy to show good news stories and attribute Christian faith if applicable, but they are just as happy to prove someone is a social misfit,[205] and the focus group participants said they believed that the media and the public enjoy making people seem odd.[206] Television programmes often portray Christian characters as peculiar, and the focus groups quoted Shortland Street, a New Zealand soap opera, and also Ned Flanders in The Simpsons.[207] Luke, in focus group 3, commented that Brian Tamaki is not a nutter, but that the media choose to make him look that way, perhaps provoked by the Destiny church's

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[202] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-141).
[203] Nathan and Luke in focus group 3 (3N-178, 3L-179).
[204] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-181).
[205] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-178).
[206] Daniel in focus group 1 (1D-186).
[207] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-180).

mishandling of the media.[208]  These opinions show the participants see the power of the media in perpetuating Perception 7.

## 8.8  Perception 8: The church is after your money.

Perception 8 reflects the interviewees' belief that churches and Christians should not own or display excessive wealth, nor that church leaders like Brian Tamaki of Destiny Church should have lavish lifestyles.  Theatrical Church services enhanced by their sophisticated technology and a sense of performance also provoked a feeling that church money is being used for the wrong things.  Social work in the community such as that done by the Salvation Army was perceived as being the correct way to spend church money.  Perception 8 also included reaction against church being commercialised and a pastor, priest or minister having the persona of a businessman.  In their condemnation of excessive material goods, the interviewees likened such behaviour to conman-like tactics, fleecing money from vulnerable and deceived church members.  Destiny Church was mentioned several times.  Some interviewees said money is all the church wants from its people.

All of the focus group participants related to this perception in general, but they were defensive about their own churches, saying Perception 8 was not valid for their own Christian practice, and that only a very small part of the Christian community pursues money in the ways described.  The focus group participants, like the interviewees, react negatively when they learn of churches seeking money in the ways described in Perception 8.  Some focus group participants also felt the pursuit of money related to abuse of power, and that some pastors twisted biblical truths to make people feel guilty if they do not give money.  Focus group participants agreed that church money should not be used to provide lavish lifestyles for pastors, and were sympathetic towards the interviewees and Perception 8.  They thought the perception needed to be

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[208] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-189).

broken, and that this might be achieved if the interviewees actually went to church for themselves so they could see that Perception 8 is not applicable to all churches.[209]

Focus group 2 admitted and discussed a struggle around issues to do with money and working for the church, specifically being judged by people within the church about how they, as church workers, spend the money they have. Hans put it this way:

> …[church] people ask "… they ask us for money and they ask us to tithe, and they go to Starbucks" - oh no, not Starbucks… "they go to coffee- how many coffees do they get every week?" You-know that kind of thing."[210]

This perceived judgment from fellow church members was far closer to home for this group than Perception 8, where the interviewees interpret the church from a distance: four-dollar coffees at Starbucks seem to belong in a different category to lavish consumerism, but the reaction in this focus group shows an existing awareness of and struggle with money. This group also commented on other things they spend money on such as living in "nice houses", and the quality of things they buy. Hans, again, said:

> …what is the appropriate place for us as ministers to have things like you-know, iPhone and a MacBook and things like that… I've definitely heard people with the same perception, that the church is after your money… I think that to some degree also it's [pause] it is, unfair, people shouldn't look at, at, where that money goes…[211]

This group admitted that this issue is something they have wrestled with themselves and thought they would continue to do so, and they commented on it being "an uphill battle."[212]

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[209] Barry, Daniel, and Earl in focus group 1, and Izzy in focus group 2, and Luke and Rosa in focus group 3 (1B-195, 1D-196, 1B-197, 1E-209, 2I-174.1, 3L-216, 3R-220, 3R-223).
[210] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-174).
[211] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-174).
[212] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-174).

There appears to be a tension here between being responsible managers of money given to the church, and drawing a line of acceptable consumption. This focus group showed that the item of contention with Perception 8; money, is not just a concern to people outside of the church looking in, but also to church leaders who administer the church's income, as well as church members who give the money. Even though the participants in this focus group had decided that they would live in what they define as "nice houses" and purchase Apple smart phones and computers, they still "struggle" with these consumer choices and the opinions others have of them. The judgment this group feels from inside the church seems to be at a different level from the judgment of the interviewees with Perception 8, but who should decide what constitutes excessive consumerism? The answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this particular research project but the issue of money is not. What I want to highlight is the awareness of these issues that one of the three focus groups showed. This focus group also said there is a need inside the church to be transparent about money, by keeping the members updated with church spending.[213] The focus group also said that in order for the church to be relevant and not boring, money had to be spent on "doing church".[214]

Throughout the Bible wealth and prosperity occur in many and varied ways, enough to validate most current-day dogma on the issue. The concept that Christians should be "poor", or at least not "rich" can be derived from several texts in the New Testament of the Bible. Rich and poor are very subjective terms and have meant different things at different times, and I suspect this creates some of the diverse views. The focus group participants pointed out that on several occasions, Jesus challenged rich individuals about their wealth, asking them to be generous, unselfish, and not to allow wealth to compete with

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[213] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-174).
[214] Fiona and Gareth in focus group 2 (2F-172, 2G-173).

following him.[215]  The concept that Christians should be "rich" and not "poor" can also be justified biblically, usually with texts from the First Testament, but Paul the Apostle in the New Testament says in 2 Corinthians 8:9,

> For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.

Another often quoted statement from Jesus is where he says, "For you will always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me" (Mark 14:7).  While I do not interpret this to mean there will always be poverty in the world, I have heard Christian people justifying their wealth against their understanding that Jesus meant for there to be poverty in the world.[216]  There are many diverse views on wealth and poverty in the church and these are expressed in different ways, one example being the tension shown in focus group 2 as they engage with this issue.  I believe the ambient culture in New Zealand picks up on these diverse expressions, but Perception 8 from the Sam representatives show there are some dominant messages about the church and wealth coming through.

Andrew in focus group 1, critiqued the assumption in Perception 8 about the source of the money that church leaders spend.  He argued that it might not be coming from the church members, but from family wealth, or from successful businesses that church leaders run alongside their church ministry.  Andrew finally concluded, "I think that money's not actually the big demon that a lot of people wanna make it."[217]  Andrew seemed to be justifying luxury and wealth

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[215] For example, in Matthew 6:24, Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other.  You cannot serve God and wealth."  Another example, from Mark 10:23, "Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, "How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!""

[216] In this text in Mark 14 Jesus is making the point that he will not always be with them in this fully human form, in other words, it is good for them to make the most of him now in this moment.

[217] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-198).

provided that the pastor's wealth was independently gained and not collected from the congregation. The focus group reacted to this strongly. Earl said that money was still important in the Gospel accounts in the Bible, and that Jesus had a lot to say about money.[218] This was one of the few obvious disagreements within a focus group session and highlights the tension within the church over an issue that may, perhaps, be more complex than the others. It seems the participants do not have a clear, agreed guideline about money, and that the Bible is not prescriptive on the issue.

Some focus group participants had strong opinions about what they thought the interviewees might themselves be like if they had money, and seemed to find hypocrisy in talking about the church and money the way they did. Owen had this to say:

> I find this [Perception 8] interesting because probably the very people that say that- half of them would be the biggest rip-off business people that you've ever met anyway, and they'd justify their position, yet for some reasons they would turn around and be so critical of church, even asking for a little money… and yet… a lot of these people would have a lifestyle of get-get-get! …I find a lot of people's lifestyles are so… money-hungry anyway, …people are happy to… run some pretty shady business practices and… get money out of people in some dodgy ways,… but, be so critical of the church that might have a slight expectation of getting a little of money… to do things.[219]

"Rip-off" business people with "shady practices" and money-hungry lifestyles seem to reflect interviewees' Perception 8 back on to them. Whether or not the focus group participants' impression of the interviewees is correct, this reaction shows a defensiveness to actually engage with Perception 8, maybe because it is either too unrealistic, or perhaps it strikes a sensitive nerve.

In response to Perception 8, the focus group participants determined that the interviewees did not understand how churches actually work. For instance, it was pointed out that the interviewees did not know what a tithe is, and that

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[218] Earl in focus group 1 (1E: 1A-198).
[219] Owen in focus group 3 (3O-217).

outsiders assume it is much more than the tenth of income that it actually is. Talking about the tithe, the focus group participants decided that churches are not asking for much financially from people who are committed to the cause of the church,[220] especially facing the reality of how much it costs to run a church. They also reflected, with some frustration, that the interviewees consider it is acceptable for the Salvation Army to be given money, but that the church as a whole cannot give help if it has no funds. Frustration certainly drove Marie from focus group 3 to say, "…they [the interviewees] haven't actually thought it through properly."[221]

One focus group wondered why anybody donates money to any cause in society. They agreed that people do understand about giving money to fund museums and universities, but with an expectation of a return, such as high quality education. The focus group believe that this type of giving is not criticised because it is accepted, whereas due to an overarching negative perception of the church, the interviewees did not like seeing money go to Christianity. Gareth said, "…they don't legitimise the church,"[222] which was thought to be the case centuries ago when the church had a more central and influential place in society. Focus group participants also commented on the "power" of giving money away, and that they thought the majority of wealthy people, whether Christian or not, understood the principle of giving.[223]

Two of the focus groups commented on how people might acquire evidence for Perception 8, naming overseas travel and television as influential. The focus group participants thought that when people saw the Vatican and the extraordinary wealth of the Catholic church, and perhaps compared it with widespread poverty in the world, the perception was reinforced. Rosa said,

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[220] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-204, 206).
[221] Marie in focus group 3 (3M-221).
[222] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-176).
[223] Barry and Andrew in focus group 1 (1B-199, 1A-200).

"…what's the point of all that when it could be given to the poor?"[224]  The participants thought Christians were negatively portrayed in television programmes that show USA church services with pastors involved in scandals, and televangelists of the 1980s who misappropriated funds.[225]

The focus group participants had differing opinions about Brian Tamaki and the criticism he received from the interviewees.  Some agreed with the interviewees, and thought it was true that it seems Brian Tamaki gets his money from gullible church members.  These participants thought Destiny Church members have been taught that they will find their own way to wealth by giving to the church,[226] leaning into the hope implanted by "prosperity theology."[227]  Luke, in focus group 3, commented on how Brian Tamaki's "flock" probably like seeing him "riding his BMW":

> …that's how they want to honour [interrupted by Rosa: "honour?"] [Interrupted by Owen: "they're free thinkers"], and it's a cultural thing.  I don't fully understand it but it is a cultural thing amongst Māori and Polynesians.[228]

These comments show the complex issues concerning money and the church and the varied opinions expressed within focus group participants about money.

## 8.9  Perception 9: The church? Who cares?

Perception 9 came from a general attitude that the church does not have a good public profile among the people interviewed.  Apart from some good works done by some of the church, the communication of the church, whether by the church, by Christians, or by external means such as the media, was not

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[224] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-218).
[225] Earl in focus group 1, and Rosa in focus group 3 (1E-207, 3R-218).
[226] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-195).
[227] Prosperity theology or doctrine assumes financial well-being is the will of God for Christians. Actions such as positive speech and donations to the church are thought to increase a person's own material wealth (McFarland, 2011).
[228] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-224, 225).

particularly important to the interviewees. Some of the comments about church forming Perception 9 were that the church profile is understated, not very good at the best of times, and in terms of the media representation, negative. The interviewees said they did not spend time thinking, talking, or worrying about the church, which just was not on their radars, and it did not enter their minds. When it did cross their consciousness, the trigger generally appeared to be something negative.

The focus group participants tried to find reasons for the interviewees' opinion of the church. One reason that was offered centred on New Zealand's increasingly secularised society, and the cultural shift that has contributed to diminishing connection to the church.[229]

Gareth, in focus group 2, suggested that apathy was the reason for a lack of connection:

> I've identified this apathy issue – that's the issue that we face… we're not
> being persecuted or whatever – we're just ignored. I think that's the
> biggest problem for all of the previous reasons [Perceptions] combined –
> that's why we're being ignored.[230]

In other words, in Gareth's opinion, if all of the negative perceptions of the church did not exist, people like the interviewees would not be indifferent to the church, but would engage with the positive aspects of church life. This may be the case, but I suspect changing people's apathy towards an organisation would take more than just creating a positive image of it.

The issue of apathy was raised by another focus group who commented on how people these days do not want membership of any organisation such as sports or bridge clubs because of the commitment of time and money that are involved. For most people, the notion of becoming part of a church goes

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[229] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-189).
[230] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-190).

against the current trend for less or no participation.[231]  The focus group participants also thought that when people's lives are going well they do not need the church,[232] and this was in relation to the possible care and support a church might give people in times of crisis.  Another group thought there were a lot of barriers or "walls" these days that prevented people from considering the Christian philosophy.[233]

The focus group participants thought that the church is not providing answers to the questions that people are asking about life, that it was therefore seen as irrelevant.[234]  For instance, when reflecting on trying to invite "non-Christian" friends to church, Hans, in focus group 2, said, "…it just has nothing to… intersect with their life and they don't think that it should."[235]  Hans definitely agreed with Perception 9, but thinks the interviewees *should* care about the church.  So, on the one hand, the focus group admit irrelevance, but mixed the admission with the conviction of belief.  This raised the sorts of questions asked by Fiona:

> …how do we make them care?... what do we do to show them that we are relevant or… [that there are] all these things that would… be exciting to have in their lives, not just a waste of another weekend morning.[236]

This focus group's solution to Perception 9 is to do all they can to become relevant so that people such as the interviewees will get to the point where they see the church as something important that makes a difference in people's lives.[237]  The participants in this group wanted the church to seem more than just a building or an institution, or a word with baggage, or something that is

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[231] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-239).
[232] Quenton in focus group 3 (3Q-245).
[233] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-220).
[234] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-220).
[235] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-188).
[236] Fiona in focus group 2 (2F-189).
[237] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-190).

not real, but rather a community of people that cares. In Izzy's words, they sought for the church to be "…something real."[238]

Another focus group responded by suggesting the image of the church should be about Jesus, so, as Rosa said, people could, "…meet Jesus, they need to be confronted with a person, not asked to join a club."[239] In Rosa's vision of the church, this "person" was both the Jesus of history described in the Bible, and risen Christ of faith that Christians might worship today. Rosa went as far as suggesting people like the interviewees need to be sheltered from the church by saying, "…we have to find a way of exposing people to Jesus rather than the church."[240] Rosa acknowledged the negative perceptions of the interviewees and how they hinder positive connections with the church.

