From Sacred Canopy to Sacred Umbrellas: Cultural Characteristics of Parishes that Thrive

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Table of Contents

Abstract

From Sacred Canopy to Sacred Umbrellas: Cultural Characteristics of Parishes that Thrive, by Hannah Vaughan-Spruce

The Catholic parish in the west has not fared well owing to the secularising dismantling of the 'sacred canopy', most pronounced since the 1960s. With the help of historical philosopher, Charles Taylor, I define the secular landscape that has emerged in the canopy's wake, and which Catholic parishes have been called to evangelise by successive popes. Studying the culture of two parishes that thrive in their secular context through a critical realist lens, I identify five cultural characteristics that signal these parishes' success. These parishes demonstrate that, in a pluralistic, secular environment, it is more effective to consider and treat Catholic parishes as distinct, 'sacred umbrellas', rather than generalist, interchangeable components of a wider system driven by 'canopy' mentalities. Data demonstrates what might happen when a Catholic parish fosters 'umbrella community' with a focus on personal transformation and authenticity: diffuse community results, attractive to the postmodern seeker. What is more, confident and invitational evangelisation develops among parishioners. I argue that structural and cultural change on a parish and diocesan level has the potential to reverse the trends of decline by allowing parishes to strategically renegotiate their identities in such a way that will attract both believers and seekers of the twenty-first century.

Introduction
‘Culture Eats Encyclicals for Breakfast’

The famous business adage often attributed to management guru Peter Drucker, ‘culture eats strategy for breakfast’, implies that culture is an overwhelmingly powerful force in determining the success or otherwise of strategy. This has been re-spun in some Catholic circles (cf. Glemkowski, 2020) as ‘culture eats encyclicals for breakfast’. The implication is that, despite the numerous papal and magisterial pronouncements on evangelisation in the last five decades, prevailing culture within the Church holds sway. Stroke-of-the-pen teaching does not effect behavioural change, and Catholic practice with regard to evangelisation at a grassroots level remains largely untouched. In short, Catholics are generally not evangelising; or if they are, they are having little success.

Certainly, the teaching on evangelisation since the Vatican Council has been conspicuously voluminous. The council’s decree, *Ad Gentes* (AG), spoke of the Church in terms of her missionary nature. As the Church following the Council became caught up in questions of internal renewal, Pope Paul VI chose in 1974 the topic of evangelisation for the Synod of Bishops. The ensuring apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), spurred the Church to mission-mindedness. Pope John Paul II coined the term ‘new evangelisation’ when he wrote to the Latin American bishops calling for an evangelisation, “new in its ardor, methods and expression” (1983: 9), and declared in 1986 a decade of evangelisation in preparation for the jubilee year of 2000. In 1990, he issued the encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (RM), writing,

> I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church’s energies to a new evangelisation. (RM, 3)

Pope Benedict XVI institutionalised the Church’s focus on evangelisation in 2010 by creating a new curial office, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation. Pope Francis’ pontificate has been in some senses the culmination of the previous three by frequently pointing to the urgency of evangelisation, in particular in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*: “What are we waiting for?” (EG, 120).

Yet, despite thousands of words written on the subject, evangelisation has generally not materialised in a significant way on a parish level. The conversion level to Catholicism is only

7.7% (Bullivant, 2016: 12), low in comparison to other Christian denominations. Furthermore, even among Catholics, 59.6% (that is, around three in five) cradle Catholics never or practically never attend church (Bullivant, 2016: 14). Much ink is being spilt on evangelisation, as all the while, Catholics themselves disaffiliate and disengage in increasing numbers.

In 2015, I was involved in a project that studied the lapsation of 256 Catholics who lived in the Diocese of Portsmouth. While their disaffiliation was often supported by intellectual struggles and falling levels of personal faith, it was frequently an experiential reality within the local parish that triggered their decision to leave (cf. Bullivant et al., 2019: 1-35 for numerous examples):

> Mass was a ritual that was just done without any thought. The more I examined my life and my purpose and spirituality, the more I realised that Mass was not part of my life. (Male, 46; *ibid*.: 9)

> Despite trying to get involved at every level … I never felt that my face 'fitted'… No one was very friendly, and it felt very cliquey. (Female, 66; *ibid*.: 13)

> I think the Catholic service, or at least the ones I attended, were sometimes sombre and joyless. And if we are coming together to worship, surely it should be the opposite. (Female, 30; *ibid*.: 20)

In the 2020 Instruction from the Congregation of the Clergy on the parish, it is acknowledged that, "the current Parish model no longer adequately corresponds to the many expectations of the faithful" (PC, 16). It is a continuity of Pope Francis' impassioned words in 2013:

> I dream of a 'missionary option', that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church's customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation. (EG, 27)

The figures on lapsation and the data from the Diocese of Portsmouth made it clear to me that parishes, on the whole, are not implementing a 'missionary option', or questioning their

'customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures.' Accordingly, this study has two research aims:

- To identify indicators of an evangelising culture in a parish setting;
- To explore how cultural factors influence a parish's ability to evangelise.

I choose 'culture' as the concept that best denotes the experiential reality of parish life that, as the figures attest, fails to attract nonbelievers and, as revealed by our Portsmouth data, triggers Catholic disaffiliation. My first aim indicates that this study is predominantly empirical: I aim to uncover examples of where Catholic parish culture is successfully evangelising. My second aim indicates that I also want to explore cultural factors that stymie or otherwise undermine a parish's evangelising efforts.

In order to achieve these aims, I break them down into the following four objectives:

1) To investigate theories of culture, specifically, how the culture of a group of people can be identified and defined;
2) To study the culture within a sample of parishes through various methods of sociological research;
3) From these findings, to identify the factors that contribute towards evangelisation and growth, and those that contribute towards maintenance and decline;
4) To outline practical steps that parishes can take towards cultural change.

In Chapter 1, I set the scene by defining the British religious/secular landscape. Britain's nonreligious population is steadily growing. Decreasing levels of Christian belief radically impacts the ability of communities to hand faith onto the next generation. I explore and define this reality, examining current research on parish decline since the Second Vatican Council, as well as sociological research that suggests how such communities might better weather the storm of secularisation.

In Chapter 2, I examine theologically the sociological positions I have adopted in Chapter 1, defining my understanding of the relationship between culture and faith, and to what extent Catholic theology can legitimately accept some of the principles of modern culture. Having defined my theoretical assumptions, and turning to sociology, I define my critical realist

theoretical framework, how I understand structure, agency and culture, and how I will operationalise this understanding in my empirical work.

In Chapter 3, I outline the parameters of my research before introducing the selection of the parish case studies, outlining methods, defining my own role as researcher and stating how the data will be analysed. I complete this chapter by identifying cultural characteristics of two parishes where growth is evident.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I analyse data from all five parishes through the lens of the characteristics identified in the first two. This analysis enables me to reach a wide range of hypotheses about how a parish can best thrive in twenty-first century Britain. I suggest why parishes have failed to thrive, and more positively, how they might still do so.

The concluding document of the General Conference of Latin American Bishops (Aparecida) asserts, "We are living through a change of epoch, the deepest level of which is cultural" (Bergoglio, 2007: 44). While the Church's theology of evangelisation is rich and compelling, what is even more necessary and desirable is an embodiment of that theology in lived practice. In the rapidly secularising west, it needs to be enculturated. In EG, Pope Francis calls for parishes to develop a "missionary impulse" and in this study I am on a quest to discover what this looks like: when a Catholic parish, embattled by secularisation, successfully embodies that "missionary impulse", yielding fruit in growing numbers of disciples. What is more, it is my goal to determine if and how any such models or principles lived out by such Catholic parishes are transferable to others, so that parish decline would not be inevitable, but rather, a reversal of trends may even be seen.

Chapter 1
The Plight of the Parish in the Secular Landscape

In this chapter, I outline the contours of the British landscape in which the Catholic parish finds itself, and which it is called to evangelise. This is achieved in three stages.

In 1.1, I give an overview of the evidence for the rise of those of no religion ('Nones'), and of Christianity's decline in general, and of disaffiliation from Catholicism in particular. Sociologists interpret this data in a myriad of ways, and while I propose a traditionally narrow definition of religion, thereby aligning with the position that recognises real decline in religion, I argue that those who define religion more widely nevertheless have important insights into the persistence of the sacred in the culture that should not be overlooked. This position is supported by the evidence of the effects of pluralism on religion that seem to be construed in religion's favour.

In 1.2, I use the thought of historical philosopher Charles Taylor alongside the data to suggest the contours of the (non)religious landscape of Britain. What those who construe religion as spirituality contribute to the discussion is an acknowledgement of the changing, subjectivising nature of religion, and I draw on Taylor's work on authenticity to expound this more deeply, as well as delving into the 'fragilising' impact of pluralism on religion and how this makes belief vulnerable. Drawing on sociologist Christian Smith I consider a sociological framework for the understanding of how religion might best thrive within this landscape.

In 1.3, I turn to the Catholic parish, considering qualitative research from France and the USA as well as Britain to propose what might be the effects of secularisation on the parish since the 1960s. In light of the landscape already drawn, I point to the sociological questions raised when we consider the need for the parish to adapt to its rapidly shifting cultural surroundings. I suggest ways in which the current construction of parish life contributes to its own decline.

My sociological stance will be expounded in greater depth in Chapter 2; however, this chapter embarks into indisputably sociological territory. It is therefore incumbent on me to outline some sociological parameters at the outset, the reasons for which will be detailed in the next chapter. Why is this needed? Every theoretical perspective in sociology is underpinned by

philosophical metatheory, that is, "a theoretical posture that reflects conceptually on theory" (Porpora, 2015: 200). Many (empiricist) sociologists would reject such an idea, privileging the empirical above the conceptual, and displaying deeply engrained hostility to philosophy. But, once we dig into sociological theory, it is evident that every theory has an innate position on a number of questions: whether or not humans are agents; whether objective human relations exist between social positions; on whether intensive or extensive methods are to be preferred in research; on what truth is; on whether value orientation is recognised as legitimate; and, of course, on whether or not metatheory underpinning theory is accepted (cf. Porpora, 2015: 190). These differences are rooted in philosophical differences which we could categorise under four headings: positivism; critical realism; postmodernism/poststructuralism; and pragmatism. At the outset, I nail my colours to the mast by declaring my critical realist standpoint. In doing so, I am not adopting a sociological theory, but rather a philosophical metatheory. The function of critical realism (CR) "is not to promote any particular theoretical perspective but to specify what makes for productive scientific activity" (Porpora, 2015: 202). According to its standpoint on the numerous possible positions listed above, CR will help us indicate what sociological conclusions can be drawn, and which cannot.

Before outlining CR in greater depth in Chapter 2, however, it will be impossible to assess the theory I refer to in this current chapter in the light of CR. Rather, this chapter serves as a literature review of the various interpretations of the secular and religious landscape in Britain. I recognise that sociology is a multi-paradigm discipline (what Douglas V. Porpora reckons as a "scandal" and "synthetic failure" (2015: 219), and likewise claims that sociology has need of deeper conceptual analysis, not just more data), and that coherence is lacking in the philosophical groundings behind the theories I will reference. Many sociologists do not reference the philosophical metatheory that underpins their work. I will postpone commenting on the validity of some of the theory referenced here until Chapter 2; however, here I can make just one comment so that we do lose our way too hazardously before being more definitive in Chapter 2.

This one comment concerns statistical analysis, of which we will see much in this chapter. It will serve us well in this chapter to be wary of theory where statistical analysis is used "in service to general laws" (Porpora, 2015: 215). This is impermissible from a CR perspective and will be explained in Chapter 2.

As we launch into a review of theories around religion in Britain, being mindful of the following will pay dividends:

> Pay at least some attention to the philosophical grounding of your research, to what ontology you assume, what views of causality you hold, and so on. And to continually reflect on those matters in a manner that might be described as fallibilist or open to correction. (Porpora, 2015: 208)

It is necessary at the outset, too, to make three further remarks. First, I am focusing my question on 'Britain' rather than the UK, or indeed, England, simply because the datasets I am using are based on surveys of Britain. I start out at the macro level by considering Britain's religious landscape as a whole, before, later in the thesis, zoning in on the micro level of individual Catholic parishes.

Second, while the majority of social scientists cited are concerned with religion's decline as a whole, and in many cases, Christianity in particular, my specific focus in this study is just one Christian tradition, Catholicism. At 8.3% of the population (Bullivant, 2016: 9), Catholics make up a significant proportion of the country's Christians, and Catholic trends in growth and decline in some ways mirror other Christian denominations, while others do not. Owing to the complex nature of these differences, and manifold causes behind them, I am limiting the scope of this study by only including Catholic parishes, in order to compare like with like, as far as Christian tradition is concerned.

Third, my question in this first chapter is concerned with the Catholic landscape in Britain, but it is also concerned with the nonreligious landscape. The question of how Catholic parishes can be more effective in evangelisation does concern the retention of Catholics, but it is also posed by the mandate to "proclaim the Gospel to all nations" (Matthew 28:19), what Pope Francis terms the "missionary option" (EG, 27). If that is the case, the background provided in this chapter needs to be concerned with the nonreligious landscape in Britain as well as the realities of Catholic disaffiliation. Roughly 2.7 million Catholic disaffiliates now consider themselves 'Nones' (Bullivant, 2019: 29). The overlap between these two categories suggests that there can be few clear distinctions in the approach we might take to reach out to lapsed Catholics and to the nonreligious (cf. Bullivant, 2017: 12; cf. RM, 34).

Having delineated the scope of the landscape I am concerned with – British, Catholic and nonreligious – let us now take a high-level view over its contours.

1.1 Britain's Nonreligious and Catholic Landscape

First, it is important to identify the datasets to which I am referring. In the case of Catholic disaffiliation, I draw on two main sources: Stephen Bullivant's *Contemporary Catholicism* report (2016) which uses the 2012-2014 British Social Attitude (BSA) survey dataset;[1] and his *Mass Exodus* (2019), which details the haemorrhaging of Catholics from the Church in Britain and the USA since the Second Vatican Council. Here, Bullivant bases his analysis on combined data from five years of the BSA survey, from the years 2012 through 2016 inclusive. Pooling the data creates access to a larger sample of 2376 cradle Catholics. In the case of the nonreligious, I draw on two main sources: Bullivant's 2017 report, "The 'No Religion' population of Britain", which uses two datasets: BSA (2015) and the European Social Survey (2014); and Linda Woodhead's studies of Nones with YouGov between 2013 and 2015. In some cases, where a contemporary figure is more valuable than a mean figure, I refer to the most recent BSA data.

1.1.1 The Rise of the 'Nones'

In 2018, 52% of the British population identified themselves has having 'no religion' (The National Centre for Social Research, 2019: 2). Analysis of the data shows that the number of those who affiliate themselves with no religion has steadily grown, with a mean increase of 0.5 percentage points per year from 1983 to 2015 (Bullivant, 2017: 8). In contrast, only 20% claim to have been brought up with no religion (*ibid*.: 8). So while there are roughly 10 million cradle Nones, there are an estimated 24.3 million current Nones in Britain (*ibid*.: 8). Indeed, it would seem that the Nones are most successful at retention: 92% of cradle Nones currently identify as nonreligious, and for every one British convert from 'no religion' to any Christian identity, there are twenty-six British 'nonverts' from a Christian identity to having no religion (*ibid*.: 13). Less than half of one percent are converts to Catholicism (*ibid*.: 13). As Linda Woodhead expresses it, "'no religion' is proving sticky in a way that Christianity is not" (2016: 249).

It is impossible to draw conclusions about roughly one half of the British population. Woodhead asserts that her studies do not reveal significant correlations,

[1] YouGov data on religious affiliation largely supports these trends seen in BSA data (Woodhead, 2016: 246).

> …by class, education, gender, political inclination or region. Nones are distributed throughout the population, and exhibit considerable diversity. They are not a distinct minority, but a confident and rather unselfconscious majority. The choice of 'no religion' seems to be a negative more than a positive choice: a refusal of existing categories and a *dis*-affiliation from the organised religious groups. (2016: 252)

Yet it is possible to extrapolate certain demographic facts (the most interesting are below), as well as (in some ways remarkable) data about Nones' belief in God, church attendance and even prayer life.

Firstly, in terms of ethnicity: Nones are significantly whiter than the population average (95% Nones versus 87% of the British population (Bullivant, 2017: 11).

Secondly, the dramatic rise in Nones is primarily caused by the 'nonversion' of those brought up in a religion, who later in life come to identify as having no religion (*ibid*.: 12). 61% of current Nones are cradle Christians of some sort, with 11% of Nones being former Catholics (*ibid*.: 12).

Third, it is perhaps unsurprising that, given that 61% of Nones are by their own admission former Christians (*ibid*.: 12), their beliefs about God are by no means rigorously atheistic. 3% say that they know God exists and have no doubt about it[2], while others either believe in God at some times and not others (9%), have doubts but say they do feel they believe in God (8%), or, while not believing in a personal God, do believe in a higher power of some kind (16%) (*ibid*.: 14).[3] In Woodhead's studies, too, the majority are classed as 'maybes', 'doubters' and 'don't knows' compared to a minority of 41.5% convinced atheists (2016: 250). In Bullivant's study, on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is 'not at all religious' and 10 is 'very religious', 15.3% of Nones remarkably ranked themselves between 7-10 (2017: 14). 10.6% said they attended religious services at least once a month or more frequently (*ibid*.: 15). 9% said they prayed at least once a month, with 4% saying they prayed every day (*ibid*.: 15). In Woodhead's study, while 1 in 4 reported engaging in some religious exercise once a month, a strikingly negative

[2] 5.5% definitely believe in God in Woodhead's data (2016: 250).
[3] This is drawn from BSA 2008 weighted data.

attitude was expressed towards *communal* religious practice (2016: 250). In summary, Woodhead writes,

> …a typical None is younger, white, British-born, liberal about personal life and morals, varied in political commitment but cosmopolitan in outlook, suspicious of organised religion but not necessarily atheist, and unwilling to be labelled as religious or to identify with a religious group. (2016: 252)

While being wary of the generalising language of "typical None", this data does serve in marking out the contours of the landscape we are exploring. Britain's largest religious denomination – the Nones – seems to tower above any other, retains its adherents successfully, and effortlessly vacuums up disaffiliates from other religions. And yet, there is ample evidence that the beliefs and practices of this vast religious group are by no means homogenously atheistic or even agnostic. There is enormous variety in spiritual outlook, including openness to the possibility of God or something beyond the material. The nuances in these data demonstrate the need for careful interpretation when we make some initial conclusions about how religious or secular is the landscape of the British mission field.

1.1.2 Disaffiliation of Catholics

The other large piece of the puzzle, when considering the British religious landscape and how the Catholic Church can better evangelise, is Catholic disaffiliation. The impact of this reality on the life and effectiveness of the Catholic parish cannot be underestimated. It is not only a British problem, of course. Placing the British Catholic picture within the context of global Catholicism, Bullivant writes:

> …it is abundantly clear that disaffiliation is a significant trend within contemporary Catholicism, *and a global one*. It is not, as it is often assumed to be, simply a 'local' concern for a fairly narrow band of western European countries, plus a handful of others in the Anglosphere. Disaffiliation is a demonstrably large and non-localised issue for the Catholic Church. (2019: 11)[4]

[4] Among scholars of the sociology of religion, there has long been an assumption that while Britain is typified as secular, the USA is the religious counterpart. Yet Bullivant questions this thesis in *Mass Exodus* (pp. 12 ff.). It is a question that will become relevant in Chapter 3, when I consider the methodological implications of undertaking two case studies in North America and three in Britain.

He refers to International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) data which identifies 12 countries, coming from five continents, where there are relatively high levels of disaffiliation (where over 20% of cradle Catholics disaffiliate) (Bullivant, 2019: 9). Of the overall number of 44 countries studied, Britain has the second highest rate of Catholic disaffiliation at 44% (*ibid.*: 28). 37% (nearly 2 in 5 cradle Catholics) identify as having no religion at all (*ibid*.). Interestingly, the rate of cradle Catholics becoming Nones ('Catholic nonverts') "is over twice that of their American counterparts; while the proportion of American cradle Catholics who now identify with a different Christian label – that is, *Catholic switchers* – is almost three times that of their British ones" (Bullivant, 2019: 29). When one correlates these percentages with population figures,[5] we are talking enormous numbers of individuals: 3.2 million disaffiliates out of a total 7.2 million cradle Catholics, of whom 2.7 million now regard themselves as Nones (*ibid*.: 29).

Let us remark briefly both on British Catholicism's retention and conversion rates.

While retention rates appear strong compared to other Christian traditions (55.8%) – e.g. double the retention rate of Baptists (Bullivant, 2019: 35) – statistics show that overall they are falling. In 1993, seven out of ten cradle Catholics still identified as Catholics in adulthood. Some twenty-one years later, in 2014, the proportion is five out of ten (that is, a total fall of around 20 percentage points) (Bullivant, 2016: 11).

Certain variables seem to affect retention rates. One is geography: retention rates vary from region to region. They are highest in the North East (66%) and North West of England (60%), and lowest in the South East (excluding London) (49%) and East Midlands (45%). Of these latter two areas, Bullivant writes:

> …having been brought up Catholic is a stronger predictor for regarding oneself to be a non-Catholic adult than a Catholic one. (Bullivant, 2019: 32)

A second variable that affects retention rates is ethnicity: cradle Catholics who are members of ethnic minorities are more likely to continue practicing than white, British Catholics (cf. Bullivant, 2016: 20). European Social Survey 2016 data show that 21% of current Catholics

[5] Office for National Statistics 2016

are foreign-born, compared with 8% foreign-born within the population as a whole (Bullivant, 2018).

If Catholic retention rates are comparatively strong, conversion rates are abysmally low: fewer than 1 in 10 is a convert (Bullivant, 2019: 37) and, "current conversions to Catholicism are dwarfed, by a ratio of one to ten, by disaffiliations away from it" (*ibid*.: 39). We already noted that, of cradle Nones, less than half of one percent are converts to Catholicism (Bullivant, 2017: 23).

Under this heading of Catholic disaffiliation, we should not neglect to consider lapsation – that is, Catholics who still identify as such (in other words, who maintain a semblance of belonging), but whose practice is minimal or non-existent.[6] BSA data demonstrate that 59.6% (that is, around three in five) cradle Catholics never or practically never attend church (Bullivant, 2016: 14). Just as there has been a steady decline in retention, there has also been a steady decline in practice. Analysis of weekly Mass attendance figures from parishes in England and Wales reveal that in 1990/1, 35% of current Catholics attended Mass weekly in contrast with 24% in 2016. For cradle Catholics, figures are lower: 25% attended weekly in 1990/1, compared with 13% in 2016 (Bullivant, 2019: 199).

1.1.3 Wider Phenomenon of Decline

While this study is restricted to Britain, we have already noted that Catholic decline is an international phenomenon, and it is worth briefly alluding to data which demonstrate the wider religious decline in Europe as a whole. David Voas (2008: 158), drawing on European Social Survey 2002 data, examined the mean level of religiosity (including affiliation, practice and belief) of respondents divided into 5-year age groups for the 21 European countries in his sample.

> The most striking observation is that not only is decline in religiosity across the birth cohorts universal in all of these countries, the graphs are fairly linear and remarkably parallel. In other words, the rate of decline seems to have been essentially constant both over time and across Europe. … If we compare people born in the early 1980s with

[6] Bullivant comments that lapsation is a broader and better studied phenomenon, of which disaffiliation is a smaller part. See Bullivant, 2019: 8 for an account of the differences between lapsation and disaffiliation. For a recent study of lapsation in the Diocese of Portsmouth, UK, see Bullivant, Vaughan-Spruce et al. 2019.

> their grandparents' generation (born in the late 1920s), we find an average gap of exactly 1 scale point across the 21 countries. The same two-generation difference in the index is found in most of the countries individually: a range from 0.88 to 1.27 in the religiosity score gap includes two thirds of the nations…

Voas writes: "the pattern of decline has been similar everywhere, with the result that the overall rank order by religiosity has been largely preserved from the early to the late 20th century" (*ibid*.: 159), with the most religious countries declining the most and most secular declining the least.

While we hold that statistics do not give the full picture, the picture they do present appears, admittedly, fairly bleak. Sociologists interpret the data in manifold ways. Those such as Steve Bruce hold that the decline does not seem set to change. He considers the religious situation in Britain to be an example of "late secularisation", which he defines as "a combination of a largely formally secular society and an active-involvement-in-organised-religion rate of less than 10 per cent" (2014: 14). It is in this stage of secularisation, he proposes, that any reversal of the trend seems sociologically highly improbable. While we cannot debate the accuracy or not of the secularisation thesis, we can review the literature indicating how religious or secular is the British landscape. There are many standpoints on secularisation and each is implicitly accompanied by an inference about the religiousness of twenty-first century Britain. We will turn to this spectrum of perspectives now.

1.1.4 How Religious / Secular is Britain?

Bruce and those who hold the so-called secularisation thesis would hold that Britain is not very religious at all, and becoming increasingly less so. At the opposite end, Grace Davie and others who would define religion more broadly as spirituality,[7] argue that belief in Britain is still strong, simply manifested in different ways. Both positions offer insights that will inform our position on how religious or secular Britain is.

Steve Bruce's 'late secularisation' perspective holds that religion is heading steadily towards irrelevance. Bruce argues that, for religion to survive, it is necessary "to produce a shared social product" (Bruce, 2014: 14). A diluted, heterogenous, individualised faith results in a declining

[7] Of course, varying philosophical metatheories underlie their differences.

stock of knowledge that is difficult, if not impossible, to hand on: "there is no longer a common stock of knowledge from which shared answers can be drawn and coercion into a common faith is no longer an option" (2014: 15). Elsewhere Bruce writes, "I cannot see how a shared faith can be created from a low-salience world of pick-and-mix religion" (Bruce, 2002: 105). Bruce's definition of religion is fairly narrow which means that he ascribes 'religiousness' similarly narrowly. Christian Smith's definition of religion, which is close to Bruce's in many ways, defines religiousness by a person's carrying out "culturally prescribed practices":

> Religion is a complex of culturally prescribed practices, based on premises about the existence and nature of superhuman powers, whether personal or impersonal, which seek to help practitioners gain access to and communicate or align themselves with these powers, in hopes of realising human goods and avoiding things bad. (2017: 22)

It carries a similar concept to Bruce's 'shared social product': practices must be "culturally prescribed" to be religious, which implies "communal memory and the authority of historical tradition" (Smith, 2017: 27): Smith comments that, "religions are almost invariably social activities – communities of memory engaged in carrying on particular traditions" (*ibid*.).

Along Smith and Bruce's lines, then, we would conclude that the 59.6% of cradle Catholics who never or practically never attend church – regardless of whether or not they affiliate themselves with Catholicism – are *not* 'religious', since they are not engaging in the practices.

Sociologists such as Davie, who do not centre their definition of religion on 'practice' but rather on 'belief', maintain, on the other hand, that the decline in a set of indicators related to religious commitment to institutional life and creedal statements is not equivalent to a decline in religion. The reduction in 'hard' indicators does not reflect "the less rigorous dimensions of religiousness", which are harder to measure; neither do they reflect that between half and two-thirds of British people still believe in God or a supernatural force (2015: 73).[8] She concurs with the observations of sociologists already considered that an increase in secularity in Britain has also been matched by an increasing heterogeneity in religious belief (2015: 77). This is also a conclusion drawn by the sociologist of religion, Michael Hornsby-Smith, who, having studied the range of British Catholic belief in the latter decades of the twentieth century,

[8] Davie uses British Social Attitudes data from 1991-2008 (see Davie, 2015: 74).

reached similar conclusions, labelled 'customary religion' the trend whereby Catholics espouse a heterogeneous range of beliefs: "a residual form of Catholicism filtered through personal interpretative processes" (1991: 219).

Essentially, Davie and others such as Woodhead (2016) are proposing a redefinition of religion where external practices are not correlated with internal belief. Davie's rejection of any correlation between the 'externalisation' of religion (what could be termed hard indicators, or 'belonging') and the corresponding 'internalisation' of religion ('believing') implicitly leads to her denial of what Peter Berger (1990) has called "plausibility structures". His thesis holds that as the social and cultural structures of our world become more secular through the process of differentiation, there is a parallel secularising of people's consciousness; the world is no longer viewed with a religious outlook or interpretation. Objective facts in the world are internalised in an individual's consciousness, and in this way, society socialises a person (1990: 7-9). Socialisation is successful to the extent that there is a symmetry between the objective world of the society, and the subjective world of the individual. The more religion is absent from one's experience, the less a person thinks in terms of religion. This is when a society's 'plausibility structures' – the "social 'base' for its continuing existence as a world that is real to actual human beings" – begin to dismantle (1990: 45). At the heart of Davie's thesis, however, is precisely the view that believing can thrive *without* belonging, the internalising of religion can survive without its corresponding externalisation.

While acknowledging the loss of societal religion, as do the secularisation theorists, Davie and Woodhead locate their search in the residual, fuzzy remnants, attempting to make a case for its persistence. It results in a definition of religion that is so wide, critics say it loses all meaning. "Put simply, increasing numbers of people believe that belonging doesn't matter" (Voas and Crockett, 2005: 14).

While leaning towards Smith's 'practice' definition of religion, I acknowledge, too, that subjectivity is a vital element of religious identity. There is certainly insight in the 'religion as spirituality' theorists that is not completely grasped by secularisation theorists such as Bruce and Voas. My sociological position involves a thoroughgoing account of agency that we will explore in 2.2.3.

Interestingly, Voas does admit to the many grey – or 'fuzzy' – areas where the traditionally understood concept of 'religiousness' (represented in Bruce and Smith's definitions) appears as shifting sands, no longer fully capable of defining the positions people actually adopt. Voas shows that there are large swathes of the European population who can be defined neither as wholly religious or wholly nonreligious: practice is not "dichotomous". He suggests that rather than "a progressive dilution of religiosity on the individual level" what we are observing is "a changing mix of the religious and secular," and "residual involvement" in Christian practices, if not steadfast commitment (Voas, 2008: 161). This is mirrored in the findings of Lois Lee (2015) who holds there is a parallel heterodoxy among those of no religion. Common ground with Davie and Woodhead might seem likely here, however, in his conclusions, Voas ascribes doggedly to the traditional secularisation thesis:

> …not long after wholly secular people outnumber the religious, the proportion of fuzzy Christians will reach a plateau and then start to fall. Ultimately they will be overtaken by the completely secular subpopulation, which will continue to grow steadily. (2008: 167)

Over time, his predictions forecast – along with Bruce – an inevitable end to religion, in the form of people neither religious nor secular, merely indifferent.

While holding to a narrow, practice-based definition of religion, it is important to allow for nuance which Bruce and Voas do not admit. Smith has a helpful insight that secularisation is particular to each religious tradition: if it is a decline in the 'culturally prescribed practices' that constitute that religion, theories about secularisation "will have to be specific to a certain religion, time period, and geographical context, and to rely on intimate familiarity with the substantive content of the practices prescribed by particular religious traditions" (2017: 244). In other words, secularisation "is a *moving target*, because the changing subject on which it is focused (religion) is not a static entity, but a social, cultural, and historically variable human construction" (*ibid*.: 249). Different measures will be needed, then, and this "should push us in more historical, cultural, and qualitative directions of case-study research" (*ibid*.: 245).

This differs quite considerably from Bruce's positivist methodological approach, which is convinced in the ability of research methods to be standardly applied to different religious phenomena (2018: 8-17). It also challenges his treatment of religion as a "static entity" (Smith,

2017: 249): the premise of the secularisation thesis rests on a "single moral universe" (Brown, 1992: 37) presumed by nineteenth century social scientists and adopted ever since as the standard of religiosity from which any change is indication of decline. Callum Brown rejects any thesis which proposes "religious decline as a prolonged, unilinear and inevitable consequence of modernity" (2001: 11). He would be aligned with Davie, Woodhead, et al. in his view that secularisation theory measurements of hard indicators are simplistic and reductive: churchgoing and non-churchgoing; protocols of behaviour. A standard of religiosity – and religion itself – is defined by Victorian discourses and decline is measured against these standards. He suggests that such an approach "self-referentially" accepts and legitimates the Enlightenment narrative that, "secularisation is a salute to reason, the intellect and to progress" (2001: 32). It would be truer to the nature of religion itself, Brown proposes, to measure Christianity not only statistically, but by its own discourses.

Both approaches are needed. The 'moving target' position suggests the need for intensive methods, proposing the value of ethnographic approaches not allowed for by empiricist positivists such as Bruce. Abby Day's position entails an understanding of religion that is "shaped by boundaries of time and space … localised, specific, and typically small-scale and domestic" (2011: 5). However, the institutional and societal cannot be neglected. Hard indicators reached by extensive methods, too, are needed, even if we accept that they do not tell the full story.

What Davie and Woodhead contribute is their recognition that the situation is far less clear cut, that signs of the sacred persist in society, that heterogeneity characterises both belief and non-belief, and that religion is changing. To label this reality, contrasting it to the stance often taken by secularisation theorists, we here introduce philosopher Charles Taylor's three versions of 'secular'. Taylor is also helpful in demonstrating that more than the empiricist part of the picture is needed.

First, 'secular$_1$' refers to the classical definition of secular, "as distinguished from the sacred – the earthly plane of domestic life" (J. Smith, 2014: 142). This is generally not referred to in sociology, although it may be employed in theology.

Second, 'secular$_2$' refers to "a more 'modern' definition of the secular as *a*religious – neutral, unbiased, 'objective' – as in a 'secular' public square" (*ibid.*). This second version is what

Taylor believes Bruce employs. In Taylor's eyes, Bruce's understanding of secularisation is one of "subtraction stories" (2007: 47), "the old world with the God-supplement lopped off", the "neutral, unbiased, 'objective'" space that remains after belief and superstition have been eliminated. In James K.A. Smith's words – in his commentary on *A Secular Age* – in the view of those committed to this kind of secular (linked with 'secularism'), "political spaces … should carve out a realm purified of the contingency, particularity, and irrationality of religious belief and instead be governed by universal, neutral rationality… [there is] a confident expectation that societies will become secular$_2$ – that is, characterised by decreasing religious belief and participation" (2014: 21). In such a space there is little room, for example, for a Christian doctor to be motivated both by science and his or her Christian belief. In the secular$_2$ public square, areligion is the default operating mode. For Taylor, such a space is neither natural, neutral or default; it is closed "spin" since it does not recognise the viability of outlooks other than the areligious – a Christian doctor, for example, being motivated by religious beliefs (cf. 2007: 428-9, 433).

Taylor therefore proposes 'secular$_3$' (the idea heard in his 2007 title, *A Secular Age*) which motions "an age of contested belief, where religious belief is no longer axiomatic" (J. Smith, 2014: 142). A society is secular$_3$ when "religious belief … is understood to be one option among others, and thus contestable (and contested)" (*ibid*.: 21). Religious practice might be "visible and fervent" – there could even be religious revival (*ibid*.: 22); but the plausibility structures of such a society – heterogenous and pluralistic, hedged within an immanent frame – make religion, and all ultimate beliefs, contestable. This outlook accords with Taylor's proposed methodological approach, of adopting one's own (non)religious position as an open "take".

These distinctions are helpful because they help us identify what the secularisation theory position lacks: a recognition that religion's irrelevance is not inevitable, and that nonreligion is itself contestable. A secular$_3$ position allows for the persisting signs of the sacred pointed to by Davie and Whitehead, without allowing this recognition to distort the nature of religion itself. Fascinatingly, Woodhead's 'Dawkins indicator' – a tool she used in her studies which assembled "a basket of different indicators, including atheism and hostility to faith schools" in order to uncover how secular Nones are in the strong sense – revealed that only 13%, that is 5% of the population, could be classified as such (2016: 250). In Taylor's terms, this means

that only 5% would align themselves to a secular$_2$ outlook, despite the best efforts of secularisation theorists to advance this narrative.

Holding a narrow definition of religion as 'culturally prescribed practices', the decline of religion in general and Catholicism in particular in Britain seems undeniable. Heterogenous and pluralistic plausibility structures mean that belief is contested; but it also means that the secular, areligious public square is not inevitable. This, too, is contested, and perhaps, a more minority position than secularisation theorists would have us believe. The secular$_3$ understanding will be explored more fully below. Furthermore, we recognise the cultural context: religion is not static, and while defining it by its prescribed practices, it is important to recognise that these may change. What looked like decline in one era may no longer look like decline in another era.

1.1.5 Pluralists and 'Supply-Side' Theorists

As we develop a picture of a secular$_3$ landscape, it is important to consider the phenomenon of pluralism and whether its role stimulates either religious growth or decline. This is a good juncture at which to draw in the sociologist, Peter Berger, who, later in his career, shifted from his original stance as a classic secularisation theorist. Defining pluralism as, "…a social situation in which people with different ethnicities, worldviews, and moralities live together peacefully and interact with each other amicably" (2014: 1), he now argues that, "if secularisation theory must be given up, we need a theory of pluralism to replace it" (2014: xi), a position we will now explore.

Traditionally, pluralism is seen as a symptom and cause of decline. David Martin elaborates that the pluralism of Protestant dominated settings allow for the "universalisation of dissent" (1978: 30), adding that, "the logic of Protestantism is clearly in favour of the voluntary principle, to a degree that eventually makes it sociologically unrealistic" (1978: 9; see also Berger, 1980). Voluntarism, according to the traditional thesis, leads to fragmentation and individualism whose logical end is found embodied in Davie's diluted version of belief, and the notion of 'spirituality' proposed by Heelas and Woodhead (2005). Hornsby-Smith concedes that diluted 'customary religion' results from "a breakdown in the processes of formal socialisation … processes of trivialisation, conventionality, apathy, convenience, and self-interest, which had eroded and modified the formally prescribed beliefs and practices of Roman

Catholicism" (1991: 219). We have noted the risk to religion when its 'shared social product' is diluted.

Yet Berger sees much opportunity for religion in the context of pluralism. His argument is based on the corresponding differentiation that secularisation causes to take place in individuals' consciousness – in institutions and discourse no longer influenced by religion, one operates "as if God did not exist".[9] He employs Alfred Schutz's "multiple realities" and "relevance structures" to develop this idea (2014: x-xi). Berger comments, "many ordinary believers … succeed in being *both* secular *and* religious" (2014: xii). In other words, not only are religious standpoints relativised; so are secular ones. Berger points out that pluralism makes the quest for certainty impossible (1982: 20).

> Just as pluralism reinforces secularisation during its ascendancy so, paradoxically does pluralism soften any form of established or institutionalised secularity. (1982: 19)

In other words, Berger is arguing, in line with Taylor's secular_3 outlook, that *any* religious/nonreligious standpoint becomes more vulnerable in the context of a pluralistic society. For Berger, secularity has suffered a crisis just as religion has: "As the ideals themselves ["the eventual triumph of natural science, the attainment of national independence, or the success of revolutionary struggles"] lost plausibility, Enlightenment secularity lost whatever potential it had for theodicy, and the consoling capacities of religion gained new credibility as a result" (1982: 15). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that pluralism can in fact lead to religious growth. Stark and Iannaccone refer to a study of fourteen countries which showed that a high rate in weekly church attendance correlated with high religious plurality in the country (1994: 239-40).

We have suggested that religion is not a static entity, and the ways in which pluralism has effected change on religion is a good example of its shifting nature. Clearly not holding to the view that voluntarism kills religion, Brown argues that religious plurality in the late nineteenth century contributed towards moral and cultural stability. Indeed, it was key to much religious revival in the 1800s when (in line with the transition towards what Taylor calls the Age of

[9] A phrase coined by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) who proposed that law should be formulated as a purely secular discourse.

Mobilisation) the rise in evangelicalism saw a movement away from conformity to established religion and towards individualism and choice. Where territorial and established churches in Europe tended to view conversion "within a framework of obedience to the state" (Brown, 2001: 37), conversion within evangelicalism was viewed as a more subjective, personal, individual reality. As voluntary organisations became the agencies of mission, the meaning of 'being religious' was recast. Interestingly, it was the secularisation thesis – the fear of a lapsed multitude – that was the primary propaganda used by evangelicals to cajole each other into giving time and money (Brown, 2001: 45). Even in the midst of a growth of religion, clerical leaders such as Chalmers were motivated by their conviction about growing secularisation.

This nineteenth century British trend towards voluntarism and individualism in conversion (paving the way for a coming Age of Authenticity – a Taylorian concept we shall explore below) mirrored the reality in the United States: here, religious freedom included organisational expression in the form of congregations, and territory counted for little (Berger et al., 2008: 29-30). In Berger's words, "Pluralism transforms religion both institutionally and in the consciousness of individuals" (*ibid.*: 13). Even more so in twenty-first century Europe, a market has established itself, and voluntarism increasingly marks European churchgoing, regardless of the constitutional position of the churches.

While pluralism has certainly secularised the landscape, it in fact has created a marketplace that barely existed during the hegemony of societal religion. This market, driven by personal choice rather than societal conformity, undeniably damages religion in dismantling its structures; yet, there are ways in which it can benefit religion. Stark and Iannaccone's 'supply-side' reinterpretation of the data develops this line of argument to its extreme, excluding any recognition that the dismantling of religion's structures can cause it harm.

Stark and Iannaccone propose that when a religious economy is competitive and pluralistic, religious participation will be high (1994: 233). When a religious provider, on the other hand, holds a monopoly, religious mobilisation is demotivated and what results is,

> …an unattractive product, badly marketed, within a highly regulated and distorted religious economy. (*ibid.*: 232)

Pointing to the vast difference between religious practice in America and Iceland, and the contrasting similarity between American and Icelandic personal, subjective religiousness, Stark and Iannaccone posit that what is lacking on the Icelandic side is religious mobilisation, the ability to meet high potential demand: "where people are not confronted with a range of efficient religious suppliers, low levels of religious consumption exist" (*ibid.*: 241).

For Stark and Iannaccone, desacralisation – the dismantling of 'societal religion' – often reveals widespread apathy rather than creating it (*ibid*.: 235). They maintain that "a vigorous religious pluralism" will arise following a lag onset by desacralisation (*ibid*.: 234). While we cannot discuss the truth of this claim, their argument contributes to our position – aligned with Berger – that pluralism can be an environment conducive to religion's growth. Berger points to the compromises religious communities would have to make in a religious marketplace, foregoing any privileged position (accepting, in Taylor's words, a secular$_3$ society): "Giving up monopolistic conspiracies means entering a market in the realm of ideas as well as economics," according to Berger (*ibid*.: 22).

> … if a religious market brings about theologically displeasing standardisation and marginal differentiation, it also brings about a situation in which every reflective believer must return to the original motives for his or her beliefs, which cannot be found in an accepted social establishment. (*ibid*.: 23)

While there is much to be said for the opportunities that individual choice and market economics bring to religion, I am unable to agree whole-heartedly with Stark and Iannaccone that the destruction of religion's structures solely brings benefits. The position I would want to take cannot minimise the role of structure in religion flourishing. Certainly, in the case of the Catholic Church, a parish would not exist without the diocesan and hierarchical structure of which it is part. Stark and Iannaccone are naïve to dismiss so thoroughly the role of structure. This is a point to which we return in 2.2.2.

In conclusion, Wallis and Bruce's prognosis that religion "is likely to survive as privatised belief and practice, at society's margins or in its interstices" (1992: 21) is likely over-pessimistic, ignoring the signs of heterogenous spiritual openness among the nonreligious as well as the potential impact (if not fully mobilised) of pluralism on religion. One of the characteristics of an increasing religious pluralism in a society is the new emphasis on

voluntarism, which we recognise as of growing importance if a religion is to flourish in the twenty-first century. At the same time, while heterogeneity within a society can lead to more acceptance of religious practice, we acknowledge Bruce's point that heterogeneity *within* a religion can weaken and dilute it. This is another reason why a fairly narrow definition of religion is helpful.

With these preliminary explorations completed, I introduce a short 'postscript' to this section, in order to introduce terminology from Taylor which will help us to define various approaches to questions of religiousness that will continue to arise throughout this thesis.

1.1.6 'Unthoughts', 'Takes' and 'Spins'

It is perhaps an unusual move to introduce a historical philosopher into the company of sociologists of religion.[10] Taylor's aims in his major 2007 work, *A Secular Age*, are grandly epic as he proposes a sweeping historical and philosophical metanarrative which seeks to explain "why [it was] virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable…" (2007: 25). He approaches history from a philosophical standpoint which is a very different approach from empirically driven sociology.[11] But Taylor adds value in a number of ways, two of which I will emphasise here. First, and most significantly, there is much to explore in his thesis in answer to the question I am posing in this first chapter: *how might we define the landscape in Britain in which Catholic parishes seek to evangelise?* We shall encounter some of his most relevant theory in 1.2. Second, and of most immediate importance, it signals my desire to incorporate other methodological approaches than social science's tendencies towards *a priori*, reductive explanations (cf. Taylor, 2010: 663-4). Taylor proposes that social science learn from interpretive anthropology, which would "force us to learn about and articulate the very different understandings which are afoot in our world, rather than proceeding immediately to an explanation of the differences" (2010: 663). Where reductive explanations can marginalise even widely held understandings of our world, a "genuine pluralist social science" allows for richness, complexity and even ambiguity.[12] The destabilisation of the dominant secularisation

[10] I will comment further on the possibilities and limitations of the inter-disciplinary way in which I am using Charles Taylor in 2.2.5.
[11] Peter Berger points out that Taylor's is a history of ideas, and while ideas have influenced populations, historical developments are often triggered by much more mundane political, economic realities (see Berger, 2014: 51).
[12] Taylor's 'social imaginaries' as a methodological approach create new openings for other perspectives. See also David Lyon, 2010.

thesis (cf. Hadden, 1987) has proved that such approaches are limited and even distorting, and Taylor's approach seems to rebalance some of these defects.

While I will not delve at this juncture too deeply into the theory which Taylor contributes towards answering my question, what is instructive at this point is an introduction to his thesis in *A Secular Age*, in order to provide a context for the varied ways in which I will introduce his ideas. There may be slight disorientation in our moving between the worlds of sociology of religion and historical philosophy – each with their own methodological presumptions and parameters – and so having a clear Taylorian backdrop against which to understand certain of his concepts should assist the orientation process.

For Taylor, secularisation is not accounted for by rationalising "subtraction stories" (2007: 47); rather, he holds that "an entire reconfiguration of meaning", has been *accomplished* (rather than uncovered), resulting in exclusive humanism. To the medieval person, there is an enchanted order to reality: "Human agents are embedded in society, society in the cosmos, and the cosmos incorporates the divine" (2007: 152). Over 500 years, a process of "great disembedding" (2007: 146) has taken place. He traces this process philosophically and historically starting with internal movements of Reform within Christendom (wider than just the Reformation but nevertheless including it); disenchantment that accompanied new worldviews instigated by the Reformation; the rise of nominalism in the late medieval period; and a gradual shifting towards a goal of "mutual civility", "a sort of naturalised, secularised sanctification" in the words of J. Smith (2014: 43).[13] It is a process of what Taylor calls "immanentisation": reality has become "enclosed within the material universe and natural world" (J. Smith, 2014: 48), any purpose beyond the material is eclipsed, and where we believe in God's providence, it is a kind of providential deism. Immanentisation is "the process whereby meaning, significance, and 'fullness' are sought within an enclosed, self-sufficient, naturalistic universe without any reference to transcendence" (J. Smith, *ibid.*: 141).

Clearly, this process leaves in its wake certain "malaises of modernity" (2007: 299). Taylor considers that our experience of living entirely within (what we imagine to be) a natural (rather than supernatural) order – what he terms an "immanent frame" – is of a constructed, circumscribed space precluding transcendence. Taylor writes: "[the immanent] frame

[13] The process can be read in full in Parts I and II of *A Secular Age* (2007: 25-295).

constitutes a 'natural' order, to be contrasted to a 'supernatural' one, an 'immanent' world, over against a possible 'transcendent' one" (2007: 542). The very distinction between natural and supernatural is itself an effect of the immanent frame (*ibid*.: 542, 548). When reality was seen as enchanted, the entire cosmos was understood to be 'charged'. Its effects upon the twenty-first century, Western individual will be explored in 1.2. But before turning to this, we need to explore what Taylor could contribute to our methodological approach, the second reason for introducing him at this moment.

Helpfully for our discussion about interpreting the data of decline, Taylor comments that scholars' arguments about *what* the decline in religion is and *when* it began are rarely disentangled from their reasons *why* religion has declined.[14] This question edges too close to the personal for comfort, perhaps, as Bruce writes:

> …one still finds opponents [of the secularisation thesis] arguing against it on the grounds that its earliest proponents strongly *desired* a secular society. We take the view that while the reasons why a particular scholar promotes a thesis may be of biographical or historical interest they are not germane to its testing. That must rest solely on its accuracy and analytical utility. (1992: 27)

But let us hear Taylor as to why a scholar's 'why' is as important as their 'what' and their 'when'.

To approach this question, we need first to introduce some key concepts. Taylor's concept of an 'unthought' is defined by J. Smith as, "The (usually unstated) presuppositions that undergird an account of secularity and the decline of religious practice" (2014: 143). Taylor suggests that 'unthoughts' might include that religion *must* decline because it is false, irrelevant, or authoritative (2007: 429). He explains, "one's own framework beliefs and values can constrict one's theoretical imagination" and, "Political partisanship is the real stumbling block of neutral social science" (2007: 428). He adds, "it is only a continuing open exchange with those of different standpoints which will help us to correct some of the distortions they engender" (*ibid*.), otherwise, "distortive judgements unconsciously engendered out of this outlook can

[14] Interestingly, Bruce too suggests that "scholars often conflate their definitions and explanations" (2002: 2).

often thrive unchallenged" (2007: 429). He is therefore positive about the possibility of "dialogue and even persuasion across 'unthoughts'" (Smith, 2014: 81).