Another solution that was suggested to address Perception 9 was simply for Christians to do good. The example of Jesus from The Book of Acts in the Bible was given where he went about doing good, and the focus group suggested that Christians should follow his example.[241] This group discussed the power of positive actions to break down the barriers thought to form Perception 9.[242] Participants suggested the church do more "serving" in the neighbourhood, by for example, picking up rubbish.[243] Doing good was thought to be the solution to Perception 9 because positive action can impact people long-term.[244] It was suggested by one group that since the devastating earthquakes in Canterbury, particularly in February 2011, because many churches and Christians helped by caring for people and visited areas with the worst damage to see if people were all right, that sort of activity was thought to be positive for the church profile in

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[238] Izzy in focus group 2 (2I-191).
[239] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-239).
[240] Rosa in focus group 3 (3R-239)
[241] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-239).
[242] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-220.1).
[243] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-224).
[244] Barry in focus group 1 (1B-221).

general.[245]  The focus group participants believed that at such times, when people's lives are suddenly turned upside-down, they might search for the kind of things the church can offer, such as care and support.[246]

The most dominant response from the focus group participants was that it would be helpful if the church had a positive image.  In fact, they talked about how negative images form obstacles in people's minds that need removing before Perception 9 can change.[247]  Throughout the focus group sessions there was very little comment on the purpose of this research project, but in this section Andrew, in focus group 1, did acknowledge some usefulness:

> …hearing this [Perception 9] is actually… really important because if this is the starting place, then we've got to step a long way back from trying to tell people "hey, you-know, just come to Jesus and ask for his forgiveness."[248]

This shows a participant beginning to use the newly acquired knowledge through the focus group process and reflecting on his or his church's actions.  Andrew seems to be saying here that the simplistic, "Just come to Jesus and ask for his forgiveness" is a long way from making a positive connection with people like the interviewees.

Focus group 2 thought that the interviewees must actually care a little bit about the church to be bothered to comment so negatively on Brian Tamaki and his church.[249]  Gareth's reaction to this observation was to ask the question, "Is it better to be hated or ignored?"[250] which went unanswered.  I interpreted this comment to mean that while the interviewees perhaps have a low opinion of Brian Tamaki's church, Perception 9 would suggest in general they do not care about much of what the church is and does, and so a specific church being

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[245] Pam and Quenton in focus group 3 (3P-248, 3Q-249).
[246] Quenton in focus group 3 (3Q-245).
[247] Catherine in focus group 1 (1C-219).
[248] Andrew in focus group 1 (1A-220).
[249] Hans in focus group 2 (2H-192).
[250] Gareth in focus group 2 (2G-193).

ignored might actually be better than being hated.  Also, Destiny Church is known because of media coverage which puts it into a different category to most churches.

The focus groups talked a little of events in the twentieth century, mentioning first, the persecution of the church in China under Mao, when the church went "underground" in 1948.  According to Earl in focus group 1, the church shrank during this time, but had a "solid hard-core belief in Jesus… the… true church… so that's what we need! A bit of persecution [laughter around the group]."[251]  I wonder if this shows another type of defensiveness, in which the participant believes things would be better under different circumstances, but, because those circumstances are beyond their control, things remain the same or get worse.  Earl wrote on his feedback card, "…I believe that if the Church experiences intense persecution the purification will mean only true believers survive…"[252]  This seems like a harsh reaction to Perception 9 and shows an embrace of all the negative perceptions from the interviewees, with a desire for them to get worse, perhaps before they could get better, even if it meant persecution.

Luke, in focus group 3, mentioned the theories of the 1960s that the church was going to die due to being in a modern, secularised world, because the church was so rooted in the past.  Luke commented that time proved that the church has not died.  He said:

> Christianity is wildly successful all round the world… I don't think
> Christianity is going to any time disappear out of western society either…
> so they'll be having to do their theories about it again.  For all the negative
> publicity and whatever, and all the dreadful examples, and hypocrites and
> lack of integrity yet it still keeps going on.[253]

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[251] Earl in focus group 1 (1E-225).
[252] Earl in focus group 1 (1E-243).
[253] Luke in focus group 3 (3L-241 & 243).

These comments appear to relax any need on the part of the focus group participants to address Perception 9. The view of participants seemed to be that the church will continue in its success, its longevity and its persistence despite the negative perceptions of the outgroup. Overall, according to focus group participants, it is the people outside of the church who need to change their views, not the church that needs to be different. Oddly, the focus groups turned Perception 9 around, and replied to the interviewees, "These perceptions of the church? Who cares?"

In this chapter I presented the analysis as well as some discussion of the data gathered following the method described in chapter 6, where I presented the nine perceptions arrived at from stage 1 of this research, to three focus groups of church leaders. In the following chapter, chapter 9, I present my conclusions to both stage 1 and stage 2 of my research.

# Chapter 9: Conclusions and discussion

My research is based on the proposition that the Christian church in New Zealand is maladapted to contemporary society. The purpose of this research was to use basic communication theory as a lens to identify if, how, and why this lack of adjustment exists. This research was stimulated by the contemplation of a hypothetical person I chose to call Sam: a New Zealander, spiritual but never Christianised; a person who has journeyed into and found sustenance in her own spiritual exploration separate and apart from Christianity. My observation, based on my years as a pastor within the Baptist church in New Zealand, was that Sam is not an uncommon phenomenon in early twenty-first century New Zealand society, and furthermore, that people like Sam are on the increase. The "Sam phenomenon" – that is, spirituality outside the church – is matched by another phenomenon in New Zealand society: the decrease in Christian spirituality, and affiliation to and participation in, the Christian church (Guy, 2011; Ward, 2006).

I entered this research project believing that the steady decline in the relevance of the Christian church and Christian spirituality in New Zealand society was partly caused by the communication of the church into society, and that Sam could hold the key to interpreting and making sense of the current communication of the church to its various audiences. My research took place in two stages, with two groups of people: group one being the Sam representatives, who were interviewed in stage 1, in order to answer the research question:

> *What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?*

Group two consisted of a number of church leaders who were focus group participants in stage 2. They were drawn together in order to answer the research question:

> *What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and perceptions discovered in question one?*

## 9.1 Conclusions

The data revealed four major conclusions, one from the interviews in stage 1, and three from the focus groups in stage 2. The stage 1 data allowed me to draw the following conclusion:

> 1) The Sam representatives' perception of the church is "overwhelmingly negative".

From the stage 2 data I can draw three conclusions:

> 2) There is a strong "them and us" separation between the church leaders and the Sam representatives. The church leaders exhibited strong ingroup tendencies which negatively affect the communication and work of the church.

> 3) The church leaders expressed that, "It's not easy being Christian", exposing an underlying insecurity in their overall identity as Christians and the church when facing critique by those outside of their group.

> 4) The final conclusion from the church leaders comes as the statement, "They just don't understand", where they claim the Sam representatives are wrong in their way of perceiving the church. This goes to the extent of constructing Sam as an enemy of the church.

In the following four sections, I will discuss each of these four conclusions.

## 9.2 "Overwhelmingly negative"

I framed this research around the idea that Christendom was a period of time, or paradigm, in which the Christian church actively participated in shaping and managing society, producing, thereby, certain social characteristics and institutions. This period of time is now over, and the current period of time can be referred to as post-Christendom (Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003; McLeod, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Trebilcock, 2003). I acknowledged in chapter 2 that while, for example Sutherland (2000) finds the paradigm concept of Christendom unhelpful, I find utility in the concept of post-Christendom as a way of expressing my sense that, "Something is different now, things have changed."

I believe my conclusion from stage 1, that Sam's perception of the church is "overwhelmingly negative", has been caused by the "something is different now, things have changed" phenomenon that has come about through the gradual change from Christendom to post-Christendom, together with the fact that the expression of "church" has stayed predominantly rooted within Christendom. I am not suggesting that if the church had evolved its expression into post-Christendom, the Sam representatives would have included Christianity in their own spiritual exploration. What I am suggesting is that their perceptions of the church would, perhaps, be positive or at least neutral, which I believe could make a difference to the Sam representatives as they explore their spirituality.

My data support the idea that churches operating under strong Christendom influences (Frost, 2006; Frost & Hirsch, 2003; Kimball, 2003, 2007; Murray, 2004a; Taylor, 2005; Trebilcock, 2003), are not authentically connecting with people outside of the church. From my perspective, this finding is quite liberating because rather than relying on a hunch or speculating about why things are generally looking bad for the twenty-first century church in New Zealand, I can now point to data and analysis that shows evidence of a church perceived to have what I am defining as Christendom-like characteristics in

post-Christendom times. This is why I am concluding that my Sam representatives have an "overwhelmingly negative" perception of the church. Now, at the conclusion of my research, I have evidence that the communication of the church, or how the church is communicated into society, is negatively influencing New Zealand society's perception of the church. I believe this is influencing the decline of the church in New Zealand.

The analysis of my data suggests that churches desiring a positive connection with people outside of the church could do so by gaining an understanding and expression of what can be referred to as post-Christendom characteristics, or in other words, the qualities and ideals of the future church (Drane, 2001; Gibbs & Bolger, 2005; Jamieson, 2007; Jamieson, et al., 2006; Murray, 2004a). I believe that if the characteristics of post-Christendom churches, as defined in the literature, became the dominant expression of the church in New Zealand, the perceptions of people like Sam would be much more positive. When this happens, the communication of the church in society will be positive or neutral, which would enable the work of the church to occur unencumbered by the baggage that restricts it today.

It is simplistic to make a direct correlation between the nine perceptions from stage 1 of my research and the Christendom expression of church in New Zealand. However, when considering the hoped for characteristics of post-Christendom expressions of church (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005; Jamieson, 2007; Jamieson, et al., 2006; Murray, 2004a), it is possible to see how the perceptions of my stage 1 research participants could be changed if the dominance of Christendom classical churches were replaced by post-Christendom expressions of Christian-faith-communities. My conclusion is that the purpose of the church, including its "mission", would be easier if the perception of the church outside of the church were positive. This seems as though I am stating the obvious, but in my experience within the church, there appears to be very little concern for perception and communication issues from the perspective of society. The concerns within, for example, the evangelical and Pentecostal

churches, currently seem to be how people outside can be attracted into the church so that they can become aware of the salvation-answer the church has for society. Events and programmes run by the institution of the church are intended to attract people from the outside in the hope that they will want to become members. All of this is currently done, it seems to me, without evidence of much thought about perception or communication in society.

I believe the negativity highlighted in the nine perceptions can be reversed, but that this will not happen quickly: if the church takes the information seriously, it will take decades rather than years to overcome the perceptions and the history of the perceptions, but I believe it is possible for the church to be more positively perceived in New Zealand society. Many of the negative perceptions were created by exposure to, and awareness of, minority parts of the church, usually specific individuals, who were disrespectful of others or showed a lack of integrity, and thus acted counter to the popular understanding of what it means to be Christian and part of the church. Popular understanding of Christianity outside of the church certainly appears to be lacking the full and detailed picture of the church in the New Testament of the Bible, but specifics such as following the teaching of Jesus to "love your neighbour", as well as the expectation for honesty and integrity from Christian people seem to be clearly understood outside the church.

Negative perceptions are usually detrimental to the organisation but when the organisation produces a commodity that seems essential, dependence on the product can overcome the poor reputation of the company and keep people buying. For instance, when the careless mishaps of oil companies cause environmental disasters, people do not give up buying petrol, and thus, although the petrol companies can survive because of dependence on their product, they nevertheless have an incentive to repair their damaged reputations. By contrast, the church has nothing that the Sam representatives need: they rely on it for nothing, so changing perceptions could prove a considerable challenge. There is no way to predict whether the church will take

note of my research conclusions or ignore them, and so the effort may never be made by the church to build a positive reputation among the Sams of the world.

If the Sam group continue to ignore the church as a place to explore teir spirituality, and also hold "overwhelmingly negative" views of it, church insiders may conclude that the church is being persecuted. There were some signs that my church leaders already interpreted the perceptions this way. However, the lack of resentment and bitterness from the Sam representatives goes a long way towards convincing me that they were not persecuting the church, but rather dispassionately stating their opinion.

## 9.3 "Them and us"

This "them and us" conclusion from my focus group data stems from my identification of the church leaders having the characteristics of a very strong "ingroup" (Hoverd, et al., 2012; Tajfel, 1982b; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As an ingroup, they believe they hold the right and complete knowledge of, in this case, what and how it is to be Christian, and the church, and their reaction to the people outside of the church is the expectation that they too should have the correct knowledge. In the opinion of the church leaders, the nine perceptions from stage 1 were the result of the Sam representatives having incorrect and incomplete knowledge of the church, and they blamed the Sam representatives for not conforming to their standards of knowledge. The blame and the categorisation allowed them to constitute an "outgroup". As I worked through the nine perceptions in the focus groups, the church leaders showed frustration and even exasperation, that the Sam representatives again and again seemed ignorant and ill-informed, and therefore misinterpreted what being Christian and the church was actually about. The Sam representatives' lack of complete knowledge came as something of a revelation and surprised some church leaders, but generally, they took no responsibility for the lack of correct knowledge on the part of the Sam representatives. Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) suggest something gets lost in translation with Christian communication. My conclusion "them and us" not only summarises data that suggest a loss in

translation, but also delineates the size of the translation problem. Furthermore, the originators of the communication, the church leaders, do not see themselves as being part of the translation problem, but rather, put the blame on the receivers of the communication, the Sam representatives.

The church leaders' response shows a privileging of self or of their own point of view (Stets & Burke, 2000), without any self-critical awareness that they themselves may have contributed to the poor understanding that outsiders have of the church and of Christians. It seems that the Sam representatives gain their knowledge of the church and Christians from two primary sources: from the media, and from observations of people they know who are church-going Christians. This being the case, my data suggest that the church needs to do a better job of communicating what it can do, and why it matters. Interestingly, the church leaders did not specifically suggest improving church communication to achieve better understanding, but they did offer an indirect solution, which was that Christians simply need to do more good in quiet, humble ways. However, ultimately although humble goodness is an attractive idea, and could never do harm, the church holds the correct knowledge of the church, so it is the responsibility of the church that it presents itself as it wishes to be understood.

The wide divide that has been revealed between the two groups is one of the major findings of this research. The distance between the two groups, the nature of the distance, and the scope of the distance, are all important because of their implications for the future of the church as a social institution. To see the distance for what it is, raises questions about ways to bridge the gap, about whose responsibility it should be to undertake such bridging, and even perhaps, whether the gap should be bridged at all. My personal desire, and, in fact the motivation for this research, is to build the bridge, because I believe the church does have something to contribute to society. For instance, the way it might model caring for people through an expression of Christian spirituality. However, if this bridge were to be built, the "them and us" dynamic that exists

must be overcome, and the initiative should start on the church side of the gap, where the highest expression of Christian spirituality motivates a particular way of life based on caring.

Some Christendom churches may already be aware of the gap that I am describing, but they are possibly not identifying it as a disconnect in the way my data show. Many churches understand the gap in terms of the decline in the numbers of people at Sunday church services, which also, of course, translates to less income from the collection plates. Some churches also, might describe the gap as a result of the number of church service genres available, where this creates a competition of consumer choices for church-going people, as described in the "selling God" section in chapter 3, which is mostly negatively critiqued (Einstein, 2008; Hoover, 2006; Moore, 1994; Twitchell, 2007).

I believe the strong ingroup of church leaders could be helped by offering them education and facilitated engagement with ingroup/outgroup dynamics through some social psychology group theory, in particular social identity theory (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Hoverd, et al., 2012; Spears, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Looking at this "them and us" theme though the lens of social identity theory provides the language and vocabulary to talk about change with my strong ingroup church leaders. Helping these people understand the characteristics of the ingroup, and associated things such as perceptions of moral superiority, the dynamics of ingroup favouritism, and outgroup hostility will be a way to help them gain this new knowledge about themselves and those in the outgroup (Allen & Wilder, 1975; Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Spears, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, when considering the critique (the nine perceptions) from the Sam representatives, it would be useful for church people to find ways of seeing people outside the church without judging them by church values and church standards. If people outside the church have not signed up to the church "way of being", there should be no expectation for

them to follow church values and standards. As the church is increasingly seen to have an irrelevant world-view in New Zealand society, I believe it is important for post-Christendom expressions of church community to have an appreciation and acceptance of world-views different from their own, while engaging and interacting sensibly and with self-awareness from the position of being Christian in a post-Christendom context. The church leaders in my research, who have the desire to be understood by the Sam representatives, could improve their communication and connection with society by trying to gain an appreciation of the perspective of the Sam representatives and how they see the world.

A different issue to do with the knowledge that the church and Christians hold as the ingroup (represented in this research by the church leaders), is the theological nature of much of the knowledge they hold, as opposed to the understanding of the "man in the street", which in the case of my Sam representatives, was knowledge unshaped by "Christianisation". The complicated and mystical aspects of this theological knowledge seem to exacerbate the ingroup/outgroup divide in the absence of any common Christianised ground. At the moment, the church leaders expect the Sam representatives to have a sound knowledge of the church and Christians, yet in the current climate, I doubt anyone in the outgroup could gain a fair and comprehensive knowledge without intentional, positive engagement with the ingroup. I do not think the opportunities for this are very likely with the strength of the current "them and us" divide.

A post-Christendom ideal (Murray 2004a) for the church is to be an inclusive and diverse community of people at various stages of Christian faith and experience. The strong "them and us" conclusion from my data conflicts with this ideal. An example of the way the "them and us" construct hinders the ideals of the church is revealed in the imperatives of the evangelical church which are, first, to facilitate drawing people towards God, and second, sustaining the spirituality of those with Christian faith. These imperatives which constitute the mission of the church should drive the church towards

people such as my Sam representatives, but the "ingroup" thinking of the church leaders hinders the accomplishment of its mission.

The church leaders have drawn a line that places them on the inside and the rest of the world on the outside, and to some extent, this is understandable as they attempt to build and sustain their identity. It is unlikely that the church leaders would admit that they have created this metaphorical line: in fact, perhaps a better metaphor is a barrier that is hard to see, rather than an uncrossable line. Some church leaders would think there was a definite process to go through to become part of the "ingroup", a type of initiation into the values and beliefs that form an ideological line that must be crossed to become part of the church,[254] but I do not think they would see it as an unwelcoming or insurmountable barrier. When the church leaders reacted to the nine perceptions, there was a sense that they are so immersed in their own way of "doing church", that they have actually caused the outgroup, the Sam representatives, to have written them off as inconsequential to anything within the outgroup reality. I would suggest here that the outgroup perceive the church as irrelevant, because they actually *see* the church as irrelevant. In my opinion, this is different from saying the church *is* irrelevant.

While there are some positive aspects to being part of an ingroup, such as the creation of identity, and the maintenance of organisational structure and philosophy, the negative aspects such as building barriers against the "other" or being competitive with the outgroup are not, in my opinion, good characteristics for a community that claims to be based on the values of Christian spirituality.

In terms of post-Christendom, if it is accepted that we live in a post-modern age, or at least are living with the effects of "liquid" modernity (Bauman, 2000),

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[254] For example, in some churches the entry process to becoming Christian is defined through a person's acceptance of "The four spiritual laws" which was an evangelistic Christian tract created by Bill Bright in 1952.

the choices that people have in terms of spiritual exploration are likely to proliferate rather than reduce. If the dominant expression of Christianity now exists across such a divide, in a state of "them and us", people who fall in the "them" group are more likely to find attractive alternatives away from the "us" group.

The "overwhelmingly negative" conclusion showed that some people on the outside of the church have considerably bad perceptions of the church in New Zealand. This, coupled with the "them and us" divide, creates an unfortunate situation for the church. While I do not claim that the nine perceptions from stage 1 of my research are necessarily objectively and universally true, I strongly contend that they are truths for the people who spoke to me. If church attendance and Christian affiliation in New Zealand continue to decrease, and Christendom expressions of church continue to dominate the church landscape, the negative perceptions of the Sam representatives are likely to be promulgated further throughout society.

The relationship between the church and wider New Zealand society is a matter for both the church and the secular world to consider. The great tradition of Western faith, built around different expressions of Christianity has shaped society in many positive ways (Witte & Alexander, 2010). For example, the beginning of healthcare for the masses, education for common people, aspiration for justice, shaping modern democracy, influencing workers rights, child protection, the Civil Rights Movement, ending apartheid in South Africa, and even the European settlement of New Zealand would all have turned out differently if there had been no Christian influence. There is no doubt, Christianity and the church have been historically influential in positive ways, and that these positive contributions to social development need to be held up and remembered alongside the negative influences of the church over the course of two millennia. The "them and us" divide that I have identified in existence today that I believe is contributing to the decline in the influence of the church, is most easily attributed to what is referred to as the change from

Christendom to post-Christendom: something is different now, and the church is acting as though it is unable to adjust.

The church is no longer in a position to have influence in society by virtue of merely existing, but rather, must build connections with society, and influence through its presence and its behaviour. The "them and us" divide must be bridged. I believe people in society are drawn to things that are authentically meaningful, so if church seems inauthentic and meaningless, people will not choose it.

## 9.4 "It's not easy being Christian"

The huge gap between the two groups detailed in the "them and us" conclusion sets the scene for this next conclusion. The defensiveness of the church leaders situates them on the back foot with signs of pessimism and defeat that seem to almost subconsciously be shaping their response. They all seem to be good, well meaning people, committed to the Christian faith and the cause of the church, yet there appears to be an underlying insecurity in their overall identity as Christians and part of the church when they face critique by the outgroup. I call this conclusion, "It's not easy being Christian" because of a childhood memory it provokes:

Just as Kermit the frog begins his song "It's not easy being green" by being melancholic about his lot in life, similarly do the church leaders react to the nine perceptions: overwhelmingly, their response was that no one (except other church members, presumably) understands how hard it is to believe as they do, and their reaction to being misunderstood smacks of self-pity and victimhood. It is as if the church leaders say of the Sam representatives,

> It's very well for them to say these things – they're not Christians, we're Christians and we get all this bad press! Nobody knows how hard it is for us to be Christian.

The church leaders give the impression that if all of the minority examples of bad Christians and churches would just pull themselves together and toe the

party-line, all the negative perceptions would disappear. The church leaders
blame the handful of bad examples, which are often the only coverage the
media give the church. They do not appear to see that the perceptions of
outsiders might be the result of church actions that could be recognised as
damaging, and second, avoided in the future.

Church leaders say that it is hard to be Christian because of the high standards
against which they are measured. The Christian ideal of perfection is what they
strive for, but only one person has ever achieved it: Jesus, who is believed to be
both fully human and fully God, a mystery sometimes referred to within the
church as the Incarnation. Church insiders know that the ideal is unattainable
and they consider it unfair that people who do not understand it should hold
them to it. The social significance of this is in the reinforcement of the divide
between these two groups of people. Just as the Sam representatives saw the
church as being judgemental towards them, the church leaders are seeing the
Sam representatives being judgemental in the other direction, because of
ignorance. The perfect ideal that can never be achieved makes sense to people
inside the church, but to those outside it becomes an easy target for criticism.
The lack of knowledge, or incorrect knowledge, highlights another area where
there is no shared understanding or common ground.

Another factor that makes it hard to be Christian, at the heart of faith: belief in
mystery, in the intangible and the ineffable. The church leaders do not like
being considered stupid, and they do not like something that shapes so much of
their life and identity to be considered irrelevant. The Sam representatives
were people who considered themselves to be spiritual, and so mystery was
something they accepted and embraced in various ways. It seems their
exposure to the mystery of the church was not done in a way that made sense to
them, but was rather hidden, misrepresented, or distorted by issues such as
perceived gender inequality, misuses of power, oppression, and greed. This
interpretation of the mystery of the church shows another instance of a lack of
shared understanding or common ground, or in other words, the existence of

communication issues. I wonder if the way the church leaders communicate the Christian ideals, and the way their reality is actually defined, are different from each other, and this causes them to be misunderstood.

The church leaders often commented on the negative way the media portray the church and Christians and they saw this as being unfair and distorted. They believe the Sam representatives gain a lot of their knowledge and understanding about the church from what they see on television, and this is simply the expression of a very small minority of the church and Christians. For the church leaders this is seen as another injustice to their cause, something they have no control over, yet something very influential in society that contributes to how the church is understood. The lack of control the church has of the media is an indicator of the change into post-Christendom. One of the ideals of Christendom was controlling influence within society. That no longer exists, and the response by the church leaders to the negative media portrayal of the church could show a desire for such control, or at least the lack of acceptance of no control.

The issue of money was unresolved in the church leader discussions. They expressed a sense of judgment from the Sam representatives, but also shared feeling judged from people within the church as well. Money appears to be a vexed issue for the church leaders with various attitudes expressed. Within the focus group setting, money as a topic of discussion had a similar reaction to talking government politics over Christmas dinner: there are usually many different opinions that cannot be reconciled, and it is often more pleasant to change the topic. In terms of money and the church, I wonder if the response of my church leaders shows this is an area that needs exposing and working through more thoroughly, for example, is the reaction I discovered due to biblical interpretation, or cultural values?

The church leaders expressed clearly that they were not prepared to give up any of their Christian-ness, such as giving up or changing any of their dogma in

order to seem more relevant to twenty-first century New Zealand society. I do not think they need to, but rather open the door to dialogue, showing security in their distinctiveness rather than defensiveness.

The "it's not easy being Christian" conclusion could be reflected on alongside the biblical story, for example, looking at some of the people in the New Testament of the Bible, such as Jesus, and the community of the early church in The Book of Acts. There are many instances of being misunderstood, and even of disappointment, but these things did not define their identity, rather their beliefs and purpose were the identity creating features of these stories. Looking at these biblical stories with a view on the communication process would be a way of identifying any shared understanding or common ground between the historical church and society of the New Testament, and to examine the state of the communication loop between the church and society in New Testament times.

Communication can be described as the relational process of creating and interpreting messages that elicit a response (Dance, 1970; Lasswell, 1948). I will now give an example of a biblical story where this description of communication can be used to look at this "it's not easy being Christian" conclusion to see a juxtaposition as old as the earliest writings about Jesus and his teaching: it is recorded that the religious leaders of the time of the New Testament Gospels did not like what Jesus was teaching, my interpretation of this dislike, is because Jesus was subversive and turned ideas upside-down. For example, to highlight God's generosity Jesus said as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew "…the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16). This was said in order to show what God is like, and also to show how people who follow Jesus might be like if they were serious about the transformation he advocated. This example is even counter-cultural in twenty-first century New Zealand society: we know that the top people in an organisation are the most important, CEOs get paid hundreds of times more that those at the bottom of the organisational chart, managers have higher status than cleaners, and the

priest or minister in a church is given more status than the person who has only just begun any sort of journey within Christian spirituality. What would "the last will be first, and the first will be last" look like in these situations? Jesus created messages, and the interpretation by the religious leaders elicited a response that appears to show a negative reaction to the challenge Jesus gave, which appears to be the point. The communication of the church in twenty-first century New Zealand society appears to be without the challenge Jesus elicited, as identified in perception 9 from the Sam representatives: "The church? Who cares?"

The church leaders in my research are right: it is hard to be Christian with its counter-cultural ideals and expectations. Being Christian requires more than just a superstitious commitment to the hope of an afterlife, but this appears to be how my Sam representatives see many church people expressing their Christianity. It is not hard to sign up to the Christian philosophy, it seems very hard to embody it in a consistent way with integrity.

Earlier in this section I used a song Kermit the Frog sang about his greenness, and connected how hard he found it to be green, with how hard my church leaders find it to be Christian. Near the end of the song Kermit sings of great things that are green and ends by embracing his greenness. I believe the focus group participants should just relax a little in their Christian-ness when it comes to expressing who or what they are, and alongside this take responsibility for the image they (the church) presents, not being content with how they are currently perceived, and mixing creativity, intelligence, and awareness into any future response and planned communication.

The social significance of this "it's not easy being Christian" conclusion is strongly related to the previous two. If I had presented to the focus groups of church leaders "overwhelmingly *positive*" perceptions of the church from the Sam representatives, it would have been received as praise and affirmation, which would have guided the focus group discussions in very different ways to

how they actually occurred. Even though the perceptions were not overwhelmingly positive, it is still worth pondering a situation where within broader society, church leaders feel relaxed and confident about their identity as Christians. I use the word "relaxed" because there is often a sense of agitation or arrogance when church people present themselves in public and this is not conducive to dialogue or understanding. For example, in the recent discussion about same-sex marriage in New Zealand, the loudest public church engagement was predominantly against any change to how marriage is defined (Davidson, 2012). Because the church argument does not make sense to a majority of people outside of the church, particularly people under the age of 35, to church outsiders it seems odd to follow the church when they are a minority that does not make sense. In my opinion, a relaxed and confident response from the church on this issue would be to acknowledge the changes in society, as well as the church's minority position within it, and then find ways to positively demonstrate the values that are held. This type of response, again in my opinion, is easy, and based on reality (of post-Christendom) rather than an expired Christendom. Much of the "it's not easy being Christian" conclusion is self-imposed by the church leaders, and could therefore be reversed by church people, similarly to Kermit discovering the very good things that are green, and deciding being green is just fine.

I have no doubt the church leaders have confidence within the ingroup identified by the "them and us" conclusion, this is a safe and known environment mostly void of the type of negative critique shown in the "overwhelmingly negative" conclusion. There are positive elements to the creation and support of Christian identity within the ingroup context. It is the existence of the gap or divide, or disconnect between the church leaders and the Sam representatives that enables the "It's not easy being Christian" conclusion to exist. The "them and us" and "It's not easy being Christian" conclusions are connected, and therefore co-exist.