The boldness of introducing the concept of the 'unthought' into social science is clear: it raises the question of personal biases, implicitly casting doubt on the validity of sociologists' conclusions as science. Yet its value will become clear when we consider the varied 'whys' behind sociologists' interpretations of the data outlined above.

To the concept of the 'unthought', we add the ideas of 'take' and 'spin'. As a way in to understanding these terms, we need to consider what it means that we inhabit the 'immanent frame'. For Taylor, even if we believe in transcendence – in a reality beyond the material – we nevertheless inhabit the self-sufficient immanent order. Immanence is the "sensed context in which we develop our beliefs" (Taylor, 2007: 549), and the question is how we inhabit it. "Some inhabit it as a closed frame with a brass ceiling; others inhabit it as an open frame with skylights open to transcendence" (Smith, 2014: 193): how one inhabits the immanent frame is "background to our thinking … unformulated" (Taylor, 2007: 549). Yet we can recognise our construal of life either as a 'take' (which recognises itself as a construal) or as a 'spin' (which does not).

The idea of a 'take' is important for Taylor's desire for a genuinely pluralist approach to social science. In Smith's definition a 'take' is,

> …a construal of life within the immanent frame that is open to appreciating the viability of other takes. Can be either 'closed' (immanentist) or 'open' (to transcendence). (2014: 143)

Clearly, the concept of 'takes' is useful in demonstrating how scholars may be committed to their own position, while accepting the viability of other takes. Contrast that with a 'spin' – a construal of life "that does not recognise itself as a construal and thus has no room to grant plausibility to the alternative" (Smith, 2014: 143). Taylor suggests that we can inhabit the immanent frame as a 'Jamesian open space' (with reference to William James' "open space where you can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief" (Taylor, 2007: 549)) – and if we do this, we recognise the contestability of our take on things, we feel the cross-

pressure[15] of the alternative. If we do not experience this cross-pressure, we have probably settled for 'spin', that is, an overconfident outlook that one cannot imagine being otherwise. Avoiding entering the 'Jamesian open space', one's reading is too obvious or compelling to be contested.

It is now clear how these three Taylorian concepts – 'unthoughts', 'takes' and 'spins' – have methodological implications for how the sociologists we have considered interpret data on religious decline. If we accept Taylor's postmodern premise that the kind of certainty obtainable in the natural sciences is unattainable in the social sciences (cf. Taylor, 2004: 69-82), then we will see the value in sociologists probing their 'unthoughts', questioning whether their scholarly positions are construals open to the validity of other standpoints, and allowing their 'takes' to be contested. Taylor comments,

> The actual experience of living within Western modernity tends to awaken protest, resistances of various kinds. In this fuller, experiential sense, 'living within' the frame doesn't simply tip you in one direction, but allows you to feel pulled two ways. A very common experience of living here is that of being cross-pressured between the open and closed perspectives. (2007: 555)

I introduce these Taylorian concepts in order that we might use them throughout the thesis to shed light upon various intellectual standpoints, but also to declare my desire that my methodological position be open to such 'cross-pressure'.

1.2 Exploring the Landscape

Taylor's secular$_3$ definition seems to be the best description of the reality we have been exploring: "an age of contested belief, where religious belief is no longer axiomatic" (J. Smith, 2014: 142), where "religious belief … is understood to be one option among others, and thus contestable (and contested)" (*ibid*.: 21). This definition accounts for the vulnerability of non-belief as well as belief, in a way that Bruce's understanding of secularity does not. Neither does this definition downplay religion's decline, as Davie's optimistic thesis does. The plausibility structures in a society such as Britain's are necessarily heterogenous and pluralistic, hedged

[15] 'Cross-pressure' is another key term of Taylor's that we shall come to when we consider Britain's religious landscape. In Smith's definition, it is "the simultaneous pressure of various spiritual options; or the feeling of being caught between an echo of transcendence and the drive toward immanentisation" (2014: 140).

within an immanent frame. Not only religious beliefs – but all ultimate beliefs – are contestable. We now turn to examine the features of this landscape, beginning with an exploration of the moral ideal of authenticity.

1.2.1 The Age of Authenticity

We concluded that Davie's and Woodhead's approach to religion as spirituality offered important insights into the persistence of the sacred within secular$_3$ society. Echoing the Aparecida document's comments on "a change of epoch" (cf. Introduction), Taylor provides some observations about the West's move in the 1960s into a new age, an Age of Authenticity. His insights offer a deeper philosophical understanding of the changing nature of religion, which we might surmise is linked, in the sociological realm, to Davie's redefining it in terms of spirituality.

Taylor contrasts what he calls the Age of Authenticity with the *Ancien Régime* (pre-1800), where connection to the sacred is through belonging to the Church, and where the sacred is coextensive with society: adhering to God and belonging to the state are closely tied. In the Age of Mobilisation (roughly 1800-1960), a "denominational imaginary" is developing, with a greater emphasis on voluntary association. No sacred backdrop can be taken for granted; the emphasis is on human agency in 'mobilising' new rituals and practices, and God will be present to our polity to the extent that we order it according to his design (cf. J. Smith, 2014: 84-5; Taylor, 2007: 447). Joining the Church, however, still involves belonging to something larger than oneself. In the Age of Authenticity (1960s onwards), however, the sacred is completely uncoupled from any institutional allegiance. "The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this" (Taylor, 2007: 486). The 'social imaginary of expressive individualism' is,

> …the understanding… that each one of us has his/her own way of realising our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside. (*ibid.:* 486)

In this age, "bare choice as a primal value, irrespective of what it is a choice between, or in what domain" (*ibid*.: 478) is paramount, and the highest virtue is tolerance, "the sin which is not tolerated is intolerance" (*ibid*.: 484). Taylor recognises that this triumphing of

"individualism as self-fulfilment" (1991: 16) is critiqued by traditionalists who find individualism and subjectivism indulgent and self-centred, equating it with "hedonism" and "narcissism" (1991: 16), leading them to create false dichotomies: "Each is comforted in their position by the thought that the only alternative is so utterly repulsive" (2007: 509) but in so doing, "miss a good part of the spiritual reality of our age" (*ibid*.). They do not "seem to recognise that there is a powerful moral ideal at work here, however debased and travestied its expression might be" (1991: 15).

By moral ideal, Taylor means, "a picture of what a better or higher mode of life would be, where 'better' and 'higher' are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard of what we ought to desire" (*ibid.*: 16). The term Taylor uses for this contemporary ideal is *authenticity*, "being true to oneself", "finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity" (*ibid.*: 15, 68). In *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Taylor traces and acknowledges some of the ways that this contemporary, moral ideal travesties and betrays itself, giving itself a bad reputation among moral conservatives. But he maintains it is an ideal that is "very worthwhile in itself", indeed, "unrepudiable by moderns"; authenticity is an ideal that needs "retrieval" (*ibid*.: 23).

It would be hard to deny that Taylor's understanding of the self and formulation of authenticity is strongly influenced by Heidegger (Sherman, 2005: 148). Commenting on Heidegger's take on authenticity in *Being and Time*, CR scholar Andrew Collier writes,

> The call of conscience individualises us in that it takes us out of our refuge in the 'they' and in our entanglement with things, out of all *ponziopilatismo*,[16] and makes us take responsibility for our choice. (Collier, 1999: 113)

Agreeing with Taylor's understanding that authenticity is not necessarily hedonistic, he adds:

> …[it] is quite different from making us either selfish or isolated. On the contrary, is it not precisely the pressure of the 'they' that urges egoism on us… it takes a strong individual stand to 'swim against the stream' and seek the good of others. (*ibid*.)

[16] Inauthenticity in terms of 'washing one's hands.'

What Taylor terms a retrieval occurs by understanding that human life cannot be purely subjective or self-defined; it is fundamentally dialogical (1991: 33). Taylor posits that our identity is formed against a background "against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense" (*ibid*.: 34). He terms this background a *horizon*: one thing we cannot do, "if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which these things take on significance" (*ibid*.: 37). Denying the horizon is where the subjectivist principle can destroy itself. Thus, Taylor summarises,

> …authenticity (A) involves (i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognise as morality. But it is also true, as we saw, that it (B) requires (i) openness to horizons of significance (for otherwise the creation loses the background that can save it from insignificance) and (ii) a self-definition in dialogue. (1991: 66)

In *A Secular Age*, Taylor asserts that we can accept the *framework* of Age of Authenticity spirituality – the quest-like shape of the postmodern person's searches – without adopting what is often the distorted, individuating *content* of such spirituality (2007: 516). He makes the point that, in fact, spiritual quests can end in religion, citing the Taizé community and World Youth Day as cases in point (*ibid.*: 509, 517). Authenticity, according to Taylor, is our inescapable milieu in a secular$_3$ age, and while it is an approach to spirituality that is easily distorted, he has little time for nostalgia:

> If ours tends to multiply somewhat shallow and undemanding spiritual options, we shouldn't forget the spiritual costs of various kinds of forced conformity: hypocrisy, spiritual stultification, inner revolt against the Gospel, the confusion of faith and power, and even worse. Even if we had a choice, I'm not sure we wouldn't be wiser to stick with the present dispensation. (2007: 513)

This background may be seen as providing an explanation as to why thinkers such as Woodhead and Davie can locate the search for the sacred in spirituality rather than in traditional, institutional religion. The Christian past "haunts" us "like a city FM station in the countryside" that fades in and out (2007: 521). Taylor's analysis of the role of authenticity can apply equally to the seeking of the religious and nonreligious, and it is a spirituality that seems to add value as we explore the landscape in more detail.

Before moving ahead, a caveat. At the outset of this chapter, I declared my CR standpoint, cautioning that much of the theory explored in this chapter's literature review would need to be re-examined beneath the CR microscope in Chapter 2. Here is a second occasion on which I need to proceed cautiously. While Taylor is, in the texts we are referencing, in the role of historical philosopher and not sociologist, his theory has sociological import. I have indicated that theory concerning Ages in history and 'social imaginaries' is deliberately epic and sweeping (and I have already warned caution at the outset of this chapter against "general laws"). Furthermore, while Taylor ties authenticity to secularity conceptually, can this be sociologically verified, and if not, does it matter? While exploring Taylor's thought and making initial soundings about what seems to ring true, I refrain from adopting any theoretical positions until we have had a chance to ventilate such theories in the context of CR. I will reach conclusions in 2.2.5.

1.2.2 Fragilisation and the Nova Effect

According to Taylor, the 'great disembedding' process has resulted in eclipsing transcendence and the construction of an 'immanent frame' (cf. 1.1.6). Here, we ask two questions. How, in Taylor's view, has immanentisation shifted our view of society and of God? And, what has been the impact of pluralism on the vulnerability of convictions?

For Taylor, the eclipsing of transcendence achieves a modern moral order in society, civic religion[17] rooted in natural religion that is tethered to a generic and deistic god. While this modern moral order is God's design for humans, its order has an authority in which even God cannot intervene. 'Polite society' is an end of this order:

> …it is a social and civilisational framework which inhibits or blocks out certain of the ways in which transcendence has historically impinged on humans … It builds for the buffered identity in the buffered world. (Taylor, 2007: 239)

This is an order of "mutual benefit" which is "a kind of secularisation of Christian universalism" (J. Smith, 2014: 56). It takes Christian principles (love your neighbour, for example) and asserts that humans are self-sufficient and capable of living such principles

[17] For a thorough outline of this, see Bellah, 1967.

without grace, "immanent[ising] this capacity of beneficence" (Taylor, 2007: 247). For exclusive humanism, flourishing is the end of human activity – with no call to transcend beyond it: altruism through our own efforts is "moral fullness" for exclusive humanism.

Within this context, Taylor argues that Christianity somewhat concedes the game to immanentising forces. In defending transcendence using reason, Christians have unwittingly professed a deistic account of Christianity (2007: 226). Taylor claims that modes of apologetics that attempted to buy into the 'world picture' of the new modern order in fact bought into secularising, Enlightenment narratives, and, diminishing the particularities of Christian belief, presented a more generic deity.[18] Mimicking the stance of the rationalist, their approach to apologetics is to take a dispassionate, 'God's-eye-view' that surveys the whole, forgetting the impossibility of such a position within a truly Christian worldview in which we are situated within a hierarchy of forms. The result is what Taylor terms "pre-shrunk religion" (2007: 226). God is scaled down, and in Smith's words, "plays a function within a system that generally runs without him" (2014: 53). Once God is reduced to a deistic agent, it is far easier to forget, reject or ignore him.

The majority of thinkers we have considered so far would agree that what Taylor outlines above is part of the secularisation process. It engenders, as we have seen in 1.1.5, a fragmenting and pluralising effect, as multiple worldviews – within and outside religions – proliferate.

Taylor describes the 'feel' of the secular age, not as the monolithic, rational experience secularists$_2$ would have us believe. Rather, it is fraught with tensions. As soon as nonbelief becomes an option, every stance is relativised. Taylor describes how the manifold spiritual options produce 'cross-pressure', the feeling in J. Smith's words, "of being caught between an echo of transcendence and the drive towards immanentisation" (2014: 140). Smith describes it as a "haunting" (2014: 3): the "ghosts" of belief "have refused to depart" … "both our agnosticism and our devotion are mutually haunting and haunted" (2014: 4).[19] This cross-pressure results in the 'nova effect', an explosion of myriad options for meaning and significance. Such a pluralising array of options triggers what Taylor calls the 'fragilising'

[18] We can see the continuation of these tendencies in the 'religion as spirituality' accounts. Taylor's view would be that, in broadening belief so wide, they unwittingly secularise religion.
[19] Smith uses the opening line of a Julian Barnes (2009) novel to convey this sense of 'haunting': "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him."

effect. When those close to me do not share the same faith or spiritual outlook I do, my own faith is contested, and therefore, fragilised and vulnerable.

> This kind of multiplicity of faiths has little effect as long as it is neutralised by the sense that being like them is not really an option for me. As long as the alternative is strange and other, perhaps despised, but perhaps just too different, too weird, too incomprehensible, so that becoming *that* isn't really conceivable for me, so long will their difference not undermine my embedding in my own faith. This changes when through increased contact, interchange, even perhaps inter-marriage, the other becomes more and more like me, in everything else but faith: same activities, professions, opinions, tastes, etc. Then the issue posed by the difference becomes more insistent: why my way, and not hers? There is no other difference left to make the shift preposterous or unimaginable. (Taylor, 2007: 304)

Berger agrees that in modernity any conviction will be vulnerable. For the premodern who lived according to a tradition, his or her worldview was given, and thus firmly rooted, they could afford tolerance to those outside their tradition. On the other hand, in the postmodern situation where someone lives according to a (neo-)tradition, they cannot escape the fact that they have chosen that worldview (it is no longer 'given'). Consequently, their position is vulnerable and often aggressive (2014: 10; cf. Berger, 2009). This is where – in line with the comments made in 1.5 above – a seeming hegemony of one position (in Britain, nonreligion) can give the impression of being securely embedded as a 'norm'. Bruce's analysis draws him to make the conclusion that religion is now "alien": it is "now primarily carried by, and hence associated with, people who are demographically, ethnically and culturally distinctive"; in other words, "…religion is what other people do" (2014: 17). Given that the five major populations known for their religiosity in Britain are fairly niche (elderly women, people of the rural peripheries, Poles, West Africans, Muslims) Bruce hazards that the probability of a British person not involved in organised religion developing positive social interaction with any believer is slight. Yet, for Taylor, (seeming) nonreligious homogeneity does not necessarily weaken religion, but rather can increase the fragilising effect; its flattening, immanentising powers in fact contribute to the multiple cross-pressures (creating the 'malaises of immanence'). Insulating oneself in a buffered, supposedly invulnerable life, itself generates the cross-pressure. Taylor writes,

> We are now living in a spiritual supernova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane. (2007: 300)

The experience of this 'spiritual supernova' is heightened for the individual when we considered that their spiritual quest is characterised by the moral ideal of authenticity, their desire being to find "the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity" (Taylor, 1991: 68). The individualism that underpins authenticity can make for a somewhat lonely quest for the believer and nonbeliever alike.

Taylor's approach is different not only in method, but in scope, from the sociologists we have considered in this chapter. As a philosopher exchanging with sociologists of religion, his contributions seem to belong to a different register. However, there certainly seems to be some concordance between Taylor's thesis and positions I have leaned towards in considering the different sociological approaches: there seems to be many notes of harmony. The landscape we have explored is one in which there is a surprising amount of common ground between believers and non-believers, in terms of authenticity driving their quest, of the fragility and vulnerability of their standpoints, and of their common experience of cross-pressure and *ennui*. While such theories still require CR scrutiny, we might still pose a question to the literature explored. How might religion best flourish in this landscape, where, when a secular$_3$ outlook is adopted, different worldviews, secular or religious, seem able to coexist with surprising harmony? To explore this question, I will first turn to what the literature says about how religion as a 'product' might best position itself in this landscape. From there, I will turn to the question of how Catholic parishes currently fare in the so-called secular$_3$ landscape.

1.2.3 Religion as a Concrete Product: Sacred Umbrellas

Within the context of "galloping pluralism", intense cross-pressure and stifling immanentisation, it is clear why Bruce's arguments for a religion having a 'shared social product' are deeply compelling. Supporting this position is research which demonstrates why strict churches are often strong (Kelley, 1972; Iannaccone, 1994). In line with Bruce's scepticism about 'pick-and-mix' religion, Iannaccone argues that when a church reduces 'free riding', the net benefits to the members increase (1997: 35), since average participation and therefore levels of enthusiasm and energy grow. Here, Iannaccone is treating religion as a 'commodity' produced collectively by a congregation (cf. Everton, 2018: 20), in much the same way as Bruce has referred to it as a 'product'.

Of course, the irony here of treating religion as a 'product' concedes precisely to the kind of religion that Taylor has called 'pre-shrunk'. It requires accepting momentarily Bruce's 'closed', immanentist worldview. But this is possible thanks to my 'open take' approach which accepts the validity of other positions. We are exploring the sociological literature about how religion best thrives in the (non)religious landscape we have been defining. And so, for this purpose, we can adopt Bruce's language of religion as 'product' and Iannaccone's market-place analysis, in order to explore this question 'as if God did not exist', while recognising in the background the 'subtraction stories' narrative to which these approaches pay tribute.

In answering the question of how religion best thrives in the postmodern landscape, I explore in a tentative and preliminary fashion Christian Smith's "subcultural identity theory" (Smith, 2003b; Everton, 2018: 34 ff.), before submitting it to CR scrutiny in 2.2.5. C. Smith's theory holds that our primary drive in life concerns the search for meaning and belonging, and we do this by identifying with a narrative that helps us make sense of the world. Smith contends that,

> …for all our science, rationality and technology, we moderns are no less the makers, tellers, and believers of stories that make sense of our existence, history and purpose than were our forebears at any other times in human history. (2003a: 64)

His contention chimes well with Taylor's insights about the moral ideal of authenticity driving a person's quest, where subjective meaning counts for more than objective truth. How can a religion thrive in a pluralistic world that 'fragilises' its views? Smith's subcultural identity theory – based on research about the thriving of Protestant evangelicalism – argues this can happen when a religious tradition embeds itself into a subculture that provides its followers with identity, meaning and belonging (Smith et al, 1998: 118-9). This is very different from Berger's 1967 'sacred canopy' theory, which argued that the fragmentation of society that occurs parallel to secularisation dismantles plausibility structures which in turn weakens religious faith. We have seen that Berger has now altered his approach, and would likely stand closer to Smith's view that the fragmentation of the sacred canopy opens wide the possibility for a multiplicity of 'sacred umbrellas'. Smith expounds this further:

> Canopies are expansive, immobile, and held up by props beyond the reach of those covered. Umbrellas, on the other hand, are small, handheld, and portable, like the faith

> sustaining religious worlds that modern people construct for themselves. We suggest that, as the old, overarching canopies split apart and their pieces of fabric fell to the ground, many innovative religious actors caught those falling pieces of cloth in the air and, with more than a little ingenuity, remanufactured them into umbrellas. In the pluralistic, modern world, people don't need macro-encompassing sacred cosmos to maintain their religious beliefs. They only need 'sacred umbrellas', small, portable, accessible, relational worlds – religious reference groups – 'under' which their beliefs can make complete sense. (Smith et al., 1998: 106)

Smith argues, closely in line with Taylor, that the context of modernity has created the "social conditions which intensify the kinds of felt needs and desires that religion is especially well-positioned to satisfy" (*ibid*.: 116). In the Age of Authenticity, we have noted that seekers on a quest for spirituality – "finding the design of my life myself" (Taylor, 1991: 68) – may find what they are looking for in religion (an example given by Taylor is World Youth Day). When a religious group is able to catch a falling piece of cloth, fashioning it into an umbrella that can satisfy desires for belonging and questions about meaning, religion can thrive. Furthermore, we have seen that it is against a horizon that authenticity retains its significance. Let us now examine two characteristics of religion that, according to Smith, thrives beneath 'sacred umbrellas'.

Both Distinctive and Relevant

Smith's research found that our drive for meaning and belonging is satisfied when we locate ourselves in "social groups (or subcultures) that sustain distinctive, morally orienting collective identities" (1998: 90). Distinctiveness from other groups or subcultures – knowing "who they are in large measure by knowing who they are not" (*ibid*.: 91) – is not a threat to religious vitality, but is rather an indicator of success. Religious identity is defined in relation to "specific, chosen reference groups" (*ibid*.: 104) – those whose opinions we value – rather than negative reference groups whose views we tend to ignore, or who affirm what we do *not* believe or do *not* want to become (cf. Everton, 2018: 39). These subcultures create their own plausibility structures which, while not as extensive and solid as those in Berger's canopy, are nonetheless effective at supporting belief or non-belief. This characteristic of distinctiveness is aligned with Bruce's argument about our being influenced only by those who are like us. Furthermore, conflict with certain out-groups, rather than weakening belief, in fact builds in-group strength. In Everton's words: "External conflict helps build internal cohesion" (*ibid*.:

40). Smith's study of Protestant evangelicals revealed that their sense of being under attack by wider society and culture in fact strengthened their beliefs and commitments (Smith et al, 1998: 139).

What is more, according to Smith, they seemed to grow stronger in the context of – and even thanks to – cultural pluralism and structural differentiation (1998: 89). Pluralism provides "a diversity and abundance of ideological and cultural outgroups" (*ibid*.: 97), against which subcultures can define who they are. Differences and similarities are accentuated during the process of subculture identity-making in order to simplify the process of differentiation (*ibid.*: 93-4). Involving stages of defining, coding, affirming and then policing (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock, 1996), a group socially constructs symbolic boundaries. What is formed in terms of identity, narrative and belonging, is equivalent to what Bruce refers to as a 'shared social product'.

This identity-forming and differentiation from outgroups does not mean, however, that religious subcultures need to be disengaged from secular modernity, according to Smith. His findings here contradict Bruce and Wallis's prediction that, "Religion is a singularly resilient phenomenon which is likely to survive as privatised belief and practice, at society's margins or in its interstices" (1992: 21), as well as Berger's original sacred canopy theory which held the same position (cf. Everton, 2018: 36). On the contrary, Smith found that Protestant evangelicals were *more* engaged in public life, local community, education and discussion with nonbelievers about their faith: "here are people who appear quite engaged with the people, institutions, and concerns of the pluralistic, modern world" (Smith et al, 1998: 75). In other words, religious traditions that thrive beneath a 'sacred umbrella' intriguingly combine a clearly distinct, boundaried subculture with an engagement with and relevance to – rather than disengagement from – modern culture and society.

Deploring those who interpret Protestant evangelicalism's engagement with the world as "accommodation" (1998: 99), C. Smith makes the case that,

> …religious traditions have always strategically renegotiated their collective identities by continually reformulating the ways their constructed orthodoxies engage the changing sociocultural environments they confront. (1998: 100)

This is a "generative process" which prioritises engagement and proximity above ghettoising and distance. This aligns with Bruce's position that, in a society where religion is "alien" to much of the population, it is viewed as an innovation – something out of the ordinary – and, to be taken seriously, "We have to be able to see ourselves in the people representing the innovation" (2014: 16). Exploring how innovation spreads, Katz and Larsfield discovered that, "influencees turn to influentials of their own status level much more often than they turn to those of other statuses" (1964: 238). People are more likely to consider a new idea or innovation "when it is presented to them either by friends or by people who are similar to themselves: same race, same class, same gender" (Bruce, 2014: 16). Unmediated impersonal mass communication "was only effective when it was used by a group of friends as one device among many to bring an associate into the fold" (*ibid*.). Bruce concludes:

> …most of us, for most of our lives, rely on the principle of judging novelties by how well they accord with our existing preferences and with our current notion of who we are. We ask, 'Are the people presenting this new idea my sort of people but just a bit happier, more content or more successful than me?'… We have to be able to see ourselves in the people representing the innovation. (2014: 16)

In other words, Smith and Bruce would be aligned on their understanding of the importance of those representing a religious subculture sharing similar traits with those outside, in order for the subculture to thrive.

While subcultural identity theory will be scrutinised more deeply in 2.2.5, it is worth even at this point interjecting a word of caution. The theory gives rise to questions for Catholic parishes: To what extent is cultural distinctiveness likely to characterise a Catholic parish that finds itself in a structural system (the Catholic Church hierarchy and diocesan system) which traditionally marks its own distinctiveness from the wider culture by promoting a certain homogeneity within? Given this structural background, how likely is the quality of distinctiveness to be applied to the smaller unit of the Catholic parish?

Individual Choice

We have already seen how, as the religious landscape is marked inescapably by pluralism, a religious marketplace is engendered, of which voluntarism is an intrinsic characteristic. It will not come as a surprise, then, that modern believers form their religious identity less through

ascription than through personal choice (Smith et al., 1998: 102). For subcultural identity theory, choice is paramount. As Smith explains,

> For moderns … the ultimate criteria of identity and lifestyle validity is individual choice. It is by choosing a product, a mate, a lifestyle, or an identity that makes it one's very own, personal, special, and meaningful – not 'merely' something one inherits or assumes. (*ibid.*: 103)

In other words, he argues that choice strengthens one's religious belief and one's commitment to a boundaried, identity-forming subculture. This position aligns with the ethics of authenticity that underpin the postmodern person's worldview, according to Taylor. Smith argues against those secularisation theorists who hold that choice and plurality fragment the 'sacred canopy' and therefore weaken belief, even in those who choose it. What is missing from this assessment, Smith argues, is,

> …a recognition that the socially normative bases of identity-legitimation are historically variable. (1998: 102)

In other words, the social structures, values, institutions and culture that legitimise the validity of our identity as belonging to a religious subculture are themselves culturally and historically relative (1998: 103). To apply Smith's argument to the context of this thesis, what legitimises a British Catholic's belonging to a parish in 1950 would not necessarily act as a 'normative legitimiser' in the same way to a British Catholic in 2021. What might have legitimised a person's beliefs and practice seventy years earlier is now epistemologically unsatisfactory. Smith argues that, "the primary socially normative basis of modern identity-legitimation is individual choice" (1998: 103) and if one's religion is default or mindlessly inherited, it is considered inauthentic.[20]

Smith's is a strong argument from the point of view of societal structures, and particularly in the Protestant non-denominational context, where church structures have traditionally been less prominent in acting as identity-legitimisers. Yet, we cannot downplay the universal structural

[20] Smith cites other research which affirms the role of individual choice in validating one's religious identity (1998: 103-4).

dimension of the Catholic Church that is still as solid today as in 1950, even if societal identity-legitimisers have changed.

While there are many points at which 'subcultural identity theory' is in keeping with the pluralistic, religious marketplace of the twenty-first century, we will need to submit it to the scrutiny of the CR microscope before reaching firm conclusions about the extent to which we might adopt it in the Catholic context. In the last few sections, we have indicated at multiple points where theory needs to account for structure in the form of Catholic institutional hierarchy in order to find adequate application to Catholic parishes.

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While Bruce's conclusions about religions barely surviving on the fringes of society do not take account of much evidence to the contrary, I accept his insight that religious traditions require a 'shared social product' in order to be handed down to future generations (cf. Bruce, 2014). The studies he references by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1964) demonstrate how vital social influence and relationships are in the spread of a new or innovative idea. "We have to be able to see ourselves in the people representing the innovation," he argues (2014: 16). These observations are in line with subcultural identity theory, which views religion as providing 'sacred umbrellas' of meaning, identity and belonging. In line with Taylor's moral ideal of authenticity, it is important that religion is a 'shared social product', or in other words, provides a 'horizon' against which a person's search for meaning does not evaporate through its subjectivity into insignificance.

According to Bruce's outlook, these umbrellas would appear at the edges of society, offering alternative worldviews from the expansive, monolithic, nonreligious norm that still provides some form of vast canopy over the agnostic majority. However, a picture is emerging, following the work of Smith, Berger and Taylor, of a landscape as a sea of multiple nonreligious and religious umbrellas – some larger than others – boundaried, and yet influencing each other at their boundaries. Their distinction from other subcultures seems to strengthen, rather than weaken, their identities; and yet these identities are shaped inescapably by what appears to be a growing nonreligious 'norm' umbrella, that entrenches immanence, giving rise to greater *malaise* and cross-pressure. Thus, the landscape for religious survival is not bleak, but replete with opportunity, since, in Smith's words, religion is "well-positioned to

satisfy" the kinds of desires and questions plaguing the postmodern seeker (Smith et al., 1998: 116).

Distinction from other subcultures, engagement with those outside, and individual choice seem to be the features of a religion that thrives in the postmodern era, marked by plurality of (non)religious belief. As we turn to some evidence of how secularisation has affected the parish, we will comment on the presence or lack of presence of these features.

1.3 The Catholic Parish in the Secular$_3$ Landscape

Within this landscape, we now turn to the focus of this study: the Catholic parish. Having posited some preliminary and tentative theory about how religion might best thrive in the secular landscape, we turn to explore the literature on how Catholicism has fared in the parish in the West, to this point.

In this final part of Chapter 1, I want to explore already existing research into how Catholic parishes are faring in the secular$_3$ landscape we have outlined. How effective are Catholic parishes currently at handing on belief as a 'shared social product'?

In this section, I outline some initial definitions before recapping what features we might expect to see in a Catholic parish in the light of Smith's subcultural identity theory, and Bruce's work on how religion might survive in late secularisation. I then explore some of the evidence from sociologists such as Michael Hornsby-Smith, Danièle Hervieu-Léger and Jay Dolan concerning how parishes are being affected by secularisation. From this, I pose some pressing questions to which the plight of the parish in the secular$_3$ landscape gives rise.

1.3.1 Definitions

In the letters of St Paul, early Christian communities or domestic churches are referred to by St Paul as "houses" (Rom. 16:3-5; cf. PC, 6). Michael Sweeney OP comments that, "we have a tendency to burst into poetry when speaking of the parish" (2001: 2). In EG, Pope Francis seems to do just this when he writes:

> The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable

> outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelisers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. (§ 28)

It is helpful initially to consider the legal definition from the Code of Canon Law:

> A parish is a specific community of the Christian faithful established in a particular church, whose pastoral care, under the authority of the diocesan bishop, is entrusted to a priest-pastor, who is its proper shepherd. (CIC 515§1)

Importantly, it is the *diocese* that is the basic cell of the Church: "it is principally in and from the diocese that the one and only Catholic Church exists" (Fox, 2001: 43; see Can. 368; LG 11, 23, 26). The one Church of Christ might properly be considered a church of churches. In each particular church, the full expression of the Church's sacramental life can be seen, as well as a sacramental, hierarchical structure of believers who are constituted in relation to each other around the person of the bishop. This cannot be said for other communities or associations of the faithful.

Canon 374§1 refers to the parish as *part* of the diocese: "Every diocese or other particular church is to be divided into distinct parts or parishes." The diocesan bishop's obligation to divide the pastoral care into distinct parts called parishes originates from the Council of Trent (Kirsch, 1912: Sess. XXIV, c. xiii, De ref.; cf. Fox, 2001: 45). Not only would this arrangement ensure pastoral care of the faithful, it would also guarantee necessary control of the administration of the sacraments (Fox, 2001: 45).

1.3.2 The Impact of Secularisation on the Parish

Three sociologists of religion from three different countries – the US (Dolan), France (Hervieu-Léger) and Britain (Hornsby-Smith) – identify the 1950s and 60s as the point at which parishes started to lose their social and cultural role in the wider community.[21] Up until the 1950s, when

[21] There are two advantages here in citing sociologists from three countries rather than Britain alone. First, there has been limited serious sociological study of the Catholic parishes in Britain – Michael Hornsby-Smith generating the wealth of data available to us; second, drawing from a larger pool gives us a wider-reaching sense of secularisation in traditionally Christian, western countries.

mass immigration to America ended, Dolan asserts that Catholic parishes had had a critical role in the US in integrating immigrants into society: socially and educationally, parishes "contributed to [immigrants'] socialisation into a new identity as Americans" (1989: 46). Catholic neighbourhoods had powerful identity-affirming roles.

Hervieu-Léger's term 'parish civilisation' designates precisely this socialising ability of the parish. In her study of religious change in Brittany in the twentieth century, she describes 'parish civilisation' prior to the 1960s as follows:

> Catholicism constituted a totalitarian system of behaviour and the certainties of religious, moral, social and political faith, inculcated since infancy, in the family, at church, and at school. It furnished the guidelines which ordered everyday life, governed relationships between men and women, parents and children, rich and poor, powerful and powerless, and which determined the relationships between work, life, suffering and death. It was a unified world even if its conflicts did exist, an ordered world where religion – of fear and of mercy for the repentant sinner, of submissiveness as well as of celebration – which kept everyone in 'his place'; the religious fidelity is there experienced under the vigilant control of the clergy, as both the gateway to the other-worldly salvation announced by the Church and the means through the game of intercession and the bias of morality, for coping with life, discarding worries and attracting the harvest of heavenly favours for the family, holiness, the country, all together with the valuation and the compensation for the worries and injustices sustained day after day. (1986: 57, cited in Hornsby-Smith, 1989: 59)

Her descriptive account of 'parish civilisation' is a good example of identity-validation, affirmed through the 'normative legitimisers' of a worldview termed by Hervieu-Léger as "a totalitarian system of behaviour": governed by unspoken "guidelines", a sense of one's "place", and "the vigilant control of the clergy."

Hornsby-Smith describes how this 'parish civilisation' began to collapse across the West with the modernisation of the 1950s and 60s (1989: 60). The religious world grew increasingly alien through the second half of the twentieth century as earlier "legitimisers" weakened:

> …if parishioners still retained a few religious 'reflexes', the ability of priests to guide their everyday conduct in the sexual, ethical, political, or educational domains continued to be eroded… (1989: 60)

The parish's social functions were only retained "in an indirect and attenuated way" (*ibid*.). Similarly, in the US, this 'parish civilisation' weakened once the Catholic neighbourhood was replaced by neighbourhoods of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, and the parish's socialising function was less required.

Dolan, Hervieu-Léger and Hornsby-Smith suggest that this social differentiation has had a number of effects on parishes. First, many parishes have struggled (and still struggle) to find a new social purpose in the light of their traditional social roles having been eroded. This has implications for how the parish understands itself as engaging with those outside its 'sacred umbrella' (or, indeed, if it is correct to think of people as 'outside' the umbrella). Second, as 'normative legitimisers' change, parishioners' attachment to their religion takes on an increasingly voluntarist approach. Third, there has been a diluting of what Bruce calls a 'common stock of knowledge'. This dilution has implications for what parishes have considered their distinctiveness from others. We will examine each of these in turn, commenting on them through the lens of the features identified by Smith as indicative of a parish that would thrive.

Seeking New Social Purpose

Having had its social and cultural purposes stripped away, Dolan describes how the American Catholic parish in the 1960s and 70s increasingly became, "a kind of service station where the people had their religious and spiritual needs satisfied" (Fichter, 1978; cited in Dolan, 1985: 397). Discontent with their remaining, purely religious and spiritual, functions, parishes sought to identify new social, educational and cultural purpose. He writes,

> …breaking out of narrow parochial concerns, [parishes] began to redefine their mission. As one priest put it, they were 'groping for relevance'. Many became community institutions committed to serving the needs of all people regardless of race or religion. (1985: 449)

Interestingly, Dolan points to an instinct towards engagement in parishes during these decades, even if uncertain and "groping". In the cases where this engagement jettisons distinctiveness (that is, where parishes desire to serve all people "regardless of race or religion"), it is not the engagement that Smith refers to, where engagement is coupled with confident distinctiveness.

Hornsby-Smith, too, indicates that many parishes have leant away from 'distinctiveness' and rather towards 'catholicity'. Hornsby-Smith frames the Catholic parish's challenge – one that he views as of "great social significance" (1989: 7) – in terms of fostering unity:

> …to transcend the cleavages between irreconcilables: between 'saints' and sinners, activists and nominal adherents, regular worshippers and the 'lapsed', religious zealots and those who have adapted to the norms and values of secular society, between those in social classes, ethnic groups, generations and sexes, and between those on the margins of society and core members. (Hornsby-Smith, 1989: 6-7)

As parishes have sought to carve out for themselves a new social role, Dolan and Hornsby-Smith's work suggests that they have shied away from their distinctiveness that, according to Smith, would have more likelihood of causing them to flourish in secular modernity. Instead, there has been a tendency towards pursuing engagement that downplays difference and seeks to, in Hornsby-Smith's words, "transcend the cleavages between irreconcilables."

A Rise in Voluntarist Approach

In his study of Catholicism in English parishes in the post-war, post-conciliar years, Hornsby-Smith traces how the erosion of a distinctive Catholic subculture makes a significant impact on the identity-forming role of the Catholic parish. How Catholics formed their identity in the past is no longer effective:

> What seems to be beyond dispute is that, with the dissolution of the distinctive Catholic subculture, there was an associated shift in the nature of Catholic belonging to the Church. No longer was being Catholic a part of one's intrinsic identity, an indication of ancestry and membership of an identifiably distinct religio-ethnic community, something normally ascribed. Now Catholics were increasingly required to make a positive choice and affirm the calling to participate fully in the work of the whole 'People of God'. From being a given aspect of their cultural identity which they

> accepted passively, Catholics were invited to see their Catholic faith as having meaning, and requiring from them a positive commitment to the task of mission in the world. Whereas previously 'cradle' Catholics regarded themselves as Catholics unless they positively 'opted out', there is a sense in which in the post-Vatican Church, Catholics were being asked to 'opt in', rather as converts had always had to. It seems, therefore, that the basis of meaningful belonging for the English Catholic has been transformed from one of religio-ethnic identity to one of voluntary religious commitment. (1991: 9)

Here, there is a clear sense of the shift from one set of 'normative legitimisers' to another. Prior to the 1960s watershed, Hornsby-Smith notes a time when one's Catholic identity was legitimised through one's "ancestry" or belonging to a "distinct religio-ethnic community". However, Smith's contention that these legitimisers are historically and culturally relative is proved correct in Hornsby-Smith's findings that post-1960 Catholic identity is legitimised differently: no longer through ascription, and increasingly determined by "positive choice" and "voluntary religious commitment". The question of how this shift in British Catholicism took place is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it is clearly aligned to the shift into what Taylor has termed the Age of Authenticity, and in keeping with Smith's assertion that individual choice is linked to a religious subculture thriving.

Dilution of the 'Common Stock of Knowledge'

While individual choice enhances a person's commitment to their religion, there is also some evidence that it can dilute what we are calling, using Bruce's term, the 'common stock of knowledge' of a religion. Hornsby-Smith's data gives abundant evidence among Catholics of a "rational-pragmatic worldview and its concomitant emphasis on 'making up your own mind'" (1991: 229). He coins the term 'customary religion' to designate the new, individual style of belonging to the Catholic Church.[22] In this respect, secularisation leads not only to Catholics falling away from their parishes (owing to inadequate legitimisers supporting their practice), but also to a dilution of the 'shared social product' *within* the subculture itself. Secularisation affects not only practice, but also the belief and worldview of a subculture, according to Hervieu-Léger. In fact, the entire "economy of salvation" is redefined (Hornsby-Smith, 1989: 60), even the Church's purpose of redemption:

[22] The term's meaning bears some semblances to Grace Davie's concept of vicarious religion.

> The notion of an atoning ordeal and sacrifice and the age-old and dominant problem of sin and redemption is disappearing. The contemporary emphasis on the close personal relationship with God as a source of fulfilment and on to the riches of relationships with others, is shifting practical Catholicism towards a 'transcendent humanism', offering an 'ethico-affective' and predominantly this-worldly concept of salvation. (Hervieu-Léger, 1986: 57-60; cited in Hornsby-Smith, 1989: 60)

Smith notes that one of the tasks of a sociologist of religion is to "recognise and astutely interpret the difference" between a religion "creatively renegotiat[ing] and strategically adapt[ing] their beliefs and practices to perform more robustly in a modern context" and "bargain[ing] away their core beliefs" (1998: 102). Clearly any reduction of the Catholic faith to 'transcendent humanism' would be classed under the latter category.

Taylor regards the transformation perspective – the perspective that a person can be transformed *beyond* ordinary human flourishing – as the aspect of religion most at risk in modernity. According to Hervieu-Léger's account, the ultimate human goal according to the Modern Moral Order – "a certain kind of human flourishing, in a context of mutuality, pursuing each his/her own happiness on the basis of assured life and liberty, in a society of mutual benefit" (Taylor, 2007: 430) – has crept into the self-understanding of Catholics. In their grappling to retain social and cultural functions, and in their succumbing to the pervading immanentism that secularisation engenders, it seems there has been a risk of parishes leaning excessively towards the 'accommodating' end of engagement.

1.3.3 The Question of Territoriality

Before drawing some conclusions about the impact of secularisation on the parish, we should turn to the question of territoriality. According to sociologist Tricia Bruce, the term 'parish' became more uniform and tied to territory from the sixth century, and parish boundaries were more strictly defined around the time of the Council of Trent (2017: 14). Parishes are, therefore, traditionally "individual geographies of people" (*ibid.*: 15), gathered by postcode or neighbourhood above anything else.[23] It is important to raise the question of territoriality here since, as we shall outline, some of the features of religion that thrives in the twenty-first century threaten to undermine it. Earlier legitimisers of 'parish civilisation' such as Catholic

[23] Although there is also the possibility of extra-territorial parishes. See in particular T. Bruce, 2017.

neighbourhoods, vigilant clergy, and tight-knit communities relied heavily on the parish as a sense of place. While the determination of geography may have made less of an impact on American Catholics,[24] the rise of the digital age and fragmentation of communities make territoriality seem somewhat less fitting to the reality of parish life in Britain, too. While maintaining that the territoriality principle remains in force in terms of canon law, the 2020 Congregation for the Clergy Instruction on the Pastoral Conversion of the Parish acknowledges,

> …the Parish territory is no longer a geographical space only, but also the context in which people express their lives in terms of relationships, reciprocal service and ancient traditions. It is in this "existential territory" where the challenges facing the Church in the midst of the community are played out. As a result, any pastoral action that is limited to the territory of the Parish is outdated. (PC, 16)

Notwithstanding this acknowledgement, given that the principle of territoriality remains in law and underpins theological reflection on the parish, I want explore it in greater depth.

Joseph Fox OP comments that the territoriality principle is not one just of logistical convenience, but rather has a deeper theological meaning. First, territoriality is "a guarantee of [the diocese's] catholicity" (2001: 46) since each bishop in his own area ensures and is a sign of its catholicity (this was a specific concern of the Council of Nicaea). Second, territoriality is a sign of the Church's desire to be "one people of every race and language" (2001: 46). Catholics could be grouped according to ethnic, cultural, social or other grounds; however, territorial division makes no such distinction and demonstrates the Church's catholicity. Intrinsic to the parish's definition is its manifest sense of territoriality: this is "a specific community of the Christian faithful" with a defined, geographical location. Dolan cites processions as a means of "marking off [the parish's] neighbourhood, laying claim to it, and telling people that this was their piece of earth" (1985: 208).

[24] T. Bruce notes that for American Catholicism the more European 'territoriality' principle has always clashed with American 'congregationalism via voluntary association' approach to religion. She writes, "Absent government-established religion – and amidst a plethora of options – Americans have long embraced the freedom to choose their religious communities" (2017: 4-5).

There are four main points I want to consider regarding the relationship between how religion best thrives and the territoriality principle. First, Linda Woodhead makes an interesting distinction between 'societal' and 'sectarian' religion. She holds that until roughly the 1980s, the Church of England embodied a 'societal' religion where, "by virtue of being English you had a right to be baptised, married, buried, schooled. You did not need to be religious" (2016: 257). Christianity as a 'societal religion' had a clear role "to imbue the whole of society with religious value" (2016: 257). Territoriality, one might argue, could be seen as a remnant of viewing Christianity as such a national, default religion, where one automatically belongs to a parish depending on where one lives. The 2020 Instruction acknowledgement of the parish as "existential territory" recognises the risk that holding to the territoriality principle nurtures residual attachment, 'fuzzy' Christianity, and even 'vicarious' religion, at a time in history when deeper commitment is required for religion to thrive in such a landscape.

This leads us to revisit a second, connected point. Might we argue that the principle of territoriality implies a monopoly which demotivates religious mobilisation? As T. Bruce writes,

> In the language of organisations, territorial parishes act as generalist organisations aiming to serve all in a heterogenous market. They target the middle, accessing the highest number of 'customers' (parishioners). (2017: 7)

Stark and Iannaccone's argument for pluralism and a more competitive, supply-side market suggest that a religious monopoly produces,

> …an unattractive product, badly marketed, within a highly regulated and distorted religious economy. (1994: 232)

Certainly, it is not true that Catholicism, as a religious minority in Britain, holds a monopoly. Yet the territorial principle could be argued to have a similar effect in supplying blanket, seamless provision of the Catholic 'product' through the parish system. While the system has the advantage of demonstrating the Church's catholicity, Stark and Iannaccone would argue that, in a pluralist society, it is attempting the impossible: to satisfy all religious preferences via one 'religious firm', and in so doing, inadvertently forestalling its need to create demand, ceasing to meet genuine spiritual need: "where people are not confronted with a range of

efficient religious suppliers, low levels of religious consumption exist" (*ibid.*: 241). Before adopting Stark and Iannaccone's interpretation wholesale, however, we must add a qualification: the existence of structure in the Catholic context does not allow us to read the Catholic marketplace solely in terms of free-market economics: this point will become clearer in 2.2.2 and 2.2.5.

Certainly, in practice, Catholics tend not to abide by the territoriality principle. T. Bruce writes that,

> The panacea of integrated, diverse, generalist territorial churches – drawn together by residential proximity – is often contradicted by American Catholics' lived behaviour. The more heterogenous a population, the more difficult it is to appeal to all through a generalist organisation. … Territory and fixity battle choice and movement. Parish evokes propinquity, but behaviour prompts translocalism. Parishes stay. Catholics move. (2017: 7, 66)[25]

Catholics' 'lived behaviour' tends to lean towards a 'sacred umbrella' approach of voluntary association. This leads us to our third point. We have seen that distinctiveness is one of the marks of religion that thrives – knowing "who they are in large measure by knowing who they are not" (1998: 91). It would certainly have been true that Catholics understood themselves in their distinctiveness from the wider culture at least until the 1960s; at this watershed moment, however, distinctiveness weakened as Catholic parishes tended to play down their differences and appeal to everyone. My provisional suggestion is that the territoriality principle's instinct to treat all Catholic parishes as generalist and homogenous serves more of a 'canopy' mindset than an 'umbrella' one. If we were to acknowledge sufficiently both population heterogeneity and the Catholic behaviour of choosing a community according to preference, would it not be more realistic to view a single Catholic parish as a 'sacred umbrella'? This is a question to which we shall return in 2.2.5.

Finally, individual choice is a mark both of a thriving 'sacred umbrella', and of the Age of Authenticity. In Smith's words, "it is by choosing a product, a mate, a lifestyle, or an identity

[25] T. Bruce comments further that, "If people now bind parishes more than parishes bind people, then people are less bound by the institution" (2017: 69). While certainly not arguing for the disestablishment of institutional Catholicism, she is interested in how dioceses can respond creatively.

that makes it one's very own, personal, special, and meaningful – not 'merely' something one inherits or assumes" (1998: 103). Out of all the features of religion that thrives, individual choice is the one that sits least well with territoriality. In Chapter 2, we shall reach conclusions about subcultural identity theory which will help us decide to what extent individual choice (and, therefore, by implication, territoriality) helps religion to thrive.

While a deep exploration of these questions is beyond the scope of my research, they are background issues that raise their heads when we consider the function and effectiveness of the Catholic parish in the postmodern landscape, and ones that I want to continue to keep in mind.

1.3.4 Conclusions

In the pluralistic, secular landscape, where extreme 'cross-pressure' fragilises individuals' beliefs, how has the Catholic parish fared? We have outlined that, in order to withstand the cross-winds of secularising influences, a religious subculture would need, first, to stand confidently in its distinctiveness (even if this means accentuating differences in order to simplify the differentiation process); second, to engage meaningfully with outgroups by strategically renegotiating and reformulating their collective identities; third, to emphasise individual choice as the criteria for religious identity-validity.

My survey of Dolan, Hervieu-Léger and Hornsby-Smith's work reveals some interesting suggestions. In this rapidly changing landscape, previous legitimisers are eroded, and new ones often fragile and uncertain. This is clear when we note that, while Catholic parishes in the decades since the 1960s have sustained an ongoing commitment to engagement with those outside the subculture, this has been faltering and confused. Distinctiveness has often been sacrificed while beliefs have been accommodated, leaving behind "a low-salience world of pick-and-mix religion" that, according to S. Bruce, is not likely to survive (2002: 105). While an emphasis on individual choice is likely to strengthen a person's religious belief, the transition from previous legitimisers (such as one's belonging to a particular ethnic group) to new ones has been faltering, unclear and slow. The individual believer, then, is left with uncertainty both about the content of the 'shared social product' to which they commit, as well as about what legitimises their belief, whether it be cultural ascription, personal choice, or something else. All this being said, it is unsurprising that the decades since the 1960s have seen such an exodus of Catholics from the Church.