## 9.5 "They just don't understand"

In intercultural communication research, the term "otherness" (or "othering") is used to define outsiders: those who do not belong to a particular group (Rozbicki & Ndege, 2012). In this "They just don't understand" conclusion, it is clear that there are two parties that do not share the assumptions crucial to functioning within their particular systems of reference (Rozbicki & Ndege, 2012). This is a sub-theme under the more broader conclusion "them and us". To successfully function within another group or culture, people need shared understanding. From my data I am able to show, supported by the concept of "otherness", that in twenty-first century New Zealand society, the church, as a minority ingroup, is not successfully functioning within wider New Zealand society. "Otherness" proposes a kind of xenophobia, so that anyone who is different is treated with suspicion tending towards dislike, or fear and suspicion, which will ultimately lead to dislike. This final conclusion from my research, "they just don't understand", shows that addressing "othering" ought to be a serious consideration for the church, especially in light of my church leaders seeing the Sam representatives as enemies of the church. "Othering" is therefore an issue for the church insiders who as a minority group in society, look out negatively toward those not part of the church. My data show that this is a tension antithetical to the mission purpose of the church, which in broad terms is to care for people and encourage Christian spirituality.

This position of seeing the Sam representatives as enemies appeared to be the church leaders' modus operandi when faced with external critique in the form of the nine perceptions. They did not use the word enemy but the way they talked described the Sam representatives as having enmity and animosity towards the church. It is significant to note that they did not imply that the Sam representatives were their enemies, but that they thought the Sam representatives had the church in their sights as enemies. This is significant because in all of the interviews I ran in stage 1, I never once sensed the Sam representatives had malicious intent towards the church or Christians, and the interviews were not set up indicating such an opportunity would exist. The

extremity of the church leaders' reaction emphasises the size of the divide between them and the Sam representatives.

This enemy construction was backed up several times by focus group participants quoting the Bible where Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me…" (Luke 11.23a). I interpret Jesus in this text, from examining its context, to be eliciting a challenge to his followers to convict and encourage them, as a present-day political party leader might do in a speech to their supporters. I do not interpret this text as Jesus providing a way to identify enemies. My observation of the church leaders is that they are using the words of Jesus against his broader intentions of Christian practice: because the Sam representatives' knowledge, understanding, and experience of the church and Christians has created negative perceptions, the church leaders are now perceiving them as enemies of the church because they are not deciding to be part of the church. This encapsulates this final conclusion "they just don't understand": the church leaders believe the Sam representatives are out to get them, and are therefore oppressing Christians with their negative perceptions. I do not think Jesus meant, "go out and create enemies", or "if someone doesn't understand you, they are your enemy". Rather, the opposite is true in my interpretation: Jesus helped people make sense of, and create meaning from, the mystery he stood for. For example he told stories and parables as ways to capture the imagination as an educational process, and he went out of his way to talk to people who were not considered "normal" in mainstream society, such as accountants, sex workers, and foreigners.

The enemy interpretation here is also interesting when considering the Christian philosophy where Jesus taught his followers to love their enemies, Jesus said:

> You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you… (Matthew 5.43-44).

My data show that the church leaders are creating enemies out of people who are not actually their enemies. Where, then, is the love Jesus talks of? Rather than actual Christian engagement or "mission", what my data show is disconnection.

There is yet another layer that adds to this "they just don't understand" conclusion, and that was about the ingroup and outgroup alignments. The church leaders suggested the Sam representatives would understand the church properly if only they would come into the inside and see for themselves that the church leaders were right and the outsiders were wrong. A metaphor of the situation could be the church representatives, with generous intent, effectively saying, "Come on in – the water's fine", without realising that the people outside the pool have been put off swimming, first, by some of the swimmers, and second, by the information that there are sharks in the water.

This shows a lack of empathy and understanding on the part of the church leaders as they react to the perceptions of the Sam representatives, and this supports the post-Christendom desire for improved communication from the church, which could look like the church and Christians employing the language and thought forms of the people they intend to communicate with (Frost, 2006). Some of the church leaders talked a lot about the church needing and trying to be relevant, but there seems to be a disconnect between what the church leaders think might be relevance, and what the Sam representatives might see as relevance. For the church leaders, relevance could mean engagement with real life issues during Sunday morning church services, and using current technology and media, as well as practically showing through their lifestyle that their Christian faith is meaningful to them and could be for others. For the Sam representatives, relevance would be evidence that what is signed up to in the Christian faith actually makes a difference rather than oppressing or holding people back.

This final "they just don't understand" conclusion shows a juxtaposition taking place in the church with two competing ideologies: on one hand the welcome mat is out with Christian love and care being offered to all, and on the other the barbed wire is up defensively guarding against the enemy. I believe the reality of this polarised situation could be realised with the help of self-examination, which would include developing an improved self-awareness.

Again, this final conclusion is interdependent with the previous three, but perhaps most supports the concept that "something is different now, things have changed", or in other words, using the paradigm shift way of describing the situation: the Sam representatives live and breath a post-Christendom reality, whereas the attitudes and reactions of the church leaders show them to be influenced, and indeed enacting a Christendom expression of the church and Christian spirituality. By continuing to sustain this alternative and minority reality, the gap, or divide, or disconnect I have identified through the "them and us" conclusion, will simply increase, and the "overwhelmingly negative" perceptions of the Sam representatives will be enforced.

# Chapter 10: The disconnected church

Given my four conclusions, and my interpretation of them in the previous chapter, in this final chapter I now articulate a succinct picture of how my research has enabled me to see the current situation, which is my contribution of knowledge. Following this I will outline some future research possibilities, before the final concluding comments of this chapter and thesis.

## 10.1 The purpose of this research

The purpose of this research was to discover if there was a communication problem between the church and New Zealand society, by investigating if and why Sam[255] did not see relevance in the church, and then by investigating if and why the church did not see relevance in Sam's point of view. The research also explored the likelihood of two separate groups of people who think they share the same concept of "church" but may in fact hold entirely different ideas about what the word means.

In stage 1, I discussed spirituality and the church with some Sam representatives in order to gain an understanding of the church from them as receivers of the communication of the church in New Zealand. The question that related to this stage was:

> *What are the factors that shape and create perceptions of the Christian church in post-Christendom New Zealand, for spiritual people who have not been Christianised?*

In stage 2, I took the perceptions of the church from the Sam representatives back into the church. The question that related to this stage was:

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[255] Sam is a person who in chapter 1 was described as representing people who were New Zealanders, spiritual, and never Christianised. In stage 1 of my research I interviewed people who I refer to as "Sam representatives"

*What is the response and reaction of church leaders to the factors and perceptions discovered in question one?*

These two questions together allowed me to achieve the purpose of my research by examining one dimension of the communication process that was occurring between the church and Sam. Sam did not see relevance in the church, and this examination exposed the reasons for that. The details are given in the four conclusions in chapter 9. Similarly, the church leaders did not see major significance in Sam's point of view, and this too is detailed in the conclusions.

## 10.2 Contribution of knowledge

Throughout this research project I have used the idea that when considering the twenty-first century context of the church and Christianity, the situation in New Zealand and the rest of the world is very different now from that of the past 150 years. I have been using the term post-Christendom to describe the current era as a way of marking the difference between Christendom, and the new era of Christian belief to show that, "something has changed, things are different now". I have reviewed literature that supports the concept that times have changed, and particularly for the church. My intention has been to show the church what it is like, through the eyes of outsiders.

My data showed a disconnect between what some current church leadership representatives think of themselves, and how they think my Sam representatives outside of the church think of the church. This disconnect is also illustrated in the opposite direction in how my Sam representatives perceive the church. This disconnect confirms communication problems exist between these two groups of people.

Up until now I have been referring to the church in various different ways: "Christendom church", "post-Christendom church", as well as "classical church" and "traditional church". I would now like to let go of these labels and

suggest two new labels to define the church: first, the "disconnected church", and second, the "connected church".

The modus operandi of the disconnected church fosters the "them and us" dynamic that was revealed in my research.  A disconnected church, and disconnected Christians, struggle with the realities of how hard it is to be Christian, but does not embrace the fact that many of the difficulties experienced through a negative response from society might actually be the result of how the church and Christians are *being* Christian.  Furthermore, a disconnected church puts the onus on those outside of the church to recognise and be attracted to the goodness within the church and Christian spirituality, rather than facing the need to express the heart of Christian spirituality in ways that appeal to and are accessible to outsiders.

My second new label is the "connected church", which through its modus operandi shows it understands and appreciates the twenty-first century context.  Awareness of contemporary culture allows the connected church to negotiate the tension of both holding cultural change loosely enough to match the evolution of society, as well as retaining the theological and spiritual integrity in the essence of being Christian.

Whereas the disconnected church rejects the nine perceptions from stage 1 of my research, a connected church would be likely to approach the nine perceptions with questions such as, "What have we done to cause these perceptions?" and, "How can we *be* to create positive change in how we are perceived in and by New Zealand society?"  These two new labels, and the meaning that they encapsulate, are my contribution to the body of knowledge

in the area of communication, and my offering to the broad category of missiology.[256]

## 10.3 Future research possibilities

The scale of stage 1 of my research (interviewing the Sam representatives) has been small and although my data are rich, the study could be widened without loss of integrity. I reached into the lives of seven strangers, to discover something of their exploration of spirituality that had occurred beyond the local church, with the hope that their stories and experiences would show me something about the way the local church communicates itself, or is communicated to society. To contain the scope of this research, I confined the parameters of my interview participants to people who were spiritual but not Christianised. Jamieson (2000) had earlier interviewed people who *had* been Christianised and specifically chosen to leave the church.

One of the disadvantages of the type of qualitative research I have done, is that because I was seeking detailed depth, or as Geertz (1973) defines it: "thick description", in order to contain the project and do justice to the process, I had to keep the breadth of the type of interview participants within manageable confines. A greater breadth of thick description data would add to the value of my research project. To further investigate the communication of the church, I would like to see future research done with a broader selection of interview participants, for example, seeking the perception of people outside of the church who are not at all, and never have been spiritual, and have no appreciation for the mystery associated with spirituality. My assumption would be that this type of person would be less tolerant of the church than my Sam representatives.

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[256] To read of some of my personal experience within the disconnected church, see my reflection in Appendix R.

The nine perceptions from stage 1 of my research would easily form the basis of a quantitative survey, where anyone could participate, and their indication of demographics such as spirituality, religious affiliation, or "no affiliation", as well as age, could be grouped and analysed separately. A quantitative survey such as this would establish a broader, rather than deeper, picture of how the church is perceived in New Zealand, and this current research project would provide a guide as to the construction of such quantitative research. This future research idea comes from a disadvantage I have identified with the type of qualitative research I have done: some people undervalue its worth compared to quantitative research. I have come across this undervaluing when talking to people about my research project, where the first question is often: "how many people did I survey?" When this happens I feel the need to explain qualitative research and "thick description", but when I say I interviewed seven people for stage 1, I can tell some people discredit my work because their understanding of credible research is something like a quantitative study that surveyed a number like 1000 people, such as opinion polls presented on the television news. It is usually people outside of the academy that have this opinion, usually church leaders. These are the people I would like to share the significance of this research with, so I wonder if this might best be achieved by gathering some quantitative research data that comes out of my qualitative process.

If there was an academic interest to explore the motivations behind the practical expression of Christian faith, further research could be to go deeper into the church world to explore the way of living out faith of church-going Christians in New Zealand. What I am suggesting would be an examination of the interaction of beliefs, values, and practice of church-going Christians. This could be done through ethnographic studies of the private lives of church-going Christians. I would like to see how everyday practice and lived experiences might show where these very sincere and well-meaning people slip between their own personal belief, and the practices of the organisation of the church and Christian spirituality, as exposed in my own research. This could be done

from the perspective of being inside the organisation of the church and observing individuals and communities within it, and, for example, comparing those who are part of church leadership and those who are not. One reason for doing this that comes from my own research, would be to attempt uncovering meaning around the observation from both the Sam representatives, and the church leaders: that there are vastly different expressions of buy-in to the practice of Christianity within church-going Christians.

The future research possibility I am suggesting in the previous paragraph may best be implemented within a theological setting, because this type of research, seeking the motivations behind the practical expression of Christian faith, may not be taken seriously in a non-theological setting, especially if it is carried out by researchers who do not profess Christian spirituality and the mystery it entails. The church ingroup may resist any research method that fails to accommodate spiritual mystery, even though the research could provide insight into the behaviour of Christians and the church. It is because of this that I suggest ethnographic research exploring the effect of Christian spirituality might best be done within the theological context.

My research problem in this thesis could be placed within a completely different context, such as public theology, in order to illuminate the topic from a different angle. My approach to the research problem was guided by the framework of basic communication theory, and when considering contributions to the body of knowledge, could be seen as one segment of a pie that could also have contributions from areas such as public theology, organisational theory, and biblical studies, to name a few. Public theology, for example, provides a theological framework in which to consider issues of public concern, and enters the public arena assuming it has something to offer society. I would like to see my research problem addressed from this and other perspectives.

My research has been limited to the *exposure* of issues of belonging and identity creation within the church. This has touched on an area that may be suitable

for future research, probably through the discipline of psychology, to explore issues around how minority groups in society with spirituality as their dominant framework, interact with society. My research exposed a significant gap or disconnect between the Sam representatives and church leaders. Within the church there were strong ingroup/outgroup, "then and us" dynamics, including "othering". In order to identify the phenomenon that my data exposed, I introduced some social psychology group theory and intercultural communication research. Further research in these areas around my research problem would provide greater understanding.

## 10.4 Practical application

The transformation, or reformation I am seeking, aided by the process of this research, can now be explained by the desire to help disconnected churches gain some self-awareness of the disconnect that exists between the church and society, and then help them identify how they might work towards connectedness, and thereby become a connected church. Using the terminology I have employed to describe the churches implies that the church should have some positive connectedness with society, and this is the assumption and belief that I initially brought to my research. My assumption about the need of the church to connect is shown in the way I define the purposes of the church, which are, first, positive social transformation of society and advocacy against injustice, and second, sustaining the spirituality of people who either identify as Christians or are exploring what Christian faith might mean for them. For these purposes to be meaningful, I believe the church needs connection with society. I would like my future work to be involved in helping local churches identify their disconnectedness, and then engage in ways to seek connectedness.

## 10.5 The communication of the church

The problem that this research engaged with was fundamentally one of communication. In its most basic form, communication is the establishment of common ground in terms of shared understanding. If there is no common ground, there is an inability to reach shared understanding, which, obviously,

means there will be an inability to communicate effectively. I investigated whether common ground existed between some Sam representatives and some church leaders, to see if there was any effective communication between the two groups. My data show there is very little common ground between the Sam representatives and the church.

I now know what the Sam representatives think of the church; I have the nine perceptions from stage 1. They are being spiritual in their own way, indifferent to the church, and although they may have incorrect knowledge of the church, they are nevertheless not ignorant. In a two-way communication model, diagrammatically the sender and the receiver are often placed opposite one another (see Figure 1.1 in chapter 1 that shows the Shannon-Weaver model of communication). This indicates that the communication loop that exists is balanced. Being balanced implies that the responsibility to finish being a "receiver", and become a "sender", is equal for both parties: it is a continuous cycle. I suggest that at this time we should not expect the Sam representatives to offer feedback, or to close the communication loop, because they are so disconnected, detached, or indifferent, they do not need the church.

The church leaders seem equally indifferent to the Sam representatives inasmuch as the church leaders show a disinclination to reach shared understanding with the Sam representatives. The church may see itself as trying to close the loop with the Sams everywhere, but my data show that the church is trying to close the loop by continuing to function with a Christendom modus operandi in a post-Christendom time. I submit that this "Christendom plan" for closing the loop is wrong. It has not been effective for decades, and there is no reason to think, especially, in the light of my research, that it will suddenly start being effective again.

The challenge for the church, if it can accept that the communication loop is wide open, is to experiment with different ways of packaging the message so that Sam can receive it, and the communication loop can be closed. Packaging

the messages will require consideration of the style of the communication, and awareness of the various audiences, as well as working out how best to express the "correct knowledge" of the church. My research makes me believe that this should be done in the reality of post-Christendom, and that continuing to embrace Christendom, even unknowingly, will reinforce the current inability to communicate effectively.

## 10.6 Conclusion

The main issue identified in my research is one of connection, or more precisely: disconnection. I believe the church would seem more connected to society, or in other words more accessible and have a more positively received communication, if the church and those with Christian faith could relax in the fact that Christian spirituality is only one spiritual option among many in New Zealand. They should have confidence in Christian spirituality in a way that does not require defensiveness or a reliance on historical dominance that may have once existed. Science cannot fully explain faith and belief, and Christians should have confidence in and embrace the mystery, having security in their distinctiveness.

Church people should relax into their Christian-ness when it comes to expressing who or what they are so long as they are confident their lifestyle and actions reflect the expectations given to them as the Christian-faith-community in the New Testament of the Bible, a specific example being how Christians are to care for people. This is not easy, straightforward, or without sacrifice and hard work. Then alongside this, Christian people should take responsibility for the image they (the church) present, not being content with how they are currently perceived, and mixing creativity, intelligence, and self-awareness into any future responses and planned action, all of which form part of the communication of the church. This, in my opinion, would begin to address the disconnect identified in my research: the disconnected church, and would facilitate expressions of connectedness: the connected church.

As far as I can tell there has been no substitute for the present and future hope of salvation that the church has offered in the West with its ideals of justice and selfless love.  What I am talking about in my research is the failure of arguably the greatest Western institution.  Yet failure is not death.  Just as Jinkins (1999) suggests the resurrection metaphor, so central to the Christian story, provides hope for the church which has faced death with hope throughout its history. The hope I see for the church in the twenty-first century, is the hope given by those expressing post-Christendom ideals of the church, therefore creating connection.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Ethics approval for interviews

# AUT
U N I V E R S I T Y
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

# M E M O R A N D U M
## Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

| | |
|---|---|
| To: | Frances Nelson |
| From: | **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC |
| Date: | 10 December 2008 |
| Subject: | Ethics Application Number 08/224 **A once and future church: A critical examination of the perception that some people outside of the Christian church have of the Christian church.** |

Dear Frances

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 13 October 2008 and that I have approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 19 January 2009.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 9 December 2011.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through *http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics*. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 9 December 2011;

- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through *http://www.aut.ac.nz/about/ethics*. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 9 December 2011 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of the AUTEC and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Madeline Banda
**Executive Secretary**
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc:     Mike Crudge mc@paradise.net.nz

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| From the desk of … | Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142 | Tel: 64 9 921 9999 |
| Madeline Banda | New Zealand | ext 8044 |
| Executive Secretary | E-mail: madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz | Fax: 64 9 921 9925 |
| AUTEC | | page 1 of 1 |

# Appendix B: Ethics approval for focus groups



# M E M O R A N D U M

## Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

| | |
|---|---|
| To: | Frances Nelson |
| From: | **Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC |
| Date: | 9 May 2011 |
| Subject: | Ethics Application Number 10/314 **A once and future church: a critical examination of the perception that some people outside of the Christian church have of the Christian church.** |

Dear Frances

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. I am pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 13 December 2010 and that on 2 March 2011, I approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 23 May 2011.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 2 March 2014.

I advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 2 March 2014;

- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 2 March 2014 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of AUTEC and myself, I wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Madeline Banda
**Executive Secretary**
**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc:     Mike Crudge mikecrudge@gmail.com, Rosser Johnson

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| From the desk of … | Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142 | Tel: 64 9 921 9999 |
| Dr Rosemary Godbold and Madeline Banda | New Zealand | ext 8860 |
| Executive Secretary | E-mail: ethics@aut.ac.nz | Fax: 64 9 921 9925 |
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**Appendix C: Research participant advertisements**

Advertisement one:

# WANTED

## Research Participants

**for post graduate study**

What is the perception of the Christian church to those people not part of it? My research area is in how the Christian church is communicated to society *from the perspective of society*. I specifically want to talk to people who have had nothing to do with the Christian church who have recently had an experience of any kind of spirituality for the first time.

This research will be the basis of a thesis that will be submitted as part of a Master of Communication Studies degree to the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Participation in this research is a voluntary, non-remunerated activity.

**If you would like to participate in this research, and:**

1.  You are between 25 and 35.

2.  You grew up in New Zealand.

3.  You live in Christchurch and will be available for three one-on-one interviews (~60 minutes each) within a month-long period.

4.  You are a "stranger" to the researcher (Mike Crudge).

5.  You have not been Christianised. By this I mean you have not had as part of your lifestyle any intentional connection with the Christian faith or church, such as growing up in a family that practised Christianity, or attending church Sunday School as a child, or frequenting church buildings for things other than weddings and funerals.

6.  You have had a recent spiritual experience or "epiphany" (in the last 5 years). By epiphany I mean a new realisation or intuition that there is something spiritual beyond yourself, perhaps that you sense there is something more to your physical self than previously felt or sensed, or that there is something "out there".

7.  Despite having the opportunity to explore your spiritual epiphany within the context of Christianity, you chose not to investigate it in the Christian Church.

**Please contact me, the researcher: Mike Crudge, via email or phone if you have any questions or would like to participate: mc@paradise.net.nz  Ph 366 3770**

**AUT**
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Advertisement two:

# WANTED
## Spirituality
## Research Participants
**for post graduate study**

My research takes a critical look at the Christian church in New Zealand, in particular to gain some data on how the Christian church is communicated to society *from the perspective of society*. I specifically want to talk to people who have had nothing to do with the Christian church but are 'spiritual' people, to find out what the perception of the Christian church is to those people not part of it.

This research will be the basis of a thesis that will be submitted as part of a Master of Communication Studies degree to the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Participation in this research is a voluntary, non-remunerated activity.

**If you would like to participate in this research, and:**

1. You live in Christchurch and will be available for a one-on-one interview approximately 60 minutes in length, with the possibility of a follow-up interview within a month.

2. You are a 'stranger' to the researcher (Mike Crudge).

3. You have not been Christianised. By this I mean you have not had as part of your lifestyle any intentional connection with the Christian faith or church, such as growing up in a family that practised Christianity, or attending church Sunday School as a child, or frequenting church buildings for things other than weddings and funerals.

4. You are a 'spiritual' person, in that you have a personal realisation or intuition that there is something spiritual about or beyond yourself. For the purpose of this research it does not matter how you define your spirituality, whether organised or otherwise, or how/if you express your spiritualty, so long as it has not been within the Christian church.

**Please contact me, the researcher: Mike Crudge, via email or phone if you have any questions or would like to participate: mikecrudge@gmail.com**
**Ph 366 3770**

**AUT**
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

# Appendix D: Interview participant information sheet

# Participant Information Sheet

**AUT**
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

18 May 2009

**Project Title**

A critical examination of the perception that people outside of the church have of the church.

**An Invitation**

My name is Mike Crudge and I am a postgraduate student at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT University). I am working on a Master of Communication Studies, and I'm interested in how the church in New Zealand is perceived by people outside of the church, particularly when we think about how the church is communicated.

Since you have fulfilled the selection criteria (described in the section below headed "How was I chosen for this invitation?") I would like to invite you to be a participant in my research. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.

If you agree to be part of this research, and for whatever reason decide you need to withdraw from it, you may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

I'm interested in how the church is communicated to society *from the perspective of society*. In other words, what is the perception of the church to those people not part of it, with a particular interest in hearing from people outside of the church who consider themselves 'spiritual' people.

I hope to get in touch with the lives of a few people to discover something of their exploration of spirituality (that has occurred beyond the local church), with the hope that their stories and experiences will show something about the way the local church communicates itself to society.

I'm a part-time student at AUT University and I also work part-time for the Baptist Church. The combination of these two activities has made me wonder about the place of the church in the future of New Zealand society. I approach this research with no personal agenda; I simply want to hear your perceptions on my research topic.

This research will be the basis of a thesis that will be submitted as part of the degree to the university. It is possible this research will form the basis of published work once the degree has been completed.

**How was I chosen for this invitation?**

You have met the following criteria:

1. You live in Christchurch and will be available for a one-on-one interview approximately 60 minutes in length, with the possibility of a follow-up interview within a month.

2. You are a 'stranger' to the researcher (Mike Crudge).

3. You have not been Christianised. By this I mean you have not had as part of your lifestyle any intentional connection with the Christian faith or church, such as growing up in a family that practised Christianity, or attending church Sunday School as a child, or frequenting church buildings for things other than weddings and funerals.

4. You are a 'spiritual' person, in that you have a personal realisation or intuition that there is something spiritual about or beyond yourself. For the purpose of this research it does not matter how you define your spirituality, whether organised or otherwise, or how/if you express your spirituality, <u>so long as it has not been within the Christian church.</u>

For the purposes of this research I am not interested *how* or *where* participants might explore their spirituality – either formally or informally.

I am also looking for an equal gender balance between my research participants.

**What will happen in this research?**

After I've given you this form, answered any questions you may have, and you agree to take part, we will either move straight into the time of interviewing, or we will plan a time for the interview. The interview will be approximately one hour long and will be a semi-structured conversation guided by me with the intention to hear your thoughts, perceptions and experiences concerning the research topic. There is a possibility of a follow-up interview within a month, this will be discussed at the end of the interview.

The interviews will have the audio recorded and they may be transcribed by the researcher.

The interviews will be held at suitable locations agreed by us both.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

The interviews may include discussion about your own personal spirituality and other personal experiences in your life. This may become discomforting.

You may wish to talk about something confidential in an interview. Doing so may put you or others at variable degrees of risk.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If any interview becomes discomforting either for you or for me, we can stop the interview or change the topic. There will never be any pressure to answer any particular question. If you would like to stop the interview at any time, please tell me, and if you would like to talk about something else in the interview, please say something like "lets talk about something else now" and I'll either stop the interview or change the topic. I will remind you about this at the start of any interview.

I guarantee your confidentiality. This confidentiality will mainly be achieved by using a pseudonym (false name) to identify you in my thesis and any other publications that I might write. The recordings and any transcription of the interviews will be securely kept and destroyed after six years. The only people to have access to these will be me and my supervisor.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

This has been described in the section above. Please ask if you have any questions about this.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The most obvious cost to you is the time you will give for the interview(s). Other costs will be any effects that occur to you due to talking about this topic in the interview environment. If you experience any discomfort from being a participant in this research, AUT University has a counselling service that is available to help you free of charge. The free counselling will be provided by professional counsellors for a maximum of three sessions and must be in relation to issues arising from your participation in this research project. To make use of this service:

• You will need to phone (09) 921 9992 to make an appointment
• You will need to let the receptionist know that you are a research participant and provide my contact details to confirm this
• You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and the option of online counselling on their website   http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student_services/health_counselling_and_wellbeing

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Once you have received this form and I have explained it to you, you are free to accept or decline participation in this research.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you would like to participate you will be given a Consent Form to fill out to formally agree to participate in this research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes. If there does end up being a follow-up interview you will receive some feedback from me about my analysis of the previous interview. I might ask you for clarification and I might share insights I've gained from talking to you and analysing the interview data. You will be free to amend anything from your discussion in the interview or add additional information.

You will have the opportunity to view the results of this research once the project has finished and my thesis is finished. The consent form allows you to indicate whether you want to see the results.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, email: frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz  phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Madeline Banda, *madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz*  phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

*Researcher Contact Details:*

Mike Crudge, email: mikecrudge@gmail.com  cell phone: 021 1005 915

*Project Supervisor Contact Details:*

Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, email: frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz  phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 22 October 2008, AUTEC Reference number 08/224.**

# Appendix E: Interview consent form

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# Consent Form

**AUT**
U N I V E R S I T Y
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

*Project title:*    A critical examination of the perception that people outside of the church
have of the church.

*Project Supervisor:* Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies,
AUT University,  frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz  phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

*Researcher:*    Mike Crudge, email: mikecrudge@gmail.com  cell phone: 021 1005 915

please circle:

yes / no    I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the
Participant Information Sheet dated 18 May 2009.

yes / no    I understand that my participation is voluntary.

yes / no    I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

yes / no    I understand that notes may be taken during the interview(s) and that they will also be
audio-recorded and transcribed.

yes / no    I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this
project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in
any way.

yes / no    If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including recordings and transcripts,
or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

yes / no    I agree to take part in this research.

yes / no    I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research.

Participant's signature:  ...........................................……………………………………………………

Participant's name:    ...........................................……………………………………………………

Participant's Contact Details:

…………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………..

…………………………………………………………………………………..

Date:   …………………………………………..

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 22 October 2008*
*AUTEC Reference number 08/224*

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

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# Appendix F: Interviewer guide and questions

**Interview Question Guide**
**Mike Crudge, 18 May 2009**

*Project title:*      A critical examination of the perception that people outside of the [Christian] church have of the church.

**Thematic boundaries around the research:**
The discussion needs to be focused on
- spirituality,
- the church,
- any societal or personal connection to do with the participant's spirituality or perceptions of church and religion, personal or abstract, including stories and comparison, feelings or experiences.

**List of open-ended questions to draw from when interviewing:**

1. Can you tell me about **your sense of <u>spirituality</u>**?

    a. How would you **define "spirituality"**?

    b. Considering your spirituality over the last 5 years, have there been any **changes?** (in your understanding, or your experience, or your expression of spirituality)

    c. How would you describe your understanding of **"spirituality" in relation to the church**?

    d. When you started to consider your own spirituality, did the church enter your thinking?