What is clear is that the Catholic parish's context for operating, and therefore its very objectives, have changed. The erosion of Catholic parishes' social functions coincided with a sharp upturn in secularisation, both of which triggered a marked fault-line between the parish and the wider community. While previous fault-lines existed, one like this – caused by the onset of secularisation – has not been known to parishes since the earliest centuries of Christianity. Prior to the 1960s, the Catholic parish had a clear objective of forming a deeply Catholic subculture from which flowed its secondary social and cultural functions. But since secularisation has hit in earnest, a new mission field, and therefore, a new set of objectives has emerged: engaging the secular, (non)religious. What is more, both mission fields (inside and outside of the parish) contain countless individuals steeped more thoroughly in the 'social imaginary of expressive individualism' than in the traditional Catholic subculture. This is the herculean challenge facing the Catholic parish at this change of the Age.

This brief survey of the plight of the parish in the secular$_3$ landscape raises some pressing questions to which my empirical research will seek answers. How might a parish renegotiate its collective identity and reformulate how it engages postmodern sociocultural outgroups, without sacrificing its core beliefs? How might it maintain distinctiveness, with a certain 'common stock of knowledge' while staying authentically engaged with those outside? How might it – at this change of the Age – successfully transition parishioners from one set of identity-legitimisers, helpful in earlier times but no longer validating, to a new set?

The lens through which I propose to answer these questions is 'culture'. Culture is at the heart of the secular$_3$ landscape I have depicted in this chapter. In this final part to Chapter 1, the dissonance between the life of a Catholic parish and the wider culture has become clear. This inner life of the Catholic parish can, too, be termed, 'culture'. In Chapter 2, I turn to examine this concept theologically and sociologically, to explore how we might use it as a means to investigate and propose solutions to the problematic raised in Chapter 1. In adopting a sociological understanding of culture, I can return also to the literature of this first chapter, with a new lens, to examine how theories explored here might be adopted or used in this thesis.

Chapter 2
Approaches to Culture

In Chapter 1, I sketched a sociological picture of the secular/religious landscape in Britain, and have made some initial proposals, based on existing literature and research, on how religion in general, and a Catholic parish in particular, might best thrive in such a landscape. Secularisation has resulted in social fragmentation that has not only damaged the parish's impact, but challenges its deepest sense of identity, purpose and its context for operating. Chapter 1 left us with some searching questions about how a parish might renegotiate its identity, without sacrificing its core beliefs. To this point, the picture has been entirely sociological and historical philosophical. But we need to identify a theological position to undergird the sociological recommendations, and from which to reflect on those recommendations theologically (2.1). From there, we can define more precisely a sociological position regarding how we will identify and define culture (2.2). In a third section to this chapter, we will make comments on the methodological and anthropological approach I will take, as a bridge into empirical methods (2.3).

2.1 Theological Approaches

At this juncture, I pose two important sets of theological questions. First, I lay out the theological position from which I engage with the questions of culture; a significant issue here will be the extent to which modernity ('modern culture') can be embraced (2.1.1 - 2.1.6). The second set of questions concerns the theological implications raised by the sociological picture we have presented, including the suggestions for how Catholicism might thrive (2.1.7).

As a first step, I explore the theological, anthropological principles concerning the relation of the human person to culture, in particular, in light of the impact of secularisation on culture. As we will see, culture is for the sake of the individual in Catholic thought (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), 1881, 1907). My first step, therefore, is to lay philosophical foundations concerning the relationship between the human person and culture.

2.1.1 The Human Person, Culture and Evangelisation

For John Paul II, culture forms not only human products, but more importantly, the human person (Wojtyła, 1993; John Paul, 1988). It can therefore never be neutral, but has inherent moral and spiritual qualities. Secularisation's impact has eliminated faith from much of culture which has left, in John Paul's eyes, a "void":

> The spiritual void that threatens society is above all a cultural void and it is the moral conscience, renewed by the Gospel of Christ, which can truly fill it. (1992: § 3)

Culture is formed by human beings themselves, and this "spiritual [and] cultural void" has developed thanks to the plummeting of believers in the West, and the rise of the Nones. This is a dynamic situation, because as a culture is formed by humans, it in turn forms them:

> The cultural atmosphere in which a human being lives has a great influence upon his or her way of thinking and, thus, of acting. Therefore, a division between faith and culture is more than a small impediment to evangelisation, while a culture penetrated with the Christian spirit is an instrument that favours the spreading of the Good News. (1979, foreword)

The emergence of a strongly secular$_3$ society has achieved "an entire reconfiguration of meaning" (J. Smith, 2014: 47) according to Taylor. This is not, as understood by many secularists themselves, "the old world with the God-supplement lopped off" (*ibid*.: 17); rather, it is what Taylor calls a "mutation":

> It is not that we have sloughed off a whole lot of unjustified beliefs, leaving an implicit self-understanding that had always been there, to operate at last untrammelled. Rather one constellation of implicit understandings of our relation to God, the cosmos, other humans, and time, was replaced by another in a multifaceted mutation. (Taylor, 1995: 31)

What Taylor has termed "mutation", Alisdair MacIntyre has called "severance", John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, "heretical reconstruction" and William T. Cavanaugh, "secular parodies" (cf. Rowland, 2003: 13). This "reconfiguration of meaning" has taken place throughout the shifts from Ancien Régime to Age of Mobilisation through to Age of

Authenticity, and what is most significant about it for our purposes in exploring culture is that 'meaning' becomes embodied in 'practice'. Taylor defines culture as, "a constellation of understandings of person, nature, society, and the good" (1995: 27), and, according to Taylor and the other theologians named above, as these "understandings" are mutating and, becoming embedded in social practices, they form culture (cf. Rowland, 2003: 13).

If the human person is the 'end' of culture (Wojtyła, 1993), and if the seismic shifts involved in the change of an Age entail radical "reconfiguration of meaning" – towards a 'social imaginary of expressive individualism' (Taylor, 2007: 486) – that becomes embedded in culture, is it possible for a person to withstand such forces? What can the Church hope to achieve?

For John Paul, hope rests in Christ. When an individual encounters Christ, it leads to a renewal of "moral conscience" (see 1992: § 3); their faith transforms his or her acting and way of life. In other words, culture is not the only force affecting the human person. When a person encounters Christ and responds with faith (cf. CCC 142-144), the faith 'radiates' into the world as culture thanks to human agency (cf. Dulles, 1993: 144; Wojtyła, 1993: 265-6). Human culture, the way people live together, becomes Christianised; a way of life is embodied that supports one concretely living one's faith – not only forming and humanising the individual, but redeeming and healing him. This picture is far less bleak than the (correct) prognosis that Godless culture inexorably drains human life of its spirituality. John Paul's understanding of human agency, and of the unceasing action of Christ in the world, enables a hope-filled outlook, where God, through human agency, is still active in culture.

What does this mean for the parish? We have recognised that, pre-1960s, human culture within and outside the parish community would largely have been homogenous, supporting similar cultural values and lifestyles. The parish's clear purpose would have been to maintain a Christianising culture, influencing both those belonging to the community and those outside. Yet today, with dramatic cultural shifts, and the public widely steeped in the 'social imaginary of expressive individualism', the parish's purpose has been differentiated (cf. 1.3.2). Beyond the Catholic parish 'sacred umbrella' is a pluralistic landscape with manifold, non-Christian cultural values. This new landscape means that the parish's purpose of forming a Christianising culture *within* the parish is distinct from its mission *outside* the parish. This latter purpose, I would suggest, is a new mission field, which the Church is failing to reach with its current

apparatus. Is the culture of this new mission field compatible with, or hostile to, the Christianising culture a Catholic parish aims to build? Are the two opposing forces; or is there common ground between them? How can Christianity transform modern, secular culture?

John Paul holds two realities in tension. While recognising that all human cultures need redemption (cf. LG 17; RM 54), he acknowledges that a culture is never entirely without good, humanising elements:

> When the Church enters into contact with cultures, she must welcome all that is compatible with the Gospel in these traditions of the peoples, in order to bring the riches of Christ to them and to be enriched herself by the manifold wisdom of the nations of the earth. (1987: § 5)

In Chapter 1, we identified that to reach this mission field, it is likely we need to appeal to the values of the Age of Authenticity. We have determined that the human person is shaped by and shapes culture. Whether the Church should appeal to the values of the Age of Authenticity in order to reach those outside the parish 'sacred umbrella' is a theological question, and how we answer it depends on our understanding of the relationship between culture and the Church. These are the questions to which we shall turn now.

2.1.2 Theological Foundations: Can Modernity Be Embraced?

Preliminary theological groundwork has identified how the human person is both the 'end' and the 'agent' of culture; that a 'mutation' in meaning in culture leaves the Church renegotiating a different stance from which to evangelise; and that, translated into the parish context, this stance constitutes a new mission field.

Now we reach a knotty theological question which lies at the heart of our theological positioning in relation to culture: *is modernity a friend or a foe?* It is a question that is answered by theologians in manifold different ways. The changes for parishes necessitated by this shift from one Age to another, if they are to thrive, require some theological reflection, and I shall undertake this using theologians Joseph Ratzinger, David Schindler, and Tracey Rowland among others.

Where relevant, I shall also draw on Richard H. Niebuhr's typology of five ways that Christ and culture can be seen to engage with one another. Written in 1951, other writers have since attempted adaptations that allow for a more 'post-Christendom' perspective.[26] Yet, Niebuhr's classic fivefold scheme is still eminently applicable in delineating the different ways that contemporary theologians perceive the interactions between Christ and culture. Typology is inherently limited (cf. Niebuhr, [1951] 2001: 43-44): since there is no such reality as the 'pure Gospel' or a 'neutral culture', the two realities of Christ and culture can never be adequately, commensurably compared. The Gospel, as soon as it is expressed, is culturally embedded; it does not exist outside culture. And culture, as we have seen, is always marked by values that are either humanising or dehumanising. Every encounter of the Gospel message with culture will be necessarily unique. And yet, having added this proviso, Niebuhr's five types do lend thoughtful analysis that help us understand different theological perspectives.

2.1.3 The Context of *Gaudium et Spes*'s Approach to Culture

Nowhere, perhaps, are the different viewpoints concerning the relationship between the Church and culture seen so clearly than in the debates surrounding Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) in general – and its ten paragraphs on culture in particular – was the locus of much debate of the questions outlined above, and for this reason, it makes a good lens through which to unpack and discuss theological questions.

To sketch out some context before we dive into the theological questions, it is worth identifying two notable themes of GS. First, the inescapable optimism of the document; and second, the document's moving away from a classical, aristocratic understanding of culture, and towards a more sociological understanding of the plurality of cultures. We shall consider each in turn.

It has been well commented upon that Pope John XXIII's opening of the Second Vatican Council was intentionally optimistic, eschewing any tone of condemnation (cf. Gallagher, 2003: 48). In his commentary on GS, Joseph Ratzinger comments,

> [Pope John XXIII's] optimism essentially consisted in rejecting the romantic nostalgia for the Middle Ages which makes people forget that every age belongs to God and can

[26] Craig Carter (2006) *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christendom Perspective* is one such example; Tim Keller also uses an adapted version of Niebuhr's scheme in *Center Church* (2012).

> and must stand open, each in its own time, to God's eternal present. (Ratzinger, 1969: 123)

The tone of GS, then, is steeped deeply in what Ratzinger calls an "affirmation of the present" (*ibid*.): the optimistic take on modernity strikes one even more strongly when reading the Pastoral Constitution over half a century after it was written. The beginning of the section on culture heralds, "a new age of human history" (§ 54), repeating the opening of the document which perceived "a new stage of history" (§ 4). This new age awakens bright opportunities: "New ways are open… for the perfection and further extension of culture" (§ 54). It is lavishly confident in progress, and dreams almost of a utopia: "a more universal form of human culture, which better promotes and expresses the unity of the human race to the degree that it preserves the particular aspects of the different civilisations" (§ 54); "the unification of the world" (§ 55), "the birth of a new humanism, one in which man is defined first of all by this responsibility to his brothers and to history" (§ 55).

Yet, there are signs throughout of a tempering of this language, intended, according to Roberto Tucci,

> … to relieve the anxiety of those fathers who regarded such … assertion[s] as naïve or presumptuous or even perhaps inspired by a dangerous optimism of an evolutionary kind, on the lines of Teilhard de Chardin. (Tucci, 1969: 257)

Article 56 in particular concedes to the problems to which a new global culture could give rise. Yet, even here, to promote dialogue and avoid dogmatism, it expresses its reservations as a series of questions (*ibid*.: 261): how can the "heritage of tradition" and "the faculties of contemplation and observation which lead to wisdom" likewise be preserved? As the cultures of the élites become "more refined and more complex" how might less developed cultures not be left behind?

With the hindsight of half a century's history, one cannot help but note a certain naivety in this perhaps overly affirming stance, however, we might at the same time appreciate the Taylorian 'open take' approach adopted by the Council.

The second notable theme of GS is its modern approach to culture. Certainly, there is still evidence in GS of a classical, aristocratic understanding of culture, a sense of self-cultivation summarised by the German term, *Bildung*. It is evident in article 53, for example, when it speaks of "the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments" (cf. Gallagher, 2003: 43). Theologian Kathryn Tanner, summarising how culture as *Bildung* stems from Goethe, describes it as, "A self-disciplined person replaced the creature of God, reshaped and reformed by saving grace" (1997: 4). Yet the Council wanted to avoid suggesting that culture was "valid only for those who have received an elaborate education, i.e. 'cultivated persons'" (Tucci, 1969: 255; see also Gallagher, 2003: 43). Decisively influential was an intervention made by Cardinal Lercaro during the first conciliar debate on the schema:

> Above all the Church must acknowledge itself to be culturally 'poor'; it must therefore wish to be more and more poor. I am not speaking here of material poverty but of a particular consequence of evangelical poverty precisely in the domain of ecclesiastical culture. … The Church must have the courage, if need be, to renounce these riches or at least not to presume on them too much and to be more and more cautious of trusting them. For in fact they do not always put on the stand the lamp of the gospel message but often hide it under a bushel. They may prevent the Church from opening itself to the true values of modern culture … Such renunciation of the cultural patrimony is not an end in itself but a way to acquire new riches and, humanly speaking, greater intellectual acumen and a more rigorous critical sense. (Tucci, 1969: 267)

His concern is reminiscent of Ratzinger's own reflection on an earlier article of the Constitution that, "The Church is not the petrification of what once was, but its living presence in every age" (Ratzinger, 1969: 116). Yet Lercaro's call for the Church's cultural poverty is not without controversy (cf. Rowland, 2003: 27-8) and the background to the objections he faces will be explored below.

Such views as expressed by Lercaro permeated the Council, and in response, GS notably adopts both, "a more phenomenological or anthropological view of culture as embodied in a whole range of social systems and expressions" as well as "an explicit recognition of the plurality of cultures" (Gallagher, 2003: 43). Tucci comments,

> While remaining on the descriptive plane, and therefore abstaining from a formal value judgment, it nevertheless implies a favourable attitude to cultural pluralism and the researches of cultural anthropology and ethnology. (Tucci, 1969: 256)

There are clear connections here with the sociological contours of secularity in Britain I outlined in Chapter 1: a landscape where Nones tower above any other (non)religious denomination, and yet, profess wide-ranging variety in their spiritual outlook. GS's use of modern approaches to culture recognise a landscape where heterogenous and pluralistic societal structures make any position contestable and vulnerable, causing what Taylor terms 'cross-pressure', the experience of being pulled in multiple spiritual directions, where "both our agnosticism and our devotion are mutually haunting and haunted" (J. Smith, 2014: 4), a bewildering nova effect. On a macro level, seismic shifts are radically fragmenting and reconfiguring the "constellation of understandings of person, nature, society, and the good" (Taylor, 1995: 27). In adopting this modern approach, GS acknowledges this emerging reality, and on the whole, it acknowledges it with optimism.

In line with John Paul II's later thought on man as the end of culture, Tucci describes the Constitution's approach to culture as "the activity by which man, acting on and transforming the world around him, develops and transforms himself" (1969: 255). The position is clear: the intransitive outcome of culture (the transformation of the human person) is of a higher priority than the transitive product (the artefact). References to the humanising role of culture are scattered through the text:[27] "Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture", and culture "renders social life more human" (both § 53) are just two examples.

GS's optimistic approach opens itself to critique which would label it, according to Richard Niebuhr's fivefold model, as a 'Christ of culture' approach. Some theologians, as we shall see, find the Council's adoption of modern understandings of culture problematic: we will explore to what extent GS can be labelled as a 'Christ of culture' model before turning to the critique of other theologians.

2.1.4 *Gaudium et Spes*'s 'Christ of Culture' Approach

[27] Perhaps attributable to Cardinal Wojtyła, who contributed towards GS, and whose writings about culture contain an abundance of such ideas.

Of Niebuhr's fivefold typology of the ways Christ and culture relate, there are times when GS seems to slip into one at the furthest extreme: 'Christ of culture' (2001: 83-115). Here, culture has a seemingly equal dignity with Christ, and he is understood through its lens. In this model, both the elements of a culture that accord with Christ, and the teachings and actions of Christ that harmonise with the culture, are mutually highlighted. Reason alone is needed, and there is no conflict between Christ and culture. Christ stands for, "a peaceful, cooperative society achieved by modern training" (Niebuhr, 2001: 91).[28] Indeed, at times the document speaks of the values of the modern world ('solidarity', 'unity', 'responsibility') as though they embody Christianity (or indeed, the values of the modern world!) completely. Under this type, we might be tempted only to think of a certain kind of cultural Christianity that emphasises a domesticated, ethical dimension of the Gospel; but Niebuhr argues that cultural Christianities of many different persuasions may be included under this umbrella. Any outlook that absolutises the culture of a particular era as thoroughly in accord with Christ, falls into a 'Christ of culture' typology. In Niebuhr's words, "man's greatest task is to maintain his best culture" (*ibid*.: 105). Those who adopt this model have an abiding optimism about the progress of culture within history, and therefore, this type belongs to the optimistic, almost triumphalist thinking of modernity.

According to this outlook (and it must not be forgotten, in line with comments above, that GS does *not* consistently hold a 'Christ of culture' approach), modern culture is most certainly friend rather than foe. GS seems to welcome these seismic shifts with open arms: "a new age in human history," "the unification of the world," "the birth of a new humanism". There are great advantages to this stance: it means that, with a Taylorian 'open take' humility, we can welcome the 'spirituality of the age' to which the nova effect gives rise, since the opportunities to religion, if it positions itself in epistemologically and culturally relevant ways, are manifold.

And yet, Chapter 1 revealed that this 'new age' has at the same time had a devastating impact upon regular Catholic parish life: the splintering of 'parish civilisation', of traditional legitimisers of Mass attendance and parish life, the erosion of and groping for social and cultural roles. Catholic parishes have not adapted to the new spiritual and cultural climate, and so have found themselves subject to the corroding acids of modernity. In this light, one might legitimately argue that any openness to modernity is naïve and suicidal self-destruction. Surely

[28] In Taylor's terms, we might see this as the replacement of Christ with the Modern Moral Order.

the ‘take’ of ‘expressive individualism’ is culturally incompatible with the Christianising culture a Catholic parish would want to create? Perhaps the most theologically faithful relationship between Christ and culture does *not* align with sociological predictors of growth? The next group of theologians we will consider hold that GS’s ‘open take’ involves too much risk for precisely these reasons.

2.1.5 Christ against Culture: The Inherent Atheism of Modernity

Modernity has brought with it “an entire reconfiguration of meaning” (J. Smith, 2014: 47), or a ‘mutation’ according to Taylor. This is not to be taken lightly according to theologian David Schindler, who explains why it is important to consider the meaning of ideas and the form they give to external structures, institutions, and, we might add, culture. Sin, the falling away from God’s will and grace, surmises Schindler,

> …affects the order of intelligence, and thus the cultural institutions which are ‘in*form*ed’ by intelligence. In other words, there is such a thing as a ‘bad’ (badly ordered) idea, which in turn can give the wrong sort of ‘form’ or ‘shape’ to institutions, and indeed to the way of life of a culture. It is the internal structure provided by an ‘idea’ which gives external structures (institutions and the like) their *meaning*. (1995: 196)

This explains why it is important to probe the “constellation of understandings of person, nature, society, and the good” (Taylor, 1995: 27) of modernity, since these will provide the underpinning meanings of external structures and institutions. Aidan Nichols OP agrees with the need to tease apart the “internal structures” behind external ones:

> It is chimerical to suppose that such refined metaphysics is superfluous for cultural activity … Every practice will always turn out to have some kind of ‘onto-logic’, and so a spirituality or anti-spirituality that animates it. If it is not Trinitarian – which is as much as to say, if it does not bear the form of love – then it will, in the modern era, almost certainly be mechanistic and controlling, for the underlying logic of the Enlightenment traditions is that ‘self-centric’ variety which most naturally expresses itself in reliance on technique, privileges go-getting activity not contemplative receiving, and treats efficacy as assertion rather than creative generosity. (cf. Rowland, 2003: xiii)

Schindler, with a focus on his own country (the USA), traces closely how, since its founding in the eighteenth century, reason (truth) has been increasingly abstracted from love, and nature from grace, to the point where, today, they are in "outright opposition" (1995: 210). While reason and nature assert their autonomy, love and grace are "marginalised as arbitrary matters best kept private" (*ibid*.). These are "logical" developments, according to Schindler, since although entwined with love at the time of America's founding, there was already a mechanical or rationalist worldview prevalent:

> …however much America's moral and religious will, for example at the time of the founding, resisted the mechanising and relativizing of personal relations and the secularising of culture, America's intelligence – that is, (largely implicit) ontology – was already sowing the seeds whose 'logical' fruit is this more complete mechanising of relations and secularising of culture. (*ibid*.: 211)

Schindler's reasoning derives from a von Balthasarian theology which would want to see the Trinitarian form imaged in culture and institutions, in order for them to be truly Christian. The unravelling of form and love, and the beauty which integrates them, in culture, is owing to an intrinsic rationalism or mechanism in modernity that leads logically away from the Trinitarian form and towards atheistic secularism. What results is a culture with the form of a machine that is resistant to grace according to Schindler, and in von Balthasar's words:

> … a world without women, without children, without reverence for love in poverty and humiliation – a world in which power and the profit-margin are the sole criteria, where the disinterested, the useless, the purposeless is despised, persecuted and in the end exterminated – a world in which art itself is forced to wear the mask and features of technique. (von Balthasar, 1969: 114-5)

John Paul II, too, in a homily in Denver, referred to the "culture of death" (1993), where the world is organised without God, and therefore, necessarily organised too against humanity (1989: 266).

> More than ever, in fact, man is seriously threatened by *anti-culture* which reveals itself, among other ways, in growing violence, murderous confrontations, exploitation of instincts and selfish interests. (1984: §8)

Catherine Pickstock, too, refers to the "polity of death", while Alasdair MacIntyre refers to culture that is toxic to the flourishing of virtue and the natural law.

Understandably, then, theologians in this vein – such as Rowland, Nichols and Schindler – are critical of the Council's approach to modern culture in GS. The fathers' over-reaching praise of modern culture, including mass culture, took little heed of the warning signs of a dangerous 'naturalism' in their outlook, where nature so absorbs grace that its activities are no longer seen as needing any radical transformation from God, missing God's transcendence and his eschatological call (cf. Schindler, 1990: 11). The Constitution's pronouncements of major anthropological change brought about by modernity sound more Hegelian to Rowland than Christian (2003: 25). In GS 54, the neo-classical, aristocratic references to culture as *Bildung* – the formation of the self – seem to lack reference to grace; *Bildung* based upon one's own efforts alone can be nothing more than Pelagian. Rowland comments that this section "remains suggestive of the Liberal-humanist tradition with its idea of self-perfection through education and exercise of will-power" (2003: 25). A second example of over-reaching 'naturalism' in GS is a tendency towards demythologising Christianity to the "secular present" (MacIntyre, 1984: 143). In the Church's reach towards relevance and accommodation, Rowland notes a desacralisation of Catholic institutions and the rise of "experts". Counsellors trained in professional detachment take over the work of nuns.

> …it is certainly clear that many institutions under the patronage of the Church are adopting or have already adopted the same institutional practices as those operative within secular institutions, and that this phenomenon continues to be justified by references to 'professionalisation' and the Church's need to consult secular expertise. The concept of 'professionalisation' is not itself subjected to analysis but operates in an ideological fashion to paper over contending vision of education and health care. (2003: 59)

Rowland's "excessive hostility" towards, and "root-and-branch rejection" of, modernity (Ollivant, 2004) would place her theological outlook in the camp of Niebuhr's first type, 'Christ

against culture', which would come closest to arguing that culture without Christ is lost. While not corresponding completely to Rowland and Schindler's stance, this type is a viewpoint that can be seen in different moments in history: when believers were called to leave the 'world' for monastic life, for example, or when missionaries call converts to abandon entirely the customs of their society (Niebuhr, 2001: 41). Revelation alone would tend to be the corresponding epistemological standpoint to this type (although in Rowland and Schindler's case, they would of course permit of reason and natural law, too). Put somewhat simplistically, in this model, sin and evil are located in the 'world' from which believers are called to withdraw. This viewpoint is held by those today for whom modern culture is so far from Christianity, that the best option for Christians is to hunker down within their own communities in order to preserve their own culture and values.[29]

If we apply Rowland's standpoint to the parish, what is fundamentally problematic in her approach is her failure to concede two mission fields, and therefore the differentiation of the parish's purpose. There is little evidence of her conceding that mission *outside* the parish – that is epistemologically aligned with mass culture – might need to be differentiated from the purpose of forming a Christianising culture *within* the parish. Rather, her approach to the evangelisation of culture is stated clearly at the outset of her book:

> Christians immerse themselves in the culture of the Church, and the Church, through her sacraments, liturgies, scholarship, religious and laity, Christens the world. (2003: 2)

This is an outlook that seeks to maintain "the culture of the Church" against the ravages of modern corrosion; it is perhaps even an attempt to maintain the sacred canopy. In an image used by C. Smith (1998: 98), it is the approach of a Christian standing on an island, throwing sand at the threatening waves that seek to overcome it, while at the same time, causing the island to grow ever smaller. There is only one option for such a theological approach that side-lines and is wary of engagement with modern culture, and that is to hunker down, to shelter itself from the 'cross-pressure'.

[29] Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option* (2017) is a contemporary example of this. A more extreme example of hunkering down away from the influences of wider culture is communities such as the Amish.

There are dangers in such anti-modern sentiments. One is a failure to recognise that the Church herself is part of the *genus humanum*. Ratzinger is critical of a "deeply-rooted extrinsicism of ecclesiastical thought" that allows the Church somehow to stand outside the human race, "retreat into a special little ecclesiastical world from which an attempt is then made to speak to the rest of the world" (Ratzinger, 1969: 119). Ratzinger is here, of course, speaking about theological technique, but his warning can equally apply to any notion that one can extract oneself from the cross-pressure of modernity; after all, the believer's worldview is just as saturated with the 'malaises of immanence' and the 'nova effect' as the non-believer. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, does the 'culture of the Church', referred to by Rowland, untainted by the immanence and cross-pressure of post-modernity, actually exist? Theologian commentator on Vatican II, Albert Dondeyne, remarks that,

> It would be mistaken to regard this catalogue of difficulties and dangers as a kind of jeremiad. Pessimism and optimism are out of place here, since both are a flight from harsh reality. Only by having the courage to place oneself in the midst of these contradictions can we meet the cultural task of the present day. (cited in Semmelroth, 1969: 180)

This leads to the second set of dangers in an anti-modern approach. Interestingly, Rowland's reference to 'the culture of the Church' must refer to a particular historical moment in the Church's life, since culture shifts according to the people who form it. And yet, any approach that heralds a 'golden age' of the Church – whether it be the twelfth or the twentieth century – slips into the 'Christ of culture' type. As Rowland positions herself as 'Christ against (modern) culture', she simultaneously crowns another culture (perhaps twelfth century European) as 'the culture of the Church', her optimism mirroring GS's optimism for the twentieth century. By contrast, Dondeyne is more moderate in his critique of modern culture, open to the possibilities of what Taylor calls this new 'mutation':

> The democratisation of culture has not merely encouraged a certain uniformity; it has also created new forms of culture, among them what modern literature calls 'mass culture'. Under the influence of the aristocratic cultural ideal of former times, this is very superficially dismissed as cultural decadence, whereas in reality it is a genuine contemporary cultural creation. (cited in Semmelroth, 1969: 178)

> The endeavour is immediately apparent here to present the ideal of a more universal human culture, not as a kind of levelling down into uniformity with impoverishment as its result, but as a growth of unity in diversity, i.e. as an even more comprehensive 'catholicity'. (cited in Tucci, 1969: 259)

This theological stance acknowledges the flaws of modern culture at the same time as accepting the new situation, where the canopy has splintered into umbrellas, recognising not only "impoverishment" but also new possibilities, in diversity, for catholicity. It is an approach that does not concede to the inevitability of secularisation narratives. Ultimately, Dondeyne's approach believes that modern culture is redeemable, and he is joined by a host of theologians – Ratzinger, Guardini and Carrier – who would agree. It is to this perspective that we shall now turn.

2.1.6 Christ Transforms Culture: The Pneumatological and Kairological Approach

Seemingly in praise of modernity, John Paul II claims rather boldly that,

> If by modernity we mean a convergence of conditions that permit a human being to express better his or her own maturity, spiritual, moral and cultural, in dialogue with the Creator and with creation, then the Church of the Council saw itself as the 'soul' of modernity. (1994: 5)[30]

Romano Guardini, while not a proponent of mass culture, suggests that religious response to modernity has often made Christianity seem "an enemy of the human spirit" (1950: 61). Echoing our conclusions above that we cannot extract ourselves from the modern 'social imaginary', Guardini adds, "our age is not just an external path that we tread; it is ourselves" ([1959] 1994: 81). Sociologist Jose Casanova is hopeful about the possibility of the redemption of modernity. He surmises that, where the Church discerns and accepts what is genuine in modernity, it finds new authority for itself, at the same time as saving modernity from its own "inhuman logic" (1994: 234).

[30] Rowland suggests this is an "antithetical affirmation", at odds with others of his pronouncements (see Rowland, 2003: 44).

Given the dehumanising effects of what John Paul called at other times, 'anti-culture', what theological basis is there for accepting modernity? This can be found – viewed as a possibility of transforming what MacIntyre calls the "secular present" – in Ratzinger's pneumatological and kairological treatment of history:

> Certainly the Church is tied to what was once and for all, the origin in Jesus of Nazareth, and in this sense it is obliged 'chronologically' to continuity with him and the testimony of the beginning. But because 'the Lord is the Spirit' (2 Cor 3:17) and remains present through the Spirit, the Church has not only the chronological line with its obligation of continuity and identity, it has also the moment, the kairos, in which it must interpret and accomplish the work of the Lord as present. (Ratzinger, 1969: 116)

Obedience to this *pneuma* is indeed a summons; although Ratzinger does recognise that discernment of spirits is needed so that "the moment of the Holy Spirit may not imperceptibly change into the momentary spirit of the age" (*ibid.*: 117). Yet for Ratzinger, aligned with Guardini, John Paul II and Casanova, there is no possibility of fleeing contemporary culture; in Dondeyne's words, there is need for "courage to place oneself in the midst of these contradictions [so that we can] meet the cultural task of the present day" (cited in Semmelroth, 1969: 180). Louis Dupré expresses well the reconfiguration that has taken place, to which all the theologians we are considering have referred:

> Modernity is an *event* that has transformed the relationship between the cosmos, its transcendent source, and its human interpreter. (1993: 249)

As implied by Guardini, Ratzinger and Dupré, adaptation is needed to find one's place in this transformed relationship, to discern, interpret and respond to "the moment of the Holy Spirit" (Ratzinger, 1969: 117). Where Dondeyne calls this a "cultural task", theologian Hervé Carrier speaks of "cultural action", discernment that can "mould cultural reality" (1993: 62). All strongly agree that spiritual aspects of the culture need to be retrieved, for a healing of modernity to take place. Without this, modern culture remains, in Taylor's term, 'mutilated'.

Such a theological approach is most closely aligned to Niebuhr's 'Christ transforming culture' type. It would be true to say that parts of GS and even parts of Rowland and Schindler's approach align to this type too. This is a conversionist approach which acknowledges a dualism

or distinction between Christ and culture: it neither rejects human institutions, nor sees them as wholly negative. It relies on a narrative of Christ as the Redeemer not only of the individual (as per the dualists, cf. Niebuhr, 2001), but of the individual in community, and of all being. Nature is not totally corrupt, and as such, Creation and Incarnation (not just Redemption) are strong theological themes (*ibid.*: 192-3). Where dualists would seek the replacement of culture with a new creation, 'Christ transforming culture' seeks its conversion. Reason does not run parallel to revelation, each separate in their own spheres. Rather, revelation transforms reason. Yet, this model takes seriously the reality of sin and its effect on nature: echoing a key idea of John Paul II, Niebuhr articulates the effects of sin in this way: "corrupt nature produces perverse culture and perverse culture corrupts nature" (*ibid.*: 211). As such, nature and culture need redemption.

What this approach avoids is an 'either/or' dichotomy, the choice between Christ *or* the world: this is the temptation when one considers what John Paul II calls the dehumanising effects of 'anti-culture'. Jacques Maritain, speaking of forced oppositions that originated following the Reformation and the Renaissance, warns of the danger of such dualism:

> For pessimism detaches the creature from any link with a higher order. And then, as one must in any event live, the creature takes his ease and makes himself the centre, in his own lower order himself. (1969: 25)

In other words, since there is no escape from living a human life: in forcing an opposition, the default outcome will be anthropocentrism, whose ultimate end is atheism. In our disenchanted world, it is more possible to live without Christ than it is to live without modern culture, since experientially we are steeped in the latter but not the former.[31]

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I argue that the conversionist type is most suited to the postmodern, secular$_3$ landscape, since it is a model of the Church facing outwards with a mission towards people and therefore culture; for the parish in particular it is an acknowledgement of the new mission field. By contrast, Rowland's model of Christians "immersing themselves in the culture of the Church"

[31] Buckley, 2004: 83-98 traces the path from anthropocentrism to atheism. See also J. Smith, 2014: 47-59 for Taylor's account.

belongs to another era, a time when the Church could rely upon an intact sacred canopy, when the fabric of Church culture barely knew fragmentation, a culture so robust and encompassing that one could immerse oneself in it. This was the era of 'parish civilisation', when culture within the parish and outside it held values and lifestyles in common, where the identity-legitimisers of earlier times were still propped up by societal plausibility structures. Taylor speaks of the hold of this past era, particularly of how contemporary conversions to Catholicism can also be conversions to the social imaginary of the past:

> The hold of the former Christendom on our imagination is immense, and in a sense, rightly so. … the sense can easily arise, that the task of breaking out of the dominant immanentist orders today is already defined by the model of Christendom. (2007: 734)

Taylor points to the danger in this, a nostalgia for the deepest sources of European Christian culture, which can lead to a kind of conservativism that castigates the unfettered subjectivism of modernity. Furthermore, there is a danger of forgetting or reducing the 'gap' between ideals of City of God and the earthly city (cf. 2007: 735). This is the dualism of which Maritain wrote. Mitigating these dangers, the conversionist approach best offers a way for Catholics to bear the tension of inhabiting an immanentist world, and yet transforming it with the presence and power of Christ.

2.1.7 Theological Critique of the Features of Thriving Religion

In 1.2.3, I outlined certain characteristics of 'sacred umbrella' religion that would thrive in the postmodern age. We now turn to examine these characteristics theologically.

Authenticity and Individual Choice

In 1.2.1, I introduced Taylor's concept of authenticity in recognition of the genuine insights of those who observed religion morphing into new spiritual guises. Central to this spirituality is individual choice which, as we have seen, marks Catholics' lived behaviour of voluntary association, in spite of canonical principles to the contrary, such as the territoriality principle (cf. 1.3.3; T. Bruce, 2017: 7, 66).

The question we must ask here is, does Catholicism sacrifice its core beliefs by aligning itself with a new cultural epistemology that regards individual choice as a normative identity legitimiser? Plausibility is culturally (not theologically) determined, and legitimation that relies

on ascription and not individual choice is seen by some theologians as more in keeping with Catholic theology. David Schindler writes:

> …a conception of the self as primitively constructive or creative is at the source of the autonomy that must be challenged if we are to have principled *ontological* protection against relativism and atheism. … Man is therefore not first creative but first receptive – and obedient. Or better, man is properly 'active' only as anteriorly contemplative. (1995: 217)

In Schindler's eyes, the voluntarist approach succumbs to the empty and mechanistic thoughts and actions of the Western soul: "there is a direct link between a subjectivity (or will) become arbitrary and an objectivity (or reason) become 'techne'" (1995: 199). Schindler posits that too often in modern culture there is "an absence of a primary horizon of beauty" (1995: 206) and here, he finds common ground with Taylor. We recall that while Taylor considered authenticity a moral ideal, "very worthwhile in itself", it is nevertheless in need of "retrieval" (1991: 23). Both Taylor and Schindler would agree that one's identity cannot be constructed without a background or horizon "against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense" (Taylor, *ibid*.: 34). He terms this background a *horizon*: one thing we cannot do, "if we are to define ourselves significantly, is suppress or deny the horizons against which these things take on significance" (*ibid*.: 37). Where Schindler differs from Taylor is in his lack of Taylor's optimism that a horizon may be retrieved. Schindler seems to consider the risks of relativism and atheism too great. Yet Taylor accosts those who think in such terms: they do not "seem to recognise that there is a powerful moral ideal at work here, however debased and travestied its expression might be" (1991: 15), and in so doing, "miss a good part of the spiritual reality of our age" (2007: 509).

My theological stance outlined in 2.1.6 is essentially Taylorian. My position is that a religious subculture 'sacred umbrella' may align its plausibility structures epistemologically with those of the wider culture without sacrificing its core beliefs. Conditioned by the culture's epistemology they embark on their Christian journey according to the same principles: a search for self-fulfilment, authenticity, a desire to "find… the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity" (Taylor, 1991: 68). The Church, in embracing her new mission field, appeals to those steeped in authenticity when she expresses the faith in

epistemologically relevant ways. The moral ideal of authenticity is distorted only when a horizon is not in place.[32]

Distinctiveness and Engagement

Two signs of vitality in a parish – distinctiveness and engagement – on the surface may seem mutually exclusive, yet in fact coexist in thriving 'sacred umbrellas'. C. Smith's research suggests that parishes that thrive embrace their distinctiveness, knowing "who they are in large measure by knowing who they are not" (Smith, 1998: 91), and yet do not form ghettos, but rather engage in public life and local community. My analysis of GS's theological standpoint above resulted in my adoption of a position that leans in favour of a conversionist approach – treating the realities of grace and nature separately, but without the oppositions of dualism – and eschews the risks of collapsing the two distinctive realities together, to which a 'Christ of culture' approach gives rise. Through this theological lens, I want to consider more deeply these two features.

We can view distinctiveness from two different perspectives: a Catholic parish's distinctiveness from the outside, secular world, and its distinctiveness from other parishes. The first I will treat together with the question of engagement, so let us turn to the second. In 1.3.3, I used T. Bruce's research to show how the parish traditionally operates as a generalist organisation in a heterogenous market. Theologically this relates to the principle of 'catholicity', but there is a strong sociological argument that the territoriality principle is not conducive to Church growth in a fragmented, post-Christian society. I have argued that the generalist mentality serves a 'canopy' mindset, as if seamless parish provision is itself a type of all-encompassing canopy. Catholics' lived behaviour, on the contrary, itself fragments the canopy: voluntary association is both stimulated by and encourages a 'market mentality', where one chooses a parish according to preference: Mass times, ethnicity, liturgical preference, parish programmes. While Catholics increasingly operate according to the principle of 'distinctiveness', parishes continue to behave according to a 'generalist' identity, targeting the 'middle' (Bruce, 2017: 7). Parishes' lack of responsiveness to this new market reality is well summed up in Bruce's pithy, "Parishes stay. Catholics move" (2017: 66). This situation does not require theological analysis, since it is a reality of pastoral model rather than theology.

[32] We will see examples of this in the data in 4.2.4.

In Chapters 4 and 5, we will examine the data to uncover whether and to what extent parishes pursue distinctiveness, and with what results.

Engagement is the feature that requires greater theological analysis. We have seen the tug-of-war in GS theology between balancing an 'open take' attitude towards the world, and warding off "a dangerous optimism of an evolutionary kind, on the lines of Teilhard de Chardin" (Tucci, 1969: 257). It follows logically from my conversionist position that, for 'sacred umbrellas', distinctiveness from the outside world serves – not as a threat to – but as the *basis* of engagement. This is very different from the 1970s American Catholic parish groping for relevance, minimising difference and thus positioning itself "to serve the needs of all people" (Dolan, 1985: 44; cf. 1.3.2). It is different, too, from the criticism Rowland levels against Christianity's attempts to develop a "relevant content and function" (2003: 93), dismissing calls for relevance as Heideggerian, adopted by Christian communities with some Christian gloss. Such a focus on relevance, she says, mimics Heidegger's call for an "authentic" response to the situation of the self, finding itself thrown into the culture of modernity (cf. Rowland, 2003: 13-4). In Alisdair MacIntyre's words,

> The function of religion which consisted in providing a radical criticism of the secular present is lost by those contemporary demythologisers whose goal is to assimilate Christianity to the secular present. (1984: 142-3)

However, here Rowland and MacIntyre are caricaturing a 'Christ of culture' position which we are certainly not proposing. Ratzinger's "affirmation of the present" (1969: 123) refers not to MacIntyre's "secular present", but of the present in which God continues to act. Engagement, if it is to have a redemptive purpose, accommodates not so much to the culture's 'content and function' but to its style and mode, in order to be recognisable to the culture. In Taylor's terms, we can accommodate to the framework of the "secular present" / Age of Authenticity spirituality without adopting its content (Taylor, 2007: 516; cf. 1.2.1). Rowland's characterisation of engagement and relevance too easily avoids Ratzinger's emphasis on the pneumatological summons to "interpret and accomplish the work of the Lord as present" (1969: 116).

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When John XXIII called in 1962 for openness to the world in his Opening Address to the Second Vatican Council, he was calling the Church, in Taylor's terms, to inhabit the immanent frame as a 'Jamesian open space', where we hold our position as an 'open take', recognising the legitimacy of contestability, "where you can feel the winds pulling you, now to belief, now to unbelief" (Taylor, 2007: 549). Taylor criticises the "spin of closure which is hegemonic in the Academy" (*ibid*.), as we saw in the secularisation narratives of Chapter 1. In the face of such overconfident spin, it can be tempting for Christians to settle for their own closed spin, "a way of convincing oneself that one's reading is obvious, compelling, allowing of no cavil or demurral" (Taylor, 2007: 551). Yet GS recognised that such a stance would be catastrophic for evangelisation and, furthermore, dismissive of authenticity, the moral ideal in the spiritual reality of our age. While acknowledging the dangers of modernity's atheistic leanings, my position in this thesis is that modern culture is indeed redeemable, and that, while we cannot accommodate its content, we can adopt its cultural epistemology. Failing to separate content from style forces us into insisting on an opposition between Christ and culture which – following Maritain's warning – is more likely to result in atheism than in attracting nonbelievers.

2.2 Sociological Approaches

Adopting a conversionist understanding of how grace and nature work together allows for two distinct spheres of reality that can be considered on their own terms. It is to this second sphere – culture in its sociological reality – that we turn in the second part of this chapter.

In Chapter 1, I noted that sociology's multi-paradigm reality can be problematic. Having surveyed the literature concerning religious decline in Chapter 1, I have made some provisional indications about the sociological theory I will adopt as background to my research. Now I am reaching the point where I will able to place my own philosophical and sociological stakes in the ground. We will see that, having completed this step, I will need to return to some of the sociological theory in Chapter 1 to examine it in this new light and, where necessary, qualifying and revising some of the provisional stances I have taken.

In the first section, I lay out some pointers for the critical realist, theoretical background of my thesis. With this foundation in place, I proceed to define the dimensions that will feature in the sociological position I adopt: structure, agency and culture. I then identify any qualifications

needed of sociological theory used in Chapter 1. Finally, I construct a bridge into the empirical part of this thesis, by outlining critical realist approaches to and considerations for methodology.

2.2.1 Theoretical Background

In the social sciences, there are myriad stances on how we can know social reality and how we can explain it. In this section, I address both these questions, and in so doing, explicitly identify the philosophy behind my work since it is important to give one's philosophical standpoint visibility (cf. C. Smith, 2017: 7).

What we can know

First, what we can know of social reality? A traditional epistemological standpoint taken by sociologists has been one of neo-Kantian idealism, where all that can be known is of the mind, that is of the noumenal. This stance would be discordant with my theological stance, where the mind can appropriate, if fallibly, knowledge of being. What is more, an idealist stance causes problems for sociology as we shall see below.

Roy Bhaskar makes a case for naturalism, "an essential unity of method between the natural and the social sciences" (2015: 2), where the nature of the object of social science determines the form of its science, with all the ontological, epistemological and relational considerations this entails. Bhaskar's call in the philosophy of science for a transcendental realism and critical naturalism was foundational for what is now known as critical realism. This is a philosophy of science that adopts ontological realism and epistemic relativism (cf. Archer et al. 2004: 1-22). In Margaret S. Archer's words:

> Critical realism is a philosophy of science that stands midway between a positivism that has failed and a more current postmodernism, which, from a critical realist perspective is equally flawed. (2004: 1)

Ontological realism defies neo-Kantian epistemology: reality objectively exists independent of our knowledge of it. The intransitive object of science exists independently of the science, while the transitive object of science are the theories we seek to transform into deeper knowledge about the world (Collier, 1994: 50-1). Andrew Collier names the postmodern move to allow epistemology to swallow up ontology the "epistemic fallacy" (1994: 76-85; see also

Archer, 2004: 2). The position held by those who commit this fallacy is that there is no epistemologically objective view of the world, or in other words, that we cannot know reality. Critical realists hold that it is possible to know what exists (ontology) and how it functions. Yet Archer posits an important epistemological distinction: our concepts and knowledge claims about reality (the transitive dimension) are to be distinguished from reality itself independent of our knowledge (the intransitive dimension) (2004: 2). In Collier's words, "However much science deepens its knowledge of its intransitive object, its product remains a transitive object" (1994: 51). Those who deny the intransitive dimension commit the epistemic fallacy which is according to Porpora, "a hallmark of positivism" (2015: 17).[33]

Critical realists accept that while the mind constructs the noumenal dimension, the phenomenal (reality in itself) is impossible to know directly. Thus, the second part of my standpoint is epistemic relativism: the transitive object of our knowledge is subject to continuous change. This is not judgemental relativism which would hold that all judgments are equally valid and would therefore counter ontological realism. Rather, it is a standpoint that recognises, first, that all our judgments are socially and historically situated and therefore fallible; and second, that each person is positioned to see the world differently. In line with critical realists, I hold that it is consistent to hold an ontologically realist position (reality exists independently in the intransitive dimension) alongside epistemic or experiential relativism (in the transitive dimension) (cf. Archer, 2004: 5).[34] Epistemic relativism is consistent with the Taylorian 'open take' position I outlined in 1.1.6 above. It employs a Socratic openness, a preparedness to alter one's own view. In Archer's words,

> … the only methodological *a priori* is continued openness to dialogue, dialogue especially with those with whom we disagree. (2004: 9)

Fallibility is an important property for knowledge of social reality. To defend objectivity and "claim objective truth for one's statements is to lay one's cards on the table, to expose oneself to the possibility of refutation" (Collier, 1994: 13). There is a vulnerability to claims of objective knowledge. By contrast, the Cartesian search for knowledge is a search for certainty

[33] The epistemic fallacy is almost a majority position within postmodern social sciences.
[34] It is also in line with C. Smith's weak social constructionism – humans construct a dimension of human reality, such as institutional facts – in contrast to a strong social constructionism which holds that reality itself is a human, social construction (cf. Smith, 2010: 122).

rooted in empiricism, "sense-data, which, since they are purely appearances in the minds of individuals, have nothing to be mistaken about" (*ibid*.). Non-realist approaches to knowledge can "make cognitive discourse invulnerable to cognitive assessment" (*ibid.*: 15). By contrast, the realist approach is open to criticism and transformation: previously unobserved features of the objective reality being studied can be pointed out to the realist. As Porpora expresses it,

> To the extent that positivists believe *mistakenly* than an epistemologically *foundational* road to certainty is possible, so too do they believe, as it turns out *correctly*, that we can arrive at truth. (2015: 19)

So, we can know social reality, but surely the metaphysical stake I have placed in the ground in the first part of this chapter is problematic. While C. Smith holds an ontological realist position, permitting questions of ontology (what exists in causal relationship to other entities that exist) (cf. Smith, 2017: 7-8), he chooses to bracket the question of metaphysics (ultimate reality, including the question of God) momentarily, which is "more ambitiously concerned with the fundamental nature of all being and the ultimate constitution of the totality of reality" (2017: 7). Bracketing metaphysical questions is the standard approach in sociology: in the case of a religious community, the sociologist interprets the practices, discourses and texts with no recourse to possible metaphysical realities, but as telling a story about the community. But I argue in line with Archer et al. that,

> …vibrant religious communities do not understand themselves as telling stories about community. They understand themselves as telling stories that in some sense and to some degree also express myths about the wider cosmos that we all commonly inhabit. (2004: 9)

When the sociologist focuses exclusively on the 'text' (whether that be discourse, practice or another object of study), the text's relationship to independent reality and to the individual (the two end-points in the experience) becomes severed. In Archer's words, "methodologically to bracket the world is in essence to break apart a dialectical process and to examine only one element – the social element – in isolation" (2004: 13). Thanks to a shying away from the intransitive dimension of independent reality, social science often attempts to understand the text without the two end-points. The critical realist approach I want to adopt, however, is holistic – interested in the dialectic as a whole – and places emphasis on experience: the

individual's experience of reality that is both mediated through practices, discourses and texts, and expressed through them.