2. What do you **know about the Christian <u>church</u>**?

    a. **How did you learn** about the church and **what did you learn**?

    b. What are your **thoughts** and **opinions** about the church?

    c. What do you know about **people that are part of the church**?

    d. What is your **experience with people** inside the church?

    e. What are the '**feelings'** you associate with church (and this discussion)?

3. How would you describe the way the **church communicates**?
    (This is intentionally vague in order to discover how and where the participant may have picked up information about the church.)

4. This discussion has been about *you* and *your* perceptions.

    a. Thinking about your **close family members**, how similar or different do you think their perceptions would be to your own?

    b. Thinking about your **close friends**, how similar or different do you think their perceptions would be to your own?

5. Do you know of any one else who might be interested in participating in my research?

# Appendix G: Focus group invitation information

**Research opportunity for our church leadership group to participate in:**

**How do they see us, and does it matter?**
**Perceptions of the church in New Zealand**

Mike Crudge is a pastor here in Christchurch (half-time assistant at Oxford Terrace Baptist Church), he is also doing some postgraduate research in the area of Communication Studies looking at how the church in New Zealand is communicated to society - from the perspective of society. Mike started this research with the idea that any mission the church does is a form of communication (the gospel is a message, messages are communicated…), and with any communication that involves people, having an understanding of the people being communicated to will shape the way we communicate, and therefore do mission.

Mike is particularly interested in helping local churches engage with their own local contexts. Mike has recently interviewed people outside of the church who have never been 'Christianised' to find out how they perceive the Christian church. He has come up with 9 different *perceptions* that people have of the church. The next stage of his research is to share these perceptions with a group of churches to see what these perceptions might mean for local churches. This will then help him prepare his findings in ways that are accessible for any church considering the context of their mission engagement.

Mike has asked us if we would like to participate in his research: He is asking to spend 90-120 minutes with the leadership group of our church (6-10 people) where he will present his findings so far, and facilitate a discussion around them – this will be a focus group for his research. He wants to gain our initial impressions and reactions to the perceptions people outside of the church have of the church, he wants to ask us what these perceptions might mean for our church. All we have to do is turn up, listen, and be prepared to share our opinions and reactions to what we hear.

This 90-120 minute session will be recorded and become anonymous data as part of his doctoral research. If we decide to participate, this session will be useful for both Mike's research and it will also expose us to some new research about the communication of the church in New Zealand society at this present time. Mike isn't going to be giving us any answers or guidelines, he is simply going to present the perceptions of people outside of the church. He hopes this will be interesting for us as we consider our own local context and our own engagement with the mission task in this city.



Mike Crudge

## Appendix H: Research assistant confidentiality agreement

# Research Assistant
# Confidentiality Agreement

**AUT**
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

*Project title:* A critical examination of the perception that people outside of the church have of the church.

*Project Supervisor:* Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

*Researcher:* Mike Crudge, email: mikecrudge@gmail.com cell phone: 021 1005 915

I, the undersigned, in the role of Research Assistant, agree to total confidentiality in terms of what I see and hear in any focus group I am part of. I will not disclose the identity of any people or church, now and forever.

Any notes or material I produce during any focus group will become and remain the property of the researcher (Mike Crudge).

I will also not talk with anyone except for the Researcher about the content seen or heard in any interview until the research is published.

Name (please print) _____

Signature _____

Date _____

# Appendix I: Focus group guide and questions

**Focus Group Presentation: Guide and questions**
Mike Crudge

**Introduction**

Thank you for coming: helps me a lot, hopefully helps you too = purpose of research (to help local churches engage with their own context…)

**About me**
Assistant pastor at OTBC… Carey… concern for the future of the church in NZ:

**The Research**
- Interested in how the church communicates to society, but from the perspective of society
  It's a bit like a conversation:
- 2 people talking, one walks away…
- I run over someone's cat… (Perception effects communication)

Last year I set out to find the factors that create people's perceptions of the church: people outside of the church.

In any research you need to narrow down and define your parameters:
- People who had never been Christianised: no church experience, no Christian parents/family, no Christian schooling…
- Defined themselves as spiritual…

Note: People outside the church generally lump all Christians and churches together…

**Discussion instructions**
For the rest of the time here tonight, I'm going to go through the 9 perceptions I've come up with, one at a time, and after each one, I'll be interested to hear your
- Reaction/opinion about them.
- Individually,
- But I also want you to think about your own church and local context here, I'll ask you what each perception might mean for you as a church…

**Cards**
You each have a pile of cards, they're numbered, and there's one for each perception.
Please don't look at them ahead of where I'm up to: I'll let you know when to turn them over.

So I'll talk about each one, we'll have a bit of a discussion (we'll just wing it and see how it goes), before I move on to the next perception, we'll have a minute of silence where you can write anything on the card that you might have been thinking but didn't get a chance to say: it might just be a couple of words, or it might be nothing.

1

**Consent [Participant information sheet & Consent forms]**
In terms of the ethics of doing this kind of research, I need to have your written permission to spend this time with you.
I have a clip-board to pass round, print your name, and sign it.

This is what you are signing:

We the undersigned, are happy to participate in this group discussion about the research Mike Crudge will present about the perception people outside of the church have of the church.
Mike has explained the process and we have had the chance to ask any questions about it.
We are aware that this discussion will be recorded and notes will be taken by a research assistant who has signed a confidentiality agreement. We are also aware that our own identities and the identity of our church will remain confidential and will not be exposed to anyone by Mike or his research assistant except to Mike's primary university supervisor (Dr Frances Nelson).
However, we are free to discuss our participation in this discussion beyond this group, in which case Mike takes no responsibility for our identities or the identity of our church being associated with his research.

I'm only going to take 90 minutes of your time.

Any questions?

**Ice breaker**
Pass around clip-board and briefly tell me your role in the life of this church…

**Perceptions**
Remember that perceptions are not necessarily true, but if it's how people see something, it is a truth for them.
So these 9 perceptions I'll present now, I'm not saying they are true or false, I'm simply presenting to you how people outside of the church see the church…
It's fine to disagree – if you do I would like to know…
When I use the word "church", it is all churches dumped in together – I didn't define the word for my interviewees, and they tended to include everything they know about church together under the same word ("church").

2

**Factor 1: Spirituality is seen as being outside of religion/Christianity**

Inside the church to be Christian is considered to be spiritual, and I would say we have a Christian spirituality.

The perceptions of the people I interviewed was the opposite of this in-house church view: they think of spirituality as being outside of religion or Christianity,

- in other words to be spiritual has nothing to do with church.

They mentioned spiritual qualities, as being:
- love,
- compassion,
- generosity,
- tolerance, and
- forgiveness,

Whereas religion, church and Christianity were seen as having a focus on belief rather than spiritual qualities,
this was seen as:
- negative
- uncompassionate
- fundamentalist
- pushing of beliefs.

[turn your number 1 card over now]

**Perception 1:  The church is not a spiritual place.**

There are many similarities between how the people I talked to define spirituality and what I call *Christian spirituality*,

however they have not been exposed to positive examples of Christian spirituality to see value or reason in the uniquely Christian elements.

**Questions**

What do you think about this first perception?  What's your reaction to this? That the church is not a spiritual place. (individual and communal/church)

In your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think the church is a spiritual place, or just a place that controls certain beliefs?

Considering people outside the church who haven't been Christianised, who think the church is not a spiritual place:
- Why do you think people might think this?

- What does this mean for your church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

3

**Factor 2: The church has a bad historical track record.**
The people I talked to commented negatively about the church's history.
They identified:
- division,
- suppression,
- oppression, and
- persecution: of Jews, heretics, and women.

They noted a lot of angst towards the church for trying to control people, and around the fear and guilt it put onto people.

They said Christians were not:
- loving,
- happy or
- relaxed about life.

The church was described as a social construct that changed culture, but lacked integrity through processes such as altering the Bible and arrogantly wanting everyone to be Christian-centric, which included forcing missionary activity around the world.

The church's gendering of God and subsequent oppression of women was seen as historically contextual and they think the church has not moved on, whereas society has moved on.
This was seen as the church having a general delay in engaging with social issues such as family size and euthanasia.

Due to the church not keeping up with changing culture and society trends, a spiritual vacuum has been created and filled by technology and celebrity, which can also be seen as negative.

The church once had power in society, it no longer does but acts as if it does.

It was noted with disgust how easily Christians forget their history.

[turn your number 2 card over]

**Perception 2:  The church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused it's control.**
People identify the church as being bad in the past, and they don't think that philosophically not much has changed (so it was bad then, it's bad now).

People found it very easy to negatively critique the church through their understanding of history.
Regardless of whether or not _____ is  stuck in the past with power and control issues, this is likely to be the perception of many people as they walk or drive past this building.

4

**Questions**
What are your first reactions to this perception?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think the church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused it's control?

Considering people outside the church who haven't been Christianised, do you think this perception could be true: that the church is stuck in the past, in a time where it had power and abused it's control?
Why do you think people might think this?

What does this mean for your church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

5

**Factor 3: People have high expectations for churches and Christians to be sincere and trustworthy (to have good personal character)**

When the people I talked to experienced or identified a lack of integrity from churches or Christians; they felt let down.

Even though it's common place in society for there to be things like deceptive advertising, we deal with that all the time and we just live with it, or people saying they'll do something, but not actually doing it…

When this kind of thing comes from the church or from Christians it's deemed unacceptable, due to an expected Christian-moral-code being broken.

[turn card 3 over]

**Perception 3: The church and Christians lack integrity**

People outside of the church seem to have come across Christians who were quick to find fault in others (the spec in someone else's eye rather than the log in their own…),

they've all received some kind of 'Christian Judgement'.

As a result of this they appear to have very low tolerance towards Christians who themselves do something worthy of being judged.

So people have high expectations of Christians, they often see these expectations not being met, and this is interpreted as a lack of integrity.

**Questions**

What are your first reactions to this perception?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think the church and Christians lack integrity?

Remember, perceptions aren't necessarily true…
Do you think this perception is true and fair?  Or is it a result of miscommunication?
Why do you think people might think this?

What does this mean for your church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

6

**Factor 4: People see the church as emotive and manipulative**

The church was talked about as being:
- a crutch,
- full of hype,
- an escape from reality,
- an addiction, drug-like,
- and un-balanced.

Some feelings and observations used to describe the church were:
- horrible,
- let down,
- guilt-ridden,
- stern,
- frightening,
- not loving, and
- not enjoyable.

[turn your number 4 card over now]

**Perception 4: Free, independent thinkers don't need the church**

There was a sense that some people need the church to hide behind, for protection, to escape from reality somewhat like an alcoholic might drink to escape.

So if you were a free, independent thinker, why would you sign up to something that manipulated you emotionally?

**Questions**

What are your first reactions to this perception?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think that free, independent thinkers don't need the church?

Do you think this perception is true and fair? Or is it a result of miscommunication?
Why do you think people might have this perception?

What does this mean for your church?
There are hundreds of people in your neighbourhood, I'm suggesting many of them think this, what does this mean for this church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

7

**Factor 5:  The first reaction people have when you mention church is negative**
It's kindof like "urgh…"

Much like the negative thoughts they had about the church's history, their dominate thoughts about the present church were negative too.

In terms of today's church they said the following, and remember, in terms of 'church' we're all bundled in together:
- negative patriarchy,
- very powerful men using religion to control people,
- the church doesn't want to let go of the power it once had, and it uses God as a vehicle for retaining it.
- Fear,
- indoctrination,
- dogma, and
- persecution.
- God equals oppression.
- Women are oppressed, and are
- seen as second class, and
- are therefore not seen as equal,
- and there is a prejudice towards women in/for leadership roles.
- Prejudice towards gay people was identified.
- Church does not like change,
- is rigid in tradition,
- and likes the structure of the hierarchal system.
- Blackmail,
- power,
- money,
- control, and the list goes on…

[you can turn card number 5 over]


**Perception 5:  Church is oppressive**

The negative values people mentioned about the church are at odds with many of the values expressed in 21st century New Zealand society; for example gender equality.


**Questions**

What are your first reactions to this perception?  That the church is oppressive.
(individual and communal/church)

8

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Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think the church is oppressive?

Do you think this perception is true and fair?  Or is it a result of miscommunication?
Why do you think people might think this?

What does this mean for your church?


[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

9

**Factor 6:  Christians let themselves down by their actions**

This one is similar to number 3, but rather than just being about 'character', it's about the whole of life…

There is an expectation that to be Christian should mean a lot more than just having a particular identity, not just *belief* but something that actually effects a Christian's way of life, not just *study* and *knowledge* but *practice*.

People outside of the church have some understanding and expectations around what Jesus meant his followers to be like, for example; loving and caring.

The people I talked to observed people who identified themselves as Christian, but who didn't live up to commonly understood expectations of Christians, and so this was seen as hypocritical.

They had a lot of negative reflections on Christians: they are seen as
- naïve,
- exclusive,
- one-eyed,
- having a simplistic view on life and spirituality,
- they are not compassionate.
- They are boring,
- strict,
- controlling,
- politically right-wing fundamentalists who focus on belief.
  But with this point there was also acknowledgement of a political tension between some Christians as some of the people I talked to knew of politically left-leaning Christians.
- Some Christians, specifically the Pentecostal church expression, are seen to be addicted to a contagious form of high energy self-empowerment that gives them regular hyped up experiences ("religious highs").  This was not seen as something needed by normal "together" people.

[turn over your number 6 card]

**Perception 6:  Christianity is not seen as relevant or necessary**

People outside of the church see the *practical outworking* of the Christian belief structure used as a pic-n-mix optional extra.  So they see church as being about belief, and most Christians don't do any of the practical outworking of their belief.

For example, Christians believe this stuff in the Bible, but in practice, Christians don't have to love their neighbour if they don't want to.

The actions of Christians together, when they gather (for example some expressions of church services), they are sometimes not understood by people outside of the church and are seen as
- embarrassing,
- drug-like,
- self-help positive thinking.

Normal people outside the church see no relevance or necessity for this kind of action in their lives.
Why sign up to this thing called Christianity, when on one hand you don't have to do what you sign up to, and on the other, it's crazy weird stuff.
It's a bit like joining a gym; paying the fees, but never actually working out.

**Questions**
What are your first reactions to this perception?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think that Christianity is not relevant or necessary?

Do you think this perception is true and fair?  Or is it a result of miscommunication?
Why do you think people might think this?

What does this mean for your church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

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**Factor 7:  Everyone knows somebody (family, friend, or colleague) who is a church-going Christian and they have stories to tell about them.**
**People also know about prominent Christians and organisations through media exposure and have strong opinions to share about them**

A large amount of the conversation I had with people covered negative personal experiences and stories about people they know, often in their extended families. Personal stories such as:

- Christian grandparents disowning a gay grandchild,
- a parent being socialised by Christian tradition to get married,
- a cousin swapping a gambling addiction with a Pentecostal-church addiction,
- a father who used church as a quick-fix to regularly redeem his bad behaviour,
- a child beaten at a Catholic school.