A third dimension of my realist standpoint is judgemental rationality. This is the contention that we can discuss publicly our claims about reality: "By comparatively evaluating the existing arguments, we can arrive at reasoned, though provisional, judgments about what reality is objectively like" (Archer, 2004: 2). "Provisional" is a key term here, since our commitment to epistemic relativism requires us to be open to the discovery of new information.

So, it is possible to know reality, in a qualified sense, but how? Bhaskar's "depth realism" indicates how this is possible. Deeply immersed in an empiricist epistemology, non-realist sociologists admit of the existence of experiences as within the domain of the empirical; some will also admit of the existence of what Bhaskar terms "events", within the domain of the actual.[35] Events are not on the same level as experience, since all aspects of an event cannot be apprehended by anyone. "Actualism" is a sociological position coined by Bhaskar where only verifiable experiences and events can be referenced by the sociologist in reaching conclusions about social reality. Actualists would deny the existence of invisible underlying structures that determine events (often termed "mechanisms"). These are entities with powers "by virtue of their respective inner structures" (Collier, 1994: 8), which include potentiality which may go untriggered, unexercised or unperceived, e.g. "power-over" someone else (Porpora, 2015: 34). A deep exploration of the stratified nature of reality is needed to uncover such mechanisms. Empiricist approaches are unable to undertake such enquiry,

> …lacking the concepts of the stratification and differentiation of the world, one is unable to think the irreducibility of transfactually active structures to events, and the effort, which is science, needed to reveal them. (Bhaskar, 2015: 49)

Yet, if we *are* able to undertake this scientific work, the mechanisms we uncover can be used for explanatory purposes, and it is to this question that we shall now turn.

What we can explain

[35] Bhaskar's depth realism is illustrated in chart form (2008: 13).

A non-realist, empiricist sociological stance tends to limit one's capacity to explain, locating the succession of cause and effect at the level of events only. This results in two different approaches to explanation. On the positivist side, the covering law model of causal explanation records relations among events, designating these "event-regularities" where an antecedent event is linked by logical deduction to a consequent event (Porpora, 2015: 35). Ontologically, "events are welcomed; entities and relations are not" (*ibid*.: 33), meaning that explanatory power is extremely limited. Such an approach to explanation results in lawlike propositions: as theory, these are narrow, nomothetic and "conceptually thin" (*ibid*.: 35). These are problematic, too, because they are deterministic: necessary connections between events are posited that can surely never be the case in social science when we take account of agents' freedom.

As well as being limited, such explanations work only in a closed causal system. Critical realism contrasts a closed system – where a single, causal mechanism operates in isolation and where the same input leads regularly to the same output – with an open system where "an unlimited number of ever-changing causal processes operate simultaneously, interfering with each other in irregular ways" (*ibid*.: 43). The open system scenario is preferred as consonant with the real world, and not presuming the unachievable laboratory conditions of a closed system. Collier observes that in a closed system, passive observation alone would suffice to establish laws; experiments are necessary *because* nature is an open system: "it is a multiplicity of mechanisms jointly producing the course of events" (1994: 46). In other words, a positivist approach to explanation in social science is ultimately not possible.

The second approach is interpretivist which too accepts the concept of causality in the covering law model. Yet it distinguishes the natural order – the domain of determinism and of causal relations which can be studied objectively – from the human order – the domain of freedom and reason which is studied subjectively, from within. While interpretivism accords human actors with the freedom that the positivist approach does not, its conclusions mean that causality and therefore explanation has no place in human sciences. Hermeneutic methods such as history or ethnography are suited to describing but not explaining.

Yet a critical realist approach asserts that ethnography can explain precisely by depicting in a compelling way. Depth realism means that critical realists can take a stratified approach to studying and explaining social reality. As Collier and Porpora put it,

> Effects are ascribed to causal powers, causal powers to the inner structure (and place in larger structures) of the causal agent. (Collier, 1994: 60)

> CR conceptualises causality as a relation between causal structures or *mechanisms* and *causal properties*. (Porpora, 2015: 46)

Collier explains Bhaskar's argument for the stratification of nature, the exploration of which does not come to an end: "When one mechanism has been identified and described, and shown to explain various phenomena, it becomes itself something to be explained" (1994: 48). Where lower generative mechanisms explain higher ones, we dig deeper, developing our knowledge of social reality. Bhaskar's transcendental realist approach differs from a positivist one where laws are deterministic. On the contrary, Bhaskar holds in line with an open system outlook, that causal mechanisms do not necessitate events to occur:

> The objects of experimental activity are not events and their conjunctions, but structures, generative mechanisms and the like (forming the real basis of causal laws), which are normally out of phase with the patterns of events which actually occur. (Bhaskar, 2015: 9)

> …just as a rule can be broken without being changed, so a natural mechanism may continue to endure, and the law it grounds be both applicable and true (that is, not falsified), though its effect (i.e. the consequent) be unrealised. (*ibid.*: 11)

To conclude, my critical realist positions allows us to both know social reality, although fallibly, and to posit explanations, even if they may be temporary.

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At the close of Chapter 1, I proposed that we answer questions about how a parish might thrive in the secular$_3$ landscape through the lens of culture. Now that we approach this lens sociologically, I want to argue that we cannot use merely the solitary lens of culture; we must supplement this with two other lenses: those of structure and agency. The reasons why this three-pronged approach is needed will become clearer; however, I want initially to use my

argument for social ontology as a springboard into an argument for the need of structure in social theory.

Bhaskar outlines the two foundational approaches to the relationship between an individual and society (2015: 25-79). According to a Weberian, 'voluntarism' approach, society is constituted by individuals' intentional behaviour: in other words, society is an aggregate of individuals' behaviour and therefore can be understood only as a disaggregation of that behaviour. By contrast, a Durkheimian, 'reification' approach conceives of a society with a life of its own, "external to and coercing the individual" (Bhaskar, 2015: 32). An empiricist outlook is suspicious of a Durkeimian, collectivist approach which accords ontology to social reality. In reaction, ontology has been collapsed into epistemology in many streams of the social sciences, leading to a "cultural reductionism" (Porpora, 2015: 25). When there is no possibility of ontological objectivity, there is no extra-discursive social structure: everything becomes culture. Following Bhaskar, I want to take a line that eschews the extremities of both voluntarist and reifying approaches, and adopt a line that treats both social structure and people authentically. These two elements and the connection between them will be explored initially, creating the context into which I can introduce culture.

2.2.2 Structure

Critical realism stands for "an analytically distinct, extra-discursive conception of social structure" (Porpora, 2015: 26). So, what is structure? Porpora defines it as, "[the] totality of social relations that characterise that society" (2015: 98), and elsewhere, "objective social relations that were material or independent of people's thoughts" (2015: 24), while C. Smith defines it as, "Durable systems of patterned human social relations" (2010: 322). Both define structure ontologically, although we might question whether Smith's "durable patterns" belong to a critical realist definition of structure. Such a term would seem to lean closer to an empiricist, actualist standpoint: "every time A happens, B happens" (Collier, 1994: 7).

Importantly for Bhaskar (and contra Weber, Durkheim and Berger et al.'s later construal of how people and society are connected (see Bhaskar, 2015: 32)), structure exists prior to people and its conditioning power exists outside ourselves. It does not have a life of its own as per Durkheim, and neither do individuals create society, as per Weber. Rather, individuals reproduce, modify and transform society, working on given social objects. Bhaskar terms his Aristotelian conception of human activity, "the transformational model of social activity":

> Society is both the ever-present *condition* (material cause) and continually reproduced *outcome* of human agency. (2015: 34-5)

There is a "dual character", therefore, to structure just as there is a dual character to human praxis, which involves both a conscious production and an often unconscious reproduction of the conditions of production (that is, society). Bhaskar is proposing a relational conception of sociology that avoids characterising social structure with voluntaristic idealism, and people with mechanistic determinism.

We referred in 2.2.1 to the stratified nature of social reality and the work of science in "digging deeper". Here, we can say a little more about the causal mechanisms that give rise to events that social science will want to uncover. First, it must be recognised that these are social products themselves and that people reproduce both social products as well as the conditions of their making (Bhaskar, 2015: 38). Second, these mechanisms cannot be empirically identified independently of the events they govern: "not only can society not be identified independently of its effects, it does not exist independently of them either" (Bhaskar, 2015: 45). What is more, neither do the mechanisms exist independently of the conceptions people possess when engaged in the activity, that is, of theory. In Bhaskar's words,

> Society may thus be conceived as an articulated ensemble of such relatively independent and enduring relative structures. … a complex and causally efficacious whole – a totality, which is being continually transformed in practice. (Bhaskar, 2015: 38, 53)

We have begun to paint a picture of how structural mechanisms are related to people. Bhaskar asserts that the point of contact between human agency and social structures are precisely positions occupied and practices engaged in – or, in other words, "positioned-practices" (Bhaskar, 2015: 41). When we speak of structure as "social relations", as in Porpora's definition, these relations are conceptualised as between positioned-practices, rather than between the individuals who occupy or engage in them. These relations are the "prior, objective, albeit invisible relational conditions that give rise to [certain] behaviour" (Porpora, 2015: 100). These are material relations that exist independently of being observed or conceptualised; Porpora gives the example of the ratio of jobs to job seekers (*ibid.*: 103).

Porpora convincingly makes the case, in line with my theoretical arguments in 2.2.1, that "material relations", while not visible, can certainly hold causal power. Someone acting in their own "interest" is a material relation within a free market; here, "interest" is a causal structure or mechanism where, "causality involves the operation of these mechanisms and properties in situated, conjunctural contexts" (Porpora, 2015: 46). Potentiality can be contained within a mechanism, that is, a power that goes untriggered.

As we develop an understanding of the role of structure, it becomes clearer why we cannot collapse it ontologically into culture. For sociologists in the Weberian tradition referred to at the end of 2.2.1, whom we shall name Individualists, structure is unverifiable, therefore non-existent, and ascribing causal power to invisible or even inactivated mechanisms impermissible. Archer terms their position one of "Upwards Conflation", since people "monopolise causal power which therefore operates in a one-way, upwards direction" (1995: 4). The subjectivity involved in their position is to be applauded and should not be lost altogether and yet, as Bhaskar points out, "real subjectivity requires conditions, resources and media for the creative subject to act" (2015: 37). At the opposite end of the spectrum are Durkheimian Collectivists who magnify the place of structure or the "systemic" as Archer refers to it (1995: 11) to the point of eclipsing the role of agency. It amounts to what Archer calls, "Downwards Conflation" where individuals' roles in influencing and shaping society go unacknowledged (*ibid.*: 3). For them, "structure floats above individual actors in an autonomous realm of social facts, governed by its own laws" (Porpora, 2015: 105).

Both of these "actualist" positions are distortive since they render either agency or structure as inert, dependent variables, neither recognising the power lying in both. Essential to a critical realist standpoint is to treat structure, agency and culture as analytically distinct (Porpora, 2015: 119). Indeed, the existence of structure is a common-sense conclusion when one observes how, despite its reality being denied, it creeps unnamed into mainstream sociological accounts nonetheless (cf. Porpora, 2015: 97). My relational, realist understanding of how society and people interact allows each to be treated in their integrity.

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Before moving to the second dimension of critical realism's three-pronged sociological approach, I want to indicate some of the structural elements in the landscape of my research so far, in order to concretise these concepts. The first banner under which we will consider

structure is the secularisation of society, while the second is the hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church. In Archer's words, "…all structures manifest temporal resistance and do so generically through conditioning the context of action" (1995: 77), and therefore, it is vital to understand the structural context for the sake of appreciating its conditioning power.

Statistical analysis in Chapter 1 demonstrated that smaller numbers of Catholics practising, rates of disaffiliation and the rise of the "nones" have led to a secularising of society and of parishes where few of the 'normative legitimisers' that would have existed in the 1950s remain. The rate of cradle Catholics practising (13% weekly) is a structural property that conditions the context in which popes have called for action in the encyclicals on evangelisation. Yet, in this context, a pluralism of religion has emerged in an example of "double morphogenesis", or pre-grouping and regrouping of religious groups over time. This results in a certain fissiparousness in religious groups, and is an example of interaction from religious agents evolving religion institutionally (although this varies between religions and denominations). In Archer's words,

> As it reshapes structure, agency is ineluctably reshaping itself, in terms of organisation, combination and articulation, in terms of its powers and these in relation to other agents. (1995: 74)

Individual choice featured as an element of evolving religion. In the context of structure, we gain a new appreciation for the impact of the systemic that impinges on an individual. A methodologically individualist stance is not possible, and despite this emerging theme from the literature, the systemic must not be downplayed:

> …knowledge about it, attitudes towards it, vested interests in retaining it and objective capacities for changing it have already been distributed and determined … Voluntarism has an important place in morphogenesis but is ever trammelled by past structural and cultural constraints and by the current politics of the possible. (Archer, 1995: 78, 79)

The second structural reality is the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. As is clear from 1.3.1, the parish is a part of the diocese, which is a cell of the Church. This structural reality conditions the applicability of 'subcultural identity theory' onto Catholic parishes, which differ in their structural context from evangelical churches. The 'sacred canopy' was a macro-structure, consisting of props holding up religion in institutional ways detailed in 1.3.2. The global

Catholic hierarchy maintains a macro-structure which nevertheless still impinges on parishes as 'umbrellas', micro-structures, or interactional groups (cf. Archer, 1995: 11). The Catholic macro-structure both assures the endurance of parishes, while simultaneously increasing their vulnerability as 'umbrellas' in certain aspects (e.g. limiting autonomy through determining the priestly leadership of the parish; implementing diocesan-wide policies; determining the amount of a diocesan levy).

The hierarchical nature of the Catholic Church results in other structural relations such as the differing roles held by clergy and laity. These structural relations concern the received nature of the priesthood and the relations of sanctifying, teaching and governing that exist between clergy and laity. Yet, structural relations are not unchanging, and the data will allow us to explore the extent to which agency influences and changes structural relations.

Critical realism is one of the few sociological metatheories that acknowledges the role of structure. Critical realists argue that it is essential to recognise its existence in order to be open to the possibility of structural change. Failing to recognise its existence, we collapse societal structure into the laws of nature, of which change is impossible. Such an outlook,

> …leads to the paring down of programmes of reform to small-scale tinkering such as can be achieved without structural change. (Collier, 1994: 11)

Acknowledging structure, therefore, far from lionising it, recognises its capacity for elaboration and change.

2.2.3 Agency

The possibility for change leads us to the question of agency. While holding the necessity of distinguishing structure and agency, Bhaskar claimed that, "the causal power of social forms is mediated through human agency" (2015: 26). Archer critiques those who presume we can transcend the differences between structure and agency / objectivity and subjectivity: they are treated as "ontologically inseparable because each enters into the other's constitution" (Archer, 2003: 1). Such an amalgam, dissolving one into another, does not allow for reflexivity, for a person or a group to reflect critically upon their context. In reality, people find themselves confronting structure as given realities that pre-existed them. Indeed, "structure and agency can only be properly linked by examining the *interplay between them over time*" (Archer, 1995:

65): this requires analytical dualism – since "separability is indispensable to realism" (*ibid.*: 70) – as well as "temporal distinction" – since while structures are not co-variant with time, they are normally "out of phase with the pattern of events which actually occur" (Bhaskar, 2015: 9). Critical realists therefore hold two ontologies: one which is objective (social emergent properties), and one which is subjective (agential emergent properties).

To demonstrate the necessity of such a stance, it will be instructive to outline opposing positions – what happens when structure and agency collide, when the subject (in the term used by poststructuralists) or the self (Symbolic Interactionists) becomes 'de-agentified' in a movement of Downwards Conflation? In Porpora's words,

> Contemporary sociological theory does not want consciousness or at least centred, reflective, self-aware consciousness. It expressly does not want intentionality… [but rather] the unconscious, hypnotised responsiveness to surrounding stimuli of Bourdieu's habitus. (2015: 130)

Porpora gives two examples – relational sociology and practice theory – both of which resist analytical dualism. He critiques relational sociology for missing the 'acting' part of agency: agency stays inside people's heads, which means that intentionality to take a specific course of action is missing (*ibid.*: 132). There is a resistance to unite an agent with his actions, expressed well in the words of relational sociologists, Emirbayer and Mische: for them, agency is conceptually distinct from "all empirical instances of human action … there are no concrete agents, but only actors who engage agentically with their structuring environments" (1998: 1004). Such a conception of the agent avoids affording him with "concreteness", with an ontological category. In so doing, an interpenetrating of the agent with his "structuring environment" is admitted. It is impossible to take this step without a subsequent "de-agentification".

Porpora's second example concerns the practice turn in sociology, where conscious action is replaced with "non-reflective, non-intentional routine or habitus" (Porpora, 2015: 149). Here, behaviourism is de-agentification by another means: what is in someone's head is diminished, replaced with unconscious, un-thought and automatic behaviour. Yet a blurring between structure and agent still occurs. In Loïc Wacquant's words, "the relation between social agent and the world is not that between subject (or consciousness) and object, but a relation of

'ontological complicity' or mutual 'possession'" (1992: 20). Porpora surmises that practice theorists, in reducing agency to generally automatic behaviour, have reacted against intentionality in the guise of rational choice theory, where action involves "an extended, discursive calculation of means to ends" (2015: 151). Yet he argues that intentionality can be quick and instinctive, not necessarily long and reflective. Conscious, motivated action is at play even when we follow a mundane, oft-repeated daily routine: there are still teleological, purposive mechanisms at work.

These accounts demonstrate what is lost when agency and structure are conflated. A critical realist account depicts personhood (this term is favoured over 'self' or 'subject' as the one used in other disciplines such as philosophy and law), on the other hand, as "a centre of consciousness that is the intending agent" (Porpora, 2015: 141). Intentionality need not be laboured, and it is always connected with its effects in history. There is no artificial separation between reflective behaviour and habits. Just as mechanisms act as causal powers in the structural sphere, so too are there psychological mechanisms irreducible to physical operations in the agentic sphere (Bhaskar, 2015: 81).

"Causal power of social forms is mediated through human agency" (Bhaskar, 2015: 26), and the mediating role is taken on by reflexivity (Archer, 2003). Archer defines reflexivity as,

> …the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) contexts and vice versa. (Archer, 2007: 4)

> …our personal powers are exercised through reflexive interior dialogue and are causally accountable for the delineation of our concerns, the definition of our projects, the diagnosis of our circumstances and, ultimately, the determination of our practices in society. (Archer, 2003: 130)

Given the same social conditioning, people respond with highly varied behaviour and creativity: we are radically heterogenous in our agency. In contrast to the practice theorists, subjectivity has ontology since it involves our mental activity or 'Internal Conversation' in Archer's words. Subjectivity means people are primarily active: they are not passive agents, determined by "hydraulic pressures" (Archer, 2003: 1).

These considerations shed light upon the definition of religion debate discussed in 1.1.4. The ontological role of subjectivity seems to afford credence to those who claim belief without practice accounts for religiousness. Belief as mental activity does not necessarily need to be embodied in practice, as per Smith and Bruce.

We can therefore sum up the interplay between structure and agency before turning to the third leg of the tripod: culture. In Archer's three stage model detailing the mediation of structure to agency (2003: 132-35), the first stage is the objective structural and cultural properties that shape the reality faced by the agent. The second stage concerns the agent's "own configurations of concerns" (2003: 135). The third stage is where courses of action are decided upon, where, "Agential subjectivity reflects upon societal objectivity" (2003: 133). This final stage allows for explanatory purchase, without which we fall into the territory of empirical generalisations: "'under circumstances x, a statistically significant number of agents do y'. These, of course, are not real explanations at all" (2003: 133). For Archer, it is impermissible to omit agential intentions, "for the subjective agent is the ultimate and effective cause of social practice" (2003: 134).

2.2.4 Culture

Archer (1996) outlines how culture can be treated in a parallel way to structure, while recognising the analytical distinctness between the two. She defines culture as follows:

> …culture as a whole is taken to refer to all intelligibilia, that is to any item which has the dispositional capacity of being understood by someone. (1996: xviii)

Within this wider context, she defines the Cultural System as "the propositional register of society at any given time"; it consists of the "relations between the components of culture" (*ibid*.) that is, intelligibilia, rather than the relationships between cultural agents. In Porpora's words,

> Intelligibilia are anything with meaningful content produced by social intentionality. (2015: 159)

We will shortly discuss Porpora's use of the term "social intentionality"; but for the moment, we will consider in more depth Archer's notion of the Cultural System. She roughly equates

this with Karl Popper's (2013) Three World theory, where World 1 consists of purely physical items, World 2 concerns psychological reality, and World 3 is constituted by products of the human mind, that is, social products: languages, stories, myths, books, sculptures, aeroplanes. World 3 products are oriented eminently to the social and cannot be reduced to World 2. It is worth noting that, where practice theory reduces culture to action and discourse, CR includes both (human actions such as creating a sculpture are culture) as well as the final products: a library, for example, is culture to critical realists, and so is a theory, even prior to its elucidation by a proponent, or a symphony, even prior to its performance by an orchestra. Practice theory holds, on the contrary, that culture is precisely *in action*, and for this reason, would not accept what would be seen as the reifying of social products.

Employing an analytically dualist approach to culture means distinguishing the organisational, ideational 'parts' from the 'people' with agency. When 'parts' and 'people' are sunk into each other (as occurs in a 'culture in action' approach), one of two things happen: either one is treated as an epiphenomenon of the other (resulting in "crude unilateral accounts" where the dependent element is "inert" (Archer, 1996: xv), or the conflation between the two occurs in the middle, and neither 'parts' nor 'people' are treated as having autonomy. When examining culture, there is firstly the question of the degree of "logical consistency" (– a "property of the world of ideas" (*ibid*.: xvii) –) among ideas espoused within a Cultural System. This is a propositional element of culture that is independent of the behaviour of people. Following Archer, who in turn follows Lockwood's distinctions between 'social integration' and 'system integration', this element of culture is termed, 'Cultural System integration' (CS). To examine this part of culture, we would need to examine the array of ideas espoused, determining the extent of ideational consistency and the relations among ideas. Porpora writes,

> The ideational objects of culture bear objective relations to each other about which we can argue and converse and which, like differences in depth, can exert causal influences on us. (2015: 174)

Contending that culture exists as a CS does not mean that Archer holds to the homogeneity thesis. On the contrary, there may be contradictions within the system; some may be more tightly integrated than others at the S-C level. In Porpora's words, "the degree of cultural coherence is an empirical question" (2015: 173).

There are, secondly, non-propositional elements of culture too. Here, we turn from 'parts' of culture to 'people'. Social interaction reveals the extent to which there is "causal consensus" (Archer, 1996: xvi), that is the influencing relationships between cultural agents that lead to different degrees of cohesion among people. This can be termed, 'Socio-Cultural integration' (S-C) and is the role of agency in relation to culture.

Porpora's use of "social intentionality" in his definition of culture above introduces the link between agency and culture, or between CS and S-C. Social products are produced actively, with consciousness and intentionality, and only as such can be deemed meaningful, with the possibility of hermeneutical interpretation. Through such hermeneutical interpretation, content can be deciphered as intelligibilia (Porpora, 2015: 160).

The ontology of the CS, like the equivalent structural system, does not denote permanence, and S-C interaction influences and even transforms it. Archer terms this process, "morphogenesis" (or alternatively "morphostasis" where ongoing S-C interaction maintains the CS), that is, "the complex interchanges that produce change in a system's given form, structure or state" (Archer, 1996: xxiv). S-C interaction results in cultural elaboration, which in turn alters the CS, changing the cultural conditioning. This is a cycle that repeats itself.

To concretise these concepts, we might employ Hornsby-Smith's account of 'customary religion' in 1.3.2. With this term he designates what we might call a morphogenesis to the belief and worldview of some Catholic parish subcultures: it is an elaboration of the CS, where "the dominant problem of sin and redemption" is replaced by a "practical Catholicism … a 'transcendent humanism', offering an 'ethico-affective' and predominantly this-worldly concept of salvation" (Hervieu-Léger, 1986: 57-60; cited in Hornsby-Smith, 1989: 60).

To sum up, I stated at the end of Chapter 1 that the lens through which I wanted to explore how a parish might thrive in the secular$_3$ landscape is culture. An outline of my critical realist approach in Chapter 2 has demonstrated how culture, while analytically distinct from the other dimensions of structure and agency, cannot be examined without them. There is a parallel in the ways in which structure and culture are treated: both structural and cultural systems can be elaborated by agents, and there is therefore a need to distinguish 'system' from 'interaction' in order to observe the interplay over time. Before concluding this outline of the relation between

structure and culture, it is worth remarking explicitly that, whereas structure can be explained (see 2.2.2), culture is interpreted hermeneutically. In Porpora's words,

> …although it may arise from culture, social structure is not the same as or reducible to culture because … meaning or hermeneutics is not the principal question to put to relations like power or inequality, which is to say that these relations have extra-discursive effects beyond their communicative content. (2015: 176)

He gives the example of the 2008 financial crash which can be explained in terms of objective, extra-discursive relations and agential action: cultural interpretation is not as relevant in a social phenomenon such as this. However, in the case of a CS, social products have been created with intentionality, and hermeneutical interpretations are needed to decipher them. As with Interpretivists, critical realists hold that the reasons (rather than explanations) behind cultural phenomena can be identified; departing from Interpretivists, critical realists hold that these can be causal mechanisms just as such mechanisms underlie structural realities (Porpora, 2015: 160).

2.2.5 The Religious / Secular Landscape from the Critical Realist Perspective

In 1.1.4 and 1.2, I reviewed the literature related to the question of how religious or secular Britain is. I commented on sociology's multi-paradigm nature, and that theories I reference in the literature of religious decline have been necessarily provisional until I placed philosophical and sociological stakes in the ground. Now that I have completed this step, I return to the literature to explore it from a CR perspective. It is important to assert initially that CR is metatheory, not a sociological theory, and we cannot claim to undertake "CR research". Rather, CR "parameterises – from its criteria – what good theories are" (Porpora, 2015: 208). Porpora counsels,

> Pay at least some attention to the philosophical grounding of your research, to what ontology you assume, what views of causality you hold… (*ibid*.)

These will be the questions I pose to the literature already referenced, to determine the extent to which we can adopt them as "good theories", as theoretical background to my research. I will undertake this in three steps, examining in turn, (i) the evidence of decline and the secularisation thesis; (ii) the possibility of describing a religious/secular landscape and how I

shall adopt Charles Taylor; (iii) my approach to the 'sacred canopy'/'sacred umbrella' paradigm.

The evidence of decline and the secularisation thesis

Adopting both extensive and intensive forms of research, CR certainly proposes the use of mixed methods, including statistical analysis (Porpora, 2015: 215). Yet, as suggested in 2.2.1 above, there is a positivist danger of adopting correlation coefficients too easily, falling into empirical generalisations where "event-regularities" are observed, leading to narrow, lawlike propositions. Here, we would need to be wary of Woodhead's "typical None" (1.1.1) or of supposed "global trends" of disaffiliation (1.1.2). Rejecting the traditional secularisation thesis of Wallis and Bruce was correct (1.1.4), since it has an inevitable determinism about it, not allowing for agents' freedom and the potential for transformation of structural properties.

Yet, while Bruce's blind spot is religion's ability to flourish outside traditional, institutional structures, we have witnessed, too, sociologists for whom structure is in fact an obstacle to the flourishing of religion. Stark and Iannaccone's approach (1.1.5) amounts to culturalist reductionism, where the dismantling of structure brings only benefits to religion. Our conclusions in 2.2.2 mean that adopting such an approach would both neglect the force of structure, and also overlook the possibility of elaborating it. In Archer's words,

> Voluntarism has an important place in morphogenesis but is ever trammelled by past structural and cultural constraints and by the current politics of the possible. (Archer, 1995: 79)

Therefore, in order not to dismiss the possibility of cultural and structural elaboration, we must have a robust account of structure's role in limiting and conditioning voluntarism. This applies, too, to Stark and Iannaccone's overly literal application of economic concepts to the religious marketplace. It is important that we qualify our understanding of how these can be applied in the Catholic context, where we consider that Catholic structural elements do not allow us to interpret this marketplace entirely in terms of free market capitalism.

The possibility of describing a religious/secular landscape: adopting Charles Taylor

Philosophically, there is much to unite Charles Taylor with critical realists, and he is not an interlocutor who can be "easily dismissed" (Groff, 2004: 22). Of the four philosophical

metatheories listed at the outset of Chapter 1, he certainly falls into the realist camp, if not full-blown critical realism. Ontologically, there are points at which he parts ways with Bhaskar: as a proponent of hermeneutic social science (Groff, 2004: 126), he views actions as signs that cannot be described independently of the reasons behind them. (And yet, he decidedly leans towards realism over interpretivism (cf. Taylor, 2015; cf. 2.2.1 above).) Moreover, his hermeneutic stance attributes agency to human beings which is unique in its capacity for "strong evaluation": reasoning about "the qualitative *worth* of different desires" (Taylor, 1985: 16). In other words, he finds much in common with the CR understanding of reflexive, intentional, self-aware agency (cf. 2.2.3).

Taylor, then, finds much common philosophical ground with critical realists. Yet his theory in *A Secular Age*, while drawing on social theory throughout, does not originate from sociological research, but rather from historical philosophy. As sociological theory, therefore, his thesis has not passed through CR machinery in its development. Had it done so, it would not have overcome the impossibility, from a CR standpoint, of achieving what Archer terms "global perspectivism" (2013). All social theory originates from a particular perspective and, that being the case, a non-perspectival vantage point, or God's eye view, is impossible. Neither would a contribution of every possible perspective (albeit methodologically impossible) achieve a non-perspectival vantage point: all perspectives suffer from necessary incompleteness and, therefore, necessary consequential bias. From a CR standpoint, then, identifying "Ages" in history is problematic and sociologically unwarranted given the "global perspectivism" such a term seems to claim for itself. Likewise, identifying wide-reaching, global phenomena such as fragilisation, the nova effect, or a social imaginary of expressive individualism are unjustifiable sociologically.

I propose, therefore, to hypothesise with Taylor's theory throughout the thesis, not as sociologically verifiable theory (much as my theological standpoints in the first half of this chapter are not sociologically verifiable), but rather as conceptual philosophical reference points. Certainly, there are elements in his theory that, from a sociological standpoint, we could not attribute ontology to as Taylor does. My thesis's strongly inter-disciplinary approach requires an ability to hold lightly different strands in a tension that acknowledges both the common outlooks and the inconsistencies which arise when one draws together theories originating from different disciplinary and philosophical roots. Yet, the common outlooks are compelling: Taylor's account of heterogenous, pluralistic and contestable structures in society,

while reached by quite a different route, are consonant with CR's 'open system' approach; his methodological 'open take' stance accords with the judgemental rationalism of CR, recognising the provisional and vulnerable nature of all theory (and, indeed, he subscribes to each element of CR's methodological approach: ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality). His theory, therefore, will serve to provide philosophical reference-points, adopted with a qualification that the generalisations he tends to fall into cannot be accepted from a CR standpoint.

Let us apply this position to Taylorian theory in two areas: first, authenticity, since his argument for authenticity being a determining value of our century would certainly unlock greater insights into the secular/religious landscape; second, 'social imaginary', since there are seemingly areas of overlap with our designation of culture that would be useful to unpack.

In 1.2.1, I asked whether Taylor's conceptual linkage of authenticity and secularity might be sociologically verified, and if not, whether this mattered. My argument from a CR standpoint above indicates that such sociological verification would indeed be impossible, but that we might rather treat such conceptual linkage as a philosophical, conceptual reference point. In other words, while we cannot prove empirically its proliferation in culture, we can adopt it theoretically as a concept which sits harmoniously within the constellation of other philosophical reference-points from which I am creating a conceptual map of the religious/secular landscape. There is much theoretical support for the conceptual prominence of authenticity in twentieth and twenty-first-century morality (Bell, 1996; Lasch, 2018; Lipovetsky, 1989).

Before adopting it wholesale, however, it would be important to emphasise that, as we saw in 1.2.1, Taylor is not arguing for the widespread prevalence of egoism: an argument that subjectivism is necessarily equated with a self-referential outlook. On the contrary, in Collier's words:

> …what moves us, worries us, excites us, gives us courage or overcomes us with dejection, is not the prospect of our subjective experiences, but the prospect of real transformations of the wider world. We are not egoists. (1999: 6)

This accords likewise with Heidegger's standpoint on authenticity which Collier explores, and to which we have made initial reference in 1.2.1:

> If we are to draw together all the threads of Heidegger's account of authenticity, we must see it, not as self-aggrandisement, but as sacrifice of the everyday self under the domination of the 'they' and of entanglement with the world of our concern, in order that the maximum compossibles be realised. Authenticity is good because the fullness of being is good. (*ibid.*: 115)

Furthermore, in pursuing the 'retrieval' of authenticity, Taylor's proposal of a 'horizon' or wider context which prevents authenticity's slippage into meaninglessness takes on a new light beneath the CR microscope. 'Horizon' is critical to Taylor's understanding of authenticity, and when we consider this as a social environment or background formed by "constitutive goods … that have shaped our world and can demand allegiance", that offer a point of orientation with which as individuals we dialogue, but which "we can never fully extricate ourselves from" (Sherman, 2005: 151; cf. Taylor, 1989: 515), we begin to hear echoes of CR understanding of the relationship between structure and agency. While Taylor does not employ these sociological terms, I argue that the close conceptual parallels are unmistakable. While on the sociological level, CR scholars argue for the existence of objective social relations that condition our agency, on the philosophical level, Taylor argues for the necessity of such background, if our authenticity is not to dissolve into nothingness.

The convergence of many Taylorian and CR positions mean that I shall adopt his understanding of authenticity as a theoretical reference-point, in order to serve our understanding of how religion might best thrive under secular conditions. Now we turn briefly to the second area of Taylorian theory: 'social imaginary'.

Already in 1.2.1, we have encountered Taylor's term 'social imaginary of expressive individualism'. My framework for understanding culture in 2.2.4 prompts questions about how Taylor's 'social imaginary' relates to this framework. First, we will want to re-emphasise the tension that arises when drawing together theories from varying disciplinary roots: there are no neat fits here, as different theories anchor themselves in differing assumptions.

‘Social imaginary’ seems loosely to correspond to the ‘people’ rather than ‘parts’ aspect of culture, that is, ‘Socio-Cultural integration’ rather than ‘Cultural System’. Adapting the term ‘social imaginary’ from Bronislaw Baczko (1984), Charles Taylor describes it as an “implicit map of social space”,

> …the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations (2004: 23);
>
> …that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy (*ibid*.).
>
> …[it incorporates] a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life. This incorporates some sense of how we all fit together in carrying out the common practice. Such understanding is both factual and normative; that is, we have a sense of how things usually go, but this is interwoven with an idea of how they ought to go, of what missteps would invalidate the practice. (*ibid*.: 24)

It is knowing how to act and to whom to speak and how. In the same way that my ability to find my way around a familiar environment relates to the literal map of the area, a ‘social imaginary’ gives one an understanding of how to act that is implicit in practice and relates to the social theoretical description of the same scenario. This pre-theoretical characteristic of ‘social imaginary’ suggests a S-C quality. It is a ‘common repertory’ through which we function and act, before we theorise. ‘Imaginary’ rests on images, stories and legends rather than ideas or theory. J. Smith applauds the term for its focus on the affective, the bodily, and on narrative (cf. Lyon, 2010: 658). In Taylor’s words, we are seeking,

> …that largely unstructured and inarticulate understanding of our whole situation, within which particular features of our world show up for us in the sense they have (Taylor, 2004: 173).

In J. Smith’s words,

> … [our orientation to the world] is something that comes before thinking; thus we've described it as precognitive. It is more at work at the level of the adaptive unconscious or the 'social imaginary.' (2009: 106)

Yet, Taylor seems hesitant about whether theory can be elaborated through the agency of morphogenesis, as Archer does: "The implicit map of social space has deep fissures, which are profoundly anchored in culture and imaginary, beyond the reach of correction by better theory" (Taylor, 2004: 198). Why is this? He sees an imaginary, by its nature, as possessed by a large group. He is conceiving of imaginaries shifting on metalevel realities such as the economy, the market, political life, from one era to another – over hundreds of years. In contrast, those who hold theory in common are more likely to be a smaller minority (potentially élite).

Clearly, while 'social imaginary' has S-C qualities, it may not be used interchangeably with S-C. How, then, might the term 'social imaginary' be of use in this thesis? David Lyon comments that Taylor's concept allows for "new openings" in methodology, for perspectives to emerge that may ordinarily be "muffled by modern social sciences" (2010: 649). While I am committed to defining culture according to definitions in 2.2.4, there may be points where Taylor's term allows us momentarily to leave our social science perspective and consider the developing theory through the lens of social imaginary. These considerations will not carry the same sociological weight, and yet they provide a different perspective at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, our provisional literature seems to demonstrate that Catholic parish life is evolving in a way that corresponds to mass cultural and social change. One could describe the depiction of Catholic parish life in 1.3 precisely as a 'social imaginary' which, thanks to a collapsing of religious structures, is disintegrating. In other words, in Taylor's terms, we seem to be glimpsing a metalevel shift from mid-twentieth century Catholic parish 'social imaginary' to one more fitting for the twenty-first century. Vast structural shifts necessitate the development of new theory (cf. 1.3). At the micro level, we will be able to employ 'social imaginary' as we examine the S-C reality of a parish. These are two distinctive technical terms: while examining the S-C reality allows us to describe the non-propositional elements of culture, viewing this reality from a different angle in terms of 'imaginary' allows us to hypothesise concerning agents' precognitive expectations about "the taken-for-granted shape of things" (Taylor, 2004: 29). Taylor acknowledges that, in some cases, theory transforms 'social imaginary':

> …when a theory penetrates and transforms the social imaginary … people take up, improvise, or are inducted into new practices. These are made sense of by the new outlook, the one first articulated in the theory; this outlook is the context that gives sense to the practices. Hence the new understanding comes to be accessible to the participants in a way that it wasn't before. It begins to define the contours of their world and can eventually come to count as the taken-for-granted shape of things, too obvious to mention. (2004: 29)

To conclude: while it will be impossible to verify sociologically the existence of a 'social imaginary', let alone the shifting from one metalevel 'imaginary' to another, this is an additional Taylorian reference-point which we can cautiously lean on to interpret some of the theory we may see emerging from the data.

The 'sacred canopy'/ 'sacred umbrella' paradigm

Finally, what would CR make of what many sociologists of religion see as the dismantling of the 'sacred canopy', and of C. Smith's proposal that, in a pluralistic context, religious groups instead form 'sacred umbrellas' (1.2.3)? I argue that there are hints of 'Upwards Conflation' taking place in Smith's analysis, and this is the lens through which we will analyse this process from sacred canopy to sacred umbrella.

Berger's original thesis held that the dismantling of the 'sacred canopy' – that is, the institutional structures that gave plausibility to religion – weakened religious faith. In Archer's terms, the religious Cultural System crumbled – and while we cannot study this in depth in terms of the morphogenetic cycle, we do want to explore the rise of 'sacred umbrellas' in the absence of the canopy. Initially, we note that C. Smith does not consider in his analysis that the splintering of religious groups might in fact occur chronologically prior to the crumbling of the canopy, and perhaps even be a causal factor. He simply addresses the question of the opportunism needed by leaders of religious groups to adapt to the canopy-less situation. But the reality is that religious pluralism is undoubtedly a cause of the dismantling of the canopy, and in terms of structural support in terms of lending plausibility, a great deal is lost. This is the first qualification that I believe needs to be made of Smith's theory: there is no account of the role of structure.

The absence of structure leads us to a second point, which is in fact a warning signal. It signals potential 'Upwards Conflation', where a purely 'culturalist' theory of change not only conflates culture and structure (obliterating structure), but also conflates the Cultural System with socio-cultural integration, rendering the CS merely an epiphenomenon. I base this analysis on Archer's analysis of Habermas' critical theory account. Habermas' interpretation of the societal CS of technocratic control mistakenly, according to Archer, conflates the CS with the interests of the dominant cultural group (socio-cultural level) (see Archer, 1996: 62-72). In this reading, the logical (level of ideas) is absorbed by the causal; and the material interests themselves generate ideas. How might an interpretation of this kind be risked by Smith's sacred umbrella thesis?

The absence of structure in Smith's account lays the sacred umbrella thesis open to the claim of a merging of the two levels of Cultural System and socio-cultural integration. Emancipating themselves from a dominant culture ('sacred canopy'), the sacred umbrellas thesis promotes the proliferation of subcultures where leaders construct narratives that make sense of the world: they are "the makers, tellers, and believers of stories that make sense of our existence, history and purpose" (2003a: 64). Smith describes the emancipation process thus: "many innovative religious actors caught those falling pieces of cloth in the air and, with more than a little ingenuity, remanufactured them into umbrellas" (1998: 106).

We can interrogate this reading on a number of grounds, thereby signalling qualifications to the sacred umbrellas thesis for adoption in my thesis. Firstly, there is little recognition of the difficulty of breaking free from a dominant culture. In Archer's words, "there are many objective cultural constraints which are not amenable to personal exemption" (1996: 69). Cultural conditioning remains in myriad ways, which is true of the Protestant evangelical context in which Smith's original study took place.[36] Translating it into the Catholic context, my reading needs to take account of far more than cultural conditioning: we cannot ignore the universal, hierarchical structure of which a parish is inextricably a part, impossible to separate from as a canonical parish. This is a qualification we would need to make to the sacred umbrellas thesis.

[36] It should be noted, however, that the legitimacy of cultural conditioning can more easily be thrown off (Archer, 1996: 69), and this chimes with conclusions reached in 1.2.3.

Secondly, Smith's suggestion of "remanufacturing" is not neutral: it suggests a fabrication of a new CS for the purpose of attracting new religious believers. In other words, there are material interests baked into the CS.

> The logical content, structure and potentiality of the Cultural System is granted no autonomy from the socio-cultural level which is causally responsible for it. (Archer, 1996: 65)

Archer posits that ideologies are often matters of convenience "hastily fabricated" (1996: 51) and while we would not suggest that sacred umbrella religious groups necessarily adopt ideologies, I argue with Archer that there is a strong need for the CS to be analytically distinct from the socio-cultural level. In the Catholic context, the parish CS contains timeless theology and tradition that cannot be disregarded, alongside the parish's more distinctive, innovative elaborations from a socio-cultural level.

As an aside, this point assists us in reaching an answer to a question that arose in 1.2.3. We asked how likely the quality of distinctiveness could be attributed to the Catholic parish, which is a smaller unit of the culturally distinct behemoth that is the global Catholic Church. Exploring this question through the CR lens leads us to conclude that, while distinctiveness is unlikely to exist on the CS level,[37] distinctiveness which could be interpreted as 'sacred umbrella' development might exist at the socio-cultural level. At the same time, this socio-cultural distinctiveness, closely tied to the CS which is not autonomous from it, is unlikely to drift radically or unrecognisably from the socio-cultural realities of other parishes in the same CS.

Archer levels a further critique at Habermas who holds to an understanding that the ideas of a CS are consistent: change to dominant ideas is unlikely to come from within (e.g. through contradiction, schism or otherwise) (1996: 67). This means that challenge to the ideas can only come from outside the CS, that is from knowledge generated by different interests. This is a purely Upwards Conflation standpoint:

[37] Although, it is certainly not unknown – maybe more frequently in the United States – for certain parishes to have a reputation for dissent from the normative CS, for example, in adopting heterodox teachings or customs.

> …because the socio-cultural level articulates the Cultural System, then the *dominance* of one set of ideas excludes the *presence* of other ideas. (Archer, 1996: 53)

This eradicates pluralism from the CS, which is a source of socio-cultural problems and conflict. This seems to chime with the sacred umbrellas thesis which stresses the important distinctiveness of a group maintaining, "distinctive, morally orienting collective identities" (Smith, 1998: 90), and knowing "who they are in large measure by knowing who they are not" (*ibid*.: 91). This is attractive, since a 'shared social product' is certainly aimed for, and helps in avoiding the diluted, 'customary religion' to which Hornsby-Smith referred (1.3.2). And yet, at the CS level, in order to maintain its analytical distinctness from the S-C level, acknowledgment should be made of the presence of other ideas. This enables bridges, not only hostility, with outside groups (see 1.2.3).

To conclude, the sacred umbrella thesis is useful in defining what has happened to religion since the undeniable collapse of institutional religious structures in the sacred canopy. It presents a positive outlook on the possibilities for religion within a pluralistic milieu. It demonstrates that a certain degree of distinctiveness might be achieved by a parish at the socio-cultural level. And yet, our discussion through the lens of SAC demonstrates that we cannot view pluralism naively through rose-tinted glasses. The collapse of plausibility structures has certainly damaged religion. Furthermore, to adopt the sacred umbrella thesis in a Catholic context, we need to make a number of qualifications to avoid 'Upwards Conflation'.

First, if a Catholic parish positions itself as a 'sacred umbrella', it must recognise the difficulty of shaking off deep cultural conditioning. This is not to speak of the objective, hierarchical structure of which it is a part, and which brings benefits to the parish as well as hindrances. Indeed, the Catholic parish is to a large extent still shielded by a sacred canopy (even if only within the institutional Church and not in society) that churches of other traditions are not. In 1.3.2, I suggested that the territoriality principle's instinct to treat all Catholic parishes as generalist and homogenous serves a 'canopy' mindset rather than an 'umbrella' one. While there are certainly advantages to treating a Catholic parish as a 'sacred umbrella', there are also advantages – and these cannot be overlooked – of the remaining canopy network of generalist parishes. Such longstanding structure serves as plausibility structures in the eyes of Catholics which strengthens, rather than diminishes, faith.

Second, the CS remains distinct from the socio-cultural level when it is recognised as a body of intelligibilia (including timeless doctrine) that is independent of the material interests of leaders.

Third, while a distinctive CS can help build 'shared social product', the acknowledgment of other ideas, too, is essential to maintaining the analytical distinction between the two levels, as well as contributing towards calming hostility with other external groups.

While recognising the important existence of structure in the Catholic context, we draw attention, too, to its weakened impact owing to pluralism. Peter Berger comments on how the Catholic Church prior to the Second Vatican Council "sought to create a subculture strong enough to withstand the pressures of the engulfing culture," remarking, "This effort failed, perhaps in part because it tried to include too large and heterogenous a population within its 'ghetto' walls" (1982: 20). The failure was, perhaps, in aiming to create a distinctive, homogenous, national socio-cultural reality in the context of a "fragilised", diverse and complex secular$_3$ population. In adopting Smith's 'sacred umbrella' theory, I do so acknowledging both that the 'sacred canopy' in the form of Catholic hierarchical structure still solidly exists *and* that in a pluralistic world, S-C reality within Catholic parishes is likely to vary, since this is the level at which distinctiveness, in the line of 'sacred umbrellas', can develop. Yet, I adopt this understanding of 'sacred umbrellas' with the many qualifications listed above, not least, that we avoid 'Upwards Conflation' by having a proper account of structure, which by no means has only a negative impact on religion.

2.3 Methodological approach

We now reach the point where we can build a bridge into the methodological part of my research. Already a few indicators about what makes an acceptable CR approach to research have been suggested, since any sociological stance will certainly entail some parameters for the ensuing methodological approach. Certainly, there is no one method proposed by CR: as a metatheory, it would be an overreach to be dogmatic about methods.

> Unlike both positivism and Interpretivism, CR does not pose an opposition between qualitative and quantitative methods. … Instead, CR reunifies sociological methodology. (Porpora, 2015: 63)

"Reunifying" comes in the form of CR's promotion of a methodological pluralism:

> …ethnographic description, statistical correlations, and narrative explanation all are equally important but different aspects of a scientific approach to a causally open world … [CR wants to] unify quantitative and qualitative research approaches all on an equal footing" (Porpora, 2015: 32)

In 2.2.1 above, some of the earliest indications were made about methodology when we sought to understand what social phenomena could or could not be explained according to CR. We discovered that positivism and interpretivism held a common approach to causality (see Poropora, 2015: 35-39), where (for positivism) event-regularities were sought in closed system conditions, to reach the certainty of a covering law, despite the narrowness and thinness required to achieve such certainty. Critical realists, we found, reject this approach since it relies on an element of determinism, and does not account sufficiently for agency. On the contrary, critical realists look not for regularities, but for mechanisms: the causal structure of a social phenomenon is what makes it work.

This has been outlined above in my exploration of structure in 2.2.2, but it has an important implication for methodology. However many of these mechanisms we find behaving more or less regularly, as a critical realist, I could never reach any generalising law conclusion about how *all* such social phenomena behave. This is where I diverge sharply from a positivist approach, and it has consequences, as we shall see, in how I will approach my research methodologically. What we cannot achieve in breadth, as the positivist claims to achieve, we can achieve in depth, which the positivist fails to acknowledge can be achieved, tending to leave statistics "to function as a form of evidence for an explanation rather than as an explanation itself" (Porpora, 2015: 63). In other words, while we cannot reach generalising laws, we *can* reach explanations, through the discursive exploration outlined in 2.2.2.