There were also stories with more remote connections:

- about Christians who had been featured in the media,
- such as Brian Tamaki of Destiny church and his money-hungry brain-washing con-man ways.

There were positive personal and remote experiences as well that lead to juxtaposed positive perceptions, such as:

- Christians committed to the practice of their faith,
- a childhood friend in a Jehovah Witness family who's church community visibly supported one another practically,
- a friend who was physically healed through church involvement,
- sincere Christian people actually making a difference in people's lives,
- friends who's Christian faith seemed to sustain them through long-term traumatic family circumstances,
- Christians showing respect and generosity towards others,
- and the observance of good works.

Positive stories with remote connections were few but mainly centred around:

- the good work of the Salvation Army – seen through their TV ads
- how they care for the disadvantaged in society, focusing more on giving than receiving, and not having hidden agendas.

[turn your number 7 card over now]

**Perception 7a:  Most Christians are nutters**
The influence of family and friends who are church going Christians enable a deeper exposure and understanding of Christianity and the church.  Rather than hearsay, people are able to see with their own eyes their actions, negative or positive.

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Because the media is so prominent, any church or Christian exposure given is also picked up on.  People outside the church have seen or heard of a lot of crazy behaviour which they perceive as negative.

The way they tell their stories and give their opinions is most easily summed up by saying most Christians are nutters.

In contrast to this, the second perception to this factor is:

**Perception 7b:  Some Christians do amazing good**

The Salvation Army do positive and transformative social work in the community and use branding and the media to their advantage, no doubt at a huge financial cost.
Nobody said anything bad about the Salvation Army which was remarkable considering the negative tone expressed in all interviews.

People sometimes have a tension in their mind as they juggle all the negative perceptions they have of the church, with a few stories that end up contradicting all the negative as if there is something hopeful in the church after all.

And if people knew or had more fringe or alternative Christian friends who are not right-wing fundamentalists this would occasionally rattle and break the stereotypes they have of Christians.

The positive things that break the stereotypes are:
- Stories of transformation,
- healing,
- companionship and
- community

These were acknowledged sometimes with a sense of confusion.  This perception is the only positive one of my 9.

**Questions**
What are your first reactions to these 2 perceptions?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think that Christians are nutters?  Or that some Christians do amazing good?  Or both of these things?

Do you think these perceptions are true and fair?  Or are they a result of miscommunication?
Why do you think people might think this?
What does this mean for your church?
[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card] [turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

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**Factor 8: People react negatively to churches and Christians displaying excessive wealth**

People don't think church leaders should have lavishly accessorised lifestyles.

The idea of church being commercialised and a pastor, priest or minister having the persona of a businessman were condemned as well.

Examples of such are connected to con-man like tactics, fleecing money off vulnerable and deceived church members.

[turn over your number 8 card now]

**Perception 8: the church is after your money**

When people see church leaders driving nice big flash BMWs, and living in nice big houses, they suspect the money has come from gullible church members.

Some would say money is all the church wants from its people.

Church services that look like they belong in a theatre due to their flashy technology and performances, also provoke the sense that money is being used for the wrong things.

Social work in the community such as that done by the Salvation Army, is perceived as being the correct way to spend church money.
People seem happy to give to the Salvation Army because they think they would feel comfortable around them.

**Questions**

What are your first reactions to this perception?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, would they think that the church is after your money?

Do you think this perception is true and fair?  Or is it a result of miscommunication?
Why do you think people might think this?

What does this mean for your church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

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**Factor 9:  In general the church does not have a good public profile**
Apart from the already mentioned good works done by some of the church, which was a very small part of the conversation in my interviews, but clearly created a positive impression,

the communication of the church whether by the church, by Christians, or by external means such as the media, is not particularly noticed or cared about.

There was acknowledgement that the church has something to do with Christmas and Easter,
and there were mixed reactions about church signage; from being patronizing through to interesting.

Other comments about church profile included it being:
- understated,
- low profile,
- not very good,
- and in terms of the media: negative.

[turn your number 9 card over]

**Perception 9:  The church? Who cares?**
People outside of the church, don't spend time thinking, talking, or worrying about the church.
It's just not on their radars, and it doesn't enter their minds.

When it does cross their consciousness the trigger generally appears to be something negative.

**Questions**

What are your first reactions to this last perception?
(individual and communal/church)

Thinking of your own experience with people outside of the church, do you think they care at all about the church?  Is it on their radar?

Do you think this perception is true and fair?  Or is it a result of miscommunication?

Why do you think people might think this?

What does this mean for your church?

[spend a minute now writing anything you like on the card]

[turn the card over and put it in the centre of the table…]

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**Concluding questions**

Considering the data gathered in my research:
the church (and Christians) have a bad public profile, for lots of reasons.

It's quite possible (but I won't say definitely), but it's quite possible this church
(_____) has a bad profile in the community, or is
somehow adding to people's negative perceptions.


Hearing all of this stuff tonight,

    1)  do you think it would help the church's cause if it was perceived
        positively?

    2)  If so, what do you think might help the church (this church) to be
        perceived more positively?
        Any ideas?

    3)  Be honest with me: is it useful knowing this stuff I shared tonight?



[There's one last card – if you have any final thoughts, or things you haven't
mentioned, feel free to write on the card…]




**Thank you…**
Results of this next stage of my research will be made available…

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# Appendix J: Focus group Participant information sheet

## Participant Information Sheet

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

16 August 2010

**Project Title**

A critical examination of the perception that some people outside of the Christian church have of the church.

**An Invitation**

My name is Mike Crudge and I am a postgraduate student at the Auckland University of Technology (AUT University). I am doing doctoral research in the area of Communication Studies, and I'm interested in how the Christian church in New Zealand is perceived by people outside of the church, particularly when we think about how the church is communicated. Last year I interviewed some people who are not part of the Christian church to see how they perceive the Christian church. Through this research I have come up with nine different perceptions that some people outside of the church have of the church. I am now sharing this information within church leadership groups, using the method of focus group research, in order to gain insight into how church leaders respond to the nine perceptions.

Since you have fulfilled the selection criteria (described in the section below headed "How was I chosen for this invitation?") I would like to invite you to be a participant in one of my focus groups. Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary.

If you agree to be part of this research, and for whatever reason decide you need to withdraw from it, you may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

**What is the purpose of this research?**

I'm interested in how the church is communicated to society *from the perspective of society*. In other words, what is the perception of the church to those people not part of it, with a particular interest in hearing from people outside of the church who consider themselves 'spiritual' people. Now, after finding that out, I am interested in how church leaders assimilate and respond to my findings.

I'm a part-time student at AUT University and I also work part-time for the Oxford Terrace Baptist Church. The combination of these two activities has made me wonder about the place of the church in the future of New Zealand society. I approach this research with no personal agenda; I simply want to hear your perceptions on my research topic.

This research will be the basis of a thesis that will be submitted as part of the degree to the university. It is possible this research will form the basis of published work once the degree has been completed.

**How was I chosen for this invitation?**

You have met the following criteria:

1. You are part of the leadership team of a Christian church in Christchurch. You are also available to be part of a focus group where I will present my findings so far in this research and then facilitate discussion around them.

I am also looking for a mixture of different churches in Christchurch so your church has been chosen to reflect this criteria.

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**What will happen in this research?**

After I've given you this form, answered any questions you may have, and you agree to take part, the focus group discussion will begin. This will be approximately 90 minutes in length and will take the form of a conversation guided by me with the intention to hear your thoughts, perceptions and experiences concerning the research topic.

The focus group will have the audio recorded and they will be transcribed by the researcher.

The focus group is being held at suitable locations agreed by us all.

**What are the discomforts and risks?**

The focus group may include discussion about your own personal spirituality and other personal experiences in your life. This may become discomforting.

You may wish to talk about something confidential in a focus group. Doing so may put you or others at variable degrees of risk.

**How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

If any focus group becomes discomforting either for you or for me, we can stop the focus group or change the topic. There will never be any pressure to answer any particular question. If you would like to stop the focus group at any time, please tell me, and if you would like to talk about something else in the focus group, please say something like "lets talk about something else now" and I'll either stop the focus group or change the topic.

I guarantee your confidentiality. This confidentiality will mainly be achieved by using a pseudonym (false name) to identify you and your church in my thesis and any other publications that I might write. The recordings and any transcription of the interviews will be securely kept and destroyed after six years. The only people to have access to these will be me and my supervisor.

You are free to discuss your participation in this focus group beyond this group, in which case I can take no responsibility for your identity, or the identity of your church from being associated with this research.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

This has been described in the section above. Please ask if you have any questions about this.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

The most obvious cost to you is the time you will give for the focus group. Other costs will be any effects that occur to you due to talking about this topic in the focus group environment. If you experience any discomfort from being a participant in this research, AUT University has a counselling service (including online counselling) that is available to help you free of charge. The free counselling will be provided by professional counsellors for a maximum of three sessions and must be in relation to issues arising from your participation in this research project. To make use of this service:

- You will need to phone (09) 921 9992 to make an appointment
- You will need to let the receptionist know that you are a research participant and provide my contact details to confirm this
- You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and the option of online counselling on their website   http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student_services/health_counselling_and_wellbeing

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

Once you have received this form and I have explained it to you, you are free to accept or decline participation in this research.

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you would like to participate you will be given a Consent Form to fill out to formally agree to participate in this research.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

You will have the opportunity to view the results of this research once the project has finished and my thesis is finished. The consent form allows you to indicate whether you want to see the results.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, email: frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz  phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Madeline Banda, *madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz*  phone: (09) 921 9999 ext 8044.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

*Researcher Contact Details:*

Mike Crudge, email: mikecrudge@gmail.com  cell phone: 021 1005 915

*Project Supervisor Contact Details:*

Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University, email: frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz  phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 22 December 2010,
AUTEC Reference number 10/314.**

## Appendix K: Focus group consent form

# Consent Form

**AUT**
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

*Project title:*     A critical examination of the perception that people outside of the church have of the church.

*Project Supervisor:* Dr Frances Nelson, Senior Lecturer, School of Communication Studies, AUT University,  frances.nelson@aut.ac.nz  phone: (09) 921 9999 extension 7860.

*Researcher:*     Mike Crudge, email: mikecrudge@gmail.com  cell phone: 021 1005 915

We the undersigned, on _____ 2010, are happy to participate in this group discussion about the research Mike Crudge will present about the perception people outside of the church have of the church.

Mike has explained the process and we have had the chance to ask any questions about it.

We are aware that this discussion will be recorded and notes will be taken by a Research Assistant (who has signed a confidentiality agreement).  We are also aware that our own identities and the identity of our church will remain confidential and will not be exposed to anyone by Mike or his Research Assistant, with the exception of Mike's Supervisor (Dr Frances Nelson).  Any reference to this discussion in either the doctoral thesis or other publications will not expose our identity or that of this church.

We are free to discuss our participation in this discussion beyond this group, in which case Mike takes no responsibility for our identities, or the identity of our church being associated with his research.

|   | Name (please print) | Signature | Position |
|---|---|---|---|
| A |  |  |  |
| B |  |  |  |
| C |  |  |  |
| D |  |  |  |
| E |  |  |  |
| F |  |  |  |
| G |  |  |  |
| H |  |  |  |
| I |  |  |  |
| J |  |  |  |
| K |  |  |  |
| L |  |  |  |

**Collated interview theme summary: data themes**
Mike Crudge 9 November 2009


**1. Interviewee's perceptions around spirituality**
The research participant criteria included the requirement to have not been
Christianised but they had to be 'spiritual'.

1. Spirituality is a response to a specific place, eg nature and architecture
   (001)
2. Spirituality is an awareness of something bigger (001)
3. Spirituality is a sense of otherness (001)
4. Spirituality is cosmic (005)
5. Spirituality is self-help, 'New Age', and polytheistic (006)
6. Spirituality is outside of religion (007), religion (Christianity) is not
   spirituality (002), religion/church is divorced from spiritual qualities:
   Religion = belief, spirituality = qualities (004)
7. Spirituality as a post-modern mixture (002)
8. There is no "higher power" (003)
9. Semantics around spirituality, not a word often used (004)
10. Personal experience/story (003), and experience could have been 'God' if
    Christian Worldview had been a guiding influence (004)
11. The anthropomorphising of God by the church is negative (005)
12. Science and spirituality can converge (006)
13. Some core Christian things can be positive with regard to spirituality
    (006)
14. Spiritual prompts, eg Maori culture (007)


**2. Church is perceived negatively**

1. The historical spread of the church: negative history (001)
2. Church is a social construct: power and wealth (historical) (001)
3. Christians forget history (005)
4. Church is a crutch (001)
5. Church lacks integrity, eg 001's father's funeral story (001)
6. Christians have an unquestioning happiness of/with church (001)
7. Church as building positive, church as people negative (001)
8. Lack of balance (002)
9. Church as business $ product = self-empowerment (002)
10. Church is hype, gives a religious 'high' (002)
11. Christendom experience of church (004)
12. 004's negative childhood image of Jesus on cross
13. Pope's annual message to Buddhists disrespectful (004)
14. Too belief focused rather than spirituality: fundamentalists, force onto
    people, missionary activity (004)
15. Christianity just part of identity and not practiced (004)
16. Society change = mainstream church shift and radical evangelical
    fundamentalism (005)

17. Public issues negative response: The Family, and abortion (005)
18. Church as a strong lobby group, media/education response = shy (005)
19. Gendered God = old period thinking (005)
20. Church use deceptive advertising (005)
21. 005's "wall of suspicion" (005)
22. 006's childhood impression negative (006)
23. 006's understanding of the church positive (006)

### 2a. Christians are perceived negatively

1. Christians are boring, one-eyed, fenced, brain-washed, exclusive, naive, simplistic (002)
2. Christians aren't *being* Christian, life impact is missing, eg Love your neighbour (004)
3. Christian leaders more into Scripture than practice: the significance of leaders, if church leaders are poor quality then followers will be poor, lack of committed Christians (004)
4. Lots of superficial Christians/churches, 'habit' Christians (004)

### 2b. Church is oppressive

1. History (006)
2. Patriarchy (006), (007)
3. Resistant to change (006)
4. Culture and society trends (007)

## 3. The influence of people on interviewee's church perceptions

### 3a. Negative influence

1. 001's gay daughter story of her grandparents 'disowning' her (001)
2. 911 story of Chalice (nature art piece in Cathedral Square) verses Cathedral = society response (001)
3. 001's father's funeral story and church's lack of integrity (001)
4. 001's Russian orthodox friends (001)
5. 002's mate Scotty: hyper-church = negative (002)
6. Destiny church = negative (002)
7. 002's parents/family = negative (002)
8. Brian Tamaki: Church leaders for financial gain = negative (003)
9. 003's cousin: loss of respect once Christianised (003)
10. 003's father: bad man, hypocrite, quick-fix-faith, church to confess = negative (003)
11. Christianity just part of people's identity rather than practice = negative (004)
12. 004's ex-husband's Catholic school experience = negative (004)
13. Gideon's Bibles in schools = negative (005)
14. 005's Christian friend one-eyed (005)
15. 005's own family = negative