Discursive exploration of explanatory structures is more than both positivists and interpretivists claim can be achieved in terms of explanation. Interpretivists, in accepting positivists' understanding of causality, turn instead to description, but in their alignment with positivists, are forced to limit what description can achieve. For critical realists, however, description, or more precisely, ethnography as a method, is not purely anecdotal. Through describing the

constitutive nature of a social phenomenon it is possible to explain the causal features: this is pre-eminently a task for ethnography or in depth interviews. It is the first step of establishing the phenomenon. In Smith's words, we need to,

> …learn better to value sheer description. The first thing realism always wants to know is: What actually exists? The foremost take, therefore is to describe what is. (Smith, 2010: 305)

By no means is ethnography a poor cousin to statistical analysis:

> Narrative, not regression equations, is, according to CR, the canonical form of causal explanation – not just in the social sciences but in all open system, including physics. (Porpora, 2015: 32)

> …sociologists using qualitative methods ought to become bolder than they now are about asserting and pursuing the scientific contribution of their work as descriptive of mechanisms and conjunctures of mechanisms in natural settings. (Porpora, 2015: 63)

So, if establishing the phenomenon through ethnography is the first step of causal analysis, the second step is the explanatory one. Here, we can explain why a "contingent conjuncture of mechanisms" (Porpora, 2015: 59) combine to cause a particular, non-repeatable event. This step is achieved using narrative with theoretical language. In the terms of Isaac Reed (2011), we "resignify" the phenomenon, that is, bring its theoretical significance to light by describing it in specialised language. Only such an historical account "can accommodate the causally open system constituted by the real world" (Porpora, 2015: 60). Finally, in a third step, "methodological adjudication among rival explanations and narratives" takes place (Porpora, 2015: 32), in accord with the critical realist perspective of judgemental rationalism.

If CR extols methodological pluralism, where, then, is the place of statistical analysis? Certainly, there will be aspects to research questions that are quantitative. For example, once a phenomenon has been established, statistical analysis can be used to indicate how far widespread it is, to outline its contours, or to answer comparative questions. And yet, the CR caution is that statistics do not achieve explanations of differences, nor do they reach any generalising law; never can their findings be considered without reference to the social context

that ethnography provides. They are certainly useful, but they are somewhat demoted in a CR understanding of how to interpret social phenomena.

2.3.1 Anthropological Approach

As a final step, before moving into methodology, I want to draw together some of the theological and sociological insights into a synthesis, to outline an anthropological theoretical basis for cultural change in the Catholic parish. The approach that I want to develop has three characteristics: it avoids a mechanistic approach; it acknowledges and seeks the role of grace; it is based on a personalist theory of human behaviour that is driven by a CR conception of agency. I shall explore each of these characteristics in turn.

Schindler's fears of the inherent atheism of modernity are expressed in Nichols' warning that if the onto-logic of modern life is not Trinitarian, it is almost certainly "…mechanistic and controlling… [reliant] on technique, privileges go-getting activity not contemplative receiving, and treats efficacy as assertion rather than creative generosity" (cf. Rowland, 2003: xiii). Schindler adds, "Man is therefore not first creative but first receptive – and obedient. Or better, man is properly 'active' only as anteriorly contemplative" (1995: 217). And we recall, too, Rowland's warning of the misplaced adoption of "the same institutional practices as those operative within secular institutions" and supposed "professionalisation" (2003: 59). For reasons rehearsed above, I am not adopting Rowland, Schindler and Nichols' pessimism about the retrieval of modern culture. To disregard modern, human developments from spheres outside the theological veers towards the extrinsicist 'supranaturalism' Schindler himself warns against, missing the immanence and transforming presence of God, at the expense of an over-placed transcendence. Nevertheless, it is important to heed the risks involved in social activity that is not "anteriorly contemplative." Allowing for the contemplative is a logical outflowing from my position of metaphysical openness to God's existence in this study, accepting that much of the human experience which shapes a parish's culture may be built on experience of God, and cannot be understood without this. Resisting pressure to disregard objective (including metaphysical) reality that forms a parish's social life will give space to the vital 'contemplative' dimension.

This leads well into the second characteristic of my approach, the recognition of the role of grace. Following Archer's lead, I am allowing for human experience to originate from independent, objectively existing reality, which includes the possible existence of God.

Without such an approach, there is a risk of religion being construed as 'transcendent humanism', of being reduced to a 'naturalist' outlook epitomised in the 'Christ of culture' approach, where nature absorbs grace such that social life is not seen as requiring any transformation from God. Rather, following Taylor, I argue that the 'transformation perspective' is critical to religion, and threatened by modernity (cf. 1.3.2). In Christianity, this means a participation in God's grace; here, God's self-giving offer of participation in his own life extends beyond any mutuality and is wholly free and abundant. Invoking the role of grace, I want to resist any understanding of culture as *Bildung*, the formation of one's self based on one's own efforts (cf. 2.1.5).

Finally, a clear understanding of what drives human beings will become important since sociological theories are characterised by a range of views on assumptions concerning human nature – from determinist to voluntarist. I adopt the understanding of human behaviour linked to my CR account of agency in 2.2.3 above, where the human person is centred, conscious, active and free. This also accords with subcultural identity theory to the extent to which I have adopted it (Smith, 2003b; Everton, 2018: 34 ff.; cf. 1.2.3, 2.2.5) and Smith's account of critical realist personalism (cf. 2010: 196-8). We saw in 2.2.3, that many sociological accounts de-agentify or automate the human person, in numerous examples of either Upwards or Downwards Conflation. Smith's account, alongside Archer's account of reflexivity, helps us navigate between two extremes: strong constructionism that deconstructs man, celebrating the death of the subject on the one hand; and a purely contemplative receptivity on the other that gives little acknowledgement of man's role in constructing his world. Smith holds these in balance:

> We do not socially construct reality, but we do out of reality creatively construct the social and refabricate the material. … Humans… exist in a state of dynamic tension between power and limits, action and reflection, capacity and finitude, perception and reason, truth and fallibility, ideas and materiality, knowing and not knowing, determination and freedom. (2010: 196-7)

How are humans motivated? A CR account of agency gives the most thorough and sociologically verifiable account: faced with objective properties that shape his reality, the agent develops his own subjective, ultimate concerns which lead him to take courses of action based on his "reflexive deliberations" (Archer, 2003: 135) – which in turn provides explanatory

purpose. To this, we are adding two further lines of theory specific to a twenty-first century context, the latter of which a CR scholar would not admit as strictly sociologically verifiable. First, subcultural identity theory suggests that humans are primarily driven by their search for meaning and belonging, and that we adopt a narrative that helps us make sense of the world (in contrast to rational choice theory, where a person is believed to weigh up costs in order to choose a path with the overall net benefit). Second, the search proposed in subcultural identity theory is given more particularity by Taylor who notes that the moral ideal of authenticity undergirds many a twenty-first century quest.

When we turn to analysing parish culture in Chapters 4 and 5, we will see that a parish's CS contains its assumptions on human nature, which, in keeping with Catholic tradition, are likely to be largely in keeping with the three characteristics listed above. In certain cases, parishes also draw from business concepts to aid in cultural transformation. In business, understanding and managing culture, and promoting cultural commitment among employees is understandable if it generates greater effectiveness or profitability for a company. However, a parish is quite a different body with a unique goal of making disciples. Culture would be studied, not in order to grow in profitability, but rather with a view to becoming more effective at attracting seekers (1.2.3), marketing its 'product' more attractively (1.1.5) and engaging more relevantly with postmodern authenticity (1.2.1). In these cases, we will want to explore how such ideas from a source other than the Catholic tradition elaborate the CS.

2.3.2 Conclusions

In Chapter 2, I have reached both theological and sociological conclusions that will anchor this thesis. Sociological literature explored in Chapter 1 has been submitted both to theological and sociological scrutiny.

Theologically, I have adopted a Taylorian 'open take' stance in the line of GS, adopting a standpoint that not only permits an accommodation to cultural epistemology, but in fact, argues that such a standpoint is necessary for the flourishing of Christianity in the secular$_3$ sphere. This is a positive stance which believes in the possibility of Christ's redemption of postmodern culture.

Sociologically, my CR position gives the thesis a robust ontological and epistemological mooring which has allowed me to scrutinise sociological theories advanced in Chapter 1,

qualifying many of those positions. I have adopted theories where I have been able adequately to adapt them to account for SAC, which is particularly needed when applying theory to the context of a Catholic parish, where the power of institutional structure cannot be overlooked. These are strong foundations from which I can now dive more deeply into questions of empirical study and methodology.

Chapter 3
Methodology

Having the theological and sociological groundwork in place, we move into the empirical research, my second research objective (cf. Introduction). In this chapter, I begin by outlining parameters that affect methodology. I define my approach to methodology given my sociological standpoints. I consider how we might understand the key question of 'growth', and I consider geographically or demographically specific cultural characteristics that may affect growth. Next, I give an outline of my selection process for parish case studies, the methods I have adopted, my own role as a researcher, and how data will be analysed. The final part presents five key cultural characteristics uncovered in two parishes where there is growth.

3.1 Outlining Parameters

The purpose of my research is to uncover the cultural characteristics of Catholic parishes that, against the odds within a pluralistic, secular$_3$ culture, are experiencing signs of growth. Literature referred to in Chapter 1 has already indicated some key characteristics of religious subcultures that tend to thrive (cf. 1.2.3), which my empirical data will either support or contradict. In this chapter's opening section, I intend to achieve three objectives. First, to outline in more concrete terms what a CR approach means for methodology in practice. Second, to specify how I am using the concept of 'growth' in the selection of parishes. Third, to explore other, structural factors that might influence a parish's growth.

3.1.1 Defining a Methodological Approach

My study of culture so far has indicated that cultural characteristics cannot be plotted on the axis of a graph against a parish's growth statistics. The knowledge yielded by empirical social science is of a different order, requiring different methods of study and analysis. Let us examine some possible methodological approaches in light of the commitments I have made in 2.3.

First, my account of social reality does not allow for positivist scientific methods such as grounded theory (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Thomas and James, 2006; Hodkinson, 2008; Strauss, 1994). Yet, my approach is not entirely without similarities to grounded theory. In my threefold methodological approach outlined in 2.3, the third step involves "methodological adjudication among rival explanations and narratives" (Porpora, 2015: 32). Porpora describes

this step in greater detail as an ongoing "double conversation between self and data and self and literature" which, he points out, is a certain version of grounded theory, if not "the original, simplistic, positivist version that imagined we could go into research as blank slates and just let the data affect us" (*ibid*.: 215). On its own terms, a grounded theory approach lends itself to a highly structured, coherent theoretical framework inconsonant with the chaotic reality of social life (cf. Andreski, 1972; Bulmer, 1979). In Thomas and James' words, "one must be careful that fertility is not sacrificed to orderliness" (2006: 773).

Second, other approaches might be considered. Social network analysis or SNA (Everton, 2018) is another example of an inductive approach which, while it would add knowledge through structural analysis about how influence operates, is not consistent directly with study of culture. Siehl and Martin (1988) propose hybrid methods which claim to honour "richly detailed data" (1988: 79) yielded by qualitative methods, while constructing a questionnaire, "the crux of the hybrid methodology" (1988: 86). Yet my CR approach would question the ability of a synchronic tool such as a questionnaire to reveal anything meaningful about culture: my approach outlined in 2.3 asserts that we need to first establish the phenomenon through ethnography. A questionnaire could perhaps be used as a subsequent step to identify to what extent a phenomenon exists.

Third, in line with the causal analysis outlined in 2.3, my ethnographical approach will establish the phenomenon before seeking explanation through a "contingent conjuncture of mechanisms" (Porpora, 2015: 59), seeking to "resignify" the phenomenon through bringing theory to bear on it. In exploring different approaches to ethnography, Van Maanen warns of the risk involved in adopting a realist approach to convey "tales from the field". He notes that a tendency towards "selective packaging of field data to exemplify generalised constructs is a standard practice" (2011: 52), and that there is a danger, when offering one realist reading, of "cull[ing] … facts carefully to support that reading" (*ibid*.: 53). Yet, this risk is mitigated by my critical realist approach, which rejects any search for event-regularities, and therefore generalisations, and rather looks for mechanisms, the causal structures behind a social phenomenon that make it work. It restricts explanation to one unrepeatable event, ensuring that "generalised constructs" do not creep in. Such constructs can certainly be a danger of positivistic, inductive or hybrid methods, which eradicate ambiguity and place "a greater

premium on abstractions" (Schein, 1996: 229). What is also important here is an 'open take' acceptance of the possibility of other readings, of adjudicating between rival explanations.

3.1.2 Signs of Growth and Change

In empirical, 'closed system' research, approximating to laboratory closure, where a single causal mechanism operates in isolation and where the same input leads regularly to the same output (see Porpora, 2015: 43), we might identify parishes exhibiting the kind of signs that suggest they are bucking the trend of decline: growing numbers, conversion of 'Nones', a lower than average mean age. We would then undertake a study on these parishes to determine the cultural factors that generate such growth, hoping to yield a generalisable covering law, however thin. In an 'open system', however, where "an unlimited number of ever-changing causal processes operate simultaneously interfering with each other in irregular ways" (*ibid*.: 43), this approach is sociologically impossible, and even if it were possible, the results yielded would be unrevealingly narrow. The outline of my methodological approach in 2.3 gives more details on why statistical analysis is somewhat downgraded in a CR worldview.

To achieve my third research objective (cf. Introduction), I wanted to identify two parishes in which there were signs of growth against the odds. In achieving this objective, did the considerations above rule out using statistics to identify such parishes? Yes and no. On the one hand, I wanted to avoid falling into the secularisation theorists' trap by adopting a purely positivist approach where growth is overwhelmingly numerical (cf. 1.1.4). They would use the same metrics of church attendance, Baptisms, marriages, etc., that have been used to measure Christianity's decline since the mid-Victorian era when social scientists started measuring religion.[38] Yet in 1.1.4, I uncovered that such a thesis with the metrics that accompany it is reductive and does not allow for any nuance: after all, softer indicators point to vestiges of religion in society (Davie, 2015: 73); and religion itself shifts, is a 'moving target', and should not be treated as static (Smith, 2017: 249).

[38] We recall Callum Brown's protest that the secularisation thesis relies on a loaded, social-scientific understanding of what religion is, a definition accepted uncritically by nineteenth century clerical social scientists. Their methods (and those since) measure hard indicators that are simplistic and reductive: churchgoing and non-churchgoing; protocols of behaviour. A standard of religiosity is set by Victorian discourses and decline is measured against these standards. But such an approach unilaterally and "self-referentially" accepts and legitimates the Enlightenment narrative that, "Secularisation is a salute to reason, the intellect and to progress" (2001: 32).

There is a second reason why statistics alone would lead us down the wrong path in identifying a parish that is bucking trends. Employing the empirical approach alone does not allow for an analytic distinction between the dimensions of social reality: structure, agency, and culture (SAC). Statistical analysis helps us identify trend-bucking, e.g. unusually high numbers, but it does nothing to trace the causes behind these numbers. While my research question is interested in cultural reasons, I could not be blind to structural ones. A parish may have over 2,000 parishioners attend on a Sunday (and there are one or two that fall into this category in Britain), yet even a cursory glance at the parish's demographic make-up may reveal that a sizeable proportion of parishioners are from ethnic minorities: in other words, a structural reason could be behind the parish's large numbers, which are swelled by immigration. It would likely yield little fruit to study the culture of such a parish to explore cultural reasons for the high numbers, when it is just as likely they can be mostly attributed to structural ones. The same would apply in countries where secularisation is not so advanced, such as Ireland: if Mass-going figures are relatively high in comparison to the British population, it is possibly due to the residual remains of a long Church-state relationship which gave structural reasons for Mass-attending. Studying the culture of such parishes would be informative, but unhelpful in identifying cultural factors that could be replicable outside that specific context.

Yet, I could not abandon statistical analysis altogether. The third prong of Bhaskar's "'holy trinity' of interdisciplinary research" is methodological specificity to the question asked (Bhaskar, 2010: 20). Undeniably there was a quantitative dimension to my question, since the premise of my research is religious decline which by its nature is detectable numerically. This meant that one of the criteria for selecting a parish where growth is occurring would inescapably be its size. This did not become the driving criterion, but at the same time, studying a parish that met other criteria while experiencing relatively low numbers would have been impermissible. In addition, under the quantitative heading, I supplemented the statistical measures in one parish with the results of a more sophisticated mechanism for identifying growth than merely Mass attendance: namely, a tool developed by Gallup to measure psychological engagement in and commitment to the parish, termed 'ME25'.[39]

What was the second criterion? Perhaps more significant than growth, I sought evidence of a parish that was initiating intentional, cultural change: in other words, a parish that was

[39] See https://www.gallup.com/products/174866/faith-member-engagement.aspx (Accessed 31 December 2018)

strategically renegotiating its identity, in Smith's words, or where its Cultural System was being elaborated, in Archer's, or where a parish was building a 'shared social product', in Bruce's. This change would be motivated by a recognition of the need to adapt in order to survive and thrive in the secular$_3$ landscape, to be in better shape to hand on its 'shared social product'. In Archer's terms, the elaboration of the CS always happens at the socio-cultural level, so we might expect to see either the emergence of competitive contradiction on that level (see Archer, 1996: 203-205), where socio-cultural conflict results in new, Systemic existence which breaks away from the originating group. Or in the case where morphogenesis occurs while maintaining a high level of CS integration, we may see the emergence of contingent complementarity (*ibid*.: 219-222), where, in a situation that derives from the current socio-cultural level, marginals discover new ideas causing, "…a new source of societal or sectional *variety* [to be] registered at the CS level" (*ibid*.: 221). While these were suppositions about what we might find based on Archer's morphogenetic theory, the data itself reveals whether either occurs.

What is critical to this second criterion is the use of the term "intentional" in relation to cultural change. This relates to the important dimension of agency in my SAC approach to social reality. I have outlined in 2.2.3 the importance of agency for understanding the human person as active, conscious, intentional and reflexive. An important principle underpinning my search for parishes where growth is evident is that cultural change occurs not thanks to "hydraulic pressures" (Archer, 2003: 1), but because of intentionality at the socio-cultural level. Where the 'élite' of the group (or parish leadership) are initiating change at the CS level, the result is more likely to be the emergence of contingent complementarity. Where change originates from marginals, competitive contradiction is likely to emerge. This will be explored as we study the data of each parish.

In order to identify two initial parishes, therefore, I wanted my search to be driven by the second criterion: evidence that a parish is initiating intentional, cultural change in order to more effectively hand on a 'shared social product'. This evidence would be recognised by others: whether by other parishes, dioceses, or relevant organisations; in other words, the parish would likely have developed a reputation. The first criterion of growth followed. Do the numerical trends confirm initial fruitfulness of this reorientation? If not, we would likely dismiss its usefulness in the first phase of the study. In order not to limit findings to a single, anomalous parish, I sought two such parishes that met both criteria.

By reputation, and despite an extensive search, I could not find a parish in Britain that fit the second criterion of initiating intentional, cultural change, supported by the second criterion of some measure of growth. Would this mean that the research was therefore dead in its tracks? Would taking the search abroad be methodologically permissible? After all, one would have thought that, where national structural and cultural factors are similar, there would be more common ground on which to compare two parishes of one country. Would the degree of complexity initiated through introducing a different country be insurmountable? What about differences in social context, social composition, political, economic and educational differences in their constitution? I decided to test this out.

Seeking English-speaking parishes, I turned to contacts in the USA for their advice, including Evangelical Catholic and the Catherine of Siena Institute. The Catherine of Siena Institute in Colorado Springs has worked with thousands of parishes in the US and internationally, including Britain, and recommended to me a short-list of parishes flourishing in spite of growing secularisation. Ideally, I would have found a parish in one of the least religious US states, the bottom five of which fall in New England (Pew Research Center, 2014). Yet I struggled to identify a parish renegotiating its identity in one of these states. Having spoken with the priests of parishes on my shortlist, I identified one south of LA, California (35th most religious state) that met the first criterion: it was explicitly initiating strategic, cultural change in order to more effectively hand on a 'shared social product'. In terms of the second criterion, the parish had a weekly attendance ranging between 4,850 and 5,200, and as such would be classed officially as a 'megachurch' (cf. Thumma and Travis, 2007: xix; a 'megachurch' is normally classed at over 2,000 attendees).

Putting aside the parish's commitment to change, what structural factors could cause such high attendance? 28% of the population of California identifies as Catholic while 27% class themselves as 'Nones.' 40% of Catholics in California say they attend church weekly (Pew Research Center, 2014). Already, the Catholic population is proportionately three times that of the British Catholic population, and a higher proportion of them attend Mass. This certainly will partially account for the much higher figures of Mass attendance. It also, importantly, aggrandises the structure of the Catholic Church both in the minds of Catholics themselves, and in the wider community. This particular parish hosts the annual Mayor's prayer breakfast on behalf of the wider Christian community. Such an event is likely possible owing to the

relative structural prominence of the Catholic Church locally. Such prominence likely contributes somewhat to Catholics' Mass attendance.

Other structural factors relating to southern California are its wealth and its relatively liberal political standpoint. While neither of these structural factors would increase church attendance (in fact, we might expect the opposite), they are factors we should bear in mind throughout the study, in order to recognise the inescapable role of structure, thereby doing justice to our SAC approach to social reality.

Let us probe a little further the question of whether structural and wider cultural elements are likely to be a majority contributing factor to this parish's 'megachurch' status. Can these high numbers simply be attributed both to the relative structural prominence of the Catholic Church, and high religiosity in society? Those who label themselves Christian in California is 63% which, in fact, is lower than the self-identified Christian population in two of the British parishes I used (67.8% and 65.9%). Do these figures challenge our notions of what is typically American or British in terms of religion? Not really, for while 63% of Californians class themselves as Christian, intriguingly, 22% of religious Nones and 29% of 'nothing in particulars' in California say they are 'absolutely certain' about their belief in God. Furthermore, 47% of Californians say religion is 'very important' in their life (Pew Research Center, 2014) in comparison to 29% of Canadians and 21% of Brits (Pew Research Center, 2018). In other words, even on the relatively secularised west coast, we could argue that the American 'air' is still more hospitable to and open to religion than is Britain's. It is likely that this to some extent contributes to the high Mass attendance figures.

A final remark before moving on. There are perennial questions over whether either America or Europe is the 'exceptional case' – in terms of, respectively, their relative religiousness or secularisation (cf. Berger et al, 2008; Davie, 2002). The literature leads us to conclude that there are multiple forms of modernity manifesting varying forms of religiousness and secularity, thanks to histories unique to each country (cf. Berger et al, 2008; Himmelfarb, 2005). America may exhibit a seemingly friendlier attitude towards religion, but Berger argues that it is pluralism that makes its impact in both continents, undermining homogeneity, and creating conditions for a 'sacred umbrella' mode of religion to arise (cf. Berger, 2008: 13).

A second consideration is immigration. 55% of Catholics in California are immigrants, of which 10% are first generation. The parish did not track statistics of how regularly the immigrants in their congregation attended Mass, so, while there are sizeable Mexican and Filipino populations at the parish, the percentage of the Mass-going population they constitute is unknown. While these numbers likely contribute, too, to 'megachurch' status, there is a further observation to make here. Bearing in mind the parish's explicit commitment to intentional, cultural change, it is likely that the existence of multiple ethnic groups affects its efforts to renegotiate its identity and, given that few British parishes are without the experience of immigration, this factor in fact introduces a point of comparison.

What I found intriguing about this parish was that – despite the structural and cultural factors contributing towards 'megachurch' status, despite its large numbers and relatively high Mass attendance – leaders still spoke of the parish's identity in ways that suggested a renegotiation or CS elaboration:

> And the way that we want … to see the parish is... we're here on mission. As time goes on, the building is a structure and you just get used to seeing it, you just think, 'oh, this building will never go away' and people know we're here, and we don't really have to ... aside from put on some events and invite people, that's really all we have to do. And we know this is not cutting it anymore in this culture.[40]

Certainly, as Catholics, the Californian parish's experience is not one of being in the minority as it is in Britain, or of evangelising secular 'Nones' rather than evangelical Protestants.[41] From a British outsider's point of view, there seemed little evidence of a diminishing 'common stock of knowledge', going by the strong levels of knowledge and devotion at weekday Masses displayed by children from the parish school.[42] And yet, there is an understanding among parish leaders that the culture is slowly changing, and that what has worked in the past will not necessarily continue to work. There is a recognition of the new mission field (cf. 2.1.1) outside the parish, marked by the secular$_3$ landscape.

[40] Interview, 15 May 2017
[41] Field Notes, 26-28 May 2017
[42] Field Notes, 10 May 2017

Despite the comparison limitations introduced by the undisguisable structural differences between a Californian parish and British parishes, I reached the conclusion that the parish's foresight in recognising cultural change and responding to it would be an extremely valuable contribution to this study. Not only are they initiating change, but they are doing this in a structural context where there could be strong reasons to maintain the status quo, and therefore high resistance. After all, why introduce change when Mass attendance is high? In other words, this parish's decision to initiate change in a context where decline was not as immediate a threat as in other western contexts, I thought courageous and fascinating.

Furthermore, there was enough similarity to afford some comparison: namely, (i) the comparative Christian affiliation in each context; (ii) the overwhelming impact of pluralism in each context; (iii) the structural impact of immigration on the parish's ability to renegotiate its identity. While I would need to heavily qualify the sociological findings through the lens of structure, I believed there was enough similarity here to warrant including this parish in my study. Therefore, henceforward this parish shall be termed, Parish A.[43]

The second parish I explored as a candidate for inclusion in the first phase of the study was based in Nova Scotia, Canada. Through a best-selling book, an international conference and a parish renewal ministry through which it coaches other parishes around the world, this parish had developed a reputation for initiating strategic, cultural change in order to more effectively hand on a 'shared social product'. What of the quantitative criterion? While Parish B did not start collecting figures on Mass attendance until 2017, the parish had seen a significant increase in engagement using the Gallup ME^{25} survey. Within two years, the parish's engaged : disengaged ratio rose from 0.83 : 1 to a high of 2.93 : 1.[44] This qualifies the parish under my figures heading.

Once again, putting aside the parish's commitment to change, what structural factors could cause such a growth in engagement? Here, in the Canadian landscape, structural factors in terms of religious decline are closer to the British level, and therefore, less problematic for the purposes of my research. For this parish, shifting its strategy towards the new mission field

[43] To preserve confidentiality related to people and issues at all five parishes, I have anonymised them and will eliminate details that would reveal their identity as far as possible. The parishes will be labelled A-E and the corresponding pastor/parish priest will be labelled Pastor A, Parish Priest C as relevant.
[44] That is, the number of engaged parishioners (described as having a strong psychological connection to their parish) to every one actively disengaged parishioner (who rarely shows up or is otherwise hostile about the parish).

was therefore of greater urgency. Catholics are disaffiliating more rapidly, and the proportions of Nones and those of non-Christian religions are higher (Pew Research Center, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2013). 55% of Canadians identify as Christian compared to 29% who are religiously unaffiliated (Pew Research Center, 2018). Yet, in the Nova Scotian town where this parish is situated, 31.5% of the population identify as Catholic: again, around the same level as California, and higher than Britain. This, too, would likely give the Catholic Church greater structural prominence in the Catholic mind, if not locally too. 25% class themselves as Nones (Statistics Canada, 2013), higher than the unaffiliated rate in the Atlantic region of Canada as a whole (16% according to the 2011 National Household survey), yet lower than more secular regions such as British Columbia (44% religious unaffiliated). The percentage of Nones is within the same range as the other parishes studied, all of which lie between 24.5% and 29.7% (excluding one anomaly in a British parish which was much higher at 38.9%). It is clear that in Nova Scotia, too, there is a structural reality of pluralism that undermines homogeneity, 'fragilising' both faith and worldview.

The proportion of Catholics in the general population, which is high in comparison to Britain, is a structural element that will need to be qualified. Yet unlike California, disaffiliation in Nova Scotia is at a rapider rate, and the American openness to religion does not exist in the same way. What is clear, however, is that none of these figures account for the increase in engagement. A correlation between this area of growth and the efforts of the parish would seem, at first hand, likely. That the parish has made this achievement in the context of wider disaffiliation seems significant, and for this reason, I decided to include it in the first phase of my study. The parish will be known as Parish B. In addition to the structural elements already raised concerning Parish B, the only other noteworthy structural reality is the comparative lack of immigration to the area: the population is majority white and indigenous. This will be a point of contrast rather than common ground shared with the other parishes.

Having identified the two parishes whose studies will form the first phase of my research, it is important to reassert that, despite the grounds which justify choosing them, the need continually to qualify their cultural characteristics through a structural lens will be critical to avoid reaching unwarranted conclusions. This is especially relevant for the Californian parish. The data we have considered demonstrates that the British and Canadian landscapes engender a far lower commitment to religion than does the US landscape. This cannot be ignored as we examine the culture of Parish A, reaching conclusions about which cultural characteristics may

be linked to the wider US, cultural property of openness to religion. At the same time, the fact that Parish A is initiating strategic change in the midst of healthy attendance is significant: in other words, they are rowing against a tide with which parishes in more secularised countries do not have to contend. While selecting parishes from different national, social, political and economic contexts means more complex analysis, the insights we shall glean from Parish A that is ahead of the curve in terms of anticipating greater religious decline will be considerable. Furthermore, we have other points of comparison: for parishes in all three countries, we will be examining how religion fares in a pluralistic landscape. In Parish A and in two of the British parishes, immigration will be a structural factor that will likely influence each parish's culture. Overall, I hold that there are enough areas both of common ground and of divergence to allow for informative, if sometimes complex, studies of American, Canadian and British Catholic parishes.

In some final remarks, I want to expand on my methodological approach outlined from 2.3 onwards. I want to define what I hope to achieve through the two parishes I have selected, which match the two criteria outlined. In my opening paragraph to this section, I indicated that the expectation of forming a hypothesis about other parishes based on these initial two would be unrealistic and sociologically impossible. Following my critical realist account of social reality, even a preliminary study of 1000 parishes could not enable me to achieve a hypothesis that could therefore be proved or disproved in other parishes. This is the temptation to discover generalising laws, the goal of an empirical, closed system approach, but impermissible for a critical realist, who looks, instead, for 'generative mechanisms'.

This conclusion has some significant repercussions for my research. I conclude that it would be impossible for me to achieve my third and fourth research objectives (cf. Introduction) thanks to the theoretical approach I am taking. I now see that my third objective was based on a positivist assumption that generalisable laws could be uncovered from a sample of parishes. Instead, what I hope to achieve is to reach five separate hypotheses (one for each parish) about what contributes to growth or decline for that parish. We can identify common mechanisms between parishes, but we cannot take these observations any further. This, then, nullifies my fourth objective: to outline practical steps that parishes can take towards cultural change. Parishes may wish to emulate the cultural mechanisms they see in the five parishes here, but only their unique context, with its structural and cultural factors, will determine the fruitfulness of these mechanisms.

What, therefore, can we hope to achieve? As stated in 2.3, what we cannot achieve in breadth, as the positivist claims to achieve, we can achieve in depth. First, I intend, through ethnography, to establish the phenomena related to the growth in Parishes A and B. Second, through narrative and drawing on theory, I seek to identify the mechanisms that cause such events. Third, I will offer rival explanations and narratives where they exist. In following this methodology, I seek to identify the cultural characteristics causing growth in Parishes A and B, and the mechanisms behind them. There may be overlap between the characteristics I uncover, or there may be no overlap at all.

A more extensive step would be to repeat the study multiple times in a large number of parishes. We could then introduce a quantitative element by identifying to what extent a certain cultural mechanism is present in parishes. However, this would be beyond the scope of this study. What I do undertake, however, is to repeat the same study outlined above in three British parishes: C, D and E. Similarly, here, we will be able to identify cultural mechanisms in the parishes that may be causing growth or decline. We will be able to compare each of these parishes, too, with Parishes A and B, to identify whether any cultural mechanisms seem likewise present in more than one, all along being rigorous in referencing structural causes, where relevant. What we will be able to achieve are some initial indications about what might be causing decline or growth in Parishes C, D and E. What we cannot do is fall for the positivist temptation which lures us to jump from these initial indications to generalisable laws about British parishes. This is not possible, and the conclusions of any study claiming such generalisability would be extremely doubtful.

3.2 Selection of Parish Case Studies

Having chosen Parishes A and B as parishes where I want to uncover mechanisms linked to growth, I selected a second group of UK parishes to study. While in laboratory conditions, one would seek a range of UK geographical and sociodemographic characteristics, to include a range of sizes, priestly leadership styles, and varying approaches to evangelisation, in an ‘open system’ context for research, such a precise range is impossible to achieve, even among 1000 parishes. According to these loose criteria, however, numerous parishes were considered and short-listed, mostly identified by personal connections. The three selected were as follows.

Parish C is a suburban parish lying to the west of a large, southern English town. It was founded in the mid 1950s in order to meet the spiritual needs of this new, post-war housing development. The church was built in 1965-6, and before this time, the church hall was used for Masses; some parishioners remember receiving sacraments there. At the time the case study took place (September – December 2017), the population size of the parish was 23,823, with British/Irish making up the ethnic majority (90.8%). 58.5% of the parish's population would consider themselves Christian – the largest religious affiliation – followed by those of no religion (38.9%). The average Mass count in 2017 was 250, with 48 Baptisms, 26 First Communions, 4 marriages, 18 funerals, and zero receptions into the Church or Confirmations. 30.89% of the households in the parish are counted as deprived, and the locality has an Index of Multiple Deprivation score of 23.5.[45]

Parish D is a large, southern urban parish with four churches. The Catholic registers of this parish can be traced back to 1721, although the current church was built in 1926. At the time the case study took place (January – March 2018), the population size of the parish was 83,602, with white British making up the largest ethnicity (92.1%), followed by other European (2.3%). 67.8% consider themselves Christian, while those of no religion comprise 29.7%. The average Mass count in 2017 was 1,071, with 65 Baptisms, 72 First Communions, 20 marriages, 46 funerals, 3 receptions into the Church and 53 Confirmations. 14.34% of the households in the parish are counted as deprived, and the locality has an Index of Multiple Deprivation score of 10.6.

Parish E is a small semi-rural parish lying to the south of a national park, and to the north of a small, town in northern England. The church, built in 1901 in the Pugin style, was intended to accommodate 500 people, but now has a regular Sunday Mass attendance of around 160. Two wards that fall within the territory of Parish E rank in the top 1% and 4% most deprived wards in the country, according to the Multiple Deprivation Index.[46] Records of Mass attendance show that in 1999, the average figure was 274, while in 2017, the figure was 161, up from 144 in the previous year. Interestingly, Baptisms have not declined in the same period of 19 years.

[45] Parishes C and D belong to a diocese that has developed an online platform for aggregating National Census 2011 statistics for each of its parishes as well as from internal data from the diocese. See http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/dashboard/ and http://www.portsmouthdiocese.org.uk/directory/figures_massattendance.php [Accessed 1 December 2019].
[46] See www.opendatacommunities.org

In 1999, the number of Baptisms was 35, while in 2017, the number was 37. In 2017, there were 4 receptions into the Church, 21 First Communions, 6 Confirmations and 11 funerals.[47]

The three UK parishes contain within them varying sociodemographic realities. While Parish C and Parish E have low Multiple Deprivation Index scores,[48] Parish D, while more affluent, also contains pockets of deprivation. Deprivation looks different in different contexts: while Parish C is suburban (found on a housing estate), Parish E is rural, and Parish D, the wealthiest parish, is the most urban. Culture is influenced but not determined by structural elements such as economic reality. For example, financial uncertainty was an issue that arose regularly in Parish C. The question arose in Parish C's homilies urging greater financial giving:

> I have been clear and upfront with you about this: We. Have. No. Money. In the past month I have commissioned a report on the Presbytery that has identified £100,000 worth of work. We haven't started on the church and hall. We cannot pay our staff, and I am myself presently living far below the expected income band because the parish simply does not pay. The diocese has been generous, but we cannot rely on it to save us, still less make us grow. This is not my responsibility; it is yours. It is no longer possible for us to survive on a handful of loose change in the collection plate. Every parishioner and family needs to seriously consider giving regularly and seriously, through a Standing Order, and in a manner that represents a genuine act of sacrificial love for the Church. Our present Sunday collection is embarrassing, and whilst many here struggle financially, many of you do not. If you have a smart phone, a car less than five years old, a smoking habit, the occasional meal, coffee, or pint out, or satellite or cable TV package, the chances are that you can do more. Please, please, with God as your witness, step up to this challenge.[49]

It also emerged in the theology of adopting the Extraordinary Form Mass. An idea expressed more than once by leaders at Parish C was that the orientation of this Mass symbolically enabled parishioners to turn their backs on poverty, struggle and squalor and facing towards

[47] Figures from parish registers
[48] The Index of Multiple Deprivation scores is an overall relative measure of deprivation constructed by combining seven domains of deprivation. Source: Department of Communities and Local Government.
[49] Homily, 1 October 2017

Christ and Heaven.[50] This is an example of an idea espoused within the parish's Cultural System.

The table below indicates religious population of the areas in which the parishes I studied are based.

Parish/Location	Catholic population %	Christian population %	'None' population %
Parish A / California (Pew 2014)	28	63	27
Parish B / Nova Scotia (Statistics Canada 2013; Pew 2018)	31.5	71 (55 Canada)	25
Parish C / UK[51]	7	58.5	38.9
Parish D / UK	6.9	67.8	29.7
Parish E / UK[52]	10.6	65.9	24.5

To this point, we have hinted at the relative religiousness between the US and Britain. First, and perhaps most surprisingly, in two UK parishes (Parish D and Parish E) the Christian population is in fact higher than that in which the US parish is located. The two US coasts are known to be less religious than other parts of America, and these figures challenge our notions of what is typically American or British in terms of religion. Yet at the same time I accept the general trend discussed above that in the US, "both behavioural and opinion indicators are much more robustly religious" (Berger, 2008: 12). We recall that a significantly higher percentage of Californians class religion as 'very important' to them.

Second, the Catholic population constitutes a much smaller proportion in the UK, contributing towards Catholics' perception of being a beleaguered minority. It further explains the focus

[50] Field Notes, 2 December 2017
[51] Figures for Parishes C and D from diocesan 'dashboard', cf. footnote 95.
[52] Based on diocesan 2004 figures: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Catholic_Diocese_of_Lancaster and on 2011 National Census figures.

noted in Parish A towards the evangelisation of the baptised. Finally, the None population is, for four of the parishes, fairly consistent, and within a few percentage points of each other. The anomaly is Parish C, which has a significantly larger None population, which we will need to bear in mind in our analysis of this parish.

3.3 Outlining Methods

At Parishes A, B and E, I spent three successive weeks based completely in each parish. For Parishes C and D, this was unfeasible due to other work commitments, so I travelled to each one once or twice a week over a three-month period, generally spending over fifty contact hours in each parish (regardless of size). A question was raised by the Pastoral Council in Parish D over how I could ensure valid findings, considering the time I would spend there, versus size of the parish. With a Sunday Mass attendance of 1,071 it is certainly larger than the other two English parishes, although smaller than the two North American parishes. In the event, fifty hours was adequate to capture ample data for the study of this parish. In the parishes where more activity is occurring, the time given is certainly more intensely spent, and data and observations are richer. Field notes contain more detail than those of the two smaller parishes. In the case of all five parishes, when the three methods being used to capture data (see below) tend to point towards commonly recurring themes, one can be fairly confident of their validity.

Below, I explain my generally unstructured methodological approach. The only structure I mentally adopted in my case studies were Edgar Schein's three levels of cultural reality (artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and deeply-held assumptions) (Schein, 2010: 44). This helped me to parse the "social products" contained in Popper's World 3 (cf. 2.2.4): it identifies those physical and psychological 'items' that have "social intentionality" behind them (Porpora, 2015: 159). By artefacts, I refer to the visible and psychological realities that are products of the human mind: physical space and its use; routines; rituals; interactions between people; organisational processes; structure and climate of meetings; use of time. Participant observation, recorded descriptively, is the means by which I chose to examine these social products. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews helped to complete the establishing of the phenomenon, by uncovering the meaning behind these artefacts, through revealing interviewees' espoused beliefs and values. Through focus groups, I aimed to present back the espoused values to a selected group of people, asking them to discuss these values, intentionally mining to discover what may be deeply-held assumptions. The combination of this data,

together with existing theory, enabled me to reach explanations behind the "contingent conjuncture of mechanisms" (Porpora, 2015: 59).

Participant Observation

The majority of my hours of contact time in each parish were spent in immersive, participant observation. This was unstructured for at least the first week of each case study, allowing focus and structure to emerge (Punch, 1998: 184-90). There are certain dangers related to unstructured observation. First, selective recall concerns one's mind following a pattern in the way it recalls some things and forgets others; second, selective perception concerns the mind filtering information (this can be influenced by one's 'unthoughts' (cf. 1.1.6) an issue I will consider further below); third, accentuated perception concerns one's mind being influenced by the feelings of the moment (Denscombe, 2003: 206). Systematic observation can alleviate some of these potential issues. Denscombe outlines that what is chosen to be observed should be relevant, complete, overt, obvious, precise, easy to record (2003: 209). However, I would argue that such a structured approach, rather than eliminating bias, is simply in danger of transferring bias to the planning time prior to observation. How one structures an observation schedule will be influenced by pre-existing theory and 'unthoughts'. My hermeneutical, descriptive approach intrinsically involved my agency as a researcher. Attempting to obscure this reality by creating supposedly objective charts against which to mark and measure cultural artefacts would be to attempt 'the God trick' (cf. Haraway, 1988). My critical realist approach rather unambiguously, unashamedly acknowledges my role in the events observed and recorded. When one is engaged in unstructured observation, the making of field notes is a fairly urgent business and I attempted to ensure I completed these as soon as possible after the observation, in a setting away from the context (Denscombe, 2003: 217). As my unstructured observation progressed throughout the first week, certain artefacts tended to stand out as important, strange, unexpected or contradictory. While acknowledging that these impressions are subjectively particular to me, I would note these observations as of importance to enquire about with parishioners.

Interviews

Six formal, semi-structured interviews were undertaken at each parish with key staff and volunteers. Their interpretations of key artefacts were sought, as well as the beliefs and values they espoused. After spending a week immersed in each parish, the identity of key culture bearers in the parish became more apparent, and they were selected in consultation with the

parish priest. The advantage of a semi-structured interview is that elaboration and clarification can be asked in addition to standardised questioning (May, 2001). If an entirely unstructured process were adopted, the meanings an interviewee would attribute to cultural artefacts would be entirely within their own frame of reference, and the interviewer would be less able to question them in the context of other forms of meaning-making, either in practices observed or in the espoused beliefs of others.

The question of intersubjectivity between the interviewee and interviewer is an interesting one, as there is evidence that respondents tend to accommodate their answers to their perception of the interviewer (May, 2001: 128). This inevitability affirms the stance I have adopted in being transparent about my agency as an interviewer. There is also evidence that the best qualitative responses are elicited when a sustained relationship has been achieved (*ibid*.: 127). I certainly found that interviews yielded the richest data after a relationship had been established in the first week of participant observation.

Prior to the first two case studies, I undertook a brief pilot of my methods in a UK parish in April 2017. The interview I conducted there revealed the detrimental effect of asking directly about 'culture'. The extract below demonstrates how the interviewee immediately started thinking in terms of ethnic cultures:

> **Interviewer: My study is on culture in the parish. By culture I mean the social behaviours, ideas, values that make up the parish. It's a very broad question, but how would you describe the culture of X parish?**
>
> **Interviewee:** Well I would say it's a very rich culture, even just thinking where people are from. And also, devotions… we've got people from Kerala and the Philippines who have great devotions and they are teaching us so much. We also have … the culture of family in our parish is really building up. If we do an event that involves families, we'll get huge amounts of people. We have a huge parish Mass day once a year and it's open-air outside on the school field. And we do a lot of publicity but it's speaking to the different communities and inviting people to bring food from their culture, and it's sold … people bringing their own picnic. So we have amazing noodles from the Philippines and curries from Kerala… barbecue food… That's part of the culture I think.

The pilot interview led me to adapt my approach: in subsequent interviews, I rarely if ever used the word 'culture'; I simply asked questions which would lead interviewees to describe their experience of belonging to the parish, and therefore unconsciously revealing cultural characteristics. Each interview tended to last between 30 minutes and one hour. The template interview schedule I used can be found in Appendix 2.

Focus Groups

The purpose of the focus groups was, towards the end of each case study, to present back to a sample of parishioners some of the values that had been observed and spoken of in the parish. I wanted to encourage open discussion among the participants in order to challenge and/or elaborate on espoused beliefs and values, and, if possible, to uncover some underlying basic assumptions. To achieve this, I needed to reach a balance between a self-managed group where there is low-level moderation, free of researcher influence (Morgan, 1997), and a high-level moderation approach where questions are asked in a specific order and there is little chance to deviate from the topic. Free and open discussion of participants is crucial towards allowing debate, disagreement, and a deep discussion of issues. Yet, a moderating role is also needed to guide, ask questions, probe for further information, and ensure that the data generated will be relevant for the research topic (Cronin, 2008; Krueger, 2000; Morgan, 1997).

Here are two fairly simple examples of 'assumptions' in practice from the data. The first concerns how architecture shapes culture. Of the following two exchanges among parishioners, the first took place in a parish built in the 1960s, and the second in a parish with a 1905 Pugin-designed church. In both cases, church architecture has formed quite deeply ingrained assumptions in the groups of parishioners at S-C level, about what 'being the Church' means. We might say it has informed their 'social imaginary'.

Exchange 1

P1: It was designed for a specific purpose. We come in this way. … There's [a] meeting place. The whole idea of this building was to make this throughway [gathering space] hopefully for people to stop off… even to stop off two minutes!

P2: To get people to communicate, to talk.

P1: You've got to communicate first before you can start building community.

Exchange 2

P1: As soon as you go in the door of any church really, you feel the difference. It's a calm, quiet, serene place. […]
P2: Another church I used to go to was ultra modern, it was like something off Grand Designs. It did not feel like a church.
P3: The architectural design here… it's 'churchy', it's a proper church.

The second example concerns the depth and proximity of relationships assumed normal within the parish. Again, these assumptions reveal different understandings of the nature of the parish community:

Exchange 3
P1: It's not a family affair for me. It took quite a long time to start engaging the people around me... Creature of habit, I always sit in the same place.
P2: …there are people I know who go to [the same Mass as I do]... I haven't got the faintest idea what their name is but I nod and say hello if I see them around in town.

Exchange 4
P1: …what's nice is, I'm coming [to Mass] not just by myself! I'm coming with you and you and you and you and we're in the pews. … The peace be with you? Oh my gosh, sometimes it's like... you're doing a... [sharing peace with lots of people] [laughter] And people are like, 'what is up with this?'
P2: The priest continues Mass and we're still hugging!
P1: Everybody knows everybody and we're all happy. … Because we all love God and we're there for that reason. It's just beautiful.

These are just two of multiple examples. The data reveal countless assumptions that we shall encounter, from where in the church it is normal or acceptable to sit, to what the role of the priest should be, to how acceptable it is to talk with others in the parish about one's personal faith.

My case studies involved parishes which ranged from 5,000 attendees on a Sunday to 160. I needed a common approach to focus groups that would achieve a cross-section sampling of each parish. I decided against random sampling for a number of reasons. First, given that I wanted participants to discuss openly, it seemed that drawing together groups of people with

shared experiences or similar social identities would be more successful than those of disparate views or backgrounds (Cronin, 2008: 233). I opted for structured over random sampling in order "to gain insight and understanding by hearing from representatives from the target population" (Cronin, 2008: 234; see also Barbour and Kitzinger, 1999: 7).

Second, I needed to consider the type of composition of each group: what type of similar social identity would be appropriate? Here, questions of 'Socio-Cultural integration' emerge. Influencing relationships between cultural agents lead to differing degrees of cohesion among people. I wanted to gather representation from different sectors of the parish, where different cultural characteristics might be evident, perhaps varied from the beliefs and values espoused by parish leaders in interviews. Focus groups may reveal areas of competitive contradiction, or of contingent complementarity. For these reasons, I felt that grouping people according to age, ethnicity or length of time belonging to the parish would not expose the S-C level of culture so clearly. Rather, to focus on this level, I decided to form sectors by using the criteria of different degrees of engagement with the parish itself. Interviewees had been chosen on the basis of their deep engagement in the life of the parish. I could therefore use focus groups to discover how their standpoints were similar to or different from those who were less engaged. There are likely to be many ways to categorise engagement, but I adopted the distinctions used by Gallup in their ME[25] survey of churches. While this is a somewhat crude method of categorising parishioners, I felt it would serve the purpose of exposing S-C integration. Three types of parishioner are identified, and they are here described as follows by Winseman:

1) *The engaged*: "These members are loyal and have strong psychological and emotional connections to their church or parish. They are more spiritually committed, they are more likely to invite friends, family members, and coworkers to congregational events, and they give more, both financially and in commitment of time" (2007: 67).
2) *The not-engaged*: "These members may attend regularly, but they do not have strong psychological or emotional connections to their congregation; their connections are more social than spiritual. They give moderately but not sacrificially, and they may do a minimal amount of volunteering in the community. They are less likely to invite others and more likely to leave" (2007: 68).
3) *The actively disengaged*: "There are two types of actively disengaged members. The first type usually show up only once or twice a year, if at all" (2007: 68). The second type attends regularly, but can display hostility towards norms and practices of the parish, in other words, they would find themselves on the fringe.

By what methods, then, did I recruit participants for focus groups? There are a number of ways that sampling can be undertaken: sampling from an existing list; sending out questionnaires to the parish population asking for participants; snowball sampling (Cronin, 2008: 234). Since none of the five parishes formally categorise their parishioners according to their level of engagement, I generally relied on the parish priest or a key staff member or volunteer to nominate – and in some cases, invite – participants. As those most deeply involved in the parish's life, they were best placed in terms of their knowledge to nominate group members. The process of forming focus groups was itself revealing of culture. I will make some very brief remarks here, mostly around recruitment, as deeper cultural analysis will be reserved for Chapters 4 and 5.

In Parishes A and E, recruitment was extremely smooth. In Parish A, the pastor's assistant individually invited participants to focus groups, pizza was served at each one, and there seemed to be no trouble in recruiting the numbers.[53] In Parish E, the parish priest himself invited participants and again, focus groups were easily filled. Another common factor to Parishes A and E's focus groups was the unexpectedly warm and encouraging nature of the actively disengaged groups. We shall discuss possible contributing factors to this phenomenon in 4.1.1 and 4.1.3, as we look at the impact of personal transformation and of the small size of congregation on the nature of community in the parish.

There was only one parish (Parish D) where no actively disengaged parishioners at all responded to a focus group invitation. This was despite invitations sent by the secretary to around fifty families loosely connected to the parish through First Communion or Baptism programmes. In an attempt to remedy the situation, I replaced this focus group with a phone conversation with two parents who were loosely connected with the parish, and who attended the parish a couple of times per year. They were willing to share their insights and experiences of Parish D and this generated some good data on the actively disengaged.

[53] This is in contrast with what one might expect given one Parish A interviewee's comments: "I think the busy, southern California life is a challenge. So many people spend an hour or more commuting after a full eight hour work day. Then to have children, and to have families that they have responsibilities to, just life gets busy. I think it's a challenge even to get them here, even on Sunday. Because there are so many other things competing for their time and attention. People are just exhausted. They have their children in two or three different sports activities and clubs they belong to and... I don't know if that's typical of everywhere." (Interview, 25 May 2017)

Finally, in Parishes B and C hostility was evident in the actively disengaged focus group. It took on a different quality in both groups: in Parish C, it was explicit and angry. In Parish B, it was under-stated and passive. Both are triggered by change in the parish, and a direction of travel they are not completely behind. These are discussed more deeply in Chapter 5.

3.4 The Role of the Researcher

Early in this thesis, I used Taylor's concept of an 'unthought' to suggest that researchers should examine their personal biases in particular in the context of social research on religion (1.1.6). Certainly, a positivist approach to research contends that a researcher is entirely value-free and neutral about their area of study. There is a danger when methodological approaches claim to minimise the influence of existing theories or assumptions, that "researchers can transcend their situatedness" or that, "the chicken and egg can be separated" (Bulmer, 1979: 667). Thomas and James comment,

> In grounded theory, a set of 'neutral' analytic procedures replace the 'neutral' controls and treatments of the experimental situation in the hope that they will provide the same guaranteed route to an uncontaminated correspondence. (2006: 779)

Yet, the study of culture reveals how deeply held (and therefore powerful and impossible to nullify) our assumptions are. Researchers always come loaded with values, assumptions and biases:

> All knowledge, necessarily, results from the conditions of its production … and irrevocably bears the marks of its origins in the minds and intellectual practices of those … who give voice to it. (Stanley and Wise, 1990: 39)

Critical realists realise that value-free research is impossible:

> CR expressly challenges the equation of objectivity with neutrality. From the CR perspective, it is not neutrality that is to be demanded of competent scientific researchers, but intellectual honesty – the honesty to admit when their own expectations go unmet, the honest to admit when rivals have the better argument. (Porpora, 2015: 210)

Many of the positions I have already taken indicate my own 'unthoughts' as a researcher. My ontological realism and metaphysical openness to the possibility of God's existence stem from my personal faith as a Catholic; rather than a hindrance to research, I believe that these positions allow me to interpret practices, discourses and texts according to the metaphysical interpretations that actors ascribe to them (cf. 2.1.1). Following Taylor's recognition that we all inhabit the immanent frame, my own way of inhabiting it is "as an open frame with skylights open to transcendence" (J. Smith, 2014: 193). We can recognise our construal of life either as a 'take' (which recognises itself as a construal) or as a 'spin' (which does not). A 'spin' is a position whose philosophical or theological outlook is so absolute that it does not allow for the possibility of other positions, that is, fundamentalism. Remaining committed to a generally pluralist approach to social science, and fully conscious of the 'malaises of immanence' that fragilise and throw doubt upon my position, I hold firmly to the position of a 'take', recognising that, even with an ontologically realist understanding of reality, my interpretation of this reality – including my take on secularisation, and my take on how a Catholic parish should best respond to this reality – cannot be final or absolute: this is my epistemologically relativist standpoint.

Furthermore, my anthropological standpoint recognises my agency as a researcher in the context of each field I will study. Organisation theorist Edgar Schein warns:

> When something implicit is made explicit one may destroy its utility or may threaten those power centres who feel ownership of some of the rites and symbols. At such times, the organization may react quite violently against the ethnographer, no matter how valid his or her findings may be. (1990: 238)

Such a recognition is an honest and transparent understanding of a researcher's agency; it differs from earlier anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski who aimed to capture the native's point of view in such a way that magnified the omniscient researcher: "It is I who will describe them or create them" (1967: 140; cited in van Maanen, 2011: 51). The written agreement signed by each parish at the start of each case study made the risk of the researcher's involvement explicit.[54]

[54] See Researcher/Parish Agreement, 'Impact of Study', in Appendix 1.

Finally, the subjectivities of the researcher are, of course, at play in the systematic procedures for coding and comparison, and the more we insist on its scientific objectivity, the more blind we are to the subjectivity intrinsic to the process. Adopting an explicitly hermeneutical approach, I unashamedly declare the subjectivity integrally involved in coding and at all stages of the research.

3.5 Analysis of Data

In 3.1.1, while I rejected the use of a grounded theory approach, I noted that my approach is not entirely without similarities to it. The third step of methodological adjudication, the ongoing "double conversation between self and data and self and literature" (Porpora, 2015: 215) borrows from grounded theory. In this sense, my analysis of data draws on grounded theory as a guide.

Hodkinson describes coding as,

> …ongoing process of assigning conceptual labels to different segments of data in order to identify themes, patterns, processes and relationships. (2008: 87)

Loosely following Glaser and Strauss' approach (1967), I studied the field notes and transcripts line by line, noting themes in the margins. I then mapped out these themes, organising them into codes. Once again taking the data line by line, I assigned codes respectively. Eventually, these codes were grouped under categories. I experimented when analysing data from Parish A with the possibility of using the five categories outlined by Edgar Schein (2010) when he studies organisations. These five categories are: (1) issues of external adaptation; (2) issues of internal integration; (3) reality and truth; (4) time and space; (5) human nature, activity, relationships.

I was cautious about arranging codes under these category headings for two reasons: first, I wanted to avoid manipulating the data into a framework; second, I wanted to bear in mind how a framework that works for businesses should be adapted to suit parishes (cf. 2.3.1). In experimenting with this framework during my studies at Parishes A and B, I reached the conclusion that the data was not compromised by its being sorted under these headings. Rather,

they illuminated different aspects of the parish, especially how it viewed itself in relation to the wider society beyond the parish (external adaptation). In terms of translating a business framework to a parish context, and as my familiarity with Schein's framework grew, I reordered the headings, so that (3) reality and truth, and (4) time and space, were considered first. From a philosophical viewpoint, this is a better fit, since time and space, and reality and truth, ontologically precede the other items, which flow from them. (For example, how a parish relates to the outside community (external adaptation) will be influenced by certain of its deeply held assumptions (reality and truth).)[55] I also discovered how much a building and architectural style (time and space) can influence a parish's self-understanding, so this too should take some precedence in ordering.

In the process of coding, comparing each new instance within a category with previous instances helped me to build up an understanding of the properties of the category. In Glaser and Strauss' words,

> The constant comparison of incidents very soon starts to generate theoretical properties of the category. The analyst starts thinking of the full range of types of continua of the category, its dimensions, the conditions under which it is pronounced or minimised, its major consequences, its relationship with other categories, and its other properties. (1967: 106)

When an instance replicates a feature already identified, "it only adds bulk to the coded data and nothing to the theory" (*ibid*.: 111). When no further instances add anything new to the category, it is regarded as theoretically saturated. Gradually, the number of highly specific categories is reduced to a smaller number of broader, more overtly theoretical concepts. "Resignifying" these phenomena through the use of narrative with theoretical language gives voice to explanation: 'generative mechanisms' behind the phenomena are uncovered. In the final step, rival explanations and narratives must be considered to ensure that the best and most plausible explanation is given.

3.6 Cultural Characteristics Linked to Growth: Parishes A and B

[55] The ordering of these categories does not affect the thesis, as I do not use them to structure the data in Chapters 4 and 5. However, they are the categories I used to analyse the data and also to present the data to each of the three UK parishes as a parish report.

In Chapter 1, I described the postmodern, secular landscape in which Catholic parishes find themselves, and asked how they might best thrive in such an environment. I adopted the 'secular$_3$' definition as an accurate description of the landscape as one of "contested belief" (Smith, 2014: 142), where all ultimate beliefs – religious and nonreligious – are vulnerable. The 'feel' of the secular$_3$ age is one fraught with tensions, of 'cross-pressure' leading to a 'nova effect', an explosion of myriad options for meaning and significance. This situation ultimately 'fragilises' any belief standpoint we might take. Within this "spiritual supernova, a kind of galloping pluralism on the spiritual plane" (Taylor, 2007: 300), the postmodern individual experiences a desire for authenticity, to find "the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity" (Taylor, 1991: 68) – an often lonely, spiritual quest, susceptible to *ennui*.

Within the context of this landscape, we have noted that, when Catholic parishes develop distinctiveness they form certain 'sacred umbrellas' which afford those who shelter beneath them with identity, meaning and belonging (Smith et al, 1998: 118-9), "…small, portable, accessible, relational worlds … 'under' which their beliefs can make complete sense" (Smith et al., 1998: 106). We now turn to two such 'sacred umbrellas'. Here, we will establish the cultural phenomena of these parishes, noting the mechanisms that appear to cause growth at each of them.

3.6.1 Characteristics Common to Both Parishes

'Personal transformation', 'authenticity' and 'invitation and mission' were characteristics identified in both Parishes A and B. There is an organic interplay between them, as each influence and are influenced by the others. Each section will begin with a short description before a deeper analysis of the data.

Personal Transformation

Even in the planning stages of the case study at Parish A, I am told that experiencing their weekend evangelisation retreat was critical to understanding the parish. I attend the retreat on my last weekend at the parish, and by this time, expectations have been set high. The retreat is thought of extremely highly in the parish, one parishioner commenting, "it is really emotional,

heartfelt, spiritual weekend. It is just outstanding. [Pastor A] did a home run with that. I mean he truly did."[56]

As I walk into the parish hall where the retreat is to take place, on a warm Friday evening in May, I am almost overwhelmed by the joy expressed at my arrival. All retreatants are greeted in the same way. I am taken to an overflowing buffet table, and then taken to my group for the weekend, with whom I eat dinner.

Over the weekend, ten parishioners' testimonies share the Gospel message. The testimonies are marked by their honesty. On Friday night, back at my accommodation, I open the letter comprising scriptural quotations given to each retreatant 'from Jesus', which we have been encouraged to read before bed. Intimacy is a word that presents itself to me. The details of the retreat are designed to lead to an intimate encounter with Christ. Leading up to an opportunity for Confession on Saturday, there is a powerful healing of memories reflection. Naming certain weights or sins seems to demonstrate that 'nothing is off the table': whatever you have done, God wants intimacy with you. This is followed by face-to-face Confessions.

For lunch, we reverently process into the hall where the lights are dimmed and a banquet table spread out beautifully. The Blessed Sacrament is processed into the hall, and enthroned on the altar, and we are invited in silence to 'have lunch with Jesus', and to speak with him silently as if he were across the table from you.

The weekend climaxes on Saturday evening when, after talks on the Holy Spirit, we go into the church and celebrate a consecration liturgy. After a liturgy of the Word, we are invited to go up to the sanctuary group by group. Each person is invited to make a personal act of consecration to Jesus. They read the prayer with the priests standing around them, and then the three priests and deacon pray over the person, laying hands on them. The build-up leads people to be expectant for the Holy Spirit. It is emphasised clearly and sensitively that no one has to make the act of faith, they can receive prayer without that. People respond in different ways to the prayer for the Holy Spirit. Some people experience nothing at all, some cry, some experience heat. [Pastor A] hugs quite a few people who are crying; there seems to be a fearlessness about intimacy and physical expression. One lady is on the verge of tears and he

[56] Focus Group, 22 May 2017

says, “Let go, it’s safe.” There is hugging at the end between the priests, then we gather around them, lay hands on them and pray over them.

On Sunday there is great joy when we return, a real buzz. People say they are physically tired but emotionally and spiritually alive. They are more relaxed in joining in the songs. At the end, there are talks about the importance of community, and people are encouraged to join a small faith community. At the end of the weekend, five people spontaneously share testimonies about the weekend. There are lots of tears. One parishioner tells me, “I've learnt that I actually have a purpose. And having a purpose, not just coming to church, but a purpose in life is really important. I've never experienced it before.”[57]

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The ‘event’ of the evangelisation retreat at Parish A occurs thanks to the generative mechanism underlying it: the structure of the retreat with its ideational intelligibilia. Examining the retreat structure, we can conclude that this ideational content includes the order of topics presented in parishioner testimonies; the inclusion of the priest’s own testimony; opportunities to initiate personal relationship with Christ through the letter and lunch; opportunity to make an individual decision to follow Christ; physical prayer through laying on of hands. The combined effect of these elements is – in the mind of the organising team – conducive to an experience of personal transformation. While an understanding of personal freedom and individual experience is underscored (cf. 2.3.1), personal transformation occurs while encircled by dense and intimate relationships; yet, this is not only a collective encounter, but an individual one. The way in which personal transformation is discussed in both parishes suggests that people consider themselves to share similar experiences. Of course, this cannot be verified, and judgmental rationality is always fallible. Yet this assumption of common experience leads to a style of community which we shall discuss further in 4.1.

While this generative mechanism gives rise to many accounts of personal transformation we shall consider below, my fieldwork is lacking material that would give a fuller socio-cultural account. If I were to undertake such fieldwork again, I would ask questions of participants to uncover their level of comfort with the retreat: did any want to leave? Did any reject or show reluctance to any of the exercises over the weekend? This would give a fuller account of socio-cultural integration.

[57] Focus Group, 25 May 2017

At Parish B, the theme of personal transformation is also present, and yet the generative mechanism is different: here, it is the structure of the evangelisation course they use, Alpha.[58] There are similar ideational common denominators in both mechanisms, including a similar ordering of topics, emphases on both a testimony style and the importance of making an individual decision to follow Christ; physical prayer through laying on of hands.

Parishioners comment on their experiences of transformation in the following ways:

> We have a member on our team who's probably in his 70s now, mid-70s, and his comment to me after the retreat he went on, he said to me, 'I always went to church, I was involved in all these organisations. I didn't even know a relationship with Christ was even possible'.[59]

> …it all started with mom having a really powerful experience and it transforming her whole life. So her kids see, 'hey, something's different there' and this matters. This faith in Jesus Christ really has had an effect on her.[60]

> …I mean, they're over the top and going off the deep end... They're so passionate. And you can tell, and it's contagious, and you want to be around them. […] they're phenomenal. Even like - I don't know - what did God create here? It's scary.[61]

> …[people] attend an evangelisation retreat and it opens up a whole new world for them.[62]

> [People will] come [to Alpha], and they'll have complete transformations and they're our best advertisers because everybody knows it…[63]

> Alpha definitely changed my faith.[64]

[58] See www.alpha.org
[59] Interview, 26 May 2017
[60] Interview, 25 May 2017
[61] Interview, 26 May 2017
[62] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[63] Interview, 8 June 2017
[64] Interview, 8 June 2017

> …it's not my job to convert the heart, I'll let the Holy Spirit do that. And it will be on God's time.[65]

As the generative mechanisms effect experiences of personal transformation, this concept has entered the Cultural System at both Parishes A and B. Parish A's Director of Adult Faith Formation describes the parish's vision in terms of the power of Jesus transforming lives.[66] Parish A's retreat is the mechanism generating personal transformation, but also in forming the S-C distinctiveness of the parish. One Parish A leader expresses it in this way:

> I think the retreat sets the stage for those unspoken rules - how we treat each other, how we see each other, how we see ourselves, how God sees us, what we're responsible for, how we take care of each other. It does so much even nonverbally. There's so much of a nonverbal message that goes into that retreat as well, that creates culture.[67]

> The aspects about the retreat that make it so fertile is... it's made up of testimonies, people's testimonies, within the context of the kerygma and when you hear these stories, you're like, 'oh, OK, I'm not the worst sinner in the room' or you're thinking, 'these people will love me no matter what my past is, what my sin is.' You feel more free to be yourself. It's not like the Catholic community where you feel you have to be perfect or ideal or ... yes, we're all pursuing excellence and we're pursuing a relationship with God, but we're also sinners. And I think starting from that place, seeing it in other people's lives, and having that be open. There's nothing hidden, it's just all open on that retreat, that you feel, this is a community I can be transparent with, I can be vulnerable with.[68]

Here, the elements of why this mechanism is successful in generating personal transformation are expounded. In particular, the notions of, "there's nothing hidden", "it's just all open on that retreat", "a community I can be transparent with, I can be vulnerable with" are important elements to the mechanism. Specifically, since all action is always situated, and parishioners

[65] Focus Group, 13 June 2017
[66] Field Notes, 12 May 2017
[67] Interview, 15 May 2017
[68] *Ibid*.

sharing testimonies in the context of their parish community risk embarrassment: they place themselves into the hands of those who hear them, in a kind of bargaining situation. Yet, while courageous, it importantly enables the, "OK, I'm not the worst sinner in the room" response.

At the S-C level, there are variations on how the CS characteristic is understood. In some quarters, it is understood fairly ideologically. For example, there is a view that, without exceptions, and assuming a similarity in participants' experiences, everyone needs to experience the retreat. In other words, there is a desire to consciously increase the S-C impact:

> P1: … there's still cradle Catholics that I was raised with that are still here today who won't do a retreat. But you know what? They know who we are. And we soften their hearts.
> P2: And we're not giving up on them!
> P3: And I think that's the greatest thing. Just because they're choosing not to go... they're very curious... And we've reflected on them in a positive way, for the right purpose.[69]

Let us momentarily examine Parish A's characteristic from a structural standpoint. What rival explanations could be given to account for the resulting personal transformation? Has this characteristic been generated artificially by elements of the mechanism, some of whose traits stem from Californian openness, noting that the spread of 'expressive individualism' originates uniquely from American culture?[70] American cultural traits and representational characters (cf. Bellah et al., 2008) may seem "good and legitimate" (*ibid.*: 39) to Americans, and yet, we need to keep in mind that such character traits may not seem so immediately "good and legitimate" to the British or even Canadians. One of Bellah's four representational characters is the therapist: perhaps the therapeutic focus on the expressive and 'autonomous individual' may be seen here in the evangelisation retreat (cf. 1.2.1; Bellah et al, 2008: 47). This may certainly be the case, as the parish adopts a certain epistemological alignment with the wider Californian culture, adopting features that feel culturally familiar. Yet, to explain the expressions in this way does not account adequately for the resulting experiences of personal transformation. Parishioners' accounts of "transformation", "change in my faith", "a whole new world opening up" cannot be explained merely by the cultural expressions common to a therapeutic

[69] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[70] In the 1830s, French social philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville identified 'individualism' as part of the American character (cf. Bellah et al., 2008: xlviii).

environment. The best explanation, rather, seems to be the structure of each evangelisation tool which seems to give rise to the resulting transformations.

Finally, let us flesh out the cultural characteristic of personal transformation with the literature. In 1.1.4, we saw that sociologists define religion's ontology in a myriad of ways, with varying levels of transcendence at the heart of what they understand religion to be.[71] Adopting Taylor's 'transformation perspective' (cf. 1.3.2) as central to religion, and defining secularisation as "a decline in the transformation perspective" (2007: 431; cf. Flanagan, 2010: 701), I have wanted to hold strongly to Catholicism's self-understanding, not measuring it only in terms of social significance, but rather maintaining a perspective that ties growth closely to "the transformation of the human beyond merely this-worldly flourishing" (Taylor, 2007: 430). Emerging from the data, we see embodied in the cultures of Parishes A and B the characteristic of personal transformation, which makes visible some of these concepts in social reality.

This characteristic hints at a shifting normative identity-legitimation (cf. 1.3.2), and also a suggestion that, in a heterogenous religion market (1.1.5) the emergence of individual choice is critical. There is no default, inherited or 'vicarious' option here. We will pursue this idea further in 4.2.3 as we explore arguments for a new, emerging basis of identity legitimation for Catholics. Furthermore, discovering purpose, belonging and meaning is central to the role of parish as sacred umbrella (cf. 1.2.3, 2.2.5). Mechanisms in Parishes A and B that generate personal transformation seem also to generate "small, portable, accessible, relational worlds" under which people's beliefs can make sense (Smith et al., 1998: 106). In a context where subjective meaning seemingly counts for more than objective truth, a macro-encompassing sacred canopy certainly supports plausibility; but, in its absence, the plausibility structures of a small community fare remarkably well. We will explore the community generated by personal transformation in 4.1.1.

Authenticity

The Parish B staff off-site in early June 2017 is book-ended by two very touching moments. One is when each staff member stands to present in 3-5 minutes their best achievements of the year, the balls they had dropped, and their goals for the following year. They are told, "you are

[71] In interpreting 'religiousness' as 'spirituality', for example, Linda Woodhead is less absolute than, say, Christian Smith about the need for 'transcendence' to be at the heart of religion.

presenting in front of your biggest fans", there are whoops and cheers as each person moves forward to present, and a touching, personal tribute about each staff member given by their manager. People's areas of growth are openly mentioned, there is a great deal of honesty exhibited, and extraordinary trust in the room. One staff member later tells me, "I don't know of any other work culture … where you can actually talk about your weaknesses."[72]

The second moment is at the end of the day. As Pastor B will shortly be leaving the role of pastor, staff are invited to gather round him and say whatever they wish to him. People speak of how he has enabled them to lead, how he was the reason they became a Catholic, how he has made them feel they belong even though they are not a Catholic. One staff member is emotional as he recalls the unexpected phone call from Pastor B offering him a job. Next, everyone lays hands on Pastor B and prays out loud for him. Openly and matter-of-factly, staff pray spontaneously for all aspects of his new role, even mentioning his weaknesses. The degree of emotionality and proximity exhibited are exceptionally high.

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At the Parish A evangelisation retreat in late May 2017, the ten parishioner testimonies do not leave much unsaid. Quite shameful moments from the past are recounted, including childhood, work and even crime experiences, that are, at some point in the speaker's life, attributed by them to transformation through encounter with Jesus Christ. Both speakers and retreatants experience teary moments, and boxes of Kleenex are under each row of seats. Pastor A shares his story in exactly the same way other parishioners do.[73] He is honest about his past, sharing potentially shameful experiences. This vulnerability to embarrassment sets the tone for the retreat, enabling others to be equally open in the small discussion groups. Radical openness is safeguarded by the details of the weekend, by the emphasis on confidentiality, "what happens on the retreat stays on the retreat."

It is a cultural characteristic that is evident at other moments. Two parishioners speak at another time about their experience of coming back to the Church: "To be gone for 30 years, one of the

[72] Interview, 5 June 2017
[73] Field Notes, 27 May 2017

main reasons we didn't want to come back was because it was embarrassing. And for them to accept you, and not criticise what had happened, that was just..."[74]

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Here, the 'events' in question are, at Parish B, staff sharing openly their successes and failures, alongside their candid words to their outgoing pastor and proximity while praying for him; and, at Parish A, the honest public sharing of sometimes shameful testimonies. What generative mechanisms lie behind these 'events'? In both scenarios, it would seem an atmosphere of trust and safety has been created, in such a way, that staff and parishioners have the confidence to share openly with little or no threat of retaliation, gossip, or other negative consequences. The assurance of confidentiality at the Parish A retreat is integral to creating this atmosphere. Yet, surely these alone would not catalyse parishioners' revelations of their past secrets. Pastor A's leading the way is surely an important contributing factor. This "contingent conjuncture of mechanisms" (Porpora, 2015: 59) are themselves triggered by CS intelligibilia about the value of authenticity: there is risk in such open sharing, especially when one is employed in a role, and yet participants have taken this risk for the sake of, what is in their minds, a greater good: authenticity, "being true to oneself" (Taylor, 1992: 15). We will explore the content of this value more below.

In the case of speaking openly and praying for the priest, slightly different generative mechanisms may be at play: an ongoing, close and trusting relationship with the pastor has created an environment in which staff feel confident to speak to him even of his weaknesses. Underlying such a mechanism are certain CS ideas: that the priest is human, weak and needs prayer in a similar way to anyone else. We will discuss these further in 5.2.4.

There are many examples of parishioners sharing why the authenticity characteristic is considered to be of high value:

> It gives you that sense of community, that you can know that there are people that love you.[75]

[74] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[75] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

> I've always felt comfortable and ready to use whatever abilities, talents I have, if I'm loved in my brokenness, if I'm loved in my weakness. That's understood and empathised with... I know in our Connect Group leadership, I feel trusted - and I know that the other people in the environment know that they love me…[76]

One parishioner speaks of the Game Plan (the parish's strategy for making disciples) as one of love:

> I think it's also structure with heart. I think that it's organisation that flows out of love. Especially being involved in a discipleship group this past Lent I felt cared for at the parish in a way, like I've never really felt cared for before. …[in] discipleship groups, Connect Groups. Those are where you're loved.[77]

Yet, there is not consistent appreciation for this cultural characteristic at the S-C level. At Parish B, one parishioner told me how she did not enjoy the testimonies given at Masses, saying, "after a while they all sound the same" and, "these things they share are very *personal*."[78]

The characteristic of authenticity is evident within the retreat structure itself, that is, within the generative mechanism behind the personal transformation characteristic. One prepares the ground for the other, and the two are intricately linked. Indeed, in exploring rival explanations behind the phenomena revealing authenticity, we might contest similarly – as we explored for the personal transformation characteristic – that the therapeutic and expressive emphasis is typically Californian, and therefore, not necessarily connected with the atmosphere of trust and safety, and the value placed on authenticity outlined above. There may certainly be truth in this account, and why the cultural characteristic feels more familiar in a Californian context. Yet, it does not provide such an adequate explanation for the phenomena in a Nova Scotian context. For this reason, we hold that the mechanisms described above, linked to the ideational content of the importance of authenticity, provide the best explanation for these phenomena.

[76] *Ibid.*
[77] *Ibid.*
[78] Field Notes, 14 June 2017

It is interesting to note that the adoption of cultural symbols which have their provenance in early Christianity[79] (sharing testimonies and laying on of hands in prayer) are 'resignified', taking their lead in style and tone from the postmodern milieu. It is perhaps an example of 'expressive individualism' being 'resignified' or, we could even say, 'redeemed' by the 'transformation perspective' in Parishes A and B: while the tone of authenticity is one of subjectivity, its goal in a parish context is an encounter with God, ultimate objectivity. This is a good example of a conversionist approach to modern culture: the exclusive humanist therapeutic style has been transformed into an experience that goes beyond this-worldly flourishing.

Let us explore a little more the content of this cultural characteristic with the help of the literature. Returning to Taylor, authenticity makes religion much less about "the demands of external conformity" and much more about "being true to oneself" (Taylor, 1992: 68, 15). Aloofness, solemnity and pretence are shunned in exchange for intimacy, proximity and risking shame. It is an approach that corresponds to what Taylor calls the 'social imaginary of expressive individualism': "The religious life or practice that I become part of must not only be my choice, but it must speak to me, it must make sense in terms of my spiritual development as I understand this" (Taylor, 2007: 486). This characteristic of authenticity is generated by each parish's creating an intentional space for honest, personal searching – "finding the design of my life" (Taylor, 1992: 68) – and is done collectively, in the context of the evangelisation retreat or Alpha. The personal and vulnerable quality of such seeking is modelled in the testimonies of core parishioners, staff and even priests, yet the *content* of the evangelisation retreat and Alpha (the Gospel message conveyed) means that it is only the style of authenticity that is adopted, not the distorted, individuated content of such spirituality (cf. Taylor, 2007: 516).

Invitation and Mission

Pastor A confides to me one day during the case study,

> …when I've gone to evangelisation meetings and summits of the diocese, I say, 'my maintenance guy's one of my biggest evangelisers' and they're like, 'but what education does he have?'[80]

[79] There are ample examples in the Acts of the Apostles of early Christians both sharing testimony and praying with each other through the laying on of hands.
[80] Interview, 26 May 2017

With conviction, he continues,

> But we don't need that! … it's the power and love of Christ that is within him that he's asked to share with others… we're not just here in this church, we have to be out there in the community. I think that changes us also. … our work is meant to be wherever we go. [Pastor A's PA] will even come into me and say, 'I met this guy at my son's baseball practice last night and I think we could take him in a Bible Study...' Always got to be looking![81]

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This cultural characteristic is unique in the absence of direct ethnographic data of the theme. In other words, while parishioners gave frequent accounts of invitation and mission, I did not observe this phenomenon directly. Here, the 'events' where parishioners have invited others are shared as second-hand accounts. Behind these 'events' are a complex of mechanisms: the desire for others to experience what they have experienced comes across strongly; the communal approach to invitation gives greater confidence; and the need to invite is normalised by being spoken of freely. Even the physical ways that newcomers are prioritised could be seen as a mechanism behind invitation:

> [At Christmas] people parked at the [car park outside the parish] and people who normally would be up in the parish because they're parishioners went downstairs into the auditorium and watched the Mass on the screen down there so that the guests could sit up front. It was awesome.[82]

Behind these mechanisms lie certain CS convictions: the importance of proactively sharing the Gospel message with others, rather than waiting for them to come to church; that another person's life will improve if they experience personal transformation; the need to be Christian in all areas of one's life, not just at church; the prioritisation of the newcomer or non-believer.

[81] Interview, 26 May 2017
[82] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

There are countless examples in both Parishes A and B of confident approaches towards inviting others and mission:

> …we're called by God to reach out to others - in our community, not just in our church … the parking lot to the grocery store, or wherever.[83]

> …what I've done is, live the life of a mom - what they normally do - library, park, coffee shop, downtown - where are the places where women - and the times - that women are congregating? Going there, and praying, 'Lord, I'm just praying for a divine appointment. Who do you want me to meet today?'[84]

> I think [we need to do] just more personal invitation, you know we always wait for people to come to us, but we need to go to them.[85]

> I like to have a couple [of invitations] in my purse or pocket. And I give them out and get ready because that's a time when it's so easy to turn to somebody, I just turn around and say, 'have you taken Alpha yet? would you like to think about it?'[86]

What rival explanations could account for such confident mission and invitation? Could California's relatively friendlier attitude towards religion than Britain's be a source of Catholics' confidence? As outlined in 3.2, being in a large minority may certainly increase one's confidence in sharing one's faith, especially when compared to the small minority mindset of a British Catholic. Yet there are other factors which suggest that there is more to the story. First, pluralism is a reality in each of the three contexts (US, Canada, Britain) and, as we have seen, has a similar impact of fragilising both faith and worldview, engraining an inescapably 'immanentist' outlook. Second, there is the question of Parish A's healthy attendance. In 3.1.2, we considered how this factor could demotivate parishioners from inviting others. And yet, they are initiating change in a seemingly numerically strong structural context,

[83] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[84] Interview, 15 May 2017
[85] Interview, 17 May 2017
[86] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

where there would be strong reasons to maintain the status quo. Parish A's determination to be invitational seems, on the whole, to row against the current.

Let us unpack a little more the content of this characteristic, using the literature. For both Parishes A and B, the role of relevance is important within the intelligibilia of the invitation and mission theme, that is, they are "engaged with the people, institutions, and concerns of the pluralistic, modern world" (Smith et al, 1998: 75), rather than being found on its fringes. The annual Mayor's prayer breakfast is hosted by Parish A on behalf of the wider Christian community. Two other annual events also attract interest from the wider community: Oktoberfest and Fiesta. Parish ministries are very active in the local area: the Health Ministry launched a project against human trafficking in the local area in May 2017, while Christian Services offer pre-packed food packages for the homeless in the area.[87] At Parish B, a Christmas Eve service, 'Christmas Unplugged', is promoted to those exploring faith interested in attending a service at Christmas. In 5.1.2, we shall explore the balance between relevance and distinctiveness.

3.6.2 Cultural Characteristics Distinctive to Each Parish

In Parish B, a characteristic that emerged strongly was 'leadership', while in Parish A, the characteristic of 'supernatural outlook' was prevalent. While both existed in both parishes, there was a respective prominence of one in each parish.

Distinctive to Parish B: Leadership

Walking through Parish B's offices, I notice a busy yet relaxed atmosphere, where staff work mostly in an open plan space, with some offices. Multiple whiteboards are evident used variously for goal setting, meeting agendas, inspirational quotes and questions: one line reads, 'Who am I intentionally influencing?' One staff member comments that they are "white board addicts."[88] Staff members have 'word clouds' above their desks with words describing them, alongside their top five strengths (Clifton Strengths Finder). The Game Plan (the parish's strategy for making disciples) is visible in numerous places, along with Parish B's mission and leadership statements.

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[87] Field Notes, 8 May 2017
[88] Field Notes, 2 June 2017

The characteristic of leadership is demonstrated here in cultural artefacts and the use of space. Leadership was spoken of frequently as essential for effective mission. It therefore has a close relationship with invitation and mission:

> We joyfully go and make disciples. I think the parish over the last six years or so has kind of grown... not only a lot of people, but a lot of leadership, with the leadership being at the heart of it.[89]

Integral to the leadership theme is a co-responsibility for leadership as summarised in the following parishioner's comment:

> …they've been really good at fostering 'you're a part of it'. It's not just a responsibility. 'You're a part of the mission'. We have a clear vision and get excited about doing missionary work because the vision's so clear.[90]

There is more in the content of this characteristic that we shall unpack, but first of all, what generative mechanisms might be at play? Further data help us reach explanations. At the off-site at Parish B, one of the senior leadership team members presents where the parish staff will be focussing over the coming months. She refers with some humour to the parish calendar of November 2010, when there were only three staff members (in contrast to the current 20+). The calendar is full of so many activities it is impossible to track who is leading what, or what is happening where. It was a start-up phase full of chaos. Pastor B expands more on what the parish was like at that time:

> The building is actually a lot quieter than it was in the first couple of years because all the programmes we used to run were run in the building, so at one point, we had about 30% of our Sunday attendance involved in the course of a year in taking some kind of programme. And we maxed out the building... It was insane. Every room, every night. This place was crazy. That's when we realised... our vision is 80% and we're maxed out at 30% so we have to decentralise. Which means we have to push into homes.[91]

[89] Focus Group, 13 June 2017
[90] *Ibid.*
[91] Interview, 17 June 2017

At the off-site, the senior leadership team member presenting shared that the parish's activities are far more streamlined. Drawing on a model for the growth and decline of businesses (McKeown, 2014) she shares that the parish is working through a "white-water" period currently, towards "predictable success." What is needed in the "white-water" period is stability and consistency, and for this reason, as staff they want to build more margin, structure and process into what they are doing. She comments, "The Holy Spirit can work in a structure." Fr X, the incoming pastor, later explains that they are never going to be about policies. He lists some of the structural changes to try and achieve balance.[92]

This event suggests generative mechanisms behind the leadership characteristic. Chaos from an abundance of activity, Pastor B's entrepreneurial leadership and frequent travel, alongside the booking of parish rooms to their capacity are all generative mechanisms that triggered the need for change. As another staff member explained,

> I remember one particular staff meeting where [Pastor B] profusely apologised. He said, 'I'm so sorry I have allowed this to happen.' And he said, 'I'm going to change, and I'm going to hire the people that can make the change.' And so a lot of that was our staff restructuring around hiring people like X and X. A sort of middle-management to support us.[93]

A further generative mechanism, then, was the introduction by new staff members of previously unknown theory and literature on leadership that proposed ways of leading more effectively and healthily. This complex of generative mechanisms seems to be triggered by certain ideas that are established in the parish's CS: healthy leadership is vital for effective mission; co-responsibility for leadership and mission is shared by priests and laity; uncovering and employing gifts of the laity is important for the parish to flourish.

Let us unpack the characteristic a little more. The authenticity characteristic colours Parish B's approach to leadership, allowing for more explicit discussion, unafraid of conflict. Authenticity is seen, not only in the context of the evangelisation offering and of communities, but also in the relationships and tasks of work – more prominently than is the case at Parish A.

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[92] Field Notes, 6 June 2017
[93] *Ibid.*

> One of the things that we've created is our focus on healthy conflict. So being able to disagree... We call them critical conversations, or crucial conversations, where we actually outline from the start, 'hey I need to have a crucial conversation with you.' … Because what we want to work towards is a solution together.[94]

> The unhealthy cultures in our churches don't change by themselves. If you go with the flow, they go towards the direction of inward-focus and unhealthy. So to turn that around you've got to be intentional in every single aspect and area, including leadership.[95]

The data gives rise to some interesting observations on socio-cultural integration. On the whole, in morphogenetic terms, we see elements of contingent complementarity (Archer, 1996: 219-222), where "…a new source of societal or sectional *variety* is registered at the CS level" (*ibid*.: 221). But Parish B's explicit and intentional direction-setting (which will be examined in greater depth in 5.2) and its unflinching emphasis on change (which qualified it in 3.1.2 to be studied) effects some vocal, marginal opposition, too, which challenges the new cultural symbols, and can increase their fragility. (In the words of Taylor, when a theory "penetrates and transforms the social imaginary … it begins to define the contours of their world" (2004: 29): this can be more or less challenging depending on one's comfort with the new theory.)

One staff member, using ideological language, comments,

> …you wouldn't be able to function at [Parish B] and not function the way that we do. It just wouldn't happen. It would be like putting a fresh water fish in salt water. You just wouldn't be able to breathe the air of the culture we've created.[96]

This cultural distinctiveness can be strong, leading to misunderstanding and engendering competitive competition. In encouraging conflict, and giving explicit guidance on how to engage in it, Parish B fosters close, family behaviour. 'Healthy culture' is illustrated by contrasting it with its alternative, 'toxic culture' (cf. 5.2.3). Yet, the following exchange among

[94] Interview, 5 June 2017
[95] Interview, 17 June 2017
[96] Interview, 5 June 2017

parishioners demonstrates a misunderstanding. It is a good example of how intentionally elaborating the CS challenges socio-cultural interaction, potentially engendering competitive contradiction.

> P1: …if you should disagree with something people are afraid they'd be considered toxic. And that term I do not like at all.
> P2: I agree with you, I don't like it either.
> P3: Never heard it.
> P1: I've heard somebody use it here from the parish and I was shocked.
> P4: I've heard it several times, different meetings and whatnot. They have 'toxic' and 'non-toxic' [indicating two columns].
> HVS: So you feel if you were to disagree with something you might be perceived as toxic?
> P1: Yes, you'd be considered toxic. Maybe for somebody who is shy or insecure, they won't say anything. I mean, I don't care if I'm considered toxic, you know! I'll say my thing! But that word 'toxic' is a bad word.[97]

Elaborating the CS can give rise to competitive contradiction, or in other words, create out-groups within the parish itself:

> …you definitely do see a core group of people who aren't on board with this. And that's no judgment, they are very strong in their faith, practising in various ways, but they just don't feel they need this Alpha programme, they feel their faith is strong and they do live it.[98]

At Parish A, too, there is an expected way of operating, those who are on board, and those who are not. Pastor A speaks of those who are,

> …not engaged to the level we would love to see them engaged. They're comfortable … - coming to Mass on Sunday, coffee, donuts, a mission or a class here once - they feel comfortable. Take them out of that, are the people we've felt the most resistance from.[99]

[97] Focus Group, 14 June 2017
[98] Focus Group, 14 June 2017
[99] Interview, 26 May 2017

Let us flesh out the cultural characteristic of leadership with the literature. Behind the characteristic of leadership, we see potential American representational characters (cf. Bellah et al., 2008) which may indicate cultural influences unique to the parish's north American milieu. First, there are hints of the entrepreneur. The religious marketplace driven by competition and personal choice rather than societal religion and conformity mimics the growth in capitalism and entrepreneurship of the late nineteenth-century (cf. 1.1.5; Bellah et al, 2008: 43-4). The pace of work and chaotic, start-up feel at Parish B indicates an entrepreneurial style of leadership. Undoubtedly aided by its understanding of itself as a beacon parish – even a 'hope for the world' – Parish B has a definite future orientation, with a sense of advancing. One parishioner describes the "exponential change" she has seen: it has been a "glorious ride".[100]

Second, there are hints, too, of the manager. The leadership mechanism involves building structures and systems to aid sustainability (cf. 5.2.3). A strong vision demands greater measurement and goal-setting. Time horizons shorten when activity is more focussed, for example, weekly meetings are held within each team, and there is more emphasis on deliverables. The characteristic of leadership has time implications.

Leadership characterised by entrepreneurship and management is certainly a concept of Parish B's CS that originates outside the typical Catholic parish CS. Rooted in north American cultural typology, it is a concept that has come to be 'resignified' for the parish: it is a characteristic that enables other characteristics – specifically, 'invitation and mission' – to develop.

Distinctive to Parish A: Supernatural Outlook

The night before the evangelisation retreat, twenty parishioners from the Parish A retreat team gather in the church with the priests and deacon to 'pray the campus', in other words, to pray aloud around the campus, using holy water and blessed salt, to ask for God's protection.[101] Speaking about it, one parishioner says, "prior to the retreat […] we take holy water and we claim the pews, the walls, the doors, the windows, the neighbours..." – "the entire campus"

[100] Interview, 8 June 2017
[101] Field Notes, 25 May 2017

interjects another – “for Christ. It's huge.” Another says, “The prayer is what brings the Holy Spirit.”

Pastor A, in his short explanation to the team about why they ‘pray the campus’ before the retreat, says they want to give the participants “a fighting chance” to encounter the Lord. We are allocated different parts of the campus. There is a joke that the sacristy is the worst area (there has been a lot of in-fighting among sacristans!). We are encouraged to stop and pray to the Holy Spirit in any particular spot where we feel heaviness or anxiety. One parishioner and I pray around the sacristy with holy water and blessed salt.

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The ‘event’ of praying the campus takes place thanks to the generative mechanism underlying it: Pastor A’s instinct that negative spiritual forces were at work around the retreat:

> Father was feeling some very unpleasant vibes around the retreat. And feeling that Satan was out there, and the things that would go wrong - the sound system would go down, and the lights wouldn't work - and I mean, he was out there causing all sorts of mischief. And so we started praying the campus prior to retreats. And, when anything's going on, we chase him off.[102]

Here, the ideational content concerns a belief in the reality of spiritual warfare. In other words, this characteristic is generated by the actor of the pastor, his intuition about the “unpleasant vibes” surrounding the retreat, and the experience of “things that would go wrong”. Pastor A’s conviction is adopted by parishioners too. Meetings tend to be viewed as expendable and of less importance than the real work of ministry, supported by prayer and Bible study. One staff member comments,

> We used to have staff meetings once a week years ago... But now that we've been doing the Bible studies with most of the staff ... I mean, that's really more important than a staff meeting where I can just send you a memo or a flier…[103]

[102] Focus Group, 22 May 2017
[103] Interview, 17 May 2017

The view that staff spending time in Adoration is most effective to the flourishing of the parish is a view that is shared numerous times, and part of what I am terming Parish A's supernatural outlook. This characteristic affects how situations and issues are faced at the parish. The case study at Parish A took place on the brink of a transition: Pastor A was about to leave after six years as pastor of the parish, while a new pastor plus entirely new clergy team was about to arrive.[104] This situation caused much upheaval during the period of the case study. The response from priests and parishioners alike in the face of this impending change was one of resolute obedience to authority, and trust in the decision of the bishop, to the point of being somewhat stoical: "we will do what he [the new pastor] wants" (even if that means an end to the evangelisation retreats)[105]; "this is the reality of the Church", "ministry should not be about me", "if everything falls apart because it was all based on one person, then we will have failed"[106].

> [Pastor A]'s built a good foundation and ... if you're following the Lord, you've got to be open, because his thing on obedience ... that's where you need to be ... if you say you're going to do what the Lord wants you to do, I think that's huge and God always provides.[107]

> P1: OK, I have a question for you guys. If [the new pastor] comes in and sees what's going on and he really likes it, and he wants to tweak it a little? I mean are you guys going to be okay with tweaking the retreat?
> P2: Absolutely. We have to be obedient to him.
> [ALL: Yeah, absolutely.][108]

Here, two concepts of the parish's Cultural System seem to be contradictory: on the one hand, the parish's strong authenticity characteristic, and on the other, the seemingly unquestioning obedience entailed by the supernatural outlook characteristic. It is a dissonance we will explore more in 5.2.1, but for now, we note that it perhaps explains the extreme, emotional reaction experienced by some parishioners.

[104] In 5.2.1 we will compare more deeply reactions to the upheaval caused by the transition from one pastor to another.
[105] Field Notes, 10 May 2017
[106] Field Notes, 14 May 2017
[107] Focus Group, 22 May 2017
[108] Focus Group, 25 May 2017

Let us expand the characteristic a little more with the literature. We recall Schindler's points in 2.1.5 and 2.3.1 that to overcome the arbitrary subjectivity and technical reason common to modernity, it is vital to remember the human person's true nature: "man is properly 'active' only as anteriorly contemplative" (Schindler, 1995: 217). This concept is most explicit in Parish A's CS. It enables personal transformation to occur, in the minds of parishioners, and in so doing, magnifies the transformation perspective which insists on the transcendent as central to religion.

3.6.3 Conclusions

In 3.1.2, I undertook a task to identify parishes that were intentionally pursuing intentional change. In other words, I was seeking parishes engaged in morphogenetic elaboration. While clear leadership can generate competitive contradiction, there is certainly vital need for it, particularly when other options seem to lead inevitably to decline.

What has been created in Parishes A and B at the S-C level is a cultural 'map', an 'implicit map of social space' that is a social imaginary (cf. 2.2.5), now penetrated by new theory in the CS. The characteristics of authenticity, personal transformation and invitation and mission emerge as S-C cultural realities in the lives of both parishes, with leadership and supernatural outlook distinguishing each one respectively. In terms of 'imaginary', these characteristics have become "normative … how things usually go … how they ought to go" (Taylor, 2004: 24). Interestingly, this definite direction has created a type of 'out-group' among those whose approach to parishioner engagement is according to earlier 'social imaginaries'. In the words of Pastor B,

> Come to Mass, for one hour a week, and go home. … many of them, by not being involved in anything, they really don't see most of what this parish is. They're really out of touch with it.[109]

The implications of this will be discussed further in Chapters 4 and 5. We can conclude this chapter by asserting that we have hypothesised the generative mechanisms behind the characteristics in Parishes A and B. We have established phenomena, considered alternative explanations, and noted the similarities and differences between the emerging characteristics

[109] Interview, 17 June 2017

at each parish. We have not been able to assemble a hypothesis of generalisations, as such hypotheses would be unprovable. Turning to the final three parishes, we explore their cultural characteristics in a similar manner, noting the similarities and differences with the first two.

Chapter 4
'Umbrella Community' and Cultural Elaboration

In this chapter, I will use the cultural characteristics identified in Parishes A and B in Chapter 3 as a lens through which to explore the other three parishes. The analysis will lead, at the end of Chapter 5, to five hypotheses, one for each parish, about the cultural characteristics behind each parish's growth or lack of growth. These hypotheses will draw together parish data and theory from the previous chapters. I have noted in 3.1.2 the impossibility of achieving my third and fourth research objectives (cf. Introduction). In their place, I intend to continue establishing the phenomena in each parish, using theory to 'resignify' them, consider rival explanations, and observe any common characteristics. I reassert that parishes may seek to emulate the cultural characteristics they see in the five parishes here, by attempting to employ the generative mechanisms identified; but only the parish's unique context, with its structural and cultural factors, will determine the fruitfulness of these mechanisms.

4.1 Personal Transformation

In 3.6.1, I identified the cultural characteristic of personal transformation as present in both Parishes A and B, as well as identifying the generative mechanisms causing these characteristics and the CS ideational content behind these mechanisms. This cultural characteristic was not evident in any of Parishes C, D or E. Given that personal transformation was viewed as being central to Parishes A and B's visions, we will want to explore the impact of a lack of personal transformation on Parishes C, D and E, along with the generative mechanisms that may cause this lack, with their accompanying CS ideas.

I will take an indirect approach to exploring these questions. In both Parishes A and B, the personal transformation characteristic tended to lead towards a socio-cultural reality which I am naming, 'umbrella community'. In other words, we shall explore the impact of personal transformation at the S-C level of Parishes A and B, before venturing to explore socio-cultural integration at Parishes C, D and E. By this route, and taking into account varying structural and cultural influences on each parish, we will be able to reach some conclusions about the lack of the personal transformation characteristic in these parishes along the way.