16. 006's parent's generation = negative (006)
17. 007's family/friends (007)
18. non-stereotypical verses fundamentalism (007)
19. High profile fundamentalists high media profile (007)

## 3b. Positive influence
1. Ten Commandments positive ethical/moral base = society (001)
2. 001's grandparents '"fellowship" story = positive (001)
3. Salvation Army = positive (003), (005)
4. Jehovah Witness: 003 good childhood neighbour experience = positive (003)
5. 004's friend Spreydon church = positive "committed" Christian (004)
6. 004's Buddhist friend who converted to Christianity and healed at Oxford sect church = positive (004)
7. Sea of Faith group in Christchurch = positive (005)
8. 005's Catholic family friends who coped with horrific accident (005)
9. Changed/transformed people = positive (006)
10. 006's fringe/alternative Christian friends = positive (006)

## 4. Church and money are perceived as a negative combination

1. "Commercial Church", church as franchise, show like, "quick-fix church", deception, exploitation = negative (003)
2. Church leaders in it for financial gain, eg Brian Tamaki (003)
3. Church as business, product : self empowerment (002)
4. Historically not about profit (003)
5. Salvation Army money = positive (003)

## 5. Communication specific thoughts about church (Q3)

1. Patronising, disempowering communication (006)
2. Easter and Christmas high profile, other times understated (001)
3. Church just isn't on people's radar (004)
4. Catholic church placards: returning home = positive (001)
5. Seen as refuge for some = positive (001)
6. 004 enjoys reading church signs (004)
7. 004 enjoys Christmas carols by candle light and their lack of Christian message (004)

## Appendix M: Interview thematic analysis process notes

This appendix was provided on a CD-ROM during the thesis examination process. It is not included in the final version of the thesis. The files listed in the table below were found inside a folder named: "Appendix M – Interview thematic analysis process notes"

| File name (file size) | Pages |
|---|---|
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 001.pdf (2 MB) | 7 |
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 002.pdf (2 MB) | 7 |
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 003.pdf (3.2 MB) | 11 |
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 004.pdf (1.6 MB) | 8 |
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 005.pdf (2 MB) | 8 |
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 006.pdf (3 MB) | 13 |
| Interview thematic analysis process notes 007.pdf (2.5 MB) | 11 |

## Appendix N: Focus group thematic analysis process notes

This appendix was provided on a CD-ROM during the thesis examination process. It is not included in the final version of the thesis. The files listed in the table below were found inside a folder named: "Appendix N – Focus group thematic analysis process notes"

| File name (file size) | Pages |
|---|---|
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 1.pdf (3.4 MB) | 10 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 2.pdf (1.7 MB) | 5 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 3.pdf (1.1 MB) | 4 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 4.pdf (1.1 MB) | 4 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 5.pdf (1.2 MB) | 4 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 6.pdf (1.4 MB) | 4 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 7.pdf (1.3 MB) | 4 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 8.pdf (1.6 MB) | 4 |
| Focus group thematic analysis process notes Perception 9.pdf (1.4 MB) | 4 |

## Appendix O: Interview transcripts

This appendix was provided on a CD-ROM during the thesis examination process. It is not included in the final version of the thesis because there was no permission sought from interview participants to make transcripts public. The files listed in the table below were found inside a folder named: "Appendix O – Interview transcripts"

| File name (file size) | Pages |
|---|---|
| Interview transcript 001.pdf (138 KB) | 10 |
| Interview transcript 002.pdf (170 KB) | 14 |
| Interview transcript 003.pdf (196 KB) | 16 |
| Interview transcript 004.pdf (188 KB) | 15 |
| Interview transcript 005.pdf (159 KB) | 13 |
| Interview transcript 006.pdf (179 KB) | 15 |
| Interview transcript 007.pdf (185 KB) | 15 |

## Appendix P: Focus group transcripts

This appendix was provided on a CD-ROM during the thesis examination process. It is not included in the final version of the thesis because there was no permission sought from focus group participants to make transcripts public. The files listed in the table below were found inside a folder named: "Appendix P – Focus group transcripts"

| File name (file size) | Pages |
|---|---|
| Focus group transcript 1.pdf (416 KB) | 39 |
| Focus group transcript 2.pdf (454 KB) | 45 |
| Focus group transcript 3.pdf (446 KB) | 43 |

## Appendix Q: Case study.  Christchurch: the church after 22 February 2011

The paragraphs below contain a small case study that shows a unique opportunity in Christchurch post-earthquakes that is allowing the church to consider anew: building function and form, and the place of church buildings in post-Christendom New Zealand.

The devastating Christchurch earthquakes, in particular the events on 22 February 2011, happened during the data gathering stage of my research.  I had completed the stage 1 interviews of the Sam representatives before the earthquakes.  Of the three stage 2 focus groups, two happened before 22 February 2011, and one four months afterwards.  While the earthquake events were life-changing for most people living in Christchurch, I do not believe they needed special consideration in the way the focus group data was analysed.

Nearly two years after the earthquakes the results of a quantitative longitudinal study were released that enable some comparisons between pre and post earthquake Christchurch.  This was a national study so it also enabled some specific comparisons between the post-natural-disaster situation in Christchurch and the rest of the country, such as: National religious affiliation declined 0.9% from 2009 to 2011, while in Christchurch there was a 3.4% increase (Sibley & Bulbulia, 2012, p. 4).  Religious affiliation is different to church attendance, and from my own experience, I have anecdotal evidence of both increase and decrease of church attendance in various parts of the city since the earthquakes, and this seems more a result of population drift than an increase in expressions of Christian faith, although that could be part of it.  The study exposed some interesting comparisons between people who gained faith (converts) verses those who lost faith (apostates).  The results suggest that conversion to religious faith in the aftermath of a natural disaster is unlikely to improve subjective health, but deconversion is associated with declines in subjective health (Sibley & Bulbulia, 2012, p. 7).  For me this has professional pastoral implications, and for the purpose of this research it could open up an

area of further research such as making connections between increased affiliation post-disaster, and how this may have been expressed.  Sibley and Bulbulia suggest that rebuilding the broken churches in Christchurch will be worthwhile for the positive effects it will have on those who have faith (p. 7).

What is significant post-earthquakes is the way some churches in Christchurch have reacted and responded.  Just as many other organisations who care for people were active helping post-earthquakes, so too were many individual church communities and organisations, particularly with social work in the hardest hit suburbs.  Most of the central city church buildings were destroyed, largely due to them being some of the oldest buildings in the city and from being constructed with little or no earthquake resistance in mind.  At the time of writing most of these central city church sites are blank plots of land waiting for redevelopment.  There is a public on-going saga with the heritage stone Anglican Cathedral in the centre of the Central Business District, which was destroyed to the extent that the Anglican church have a preference not to repair it due to the cost of reconstruction.  This has caused an outcry by what seems a loud minority of heritage building lovers and there is even court proceedings organised by a retired Politian to try to halt any plans for demolition. Meanwhile the Anglican church are building a Transitional Cathedral, also known as the Cardboard Cathedral, which will fill the many-year gap until a new permanent cathedral is build.  This has been a topic that has interested the media and the issues raised around it have seemingly been void of any sense of Christian spirituality, and all about cityscape icons: I do not recall hearing any heritage building supporters suggesting the old cathedral be reconstructed because of the enhancement to Christian spirituality it used to provide.  I also do not recall hearing any suggestion from the Anglican Church public relations machine that the purpose of the Transitional Cathedral has anything to do with the enhancement of Christian spirituality, even though I assume that is partly their intention.

The Pacific Island Presbyterian church on the edge of the Central Business District is having its land bought from it by the government as the new central city plan has a covered sports stadium which covers their existing church site. This church community is obviously disappointed and seemingly a little bewildered as to where to go next. The Baptist church on the edge of the Central Business District where I work has lost its church building that was built in 1881 as well as three neighbouring houses one of which I lived in prior to the earthquakes. We now have a bare piece of land and five million dollars of insurance money in the bank for us to rebuild what we lost. This is a lot more complicated than it seems. I see this as a great opportunity for us to do something redemptive with our money: the buildings we lost were constructed to suit a nineteenth-century model of church based on Christendom. As we think of the future there is a lot of room for creativity. My question is: what would a "connected church" do with this blank canvas we find ourselves with? The problem is, we are a "disconnected church" (see chapter 10). We continue to struggle, mostly ignorant of the disconnect identified in my research (I have intentionally tried to keep some professional distance between my work and my research until the completion of this thesis).

Some of the church members would love for us to replace the auditorium we lost with something new as quickly as possible: first, to take us out of the ugly primary school hall we have been using on Sunday mornings since October 2010. Second, to get things back to normal: how things were before the earthquakes. These are both valid reasons to rebuild. One problem with this logic is that before the earthquakes, we were a struggling church that has been in decline for 70 years with very little, if any, connection to our local context. Effectively replacing what we had (or contemporary equivalents) will not address the issues that were causing the 70-year decline, which I attribute to characteristics of the "disconnected church", or Christendom expression of church in post-Christendom times. The church building we lost was a massive (and beautiful) auditorium with intimidating yet spectacular architecture, a sloping floor, fixed wooden pews, with a massive pipe organ being the central

visible focal point inside.  Before the earthquakes we used this building ninety minutes a week on Sunday mornings while our youth work and other activities were short of practical usable space throughout the week.  With the rebuild progress to date, the current ideas and plans will alleviate some of the restrictive building issues the church faced before the earthquakes, but not those of "disconnection".

More questions I have are: Could certain types of buildings help a disconnected church become more of a connected church?  Have buildings been part of the problem adding to the disconnect?  In New Zealand are church buildings simply expressions of nineteenth and early-twentieth century church communities, and therefore lacking any possible engagement with things post-Christendom, post-secular, post-modern?  Might this church dare to do something different, perhaps finding a way that suits both disconnected and connected realities, giving respect to the dominant current in-house perspectives (disconnection), and taking some risks on some future ideals (connection)?  Perhaps in a way that plans a long-term phase-out of disconnected expressions of church, leaving in time only connected expressions.  Time will tell.

## Appendix R: My personal experience within the disconnected church

In my own current situation where I work as Assistant Minister in a central city Baptist church, according to my own definition I am working in a "disconnected church" (see chapter 10). This is no surprise to me, I chose to come here in 2009 to work with what I now define as a "disconnection", because of my desire to have what I describe as one foot inside the classical/Christendom/traditional form of church (now the disconnected church), because this is what the majority of church-going people in New Zealand are presently involved with. This is also the context of my own Christian experience which has been very formative in both good and bad ways. I also know and feel at home within this context. But I also have a desire to have one foot outside of this context: expressing my Christian spirituality in ways I would now define as being the connected church. I have felt this way since 1998 when I was first considering training to be a church minister, but I have not been able to articulate it this clearly until now. The disconnected/connected church labels that come out of my research make sense to me now in how to articulate the sense of frustration and disillusionment I have felt with how church is, and my desire to see something different.

I have seen and explored different expressions of church with new labels and ways of being, such as intentional or incarnational community, alternative worship, emerging and emergent church, fresh expressions, and new monasticism. In all of these new categories I have seen attempts of what I am now calling "connected church" – some of them very successful at being connected: I have been inspired by some of the things I have seen and experienced. Not all new things under these new categories are examples of connected church, some are as disconnected as the churches from which they try to differentiate themselves from. Many of them appear to have arisen out of negative reactions to what I call disconnected church. Many of these newer attempts of connected church have walked away from the disconnected church, seemingly with the attitude of "it can't be fixed, let it die…", or to put it in the

vernacular: they have given the fingers to church as we know it. As demonstrated through my research methodology and my simple metaphor of having a foot in both camps, I will not leave the disconnected church. I have hope for its future, and desire to help it become connected. I believe any local expression of disconnected church has the potential, through a process of gaining self-awareness and engagement with concepts such as those my research has uncovered, to improve or gain connectedness and become a connected church. I do believe this.

In my own church I regularly struggle with manifestations of disconnected church: I am the Assistant Minister and respect my place in the hierarchy beneath Elders and a Senior Minister, alongside the Baptist ideal of congregational governance. I know how hard it is to critique our present disconnection. My very optimistic job description is all to do with things beyond the Sunday morning church service. The only way for those above me in the hierarchy to measure my worth appears to be what I actually present in Sunday morning church services: if from time to time I mimic the traditional senior leader role and self-promote the things I am actually doing, people (senior leaders and congregation) appear to be happy. If what I am actually doing is strongly influencing and shaping the way we do things organisationally, structurally, and what we call missionally (the actual work of the church), and encouraging and developing people at the bottom of the hierarchy, because on the surface these things are not explicitly seen during a Sunday morning church service, I am questioned to give evidence of my worth. This questioning occurs about three times a year and has the effect of disempowerment. I can see why the senior leaders do this: the disconnected church elevates what happens on Sunday mornings above all else. At every Sunday service at my church there is a head-count: bums on seats, the weekly offering/collection is carefully monitored, and the number of baptisms each year are recorded, these are the way we measure our success or failure. The characteristics that define a connected church are more difficult to measure. At my church not many people would deny the importance of the connected

church traits, but in reality the congregation pays (employs) professionals to do certain expected things on their behalf.

I have seen glimpses of what I would call connectedness in my church: recently for four months we experimented by having breakfast before the Sunday church service. This intentionally altered the Sunday morning church service environment to encourage relational connection with one another and visitors. For the 20-30 people who came for breakfast this slowed down the normal rush of arriving to church and launching into the formal service components. It created both some of the familiarity of home (the smell of toast) as well as some shambolicness to what is often formal and relationally void. For now we have stopped this because post-earthquakes we are struggling to maintain the basics, and breakfast was just one more thing for a few people to make happen. To illustrate what breakfast at church was like, here is what one Sunday was like for me: Over forty minutes I moved around a few tables and had lengthy conversations with four different people: with one person about their struggle coping with a mental illness, with another about the recent death of a close friend, with another about their love for cats and how they find them far more enjoyable than humans, and with another about the issues around their spouse recently coming home out of hospital and their concerns and difficulties with this. The simple structural change of providing breakfast before the church service had created a relaxed, easy, and caring way to spend time together with others in a way so difficult to do in the rest of our busy lives. Breakfast had signs of connectedness – at least from an in-house perspective. Alongside this were also voices of disconnect from some members of the congregation: they did not like entering the "worship" space when there was the mess of used dishes, where they could see people eating Weetbix, where the smell of toast was evident, and where some people were still relaxed and sitting around the tables at the start of the church service rather than in the formal pew-like seating arrangement…