4.1.1 'Umbrella Community': The Personal Transformation Effect

When I meet the nine people in the focus group of actively engaged parishioners at Parish A, something feels different. It is clearly a tight-knit group of nine friends who have experienced much collectively, having delivered retreats together. The atmosphere is deeply warm, familial and passionate. The next day, Pastor A sums it up when he says,

> … as you've met them last night, I mean, they're over the top and going off the deep end... They're so passionate. And you can tell, and it's contagious, and you want to be around them. […] they're phenomenal. Even like - I don't know - what did God create here? It's scary. They're passionate, they love, and they'll continue it one way or another.[110]

The characteristic of personal transformation links closely to transformed parish community at the S-C level, 'umbrella community'. The retreat team focus group is the strongest example I witnessed of this community, where all nine attested to having experienced personal transformation: this correlated with the tightest form of 'umbrella community'. We can say that the generative mechanism behind 'umbrella community' is an experience of personal transformation; although this is not universally the case. There was evidence of others absorbed into the 'umbrella community' who had attended the retreat, but who did not speak strongly of personal transformation. In other words, attending the retreat without having personally had a transformative experience is also behind 'umbrella community'; side-stepping personal transformation is possible. Behind the experience of 'umbrella community' are CS ideas about the essential place of community in the Christian life. Parishioners from Parish A comment in the following ways:

> …there are people that I've spoken to who have been coming here [to the parish] for years and they do attend an evangelisation retreat and it opens up a whole new world for them. Now they recognise people and they're more open to hugging them, and saying hello, and now, they're part of the family, they're not just coming and going… And then they spread the word, and more people are coming, one by one.[111]

[110] Interview, 26 May 2017
[111] Focus Group, 25 May 2017

> P1: …what's nice is, I'm coming [to Mass] not just by myself! … The peace be with you? Oh my gosh, sometimes it's like... you're doing a... [sharing peace with lots of people!] [laughter] And people are like, 'what is up with this?'
> P2: The priest continues Mass and we're still hugging!
> P1: Everybody knows everybody and we're all happy... Because we all love God and we're there for that reason. It's just beautiful.[112]

At both Parishes A and B, there is an important generative mechanism behind the ongoing sustaining of 'umbrella community': regularly-meeting small groups. One parishioner comments about their experience of Connect Groups,

> People that you get to know really well, and you can depend on in times of illness, and when you need something, and you don't always have the priests right there. It gives you that sense of community, that you can know that there are people that love you.[113]

Another parishioner says,

> …some people from this parish actually came to the hospital and prayed for our son. People that we don't know. … They said, can we come and visit your son in the hospital so we can pray for him? And they came to the hospital, brought us some food, and prayed for our son. [...] … I don't see that … in other churches.[114]

Discussion following the talk at one Connect Group is marked by honesty and transparency (the authenticity characteristic): the way parishioners speak about their faith is rooted in everyday life.[115]

Another parishioner also speaks of her small faith community:

> …now I have an extended family of nine and we meet every Tuesday, and we do things outside those meetings. We go to movies, we go to events, we go out to dinner. And I

[112] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[113] Focus Group, 13 June 2017
[114] Focus Group, 14 June 2017
[115] Field Notes, 4 June 2017

> truly have the feeling that if I needed anything for any reason, I could call on any one of them, and they would respond.[116]

One staff member at Parish A spoke about the leader of a Bible Study that has met regularly since their evangelisation retreat:

> They were so sweet, they drove all the way up to my house and gave me a spontaneous baby shower, and got to come and visit the baby. That's just a sign of their commitment to the group, their commitment to each other.[117]

We can identify certain qualities specific to 'umbrella community'.[118]

First, a high degree of emotionality is present. Stemming from the evangelisation retreat at Parish A and Alpha at Parish B, closeness in relationships is engendered by these experiences and manifests itself in continued close proximity: honest sharing, openness about struggles and difficulties, praying with each other.

Second, relationships are diffuse, covering all areas of life. At Parishes A and B, personal transformation generates reasonably diffuse relationships, with people not only seeing each other on Sundays, but enjoying each other's company at the cinema, at birthday parties, in all areas of life. This includes the priests, and links to the insights about close relationships with priests referred to in 3.6.1.

> P1: Fr X... I was shocked, you can ask a priest to go out to breakfast?! You know, we were like, 'give it a shot'. And then he was like I wanna go!...
> P2: You know, he goes to the movies with us. He's awesome.[119]

[116] Focus Group, 22 May 2017
[117] Interview, 15 May 2017
[118] This analysis is based on Edgar Schein's four different means of analysing relationships within a group (2010: 152-4) which is useful in distinguishing 'canopy community' from 'umbrella community'. Schein has developed these means from Talcott Parsons' (1951) 'pattern variables'.
[119] Focus Group, 25 May 2017

> There is a very personal, 'I am a priest but I am a person too, so come talk to me… And for me, when I saw the priest put himself in a human position, it was like, 'woah, that's what church is like? that's what priests are like?'[120]

'Umbrella community' is strongest where personal transformation is present yet is not exclusively linked to this characteristic. It is not consistent across Parishes A and B, and is absent in pockets where personal transformation is not evident. Yet even the personal transformation of a minority can affect the community experience of the majority. This is what we will call the 'ripple effect'.

4.1.2 'Umbrella Community': The Ripple Effect

During the homily at Parish B one Saturday evening in June, Pastor B did something unexpected. He invited everyone to stand up and sing two verses of the Veni Creator Spiritus. Following this there was a time of silence while people were invited to open their hands and pray to the Holy Spirit. As the congregation sat down, Pastor B proceeded to explain 'discipleship' and the difference that personal transformation can make. He then invited those who felt they had become a disciple in the past year to come forward. Slowly, around ten people moved forward and the congregation was invited to pray over them by outstretching our hands. Next, Pastor B invited those who felt called to step into discipleship this year to come forward. More people stepped towards the front, including a little boy and a teenage girl. Many seem deeply touched at the moment. That weekend, 96 people come forward.[121] One parishioner commented on the impact she thinks testimony has:

> I think it really - people who get up and witness, or talk to a group or whatever, it's so important to validate faith, that Jesus is good, that God loves us and so on. The more witnessing that is done, the more people get excited. The belief becomes so strong.[122]

Personal transformation affects the socio-cultural reality of a parish, despite not every person in the parish being personally transformed: we are radically heterogenous in our agency. The tight-knit 'umbrella community' of the focus group described in 4.1.1 may be a minority experience. But there is evidence in the data that this nevertheless makes ripples through the

[120] *Ibid*.
[121] Field Notes, 4 June 2017
[122] Focus Group, 14 June 2017

parish as a whole. In other words, that, while the propositional element of culture (the CS) might be logically consistent, different groups experience the same reality differently.

A Baptism preparation session at Parish B is a good illustration of cultural coherence at the S-C level, since here we see core parishioners interacting with and influencing those on the fringes. What is evident is the personal connection of the leaders with the participants: they text them, invite them to parish events, and no one rushes away at the end of the session. In Schein's terms, these are examples of particular relationships, growing in their degree of diffuseness. In other words, while 'personal transformation' has not been experienced, these families are being drawn into the properties of 'umbrella community'. Here, the openness of the Baptism session and the willingness of parishioners to share diffuse relationships with participants are generative mechanisms behind the 'umbrella community' shared here.

The experience of hospitality and welcome at both parishes is also evidence of the impact of 'umbrella community' beyond those who experience personal transformation. Pastor A emphasises reaching out to the visitor or stranger: "my message to my team is, 'you go and look for the person sitting by themselves, you go to them. Don't wait for them to come to you'."[123] One parishioner says,

> In addition to the ushers, [who] are very hospitable and welcoming, we have a special welcoming group that runs the information kiosks… One of the things that I do is follow up with new members on the phone. … I think we've made a real effort at welcoming new people and strangers.[124]

A less engaged Parish A parishioner who describes himself as having been 'church-shopping' says that he used to, "go to 6:30 Mass and there was one guy who would always say 'good morning' to me... And I said, that's the only church [where] somebody greeted me."[125] Among these less engaged parishioners, two realities struck me: first, how effusively and unequivocally they spoke of the welcoming, friendly nature of the parish; and second, their uniting humorously around the pressure they had all experienced from family members to become more involved. There was gentle poking fun at parishioners who were intensely involved:

[123] Interview, 26 May 2017
[124] Focus Group, 22 May 2017
[125] *Ibid.*

> [My mom]'s … the church lady. That's all she does - home, church, home, church. I was just making a comment, like, her car's ten years old and she only has 60,000 miles on it, because she drives home, church and that's it! [Laughter].[126]

> I have this friend… who is very active here. She always asked me to get involved here in our church, and I always say, 'no, I can't' and then suddenly, I get tired of answering no, so I said yes![127]

Perhaps they are unaware of or indifferent to the transformational encounters that parishioners attest to occurring in the heart of their parish. While desire to become deeply involved personally is generally slim, the less engaged appreciate the atmosphere created by those who show higher commitment. There are certain generative mechanisms behind the hospitable atmosphere: both parishes, for example, employ a local custom of encouraging introductions to those who stand nearby before Mass begins.[128] Yet not everyone at Parish B responds warmly to the welcome.

> Unfortunately a lot of those parishioners sneak out early. They don't take a chance to try and greet and be greeted. Because they are gone, right after Communion. They're gone right out the door.[129]

'Personal transformation' is part of the "intelligibilia" of Parishes A and B, that is a concept with "meaningful content produced by social intentionality" (Porpora, 2015: 159). We have commented on the mechanisms that generate experiences of transformation, which result in what I am terming 'umbrella community'. In 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, we have commented on the degree of cohesion or "causal consensus" (Archer, 1996: xvi) within the parishes: this is the non-propositional element of culture. While personal transformation seems to be experienced by the minority, 'umbrella community' seems to be experienced by more, and is even appreciated by those on the fringes.

[126] Focus Group, 23 May 2017
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] Interview, 23 May 2017
[129] Focus Group 1, 14 June 2017

4.1.3 'Umbrella Community': The Small Parish Effect

At a Saturday evening Mass in mid-May, I slip into the back of a large, Pugin church in a northern English town, an unknown Mass-goer. Built in the late 1800s, I am surprised at the size of the church building given that only 160 parishioners attend Mass in Parish E each weekend. A large proportion of the small congregation squeeze themselves into the back few pews. A gruff, hard-of-hearing man pushes a hymn book into my hand. Before Mass, the fair amount of talking between neighbours gives the impression of a friendly community where people are known. A lady plays the organ and the congregation sings half-heartedly. A few children notably attend with their grandparents. This is a church where people seem to feel at home. One young girl with skates on her trainers skates into the sacristy to go to the bathroom during the eucharistic prayer. A good proportion of the congregation leave before the final hymn[130] and the deacon later comments to me:

> You've still got the stampeding herd of elephants during the last hymn. So the doors fly open and they just fly out.[131]

Parish E is an interesting case in demonstrating that a small congregation has many pastoral advantages, not least the ability to generate an 'umbrella community' atmosphere even without much evidence of the personal transformation theme.[132] Here, a form of 'umbrella community' is generated by a different mechanism: a small parish. There are some differences in the 'umbrella community'. While there is some evidence of diffuse relationships, the degree of emotionality in relationships seems lower.

On the second Sunday I spend at the parish, I attend coffee after Mass and feel, surprisingly, one of the community.[133] The following parishioners' comments demonstrate the interconnectedness within the community:

> I found out ... everyone knows everyone, … or they're related![134]

[130] Field Notes, 12 May 2018
[131] Field Notes, 23 May 2018
[132] Presbyterian pastor Tim Keller writes about 'size culture' in churches and how the famous '200 barrier' requires a different mindset and approach to pastoring a congregation. See Keller, 2006: 7.
[133] Field Notes, 20 May 2018
[134] Interview, 29 May 2018

> And if you're new, there's always someone in the parish you can ask questions about stuff. Like X and X. I've asked them so many questions since I've come here, why do we do this, why do we do this? And straight away they come up with the answer.[135]

Indeed, the small size also seems to result in a welcoming atmosphere to those who are new:

> I came with a friend... it was very welcoming and very warm, and I felt very much that I'd come home, which sounds a bit trite, but I did. … something deep inside me connects very much to what happens in this church.[136]

> P1: There's something very special here, isn't there?
> ALL: Yes, definitely.
> P1: Can't define what it is, but there is something very special.[137]

> Then I found that even though I wasn't a member here, it wasn't my church at that point, nobody made any distinctions … that I was an outsider, wasn't Catholic, or whatever. I've never felt that I didn't belong. And I feel the people have gone the extra mile to make me feel I do belong.[138]

Yet, the strong welcome is not consistently the experience of those who are new:

> …well I say I am not a shy person… But entering an area where everybody knows everybody else but you don't - I think is difficult - and I found that difficult. And I didn't expect to. I did go for a coffee a couple of times but because I didn't know anybody, I just smiled, and left.[139]

Direct relationships with the parish priest are possible in a church of this size.

[135] Focus Group, 29 May 2018
[136] Focus Group, 30 May 2018
[137] *Ibid.*
[138] *Ibid.*
[139] Interview, 29 May 2018

> That initial welcome from [Parish Priest E] was very important, that initial sort of acceptance of our quirkiness as a family. [140]

> I've never been to a church that's like - at the end of it - the priest's like, 'everyone in the house, we're going for a brew'. But here he says every week, 'now there's coffee and cake in the presbytery, everybody's welcome.' And we all trundle through.[141]

Parish E's 'umbrella community', though generated by differing mechanisms, shares similar qualities with that of Parishes A and B, for example, the sense of belonging: "I've never felt that I didn't belong". Are there rival explanations for this cultural characteristic? We might attribute the 'umbrella community' property to the reputation for warmth and friendliness in northern English communities. This certainly is a strong explanation for the presence of 'umbrella community': structural factors are significant in achieving a S-C cohesion. Further, in a small parish, the proximity between core parishioners and those at the fringes is closer. One perhaps should not be surprised that, in a focus group of the parish's disengaged parishioners, to find that participants even had photos of Parish Priest E's dog on their phone![142]

While we have suggested differing mechanisms behind the 'umbrella community' in Parish E, we might at the same time hypothesise that an even deeper, tighter version of this community might result if the characteristic of personal transformation emerged more strongly at Parish E.

4.1.4 'Canopy Community': Personal Faith is Private

In 4.1.1, we fleshed out the type of community that personal transformation seems to generate, 'umbrella community'. While a number of possible generative mechanisms exist behind this type of community, it was in the tightly-knit groups of those who had experienced personal transformation first-hand where 'umbrella community' seemed strongest. In the final three sections, I want to explore the impact of the lack of 'umbrella community' on Parishes C and D, examining possible generative mechanisms behind its substitute, that is, varying forms of 'canopy community' – mechanisms which, I argue, are likely obstacles to the growth of 'umbrella community'. While we have seen that this type of community existed at Parish E, it was not particularly evident at Parishes C or D, alongside a notable absence of the personal

[140] *Ibid.*
[141] Focus Group, 29 May 2018
[142] Field Notes, 29 May 2018

transformation characteristic in all three. Let us explore this particular lack, before turning to 'canopy community'.

While Parishes C, D and E are uniquely grappling with evangelisation (cf. 5.1), none has experienced the extensive and rich fruits witnessed at Parishes A and B. In all three parishes, there are small signs of conversions, with RCIA running annually at Parish D, and one or two conversions at Parishes C and E. Perhaps in these latter two, it is most surprising that the one or two converts are young adults, especially striking at Parish E given the small congregation size.

One young man at Parish C says,

> I saw bits of the Catholic life, I would come to church with my grandma when I was young and stuff. But I was never really raised religiously. It's something that I've found myself as I've got older, and it's led me to the point where in March I started coming to church every week. I'm on the course to become a Catholic and become baptised.[143]

A young woman at Parish E said,

> …it was like the Catholic Church was calling to me. Started Googling and this parish popped up and I emailed Father and then found myself here.[144]

Conversions are certainly occurring. But, unlike Parishes A and B, personal transformation is not spoken of. Rather, one's inner experience is something to be kept private. This reticence to speak about one's personal experience of faith is certainly partially generated by British reserve; consequentially, the spotlight is turned away from personal transformation as an important value. I suggest that it therefore leads to a lack of expectation that transformation may be possible, and therefore a lack of openness to such an experience.

[143] Focus Group, 17 December 2017
[144] Focus Group, 29 May 2018

The privacy of personal faith is the first quality of 'canopy community' that emerges. We will explore this quality further, before expounding the 'canopy community' concept with the help of the literature, in order gradually to build a hypothesis.

Another young woman, belonging to Parish E and a recent convert, became heavily involved with the life of the parish, even leading the prayer group. She tells me that people do not tend to speak openly about their relationship with God, and she wonders about people's experiences. She is very open with friends, family and colleagues, and finds that they are open in their response.[145] Another parishioner agrees that more open sharing would help:

> I feel we could grow more if we could talk more to each other. You can then help other people. Not saying, 'you're further up the ladder' or anything like that.[146]

> If you went up to someone [at] a Saturday night [Mass] and asked X about their faith, 'what do you mean? I've always done this, I come to Mass, Jesus is there in the tabernacle, and what else do you need?' And that's as much as you'll get.[147]

Others were slower to see the value in sharing one's faith with others:

> I can't say I talk about faith with other people. … I wouldn't particularly go to X and say, 'What prayers are you saying?' That is... it does seem to be a private thing. Whether it should be I don't know.[148]

> P1: I don't think you have to speak about it.
> P2: It's like an invisible cord really, the minute you walk into church, we're all joined together aren't we?
> P3: God leads us at different speeds. We're all at different stages on the journey. I may be here, someone else is here. But we're all united at the Mass. So I don't think you have to talk about...[149]

[145] Field Notes, 21 May 2018
[146] Interview, 29 May 2018
[147] Interview, 23 May 2018
[148] Interview, 26 May 2018
[149] Focus Group, 30 May 2018

Other parishioners from Parishes C and D remark,

> I was always told that faith, your belief is a private thing. It's personal between you and God so to actually try and share it with the people is an alien concept for me. It's like prayer, and all of that, it's a personal matter.[150]

> A lot of people are still very much in the mode that it's private. Your faith's private. It's nobody else's business.[151]

While all three parishes are aware of the need to develop an evangelistic mindset, the reticence about speaking personally about one's faith is a roadblock not to be underestimated. It seems to be one of a complex of generative mechanisms behind 'canopy community'. Language is the "micro-foundation" of what Berger means by a plausibility structure (Ammerman, 2018: 31): everyday conversations create and reinforce our social imaginaries. In Berger's words, "The world begins to shake in the very instant that its sustaining conversations begin to falter" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 21). Or in the parish context, the possibility of personal transformation looks very slight when few conversations refer to it. In Ammerman's words:

> We engage in a process of externalizing our experience through language, internalizing the responses of others to us, and coming to accept the resulting social product as objective reality. (2018: 27)

For Catholics who rarely hear conversations about experience of God and personal transformation, 'objective reality' is that it is not real and does not happen. Those who do experience it, without networks of supporting conversations, are isolated, and any transformation they have experienced is unlikely to influence the wider culture. I argue that privacy of personal faith is a mechanism generating 'canopy community' and obstructing 'umbrella community'. Let us flesh out 'canopy community' a little more with the literature.

By 'canopy community', I refer to the remnants of Hervieu-Léger's 'parish civilisation' (cf. 1.3.2), defined by an all-encompassing plausibility structure or 'totalitarian system' that began

[150] Interview, 14 December 2017
[151] Interview, 28 February 2018

to collapse in the West in the 1950s and 60s as traditional legitimisers weakened. This is a "unified world", an "ordered world", where everyone has "his place" (1986: 57). While this world has all but dismantled, a certain remnant, thanks to the cultural norms of the time, is the privacy of personal faith. While structures crumbled, cultural realities remain.

In the 70s and 80s, we noted (cf. 1.3.2) Catholic parishes responded by broadening out, "groping for relevance", and leaning away from distinctiveness and towards catholicity. This represents a second version of 'canopy community' (canopy community$_2$) that attempted to transcend differences and foster unity. 'Canopy community$_2$' is a perhaps less extreme, Catholic version of the 'societal religion' outlook described by Woodhead as characterising the Church of England until the 1980s, where, "by virtue of being English you had a right to be baptised, married, buried, schooled. You did not need to be religious" (2016: 257). In the Catholic context, it is embodied in the following quotation from Parish D:

> I think [the Pastoral Centre has] opened the parish up to the town, to the city. I think there's a lot more people using these facilities and renting them out. So it's far more ecumenical. And it goes from yoga right the way through to - we've had Jewish groups here, we've had a Muslim group you know. It's really opened it up to the whole of [the town] and beyond. And I think that is a great thing.[152]

Yet despite flinging its doors wide open, 'canopy community$_2$' holds almost as strongly to the privacy of personal faith. This is coupled with low emotionality and specificity (only engaging with someone to fulfil a purpose) in relationships, in contrast to the qualities we outlined of 'umbrella community' above.

The emerging of 'umbrella community' involves cultural elaboration: the breaking of taboo, and the confident reference to personal transformation and faith. Personal transformation is a powerful mechanism at Parishes A and B in generating 'umbrella community'. Parishes committed to growth may, therefore, attempt to foster environments where this can be experienced at the S-C level: conversation through the community about faith in and experience of God is one example of building such an environment.

[152] Interview 1, 23 March 2018

Yet there are rival narratives. Woodhead does not see the fostering of 'umbrella community' as a positive development for churches, in fact, she laments how the Church of England developed "sharper boundaries…, raising barriers to entry (e.g. requiring conversion), and placing more emphasis on distinctive language, piety and moral purity (e.g. talking about 'Jesus' more than 'God' and 'Spirit'" (2016: 257), concluding that, in its adoption of a more 'sectarian' outlook, the church has become more 'exculturated' rather than 'inculturated'. Woodhead considers the transition a misturn of Christianity.

Certainly, the loss of 'canopy community' triggered by the dismantling of plausibility structures has structurally damaged the Church, as we identified in 2.2.5, yet my modified understanding of subcultural identity theory provides a different outlook. With "small, handheld, and portable" plausibility structures, 'sacred umbrellas' offer narratives and meanings that are particular and not general. They prize individual choice above vicarious, 'fuzzy' belief, notwithstanding the structural constraints. The effects of 'umbrella community' evident in Parishes A and B support this position.

We have identified the privacy of personal faith as one mechanism generating 'canopy community' and obstructing 'umbrella community': let us consider more features of the various forms of 'canopy community' and the generative mechanisms behind them.

4.1.5 'Canopy Community': The 'Social Only' and 'No Community Needed' Effect

One cold Sunday afternoon in early February, I travel with Parish Priest D and a young visiting priest from India, to a scout hut in a nearby neighbourhood. One of the twelve parish small communities is meeting for a shared lunch and time to network together. Around 30 people are present, almost all families with children. The children are running around, while adults chat politely at the sides of the rooms. Some know each other quite well already; others are new. Some parishioners are busy in the kitchen. There is a table laid out and everyone has brought a plate of food to share.[153]

In 4.1.4, we used the term 'canopy community$_2$' to designate S-C level community marked by specificity and lack of emotionality in relationships, generated partly by a privacy about faith. Experiencing canopy community$_2$, leaders at Parish D attempt to address the formality,

[153] Field Notes, 4 February 2018

anonymity and fragmentation by launching small communities. We will discuss the impact of these groups below, but first, we explore the elements of canopy community$_2$ that drove leaders to seek this change.

Size, as we saw in the case of Parish E, can be a generative mechanism behind 'umbrella community'. In the case of Parish D, we see it can also be a mechanism behind 'canopy community$_2$'. A large weekly attendance of over 1000 at Parish D is certainly a mechanism behind anonymous and fragmented community.[154] At the end of one 8am Sunday Mass (attended by around 100 people), when parishioners are invited to stay for coffee, only ten respond to the invitation.[155] One attendee at the 8am Mass comments,

> It's not a family affair for me. It took quite a long time to start engaging the people around me... Creature of habit, I always sit in the same place.[156]

The level of connection does not seem personal or deep within different Mass communities, and there is an awareness that new people are not always being welcomed:

> …there are people I know who go to [X church]... I haven't got the faintest idea what their name is but I nod and say hello if you see them around in town.[157]

> …what happens is this - the execution line always standing waiting to shake the priest's hands and it's all the regulars who want to get to shake his hand… actually it's the other people - it's the new parishioners we need to be catching.[158]

One parishioner said she found it hard to find a way into the parish community:

> I came in my early twenties and I have to say it took me a long time for me to feel I was part of the community, I think because it's so vast and so big... I felt I had to work

[154] Tim Keller notes that a very large church (800 attendees plus) often attracts people through the quality of liturgy and programmes which tends to be high thanks to greater resources. People also enjoy the greater element of choice available to them in terms of schedule and style of liturgy (2006: 11). But the downside is the potential for anonymity and slipping through the cracks.
[155] Field Notes, 4 February 2018
[156] Focus Group, 25 April 2018
[157] *Ibid*.
[158] Interview, 25 April 2018

> a lot harder. … I do recall one thing that Fr X said that resonated. … he said, just think about the number of people around you - to your left, your right, in front - that you actually know by name. And I thought, I can't actually answer that. It struck me.[159]

Recognising the importance of community in the Christian life at the CS level, and in an attempt to overcome the difficulties of building this reality at the S-C level, the parish launched small communities. The part-time staff member who coordinates the project tells me,

> [Fr X's] vision was trying to establish the kind of small communities which were the early Gospel way of living and being… the small Christian communities. And he felt it was particularly important for this parish because this parish is big, it can be quite impersonal, quite overwhelming… we can do very practical things for each other, like lifts to the doctor or dentist, visiting people in hospital, getting people to Mass, that kind of thing. … nothing heavy duty otherwise they'll run a mile.[160]

Here, the emphasis is on building diffuse relationships through service of one another. "Nothing heavy duty" implies an aversion to explicitly Christian content: a 'personal transformation' focus seems to be ruled out. Parishioners are proud at what has been achieved with these groups:

> …how she's got people together that haven't been near a church for a long time, that are happy to meet as a group. To me it doesn't matter whether people are meeting socially. With the very background of the fact that it's a parish, it's a church thing which is what brought people together in the first place.[161]

There is an attempt here to break down the large parish into "hand-held, portable" 'umbrella community' structures. Yet, while the structures are established, they do not employ mechanisms we have so far identified that seem to generate 'umbrella community': personal transformation is absent, and the precise mechanism we have identified as an obstacle to 'umbrella community' – privacy of personal faith – is instead leaned upon. The staff member who organises them remarks,

[159] Focus Group, 25 April 2018
[160] Interview, 28 February 2018
[161] Interview 1, 23 March 2018

> Some of the groups started off very much - no prayers! We don't do prayers outside of Mass - that kind of thing! - fine. I don't mind meeting people but none of that. So we do more social type activities.[162]

She believes that people do not attend thanks to the misperception that it will be 'religious'. In other words, small communities built at the S-C level are disconnected from the CS level conviction about the centrality of personal faith. This leads to the type of polite gathering described at the beginning of this section, where faith, the one possible uniting factor behind such a small community, is not explicitly referred to and is therefore sidelined. Privacy about faith is proved to be a mechanism behind sustaining 'canopy community$_2$', and the desired 'umbrella community' is not achieved. This is a mechanism that seems to make meaningful community difficult altogether:

> …the normal British, you know, reticence, we're embarrassed to talk about ourselves. … And I think some people do have a view of the church being somewhere you go for quiet, you know, it's my spiritual trip, I'm going to church to be with God, and almost sometimes to escape. I have people, all week I'm at work… how nice to go to Mass on a Sunday and - just spiritual dimension, not whether I earn more or less or better or worse than that person. … People don't always want contact, not to be nasty, but just don't always want contact. … I think this is probably a bit of a Catholic syndrome perhaps.[163]

> But I think there's also an issue I've noticed a lot with the small communities, of people feeling very, very uncomfortable about actually saying hello to someone, it's extraordinary the level of self-consciousness![164]

There is important analysis to undertake here, considering the impact of failing to form 'umbrella community' in the context of pluralism. Smith's subcultural identity theory includes the proposition that individuals define their values and norms against their own specific, chosen reference groups, and define who they are not by reference to negative reference groups:

[162] Interview, 28 February 2018
[163] Focus Group, 11 April 2018
[164] *Ibid*. This comment in particular is extraordinary given the markedly educated and professional population.

"sociocultural pluralism does not necessarily undermine most people's religious beliefs: people can simply construct their reference groups to include enough fellow believers so that their faith continues to be affirmed" (Smith, 1998: 105). Smith writes that, "both humanly constructed sacred worlds and the plausibility structures that sustain them – modern religious believers' 'sacred umbrellas' – are relatively sturdy and adaptable" (*ibid.*: 107). Yet, there are two problems at Parish D: first, groups are intentionally not distinctive in the face of the wider pluralistic culture; second, many parishioners choose not to be involved in the parish community at all, isolating themselves through a 'Mass is my spiritual trip' outlook. It is therefore less likely that a parishioner's reference group for determining their values and norms will be his parish.

With an entrenched 'canopy community$_2$', unconsciously driven by the 'privacy of personal faith' theme, Parish D provides a good example of a parish, "groping for relevance" (Dolan, 1985: 449; cf. 1.3.2). This is demonstrated in its impressive social and charitable outreach. The Pastoral Centre is in constant use. The parish has impressive links into the wider community and a track record of charitable outreach. Charitable outreach is not just a corporate activity: on one occasion, a parishioner helped a homeless lady who came into the Pastoral Centre by purchasing a bus ticket for her on her phone.[165] The Pastoral Centre itself allows a space and shelter for the homeless:

> …usually one or two individuals who … are homeless or vulnerable … have found their way into the church, … so we often have people sitting and falling asleep and having a cup of tea. … we've had … people sleeping in the doorway.[166]

An important CS concept is operating here at Parish D's S-C level: that charitable outreach is central to Christianity. The spacious and hospitable building of the Pastoral Centre is itself a generative mechanism behind the many social and charitable activities undertaken; perhaps a largely middle-class and retired parish workforce is a further mechanism in enabling these to happen. Parishes A and B also undertook much outreach. More research would need to be undertaken to examine the impact of the 'personal transformation' characteristic on this aspect of life at Parishes A and B. Given that this characteristic had a ripple effect through to the

[165] Field Notes, 4 February 2018
[166] Interview, 23 March 2018

peripheries, with community properties that were emotional and proximate, it is likely to have affected the quality of its charitable outreach also. Only experimentation with the mechanisms behind 'personal transformation' would help Parish D uncover whether British reticence could be overcome and 'umbrella community' be achieved within the parish.

4.1.6 Community at a Time of Change

On a freezing cold evening a few days before Christmas, I join a group of twenty parishioners led by the parish priest in a black cape and biretta. Committed parishioners of Parish C are singing carols around a new estate up the road from the church. At certain points around the estate, we stop and sing a few carols. Faces appear at lit, upstairs windows. A few people bravely open their front doors to the cold in order to hear more clearly; they ask if we are collecting money. The response is always no, but a card with Christmas Mass times is handed out.

This merry event was part of Parish C's attempts to build 'umbrella community' at a difficult time of change. One staff member says,

> It would be lovely if there's all sorts going on. If it was busy, if it was not just a place where people come to Mass and then go out. It's a community. And the community's not just the Catholic community, it's the wider community as well. So there'll be people from the local area who would come here for various things.[167]

Two interesting themes arise when we consider the question of community at Parish C. First, while, as we have noted, there are few references to personal transformation in the data, meaning that the community that currently exists does not seem to flow from such a characteristic, Parish C conceives of community – if not flowing from personal transformation – as flowing from spiritual reality outside itself. This is an important propositional element of Parish C's CS. There is a strong conviction that, as the Mass is the "source" of the parish's life (cf. LG, 11), the communal life at the S-C level should flow from this; in other words, there should be a "causal consensus" between the 'parts' and 'people' elements of culture (Archer, 1996: xvi). We will explore how community is being built up along these lines, and some of

[167] Interview, 14 December 2018

the obstacles, below. The second theme concerns the differing understandings of community at the S-C level within the parish. We will consider each in turn.

Some headway has been made in building community that flows from the Mass. At the announcements (pre-homily) at every Sunday Mass, a warm welcome is extended to visitors and those who make their "spiritual home" here.[168] While many leave straight after Mass, outside there is a lot of familiar interaction between priest, deacon, and people.[169] Two of the Sunday Masses have welcome teams who have been trained to greet people, rather than just hand a hymn book. Teenagers are noticeably involved in welcoming inside the church, collecting the money, and counting the parishioners.[170] They tell me that two years ago, there was an effort to start up a youth group, and they hope it will launch again.[171]

Every parish activity is starting to be seen as an opportunity to build community:

> [The sacraments] are great opportunities to really work on developing that belonging. … There should be that opportunity to have a sense of being a part of the parish. But I think we've got a lot of groundwork to do here. … A lot of people have come and gone.[172]

> [Parish Priest C] did a few sessions explaining the traditions of Holy Week and where it came from. So those kinds of situations where you can learn something new and talk to people at the same time over a cup of coffee, it's good.[173]

And finally there is a toddler group which is,

> …trying to get them to become community with each other. …the target are mums coming to Mass. So they're there, why not join us afterwards? Children can play, cup of tea, coffee. There's a chance to get to know each other.[174]

[168] Field Notes, 14 October 2017
[169] Field Notes, 15 October 2017
[170] *Ibid*.
[171] Field Notes, 3 December 2017
[172] Interview, 2 November 2017
[173] Interview, 7 November 2017
[174] Interview, 2 November 2017

Yet two different factors push against these efforts, examples of how varying degrees of cultural coherence at the S-C level may challenge or ultimately alter the CS level concept. First, the ingrained behaviour of parishioners who leave immediately after Mass:

> But there's loads of people, I don't know who they are because they never bother to integrate… I mean, if there were more people there because they wanted to be there, the parish would be able to grow more easily I think.[175]

Second, the deep changes that have been introduced in the parish (cf. 5.2.2) have thwarted this earnest desire to build community: some relationships have broken down between parish priest and people which mean that trust is not in place on which to build community; alongside which one finds a differing vision, where community is primarily social and not flowing from the spiritual dimension of the parish. Here, we see examples of "competitive contradiction" as marginal views rail against CS concepts from leaders.

> [What would build up the community is] social events. But [Parish Priest C] said everything that is done in the parish is towards the altar. But if people don't know each other, if these people who only come on a Sunday, if they leave as soon as Mass has ended, I'm never going to get to know them, and they're never going to get to know the parish.[176]

> How do you build the community spirit? You start with the community. And how do you build a community? You only build a community by doing what the people want to do.[177]

Somewhat brutally perhaps, one parishioner comments:

> I think [Parish Priest C] cares about the community as a concept but not necessarily about the concerns of the people, if that makes sense. He's doing everything with the

[175] Interview, 7 November 2017
[176] *Ibid*.
[177] Focus Group, 16 December 2017

> best intentions but not necessarily considering the people themselves and whether they're happy with what he's doing.[178]

This divergence from the CS understanding of community leads naturally into the second theme, which includes other differing visions of community. Parish Priest C has consistently invited parishioners to invest themselves more deeply into the community:

> I think one of the things that he keeps saying and truly means is that unless people belong and get involved in the parish then they're not going to develop in their own relationship [with God] so he's desperate that people not just come to Mass - and that in itself is quite a challenge for a lot of people - but that's not enough.[179]

> For newer parishioners, I also want to ask you to begin conscientiously to make this parish your own. This is not a Mass centre. It is not a chaplaincy, or a place to come simply to 'tick the box' of the Sunday obligation. It is a family and it is a home. I want you to be part of that family, and to be at home here.[180]

The language is evocative of an 'umbrella community'. Yet there are cultural strands resisting the call. First, there are a number of ethnic communities in the parish whose previous experiences and cultures do not necessarily match what they are being invited to at Parish C. At Sunday Mass, it is apparent that the large Filippino contingent regularly leaves immediately without staying for coffee afterwards.[181] For one Keralan parishioner, my questions about 'how welcoming' the community is do not seem particularly relevant to her. She likes that the parish is the short distance from her house (a 4-minute walk), the availability of Masses and Confessions. She is extensively involved in activities organised by the Syro-Malabar chaplaincy.[182] For both the Filippinos and the Keralans, it would seem that community is found within their own ethnic communities, rendering further community at the parish mostly unnecessary.[183]

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[178] Interview, 7 November 2017
[179] Interview, 16 December 2017
[180] Homily, 1 October 2017
[181] 15 October 2017
[182] 2 November 2017
[183] This is not unique to Britain; a parishioner at Parish B also commented: "In India, where we used to go, you just go and get out - go home. Never, ever bother... maybe say hi to the priest and that's it. So it's not a thing that's localised here, it's all over the Catholic Church." (Focus Group, 14 June 2017)

The second group is the ‘otherwise committed’ parishioners. There seems to be a hesitancy amongst people who have recently started attending to make the parish their own.

> HVS: But it sounds like now you've all made this your home.
> P1: [very unsure]: Well... I don't know... It depends where we are, what we're doing. And we'll go to [the most convenient] Mass. But no, we do like it here.[184]

> … there are young adults in the area, some of whom have started gravitating towards the parish […] I think part of the difficulty is that they look in and see this isn't a parish of disciples but at the same time that's an opportunity... So to try and find a way to involve them, but to do it in such a way that the existing people don't feel that they're being pushed to the side, or that new people are being brought to the fore too quickly.[185]

This phenomenon could simply be attributed to the very early stages of change at Parish C. This is surely likely to invite curious newcomers who want to watch from the sidelines momentarily before making the decision to become very involved.

A final differing view on community is also symptomatic of a ‘canopy community’ outlook. It is niche because referred to in only one interview, but nevertheless reveals an important theological outlook. The parish deacon’s view expresses a sociologically pre-1960s understanding of the parish, where ‘umbrella community’ certainly was not needed, since the wider culture generally supported the values of the Church, both being propped up by canopy plausibility structures.

> I don't think [the parish] is a community. And I'm not sure that that's particularly a challenge. Or a problem. I say that for the following reasons. Most of these people are heavily communitised anyway. They're in the community of people who live in their block of flats, or they are involved in the school where their children are, or they're involved in an ethnically or racially delineated community. So actually seeking to establish the parish as another community I don't think is that important. Incidentally,

[184] Focus Group, 10 December 2017
[185] Interview, 17 December 2017

> I'm not sure that that's important anywhere really. I think that it's important that parishes are welcoming places but actually the parish is only a kind of geographical instantiation of the universal Church and I think if we try to worry too much about how we make it a community, what we tend to then do is end up importing fairly uncritically notions of what community are, from the secular world. And the Church isn't called to be a community, it's called to be a communion which is a different kind of thing.[186]

4.1.7 Conclusions

In these final three sections, we have turned to examine cultural properties in parishes that, we are hypothesising, are obstacles to 'umbrella community' in Parishes C, D and, to some extent, E. The uncoupling of personal faith from community and the 'Mass is my spiritual trip' outlook are both undergirded by an intense privacy about faith which, when coupled with British reticence, result in community marked by anonymity, a specificity in relationships, and fragmentation ('canopy community$_2$'). Parish C leadership, by introducing new concepts into the CS, and by promoting 'umbrella community' at the S-C level, attempts morphogenetic elaboration. Yet, as we have noted in 2.2.5, there is enormous difficulty in breaking away from a dominant culture. I modified my adoption of the sacred umbrellas thesis by noting the difficulty in exempting a single Catholic parish from its cultural conditioning, specifically within the strong structural reality of a universal and hierarchical Church. Much resistance has been evidenced above, not least, of ethnic communities that can inadvertently support entrenched cultural conditioning by investing more heavily in community outside the parish. A lack of conversations results in a lack of distinctiveness.

Such strong conditioning is a gravitational pull for Parishes C and D towards being generalist parishes, with no distinctiveness in their CS, that "target the middle, accessing the highest number of 'customers' (parishioners)" (T. Bruce, 2017: 7). In these parishes, we perceive a situation which, when combined with the territoriality principle, can pull parishes into a societal religion mentality, where sacramental provision is seamlessly provided for by homogenist, generalist parishes that cater to the majority. By contrast, the 'sharper boundaries' and 'excultration' (deplored by Woodhead) of 'umbrella communities' seem, in fact, to offer more hope sociologically. In Parishes C and D, growth is more likely when 'canopy

[186] Interview, 14 December, 2017

community$_2$' gives way to 'umbrella community'. We have hypothesised about Parishes A and B that, 'umbrella community' is a product of the experience of personal transformation.

Finally, in 4.1, the distinction between 'canopy' and 'umbrella' has come into stark relief when considering the cultural realities of Parishes A and B alongside those of Parishes C, D and E. Seeing this distinction, the question naturally rises again: are these differences not solely attributable to the ways Catholicism is lived differently in North America from how it is lived in Britain? In response to this question, I argue that the form of 'umbrella community' we see in Parishes A and B is intentional cultural elaboration, it is not default American Catholicism. In Parish A, structural and cultural factors contribute towards the parish's 'megachurch' status, and yet, leaders act with great foresight in renegotiating their strategy towards the new mission field (cf. 3.1.2). Furthermore, data in 4.1.2 affirms the inconsistency of this 'umbrella' culture. There is data from both parishes that could be labelled 'canopy' behaviour, which leaders are attempting to elaborate. In other words, it would be false to argue that 'canopy' characteristics are consonant with the culture of British parishes while 'umbrella' characteristics are consonant with North American ones. 'Canopy' characteristics are evident, too, in American parishes, while there is evidence of British parishes pursuing 'umbrella' characteristics.

4.2 Authenticity

In 4.1.1 above, I proposed that a high degree of emotionality and proximity in relationships is a characteristic of 'umbrella community' in Parishes A and B. This characteristic is closely linked to the characteristic of authenticity. An authenticity-marked search for meaning involves a desire to find the design of one's whole life, rather than merely a religious portion of it.[187] In 3.6.1, we concluded that authenticity is conducive to personal transformation. In turn, the close and diffuse relationships that flow from personal transformation create a "micro-foundation" of language and conversations, imbued with authenticity, that provide plausibility structures attesting to the reality of the experience. In keeping with the 'social imaginary of expressive individualism', 'umbrella' parishes A and B lean away from an ascription approach to religion, and towards individual choice backed by personal transformation.

[187] One parishioner from Parish A comments: "…that's one thing I've noticed being here and being active in the parish. I've learnt that I actually have a purpose. And having a purpose, not just coming to church, but a purpose in life is really important. I've never experienced it before." (Focus Group, 25 May 2017)

There are few 'events' revealing the authenticity characteristic at Parishes C, D and E. We noted in 3.6.1 the high-risk strategy of introducing high levels of authenticity into parish culture: an atmosphere of safety, trust and confidentiality alone may not stimulate parishioners to reveal elements of their past at the potential risk of embarrassment. Pastor A's modelling the safety of sharing testimony is likely conducive to others doing so; he helps to cement how highly the parish values authenticity in its CS intelligibilia. It is likely, then, in Parishes C, D and E, that authenticity has not been modelled at the S-C level; it is not present in the CS. In 4.2, therefore, we shall consider the consequences of the lack of this value.

4.2.1 Authenticity, Dense Community and High Commitment

Data from the S-C level at Parishes A and B suggest that parishioners find meaning and belonging through what Smith calls a "satisfying morally orienting collective identity". It is the experience of being known and accepted as one is, and cared for:

> [Alpha and the Connect Group] brought me to know more people so that when I walked into the church people would say, 'Hey X'. And you know, the first time... when someone knew my name when I walked into the church, I was like, 'oh my gosh!' It was completely different! I mean, people might know you and recognise you, but to actually know you, come up to you and give you a hug, and things like that. I'd never experienced that in the Catholic Church before.[188]

> People actually care. [...] They actually will check up on you, and if they see you again, the next week, they'll be like, how are you doing? They remember. That is the biggest shocker - they will meet you once and they'll remember.[189]

But, exploring the data further, there is a surprising correlation between high authenticity and high commitment. Closely linked to the reality of being known and loved, is the reality of invitation and expectation to make the mission of the parish one's own.

> [E]very Sunday in our prayers of the faithful, there's a prayer [that people would become intentional disciples]. Every Sunday, you know! If you keep hearing this,

[188] Parish B Interview 1, 8 June 2017
[189] Parish B Focus Group, 14 June 2017

there's a constant awareness that it's not something we're just thrust into. It's something that we make a conscious effort, and decide, and choose, and keep choosing, re-committing... [to discipleship].[190]

I always remember one parishioner said to me, … I've never heard a priest ask us to... that we have responsibilities. That he has expectations for us. She said I've never had a priest do that, but she said, you know what, I like it. I think I'll like it! But you know, no one else has ever commented on that, but I think in the beginning it would have taken some of us by surprise.[191]

…to work with people who are really here because of the mission of the Church, and because of their commitment to that and their desire to grow and serve... That builds me to be around other people like that and it reassures me in my own vocation, in my own walk in life. And really helps me to grow.[192]

…you feel like you belong. …people like it, like having the responsibility because Pastor B in a sense - Fr X - they've been really good at fostering 'you're a part of it'. It's not just a responsibility. 'You're a part of the mission'. We have a clear vision and get excited about doing missionary work because the vision's so clear. And that's the beauty of it. That's the love that we're talking about, you feel loved within the mission, because we feel like we're a part of it.[193]

In Parishes A and B, the link between authenticity and high commitment is intriguing and perhaps even counterintuitive. It is intriguing because central to authenticity is the desire to shake off external conformity. Yet, data from Parishes A and B seem to show that, perhaps counterintuitively, the authenticity characteristic leads to a higher than average commitment. This correlation also seems to be aligned with ‘umbrella community’, community characterised by a dense network of diffuse relationships caused by personal transformation. Let us consider this phenomenon with the help of the literature.

[190] Interview, 23 May 2017
[191] Focus Group, 13 June 2017
[192] Interview 2, 8 June 2017
[193] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

First, we recall from 1.2.3, Kelley (1972) and Iannaccone (1994)'s theory about why strict churches are often strong, and how reducing 'free riding' results in greater commitment from members. These pieces of research are in line with Bruce's arguments against a 'pick-and-mix' religion, and for a religion having a 'shared social product'. Smith's subcultural identity theory is pertinent here. One of the central theoretical statements of his theory is:

> Religion survives and can thrive in pluralistic, modern society by embedding itself in subcultures that offer satisfying morally orienting collective identities which provide adherents meaning and belonging. (1998: 118)

Second, the data supports Taylor's contention that authenticity is an ideal, "very worthwhile in itself", that can be retrieved (Taylor, 1991: 23), that its end is not necessarily subjectivism and narcissism (cf. 1.2.1). Paradoxically, at Parishes A and B, the framework of the postmodern spiritual search - "finding the design of my life myself, against the demands of external conformity" (Taylor, 1991: 68) – leads to sacrificial and self-forgetful giving.

If this is the case, we will now explore the consequences of a lack of the authenticity characteristic in Parish C.

4.2.2 Parish C and Generating High Commitment

While Parishes A and B were most successful at generating high commitment, at the time of the case study, Parish C was most engaged in attempts to generate it. High commitment seemed firmly fixed in Parish C's CS intelligibilia, as an important value, and yet, generation at the S-C level beyond core parishioners is an uphill struggle. On the one hand, there is extraordinary commitment – unprecedented in the other parishes – from Parish C core parishioners. The full-time secretary offers her time for free:

> And I got roped in to help … it escalated from three hours to full time. But I enjoy it. It is interesting, and it's helping people. I was brought up that you help people so that's why I do it.[194]

The secretary's husband is also heavily time-invested in the parish:

[194] Interview, 14 December 2017

> I do altar serving, I do things like get a van hired and drive down to Devon to pick up an altar piece that we can then bring back. … I seem to get involved in anything and everything at the moment.[195]

The part-time evangelisation assistant also works as a volunteer:

> I also had a sense that there was a real need – lots of prayer needed, and help needed as well. I was talking to [Parish Priest C] and invited to help. And pondered that. And thought yes, I'd like to be involved. So that's how I got started here.[196]

Yet this level of commitment is limited to around 10-20 core parishioners, some of whom travel some distance to attend the parish because they like what they see. Outside of this core, there is some frustration about raising commitment levels. Parish Priest C is very keen for parishioners to have a sense of ownership of their parish. A pizza box that was not picked up from the parish grounds for two weeks is symbolic of few people taking responsibility.[197] There is a desire to engage a wider group of parishioners in the mission of the parish:

> I'd want to see the liturgy of the parish as something that was beautiful because the people felt that it needed to be beautiful and needed to grow in its beauty, rather than because of the energy of the parish priest, and one or two inadequate helpers like myself.[198]

> …we would [want to] see people who are involved in some way becoming more actively involved. I've said to them that, really, everyone in the parish should have at least one thing that they're doing, that they're involved with, a group that they're committed to, or a programme that they're working with, or some catechesis that they're helping with, that indicates a level of commitment beyond Sunday Mass. So I think that's where I'd like to get to.[199]

[195] Focus Group, 17 December 2017
[196] Interview, 2 November 2017
[197] Field Notes, 19 September 2017
[198] Interview, 14 December 2017
[199] Interview, 17 December 2017

Attempts at motivating higher commitment promote responsibility and ownership in the parish predominantly. In contrast, data from Parishes A and B suggests a different emphasis on belonging above responsibility: “you're a part of the mission”, “you feel loved within the mission, because we feel like we're a part of it”, “a sense of belonging to something that's bigger than them”, “they're equipped to go and do the same that was done for them”. At Parish C, there is a different trajectory: responsibility comes first, from which belonging will follow:

> If they're coming to Mass, they need to be involved in a way, and they need to be very committed. … I can see where it's coming from; there's a sense once you immerse yourself in the parish and you feel you belong, then you feel your relationship with God and Jesus develops. The people are at a very different place though.[200]

A staff member commented on the push from Parish Priest C to invite and expect involvement:

> …there was a form to fill out as a family, ‘would you commit to this? would you commit to that?’ … That’s what we want - but I would do it a bit more gently. I would get a sense of them committing themselves to a sacramental programme first, and then when I feel they're starting to embed themselves in the community... [In response to the request for extra involvement] a lot of them went, ‘woah!’ [pulls back] A lot of them felt they couldn't respond, and some said, ‘we're just here for the First Communion programme’.[201]

At the time of the case study, it was too early to see the outcomes of this somewhat aggressive invitational approach. One parishioner commented on the requests to increase financial giving:

> … he'd basically been nagging everybody for weeks. And of course, he was using the typical Catholic guilt of ... ‘if you find yourself spending more on coffee than you give to the Church, then think about giving to the Church’. Well I mean... Maybe they want the guilt approach because that's why they come to church, but I think it's very passive aggressive…[202]

[200] Interview, 16 December 2017
[201] *Ibid.*
[202] Interview, 7 November 2017

Parish C's approach to increasing commitment adopts the second part of the Parish A/B approach – invitation and expectation to take responsibility for the mission – but it neglects the first part – the experience of being accepted, known and cared for, which is deeply connected with authenticity. Sidelining authenticity seems to make the generation of high commitment heavy lifting. By contrast, Parishes A and B have successfully tapped into the spirituality of the age with its preference for self-fulfilment above external conformity and duty, which yields the fruits of high commitment that Parish C has not yet seen. While multiple other generative mechanisms behind high commitment may exist in other parishes, in my data, the authenticity characteristic seems to be the strongest mechanism at S-C level. Developing authenticity not only allows the parish to express the Gospel in a way that 'speaks to me'; it is also paradoxically a short-cut to generating the high commitment for which most parishes would long.

4.2.3 Individual Choice as an Emerging Basis of Identity Validity

Before exploring our final segment of data on authenticity, we turn to explore this characteristic through the lens of data about individual choice. Individual choice, a normative identity legitimiser (cf. 1.2.3), is at the heart of authenticity, and therefore, part of the cultural 'intelligibilia' (combining Popper's Three World realities) of Parishes A and B. Individual choice has grown in its prominence as constitutive of Catholic identity since the 1960s (cf. 1.3.2). Because "the ultimate criteria of lifestyle validity is individual choice" (Smith, 1998: 103), anything less in terms of one's religion is at odds with the "value-epistemology" of our culture, and seen as "parochial, acquiescent, and artificial" (Smith, *ibid*.). Nevertheless, all five parishes still struggle with an ascription approach to Catholicism at the S-C level, summarised well in this comment from a Parish C staff member:

> For the English who come, especially from what I'm seeing of First Communion children, it's a case of 'tick box mentality'. You're doing this because it's part of what you do. … This is my right and therefore I can have, and I want to have.[203]

This ascription approach is further evidence of the 'canopy community' reality that doggedly resists elaboration even in Parishes A and B. In 'imaginary' terms, parishioners' precognitive expectations of "how things usually go… [and] how they ought to go" (Taylor, 2004: 24) are "deep fissures… profoundly anchored in culture and imaginary" (*ibid*.: 198). These parishes,

[203] Interview, 2 November 2017

we have seen, appeal to people to exercise choice, not only in terms of fulfilling their obligations such as attending Mass, but also as an invitation to experience personal transformation. We are witnessing cultural elaboration, as identity legitimation is subtly shifting its centre of gravity away from Mass attendance and towards personal transformation. In fact, Mass attendance alone is viewed by all five parishes not only as the bare minimum, but in some respects, as behaviour that deviates from the emerging cultural reality. Personal transformation is not the only new form of identity-legitimation; in Parish C, the new form is characterised by an expectation of high commitment. Plausibility structures are increasingly based on and in some cases strengthened by new forms of identity-legitimation and weakened by Sunday-Mass-only parishioners. This shift is seismic and can sound like a foreign language to a community abiding by older forms of identity-legitimation. Pastor A comments,

> We've been doing our evangelisation retreats for 4-5 years now. Last Christmas, we all preached the Ultimate Relationship - this was our homily at Christmas. I do think there's a number of people who think we've almost gone evangelical Christian. Like, 'we don't talk like this in the Church!'[204]

Smith makes the following point about individual choice:

> … modern religious believers are capable of establishing stronger religious identities and commitments on the basis of individual choice than through ascription. And we should expect this to be exceptionally true of American evangelicals, whose faith traditionally emphasises the importance of making a personal 'decision for Christ' through an individual conversion experience. For evangelicals, it is precisely by making a choice for Christ that one's faith becomes valid and secure. (2008: 104)

We have seen that, in Parishes A and B, emphasis on 'individual conversion experience' is not the exclusive means to belonging: after all, people are absorbed into 'umbrella community' without necessarily having experienced personal transformation (cf. 4.1.2). The generative mechanisms of the evangelisation retreat and Alpha are collective, not individual, experiences, while the emphasis is on the personal. Yet, as Catholicism allows its own emphasis on personal

[204] Interview, 26 May 2017

choice to reemerge, aligning closer with cultural legitimisers, it is unsurprising that there are accusations of it borrowing from evangelicalism.

In a number of places, we have noted the deep cultural conditioning unique to the Catholic Church, that is structural and hierarchical, and so therefore impossible for Catholic parishes alone to elaborate (cf. 2.2.5). Drawing in theory from outside the CR realm, we can explore how deeply rooted a dominant culture can be.

In line with our use of 'social imaginary', Edgar Schein elaborates that, "we come to believe that nature really works in this way" (2010: 27), at the S-C level. He refers to Argyris and Schon's concept of "theories-in-use" (1996): "the implicit assumptions that actually guide behaviour, that tell group members how to perceive, think about and feel things" (Schein, 2010: 27). These basic assumptions, loosely equivalent to intelligibilia in the CS, constitute powerful forces that drive behaviour, to some degree, unconsciously (2010: 14). One may have assumptions about what is real, how truth or falsity is demonstrated, how time is measured, how space is allocated, what human nature is (2010: 117). Using Argyris and Schon's work, Schein asserts that such assumptions can be so deeply held that they can be non-confrontable and non-debatable:

> To learn something new in this realm requires us to resource, reexamine, and possibly change some of the more stable portions of our cognitive structure – a process that Argyris and others have called 'double-loop learning', or 'frame-breaking'. (2010: 27; cf. Argyris, Putman, Smith: 1985; Bartunek, 1984)

Yet so deeply ingrained are these basic assumptions, that to destabilise them temporarily shakes our cognitive, interpersonal world, releasing large quantities of anxiety:

> Rather than tolerating such anxiety levels, we tend to want to perceive the events around us as congruent with our assumptions, even if that means distorting, denying, projecting, or in other ways falsifying to ourselves what may be going on around us. It is in this psychological process that culture has its ultimate power. (2010: 28; cf. Douglas, 1986; Bushe, 2009)

In the face of destabilisation, groups tend to develop "psychological cognitive defence mechanisms that permit the group to continue to function" (2010: 29). Argyris describes how organisations can learn "defensive routines" that prevent the kind of second-order learning that is needed in changing external circumstances (Argyris and Schon, 1996; cf. Schein, 1996: 235).

It would seem that ascription is so deeply ingrained as a Catholic identity-legitimiser, that breaking its cultural, unconscious hold on our thought and behaviour requires intentional, sustained and determined unlearning.

4.2.4 Distortions of Authenticity

During a Confirmation preparation session at Parish D, the teenage candidates are invited to go into the church 'anywhere at all' and find one thing they had not seen before and one thing they had a question about. The teenagers romped immediately all over the sanctuary, up the steps behind the tabernacle, and even right up to the tabernacle, lifting the veil. No one mentioned genuflecting, and there was no traditional, reverent sense of being in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. I am told that the goal of the exercise was to make them feel the church was 'theirs', that they could feel at home and be freely present there: "Do you feel the church is yours?"[205]

This 'event' is interesting in its being one of the few instances of the authenticity characteristic at Parish D. It seems to reveal a couple of realities. First, that, in a parish, S-C level activity (a lack of reverence in a sacred place) can be detached from CS level beliefs (the Catholic belief in the presence of God in the tabernacle). Second, that at the CS level, the value of authenticity can be overplayed at the expense of Catholic teaching. In Taylor's words, authenticity can be "debased and travestied" (1991: 15) – without the 'horizon' of the teachings of Catholicism. There is a danger of the subjectivist principle destroying itself: human life, rather, must be defined dialogically, not purely subjectively, and our identity is formed against a background "against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense" (*ibid*.: 34). A background conviction is that the 'social imaginary of expressive individualism' can realise itself authentically within Catholicism. How "each one of us has his/her own way of realising our humanity", how one finds and lives this out as one's own, "*against* surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside" (Taylor, 2007: 486, my italics) can find

[205] Field Notes, 25 March 2018

fulfilment in the Catholic faith whose definite background or horizon, given by revelation, prevents our subjectivity from falling into meaninglessness.

At Parishes A and B, the search for self-fulfilment seems to happen collectively in a context such as the evangelisation retreat or Alpha where a horizon is provided in terms of content. Parish D showed some evidence of an over-emphasised subjectivity, where the horizon of Catholic doctrine was blurred or not accepted. A more relativistic approach to catechesis was evident: one RCIA catechist expressed the view that his role is simply to share his own faith (rather than Catholic teaching), leaving participants free to make up their own minds.[206] Reflections on Scripture focused on 'what it means to you' with no sense of an authoritative interpretation.[207] One lady told me she was grateful to a previous priest for allowing a reading at her daughter's wedding from the poet Rumi, which would not normally be permitted in Catholic liturgy.[208] These examples of distorted authenticity flow naturally from the canopy community$_2$ outlook of the 1970s and 80s, that attempted to transcend differences and foster unity (cf. 4.1.1). Interestingly, these instances of the authenticity characteristic are not closely tied to personal transformation and neither do they result in high commitment (both of which are features of authenticity in Parishes A and B).

4.2.5 Conclusions

To reach some conclusions about the authenticity characteristic, I introduce theory from Smith who, in his study on thriving Protestant evangelicals, proposes a middle way between two extreme models of how Christian communities engage with outsiders. At the one extreme is sheltered enclave theory (originally developed by Berger (1967) and articulated further by James Davison Hunter (1983, 1987, 1997)). It promotes the view that religion survives and prospers when sheltered from the harmful effects of modernity. This would be the approach that eschews modern values such as authenticity. Out of my five parishes, it is most closely adopted by Parish C.

At the other extreme is religion's accommodating itself to the world. There are some hints of this in Parish D, whose distortions of authenticity I have outlined above. Hunter asserts that

[206] This relativistic approach to content was coupled with a 'don't ask, don't tell' approach to the RCIA structure (Weddell, 2012: 56-59): there is an automatic nature to participants' receiving sacraments when they have completed the course, regardless of their personal faith.
[207] Field Notes, 27 February 2018
[208] Field Notes, 20 February 2018

when evangelicalism bargains with modernity, it results in a "*cognitive contamination* of the religious worldview" (1983: 15): religious orthodoxy always loses out. Yet C. Smith's position is that religious traditions have always had to renegotiate their collective identities by articulating their beliefs anew in changing sociocultural environments: "'Accommodation' … is nothing new. Sociologists above all should know that religions are always in motion, ever reconfiguring their identities and messages vis-à-vis their social environments, whether modern or not" (1998: 100). He proposes a somewhat different take on accommodation from Mark Shibley, who recognises that a church grows in modernity thanks to "cultural – if not theological – accommodation" (1996: 134). In Smith's words: "Californians wearing blue jeans to churches that play electric guitars (Shibley 1996) does not reflect the surrender of core Christian distinctives" (1998: 101).

In 4.2, we have considered data concerning Catholic parishes adopting the characteristic of authenticity, a value of modern culture, that is not without risk. We have seen the danger involved when authenticity elaborates core Catholic teaching at the CS level (cf. 4.2.4), but that, when it does not concede to an overplayed subjectivism, this elaboration can bring growth: in the context of authenticity, personal transformation can occur, stimulating umbrella community, dense relationships and high commitment. While Hunter would term a Christian community aligning itself epistemologically to modern values as 'cognitive contamination', I argue with Shibley and Smith that cultural accommodation is necessary and indeed possible without risking theological orthodoxy. While it can be enormously difficult, as we have seen, for Catholic parishes to overcome cultural conditioning and introduce new concepts into a parish's CS, the evidence from five parishes suggests that some intentional elaboration of parish culture is necessary for the purposes of growth. Central to authenticity is personal choice. Shifting the identity-legitimiser centre of gravity (and social imaginary) away from 'Mass attendance' and towards 'personal transformation', from 'obligation' to 'invitation', is seismic, and requires sustained, intentional 'frame-breaking.'

In morphogenetic terms, we have seen how all five parishes are pursuing varying forms of cultural elaboration, convinced that growth lies with such change. Parishes A and B, both of which are pursuing elaboration in terms of an epistemological accommodation to the wider culture are seeing greatest success in terms of "cultural coherence" between the CS and S-C level. It is unknown whether, with more time, Parish C's approach will result in greater coherence between cultural 'parts' and 'people', or whether competitive contradiction would

likely grow stronger. The effect of introducing ‘personal transformation’ into Parish C is likewise unknown, within its unique structural and cultural context. We can make two conclusions here: first, that all parishes agree that elaboration is required; and second, that that pursued in Parishes A and B is undoubtedly most successful.

Chapter 5
Mission and Leadership for Growth

In Chapter 4, I defined the cultural properties of 'umbrella community', generated by a complex of mechanisms in Parishes A and B, hypothesising that such community contributes towards the parishes' growth. In Chapter 5, we continue to explore the parishes' cultural properties through the lens of the final three characteristics that were revealed in Parishes A and/or B: invitation and mission, vision and leadership, and supernatural outlook.

Before proceeding, I will briefly summarise three key parts of the theoretical framework I am using to interpret the data. We are examining the culture of each parish in terms of its Cultural System integration, and its Socio-Cultural integration. First, CS refers to the propositional or 'parts' aspect of culture, independent of people's actions. These "ideational objects of culture bear objective relations to each other" (Porpora, 2015: 174) and, importantly, can act as mechanisms exerting causal influence on people. Second, S-C integration refers to the 'people' aspect of culture: how agents relate to one another in each parish, the degree of consensus, cohesion and integration that can be found among people. The third concept we continue to use examines S-C integration from a different perspective: this is Taylor's concept of 'social imaginary'. This is the pre-theoretical way that "people imagine their social existence … both factual and normative… how things usually go… [and] how they ought to go" (Taylor, 2004: 23, 24). We employed this concept in 4.2 at the macro level in relation to the 'social imaginary of expressive individualism', which seems to be at play in Parishes A and B in terms of the authenticity characteristic, but less so in Parishes C, D and E. In this chapter, we will continue to see how 'imaginary' can be employed at the S-C level to describe the factual and normative understandings people have in the Catholic parish about their social existence with others.

5.1 Invitation and Mission

The need to evangelise is central to the CS of each of the five parishes. However, the ways in which this concept finds expression at the S-C level varies widely. Parishioners at Parish D recount an experience of evangelisation which was, for some of them, highly uncomfortable:

P1: ... the mission two years ago. They had these people coming and giving some talks, and they said, 'go out and ask people to come in off the street and light a candle.'
P2: Oh the Night of Light.
P1: And I thought, I'm not doing that, there's no way I'm doing that. [Laughter] And people went out there and I thought, they're going to get hit! They're going to get a drunk come in. But people came in... It was really good. It was a strange reaction. I didn't think they'd get that reaction. I thought they'd get a bit more 'on yer bike' type of thing.
P3: I remember that, because you had to make a choice - either you stay and pray or you go and 'collect' [Laughter] I was feeling really guilty because I thought 'I should be going, I should be going! No but I can't... Is there anyone else moving? Oh, there's people going!' [Laughter] But we prayed and they came![209]

This episode is strikingly different from the confidence and enthusiasm expressed in Chapter 3 by parishioners from Parishes A and B when they spoke of inviting people to events at their church. At Parish B, one parishioner expresses this new, invitational reality saying:

> North American Christianity has been built on a tractional evangelism. You know, "if you build it, they will come", from the old *Field of Dreams*. I think the more postmodern we get, the more we're going to get away from that. I think that the more people have to be positioned to understand that you don't just put a sign on the door, you don't just have a catchy website, whatever the case is. We have to really embrace and lean into what it looks like to influence people on a daily basis. The average follower of Christ has to. And so, I think that's how we have to continue to [grow].[210]

Parishes A and B seem to have achieved something not yet reached by the other three: they have fostered a S-C culture of confidence around invitation. Individual Catholics have confidence because their parish has enabled them to feel this way. I will explore the other three parishes' approach to evangelisation by asking how they increase the confidence of parishioners to influence and invite others.

[209] Focus Group, 25 April 2018
[210] Interview, 9 June 2017

In all three British parishes, the need to evangelise is firmly rooted in each parish's CS. It is a message that has come across strongly at all levels at the Church – universal, diocesan, parish – during Pope Francis' pontificate. Indeed, at Parish D the concept translates into a number of offerings available: Alpha, Sycamore, as well as an enquiry group for enquirers that do not fit anywhere else.[211] One parishioner comments,

> I think Sycamore and then Alpha and then the small communities are beginning to give people a bit of a sort of freedom to experiment ... so I think there's the beginnings of a shift, but I wouldn't say this is a parish that is understanding evangelisation.[212]

There is a similar uncertainty in all three parishes about what evangelisation looks like in practice, coupled with a hesitancy about engaging in it. In other words, the role of agency in fostering evangelisation with "social intentionality" (Porpora, 2015: 160) at the S-C level is faltering and insecure. The 'imaginary' about "how things usually go" (Taylor, 2004: 24) has not adapted adequately for this to become normative behaviour. We will explore what this discomfort looks like, consider the balance between relevance and distinctiveness, before finally exploring the specific problem of engaging the next generation. Throughout, I will ask what happens when parishes ask parishioners to evangelise, and how parishioners' confidence is increased to invite others.

5.1.1 Invitation: The Line Between Comfort and Discomfort

At Parishes C and E, there were signs that parishioners were truly concerned about the consequences of not evangelising, expressing a real desire to reach outward. At Parish E, there was a strong desire in particular to reach a nearby neighbourhood affected by crime, gangs and drugs. It is an estate with historic links to the parish, but no longer represented in the attendance.[213] Other parishioners from Parishes C and E said:

> …it's scary when you think of the number of people sitting around you who don't really engage in [the Mass], or know that God really loves them… This is desperate stuff and it really needs to be addressed.[214]

[211] Interview, 28 February 2018
[212] Interview, 23 March 2018
[213] Parish E Field Notes, 24 May 2018
[214] Parish C Interview, 2 November 2017

> I think what struck me was how much we all agreed it was declining. There was no one saying everything is fine. …The elephant in the room that once you start mentioning it.[215]
>
> [In a discussion about advertising RCIA on a banner outside the church:]
> P1: Maybe we should have a sign outside here. One down there and one out here.
> P2: I think so, don't you?
> P3: It wouldn't hurt.
> P1: Either something would happen or nothing would happen.
> P2: Because they don't know otherwise, do they? Rather than knock on people's doors, if you've got a public notice sign, you know.[216]

What is more, stories were recounted at both parishes (although strangely none from Parish D) of (sometimes successful) evangelistic attempts:

> Our friend came to Confession and Mass. It had been a long time since she'd gone to Confession, and she came out very peaceful, cheerful, and she said to us, 'I feel light. My burden is gone.'[217]
>
> One time I was chatting with my friends in the office, and sometimes they do their overtime on Sunday. But I said, no, Sunday is for my church. I can't work. Then they asked, why? Because it's for God! I told them, if you come to church, you get some peace of mind. Try it! I explained to them. Come for ten minutes of prayer and you'll get something different.[218]
>
> There is one girl in particular I work with and she is genuinely curious. I don't know if I can bring her or not. Because the lowest her voice goes is about 50 decibels. 'If I take you to church will you try not to shout?!' I'm working on it. Working on dropping stuff in to get people to come.[219]

[215] Parish E Interview, 29 May 2018
[216] Parish C Focus Group, 10 December 2017
[217] Parish C Focus Group, 17 December 2017
[218] *Ibid.*
[219] Parish E Focus Group, 29 May 2018

Despite this positive evidence, across the three parishes, there were many expressions of uncertainty and discomfort at the idea of evangelising. At a Parish D parish meeting, one parishioner raised the question of what 'outreach' was: was it service of the parish community itself, or did it refer to reaching out more widely into the outside neighbourhood? Another parishioner replied in response that they thought that 'wider outreach' happened in Catholic schools.[220] In the ensuing discussion, nobody referred to the call of the baptised to evangelise in the world.

> Most people hear the word [evangelisation] and their eyes go on stalks and they've got a particular stereotype [in their mind]. And when you mentioned the evangelisation strategy group, I've heard many people call it the 'evangelical group'. [Laughter] So that's in a nutshell what the understanding is. Most people trip up over the word.[221]

> I mean evangelisation to me is all going out and grabbing people off the street, and bringing them here and saying, 'come to church, come to church.' The kind of thing that makes me back away very quickly. And it's not that. Yes, it's getting people through the door. But it's also dealing with the people you've already got as well. I think use the word evangelisation and people think of Pentecostals.[222]

> Is evangelisation a vehicle for increasing the size of the parish? So every time we grab somebody in Sainsbury's, that's evangelisation working is it?[223]

People are certainly uncomfortable with misperceptions of evangelisation, such as knocking on doors:

> P1: I think for me the word [evangelisation] is a stumbling block. … As a child you'd have regular visits from the Jehovah's Witnesses and my mother would open the door and say, 'We're Catholics!' So it's very much a case of, we have our faith but we're certainly not going to be like that. And I think that was the way I was brought up. And I think the culture is now, Catholics that actually go out and work for other charities,

[220] Field Notes, 15 February 2018
[221] Parish D Interview, 28 February 2018
[222] Parish C Interview, 14 December 2017
[223] Parish D Focus Group, 25 April 2018

they do it because of … living their faith, but they don't necessarily say 'look at me, I'm a Catholic, I'm doing this.'

P2: It's more subtle.

P3: It's understated.

P1: Yes. That would be my perception of evangelisation. … I would feel very awkward saying to people I know, oh why don't you come to church with me on Sunday?[224]

I think people here in this country - English people - are reserved. And they say, the Mormons go round knocking on doors, but we don't do that sort of thing. We're English and we keep our religion to ourselves.[225]

I don't want to be seen as that Christian who's forcing ... because people do have this sort of stereotype [in their mind]. … And I think people just assume that if they come to church, they'll be surrounded by people who can't talk anything except God. Or that we're not actually normal people.[226]

I think all we can do is present a reasonable face to them, and if they want to know anything about our faith, then we must be available to them.[227]

I feel I can't be explicit. It's more like, I'll try and show them what a difference it makes.[228]

Here, we are seeing the dissonance between different levels of culture: the S-C properties (and 'imaginary') of 'canopy community$_2$' where faith is intensely private on the one hand, and the unmistakable call to Catholics to evangelise at the CS level, on the other. In Parishes C, D and E, we are seeing evidence of what might happen when these two realities collide: Catholics evangelise according to the 'canopy' framework with which they are comfortable, which the plausibility structures of the parish model and affirm as reality. "Trying to live your faith in the workplace, in your social life..." "I don't want to be seen as that Christian who's forcing…" "…present a reasonable face…" "I don't know if it's going to be face-to-face, a personal

[224] Parish D Focus Group, 25 April 2018
[225] Parish E Interview, 21 May 2018
[226] Parish E Interview, 30 May 2018
[227] Parish E Interview, 26 May 2018
[228] Parish E Focus Group, 30 May 2018

encounter with other people. And I think honestly, people don't want it…" They adopt 'undercover evangelisation' which is evangelisation of actions rather than words – more comfortable in their precognitive imaginary's "common understanding" (Taylor, 2004: 24) – and more in keeping with a 'canopy community$_2$' that downplays differences and is open to every belief. Anything bolder is associated with outside reference-groups (Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons). In other words, while calls for more explicit evangelisation have entered into the Catholic parish CS, there has been little elaboration at the S-C level that allows this new 'intelligibilia' to be actualised.

> … people at work know that I'm a Catholic but it's quite difficult isn't it? If the opportunity presented itself, I would talk, and I talk about [Parish E]. How lovely it is. But not about ... what I believe and why and things like that. But I'm open. I don't hide the fact that I come to church or anything like that.[229]

Interestingly here, the parishioner would happily speak about her parish, but not about her personal faith. The line between comfort and discomfort, between 'canopy' and 'umbrella' evangelisation is the step from witnessing to one's values through actions, to speaking explicitly about one's faith. The fear of drawing attention to oneself ("look at me, I'm a Catholic") and the horror of imposing belief on another[230] cripples Catholics from crossing the line. 'Undercover evangelisation' belongs to 'canopy community$_2$' reality and is being available if someone asks, but not proactively offering information.

Here, 'canopy' or 'undercover' evangelisation is attributed to the S-C properties of 'canopy community$_2$': privacy of faith, fear of imposing, lack of confidence, actions not words that, as we have seen, can be contrary to what is professed at the CS level. These are pre-theoretical, unarticulated expectations that are more in keeping with 'imaginary' – images and stories – than ideas or theory. Wider cultural explanations are cited for the S-C reality. British reticence is cited in Parish D as partly responsible for this outlook. As we have seen, parishioners' satisfaction with a lack of diffuse relationships in the parish leads to a discomfort even in contacting other Catholics. One interviewee commented in more detail on this phenomenon:

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[229] *Ibid.*

[230] In a conversation about how a social justice project could help people develop their faith, one Parish D parishioner responded pointedly, "Whose faith do you want to develop?", implying that Catholics would be presumptuous to try and help develop others' faith. (Parish D, 20 February 2018)

> …there's the privacy bit, which is very English, private religion… [Members of small communities] get lists of the people that are registered as Catholics in the area, and they should be knocking on the door and saying … come and join us... it's very difficult for people here to do that. …a lot of the groups have really struggled around lifting the phone and phoning people who are neighbours and saying why don't you join us?[231]

Yet, British reticence seems not to be the only limiting factor. Parish A, in their transition from small faith communities to Bible studies, experiences difficulty in developing a more intentional and explicit approach to evangelisation. Here, 'umbrella community' evangelisation does not come naturally to Parish A and needed to be built intentionally at the S-C level.

> This is one of the differences between the Bible study and the small faith community. The small faith community is this cushy landing pad where it's your home, your home indefinitely. It's that safe place where you can just be Catholic, you can continue to grow. And I think the Bible study has a trajectory. It's about launching you. … that's the end game, that they're evangelising, and they're equipped to go and do the same that was done for them. …we also want to see you have a personal apostolate at some point…[232]

> We were originally going to stay in communities, and now as life transitions, we're called by God to reach out to others - in our community, not just in our church … the parking lot to the grocery store, or wherever.[233]

> You'll get stale if you constantly sit there and read the Bible and go in circles. Reach out... that keeps us a vibrant parish.[234]

To conclude, there is strong cultural conditioning at the S-C level in Parishes C, D and E that is difficult to change: Catholics seem to feel something close to shame when finding themselves

[231] Parish D Interview, 23 March 2018
[232] Interview, 15 May 2017
[233] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[234] *Ibid*.

in a situation where it would be natural to share their faith. This conditioning is precognitive, "at work at the level of the adaptive unconscious or the 'social imaginary'" (J. Smith, 2009: 106) and stubbornly impervious to change. 'Undercover evangelisation' is summed up by one parishioner who suggested the best witness is, "Catholics that actually go out and work for other charities, they do it because of … living their faith".[235] There is a deep desire to be 'undercover Catholics', blending in seamlessly with the world, not even to be engaged in the community during their "spiritual trip" of Sunday Mass. Interestingly, even Parish E's 'umbrella community' does not easily create the conditions for confident invitation; we could surmise that the absence of the 'personal transformation' characteristic correlates to the absence of invitation.

Yet, at Parishes C and E, some parishioners are intentionally, even if falteringly, inviting and speaking to their friends about the Catholic faith. Parishioners at Parishes A and B have in their favour a dense network of diffuse relationships. In such a context, behaviour such as inviting others to church can be normalised when a perceived majority are engaged in it. Just as 'canopy community' sets the tone for an 'undercover evangelisation', 'umbrella community' enables confident and explicit invitation. Intentionally seeking to elaborate 'canopy community' towards 'umbrella community' contributes towards growth in Parishes A and B because it enables Catholics confidently to invite. Expecting 'umbrella community' evangelisation in a 'canopy community' leads to the somewhat panic-stricken tones of the exchange above at Parish D's Night of Light. The dissonance between the reality of the community and the evangelisation expected of the parishioners can be destabilising; to make it truly achievable seems to require a commitment of the parish itself intentionally to change at the S-C level.

5.1.2 From Hospitality to Mission: Balancing Relevance and Distinctiveness

We have remarked on the dissonance between a CS level proposition of the need to evangelise at Parishes C, D and E, and the S-C level reality of 'canopy community$_2$', whose properties prohibit confident invitation and mission. Parish D seems to most strongly foster other opposing ideas at the CS level: for instance, prizing openness to all and the transcending of differences. The 'canopy community$_2$' S-C reality, with a low degree of emotional or proximate contact, therefore dominates. The default evangelisation is not explicit invitation, but rather, availability, openness, hospitality. The 'undercover evangelisation' detected in

[235] Parish D Focus Group, 25 April 2018

Parishes C, D and E risks blending so well with the wider culture that it becomes invisible. Theologically, we might liken this to a 'Christ of culture' approach (cf. 2.1.4), which affirms modern culture without exception, overlooking its need for salvation.

Parish D's Community Café is symbolic of this:[236] at one extreme, parishioners view its purpose through a 'Christ of culture', 'undercover evangelisation' outlook which blurs the question of whether salvation is needed at all. A volunteer tells me that her role was to welcome and connect people. If someone arrived on their own, she would connect them with someone else. "What we're doing is evangelisation," she said.[237]

> [The Pastoral Centre committee is] about trying to open up the parish. …Whether it's people off the street, coming in for a cup of tea, or if it's activities for parishioners. …We held a Sedar here last year which was organised by members of the Jewish community.[238]

> …what I understand is that evangelisation … is spreading the word, is mission, is being open, is welcoming. Open to all and spreading it. Not just keeping it behind closed doors. …[When I did catechesis] we felt that our best remit was to welcome the parents of the children and make them feel relaxed, make them feel so welcome that they would like to come back again and not throw religion at them because that's when they back off.[239]

An 'umbrella community', by contrast, would introduce greater particularity and distinctiveness, a "satisfying morally orienting collective identit[y] which provide[s] adherents meaning and belonging" (Smith, 1998: 118). Identity distinctions are important for a religious subculture's growth (cf. 1.2.3) and are created through "socially constructed symbolic markers that establish group boundaries" (Smith, 1998: 92). Placing cards with grace onto the tables at the Community Café is a good example of this, stating, as one parishioner observed, that "this isn't just an ordinary café."[240] Among some Parish D parishioners, there is a desire for more explicit evangelisation.

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[236] See also 4.1.1 for a quotation about the use of Pastoral Centre which demonstrates canopy community$_2$ outlook.
[237] Field Notes, 15 February 2018
[238] Interview, 28 February 2018
[239] Interview 1, 23 March 2018
[240] Interview, 28 February 2018

> …in one sense not quite what we wanted because we wanted [the Pastoral Centre] to be a sort of base mission really. […] this is a building that is supposed to be about supporting us flourishing and at the moment it's doing a grand job on hospitality but not much else.[241]

> …we're still pretty much as a parish, I think, focusing on who's already in the church… and what they want, and we do a huge amount for them, there's loads of stuff going on all the time for them… five or six times the amount than we had before this was built, so it's allowed people to flourish. And also we're a well-known base for other churches and other charities to come and be based… for meetings.[242]

Indeed, there have been a couple of successes:

> We've had experiences - a couple of chaps who came to the Community Café and now go to Mass. … And they'll say, can I go and have a look in there [the church]? So I mean, these moments happen![243]

It is often found that cultural practices develop in strength and boldness in the face of encroaching, alien cultures (cf. Smith, 1998: 93). Social identity theory (cf. 1.2.3) suggests that people in subcultures cognitively group themselves in a process of categorisation, contrasting themselves with other groups considered different (Turner et al., 1987). Perceived similarities and differences are exaggerated and stereotypically simplified, through a process of 'accentuation' (Abrams and Hogg, 1990: 556): "self-categorisation is the process which transforms individuals into groups" (Hogg and Abrams, 1988: 21). In 5.1.1 above, Catholic parishioners engage in a subtle 'self-categorisation' as they associate evangelisation with 'door-knocking' Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. The underlying implication is that, 'we are different from them' and would never engage in behaviour like that.

Parish C comes closest to Hunter's position in terms of its resistance to aligning epistemologically with the wider culture, and it certainly does not have a 'distinctiveness'

[241] Interview 2, 23 March 2018
[242] Interview, 23 March 2018
[243] Interview, 28 February 2018

problem. Its activity in the community is unashamedly Catholic: their collective evangelising effort is more confident than their individual attempts. The carol singing cited in 4.1.6 is an excellent example of this confident, collective approach. One parishioner commented:

> …locally, a lot of people who aren't Catholic don't know that we're here. [During the carol singing] there were people there who didn't know where we were from, who didn't know there was a church at the bottom of the hill. Literally five minutes' walk from their front door. […] I hate to use the word advertising, but to let people know that we're here. …we got a positive reaction, didn't we? A few people saw that we were singing and switched lights off, but nobody actually gave us a negative reaction. People who asked if we were collecting donations were genuinely surprised when we said no, we don't want money, we're just here.[244]

Other examples include the parish summer holiday club which has run the last few summers as an outreach activity, sponsored by the diocesan Caritas. A large banner outside the church publicises it effectively to the local area. Children are invited to attend every day for free. The programme includes a daily hot lunch, and a day trip during the week. The children participate in prayers and mini-processions around the church, even the non-Catholics.[245] And finally, the annual Corpus Christi procession is a significant moment to let people in the neighbourhood know about the parish's existence:

> … we had the procession with the Blessed Sacrament round the estate, we probably walked for 20-25 minutes. There were a good number of people. … The church that Sunday and the [church hall] were completely packed. And there were people spilling out of the doors for that, because there were so many families in. … I bet it was the first time in goodness knows how many years that it's been done. Things like that. Letting people know that we're here.[246]

Yet, there are still (minority) concerns that Parish C's bold distinctiveness is off-putting to outsiders:

[244] Focus Group, 17 December 2017
[245] Field Notes, 3 October 2017
[246] Focus Group, 17 December 2017

> …religion has to be more relevant to the person, and to the next generation, because that's the worry. The Church is a business, without its parishioners, it's in decline. It will not survive. The Church's challenge really is how do you sell it to the next generation. [My daughter] came here and thought it was something out of medieval Britain.[247]

In renegotiating their collective identities in postmodern, pluralistic Britain, parishes find themselves engaged in a balancing act between relevance and distinctiveness. Pluralism provides "a diversity and abundance of ideological and cultural outgroups" (Smith, 1998: 97). We have seen how this in fact strengthens religion as it draws meaningful symbolic boundaries. Parish C is achieving some success here: it is unequivocally mapping out its social identity against outgroups, which in turn strengthens its ingroup identity. It is a good example of a parish taking steps to model evangelisation to parishioners, not simply telling them to do it. 'Sacred umbrellas' with clear collective identity can be inhospitable places for those who feel alienated by the symbolic boundaries, in this case, associating them with a negative past ("medieval Britain"). This is different from the homogenous, generalist parish system outlook, where low distinctiveness likely results in low identity and low commitment. Yet, at the same time, the experiences of Parishes A and B suggest that distinctiveness also needs 'heart'. We have already commented on how a bolder adoption of the authenticity characteristic at Parish C is likely to attract seekers as well as inspire higher commitment. Bold distinctiveness combined with strong authenticity are likely to prove a potent mix.

5.1.3 The Next Generation Challenge

Considering the three English parishes structurally, they are not nimble, start-up Christian churches, used to adapting responsively to the times. Rather, they are established, geographically rooted parishes designed canonically for fixity and longevity, to outlast changing seasons. One has registers running back to the early 1700s. Yet, supposedly fixed institutional establishments are exactly what modernity is successful at whittling away. My research to this point has hypothesised that flexible and adaptable 'sacred umbrellas' – "handheld" and "portable" – have more chance not only of weathering the storm of modernity, but actually of thriving in its context.

[247] Focus Group, 16 December 2017

The parish with the least transient population was Parish E. One parishioner, who had been involved in the parish since 1933, shared how he had seen numbers fall over the years:

> Definitely falling numbers. We used to have three Masses on a Sunday morning [...]. They were all full. [...] Christmas Eve you'd be standing about ten deep in the back.[248]

Another retired parishioner who had been born in the parish commented,

> …the numbers have dwindled. I think the numbers have dwindled largely because of people getting old and dying off, no young people coming forward. That I think is the main difference. I think a lot of people become lapsed; I see a lot of people around who don't go to church anymore. But there's no new blood coming in, so when people die off, the numbers dwindle.[249]

Parish E's choir is around 12 people strong and impressive in terms of the quality of its music in such a small congregation. At one evening rehearsal, three teenagers attend, none of whom are from Catholic families, but who have been invited and integrated into the community through parishioners. A teenage girl who had been baptised the previous week volunteers to sing the Psalm, and one of the choir leaders practises it with her and another teenage girl.[250] The following Sunday she performs it, somewhat nervously, yet simply and beautifully.

Parish E, while starting to grapple with the questions of adaptability, does not appear to have a problem with integrating and handing onto the younger generation. This is likely thanks to the small parish effect discussed in 4.1.3, but the skill and openness of parishioners in engaging them must also be recognised. In larger parishes it is not so straightforward. A key theme emerging from the Parish D data is a lack of succession of leadership in parish roles; and tied to this, emerging questioning about the identity and relevance of traditional Catholic groups such as the Catholic Women's League and the Knights of St Columbus. This theme is most prevalent at Parishes B and D.

[248] Focus Group, 30 May 2018
[249] Interview, 26 May 2018
[250] Field Notes, 15 May 2018

Parish B gives just one example from their youth ministry illustrating the possibility, through effective leadership, of equipping the next generation:

> One of the young girls who showed up in my first year [had a big conversion during Alpha. Her family] moved to Toronto, and she was 16 at the time. She found a parish, there was no youth ministry going on. She started running youth Alpha. And built it up to the point where - they were paying her to do it - 20 hours a week, part-time job, while she was in high school.[251]

Longevity in roles lends a quality of dependability, but the parish can become less proficient at intentionally seeking to attract new leaders. One parishioner reflected,

> I think what we haven't done as well is introducing the concept that people have to rotate through… this idea that actually to move on and let somebody else flourish is as much a gift as the actual event that you're doing. … So it is the same old same old, I'm afraid.[252]

There were numerous examples at Parish D of parish groups struggling to hand on the reins. In one group I attend, after a long discussion about reaching out to younger parishioners, one lady comments that she had been discussing these issues with this exact same group of people for 30 years![253]

> There's not many young people coming in. Young people are working. There's families. They don't want to come out again in the evening. [The parish] used to be filled by the Catholic mothers, the CWL, the Knights and the Catenians. … men and women are different and there is a place for both. …When the majority of [the members] were 20 years younger it was a vibrant, social, prayerful group, that supported a lot of religion and had a good lot of social work as well. And I think all these people are getting older and they can't do as much as they used to. There's very few younger people, none of

[251] Interview, 5 June 2017
[252] Interview, 23 March 2018
[253] Field Notes, 20 February 2018

> whom will take the reins. … I've asked a number of younger people... 'Oh no! I wouldn't.'[254]

And yet, at the other end of the spectrum, young people in the same parish do not feel they are being heard. A main concern of the youth ministry seems to be to give young people a 'voice'.

> …sometimes in churches their voice isn't heard and I think that's what's crucial with my role is to make sure that the youth voice is heard just as much as everybody else. [It would mean] … letting them have some - not control over the parish but … some influence in what's going on, rather than just being told 'this is what we're doing, and this is how we're going to do it, because this is how we've always done it …'[255]

There is a distinct lack of cultural coherence at the S-C level, on this one theme alone, where a seeming generation gap between 'baby boomer' empty nesters and millennial/Gen Z is apparent. There are undertones of resentment and frustration at what is seen as a lack of commitment.

> [The difficulty is] finding the people to commit. …The number of excuses is astounding. … [Which is different from] my age when you were delighted to commit. 'Wow, you know I'm going to do this, I'm really going to make a go of it!'[256]

> …we've got a whole generation which seems to think you can put God on hold till you've paid your mortgage.[257]

> P1: The 40-60 year olds... The under 40s have children and jobs but really the target people are 50-60 year olds. They have no excuse, their children are older. They should be taking over.
> P2: They are the ones we are trying to get.[258]

[254] Interview, 23 March 2018
[255] Interview, 25 March 2018
[256] Interview, 23 March 2018
[257] Interview, 28 February 2018
[258] Focus Group, 14 June 2017

> … we have to find a way of allowing them to participate and that participation doesn't mean actually come to meeting, because … the last thing they really want to be doing at the end of the day is going to another meeting.[259]

Older parishioners are grappling with the realisation that parish groups following meeting agendas do not seem to appeal to younger generations.[260] What does this mean for traditional groups?

> CWL and the Catenians: what's their role and what's their purpose? And it really comes down to... what is it that the parish needs from them? And if someone could actually explain or give some guidance to those groups, 'Look we really appreciate all the work you do. Could you possibly consider focusing on this,' that might actually give more impetus.[261]

Pastor B explains how it is a challenge to have groups in the parish that take their leadership from organisations outside the parish.

> Those organisations are more of a challenge, because if you think about it, in Canada, … in a parish outside Sunday Mass, you generally have three groups in your better parishes. You have Knights of Columbus, CWL and St Vincent de Paul Society who go out to the poor. What do all these three organisations have in common? They're national / international organisations. They take their culture from outside your parish. The Knights of Columbus, their head office is in the United States, it's an international organisation. … So these are the hardest ones to change within a parish that is beginning to shift, because they have their anchors, their cultural anchors outside your parish.[262]

In the homogenous, generalist parish system, national or international organisations fit in well: they can easily embed into the life of a parish that is more or less identical to that of the neighbouring parish with little adaptation; they can provide variety within the parish, offering different options of groups or guilds for parishioners to join. Central to the 'sacred umbrella'

[259] Interview, 25 April 2018
[260] Field Notes, 15 February 2018
[261] Interview, 25 April 2018
[262] Interview, 17 June 2017

approach, however, is a belief that distinctiveness is needed *between* parishes; within a parish itself, a common 'religious reference group' (Smith, 1998: 106) is required, a boundaried subculture with a 'shared social product' (Bruce, 2014: 14; cf. 1.2.3). Perhaps in such a context, such national or international groups are no longer such a good fit.

Pastor B details more of the paradigm shift needed, explaining how some of the cultural aspects of these groups will need to change in keeping with change within the parish.[263]

> So we've been asking the questions of all them, … we've said to them, "What does it mean to be Knights of Columbus in *this* parish?" That's a question they're going to have to wrestle with. Because if the life around you in this parish is changing, and the culture is changing, and you don't change your culture, you're quickly becoming absolutely obsolete to this parish.[264]

Identity change is indispensable if these groups are going to survive within parishes that are themselves intentionally elaborating their culture. As 'sacred umbrella' parishes define their distinctiveness, they naturally become less habitable to groups with different visions. This requires parishes themselves to lead and model the change that is needed. Parish B is achieving this, as traditional groups are increasingly taking more leadership from the parish than from the national organisation. How this may splinter such organisations remains to be seen, but what is undeniable is a shift in the locus of direction and vision-setting from an international, monolithic culture, to that of the local, distinctive, 'sacred umbrella' subculture.

5.1.4 Conclusions

We identified that the evangelistic success of Parishes A and B is owing to their ability to incarnate invitation and mission as a Socio-Cultural reality, rather than simply a Cultural System idea. 'Umbrella community' underpinned by the characteristic of personal transformation has instilled an environment, and formed a 'social imaginary', in which a further characteristic, invitation and mission, can flourish. Individuals can engage in developing this S-C reality through their confident and active agency. This seems, to different degrees, faltering and insecure at Parishes C, D and E. At Parish D, in particular, we have noted

[263] To sustain their mission, Parish B places emphasis on individual giving, rather than frequent fundraisers.
[264] Interview, 17 June 2017

logical contradiction at the CS level, where 'canopy community$_2$' competes with the call to evangelise, and the former triumphs over the latter at the S-C level. Experimenting with the characteristic of personal transformation may prove informative in each of the three parishes' unique contexts. Could this, which appears so fruitful in Parishes A and B, bear similar fruit in the other three? This could only be proved or disproved empirically.

5.2 Leadership

Our exploration into the invitation and mission characteristic has emphasised the need for intentional agency elaborating change at the S-C level, in order for CS ideas to be embedded socio-culturally. Our initial exploration of leadership in 3.6.2 demonstrated in Parish B the close link between leadership, and invitation and mission.

A case study is just one window of time on a particular group where structure, agency and culture all play a role. In both the 'windows' I spent at Parishes A and B, significant change was being experienced: in both cases, change had been initiated from outside each parish. This fact in itself affirms the unavoidable role of structure for the parish belonging to a hierarchical Church, which in many ways renders parishes as "sacred umbrellas" fairly vulnerable (cf. 2.2.2, 2.2.5). Both parishes were preparing for the transition to a new pastor, and in Parish A's case, three new priests. While we want to maintain that the leaders are themselves shaped by and a product of the culture ("the chief is as much a part of the local culture as are his tribal or clan compatriots" (Meek, 1988: 459)), their agency has undeniable influence. Pastor B comments:

> …the biggest role of the leader is to impact culture. The leader sets the culture in an organisation. You know, I think that hanging around the foyer at weekends and trying to be joyful... I love weekends, usually I am very joyful, and even like, giving people hugs, and laughing, and all that stuff, it sets a mood! And I think that's important, there's a trickle down effect. If the priest - no matter how well he presides or preaches - simply disappears into the sacristy after Mass and is never seen, is never visible, I think that impacts negatively. I think that's important.[265]

At Parishes A and B, and more explicitly at Parish B, leadership has enabled the authenticity characteristic, the conditions for personal transformation that produce the 'umbrella

[265] Interview, 17 June 2017

community' and confident evangelisation. Leadership is also a characteristic that Parish B found is required to bring some order to the abundance of activity generated by the 'umbrella community', and to regulate the close, family-style behaviour (cf. 3.6.2). Bearing in mind the mechanisms uncovered in Parish B behind leadership, we shall explore the role of this characteristic, if any, at Parishes C, D and E, and, where relevant, explore the impact of its absence.

5.2.1 Succession Planning

Let us first make some initial observations on the realities exposed by pastor transitions at Parishes A and B. The data presents in stark relief some of the theory discussed in 2.2.5 about the role of structure on a parish's 'sacred umbrella'. A Catholic parish's position in a hierarchical structure beyond its control certainly brings benefits: a structural reality that shields a parish from possible extinction and provides plausibility structures beyond the 'umbrella'. It also brings certain hindrances, especially when a Catholic parish determines to break free from a dominant culture: these are "objective cultural constraints" (Archer, 1996: 69) that, as we have seen in Parishes C, D and E, are extremely difficult to elaborate. In the case of pastor transitions, we see a further possible hindrance: Catholic parishes are not self-determining in their leadership: a critical causal mechanism for cultural elaboration (if not the only possible such mechanism). These factors may entrench the generalist, canopy parish system model and maintain strong defences against change.

At Parish B, diocesan decision-making seemed to affirm and support Parish B's direction of travel: the incoming pastor had already been ministering at Parish B for two years, being mentored by Pastor B. There was remarkably little concern over the transition to his leadership: parishioners had confidence that the general cultural elaboration would likely continue.

At Parish A, however, it was a very different case. In 4.1.1, I described the atmosphere of the actively engaged focus group at Parish A as "a tight-knit group of nine friends", "deeply warm, familial and passionate." This is undoubtedly a group of diffuse relationships, with high levels of emotionality, sharing all aspects of life together. Such closeness enables honest and raw sharing during the focus group, and this is where they shared their fears of what could change with a new pastor, plus two new priests.

So I'll be the voice of doubt. ... where I'm concerned and where I have doubts and where I need to work through prayer is I don't know what the mission of my new pastor is. I don't know if he's going to support what's been done, I don't know if he's going to try and dismantle it because he wants something new and different. And so one of the gifts I think [Pastor A] brought when he first came to the parish, and has instilled in every priest that has been under him since he's been here is... it's been very personal. … and I worry that... That's going away.[266]

I've been talking to a lot of people because of these changes and as much as it's breaking my own heart too, I always say, we are the Body of Christ. We, the people, are the Body of Christ. So we make this parish. I'm hoping that it's close enough that we will persevere through it, you know, I say in my talk, I love [Parish A]. I love [Parish A] for many things - the priests, the community, you know. I'm hopeful that we can still have that fire, right? It's uncertain. But look at the people around me... [gets emotional][267]

P1: I have one of my friends who - her son is second-grader at the school. And she loved the fact that [the priests] did the moms' prayer group on Thursdays, but sadly she told me today that she was just really nervous about what was going on with the changes because since the announcement none of the priests have gone to the prayer on Thursday. And she's like, what is that about? So she's feeling uncertainty...
P2: ... Like they've been abandoned?
P1: Yeah! She didn't use the word abandoned, but it was more like, you know, this was really sad. … And that was her thing to hold onto. I don't know, I guess I'm just sad and emotional about it... I've reached... I'm close to that place of accepting and whatever. I don't know about her. What do I say to her?[268]

When a diocese views the parish system as homogenous and generalist, one priest is interchangeable with another. Priests provide a teaching, sanctifying and governing function, with little need for renegotiating the parish's identity, setting direction or elaborating culture. The experience at Parish A demonstrates the traumatic, "heart-breaking" effect of interchanging priests with little understanding of the distinctiveness developed at the S-C level

[266] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[267] *Ibid.*
[268] *Ibid.*

by the parish for its own flourishing.[269] It also demonstrates how pastor transitions alone can entrench 'canopy community$_2$' characteristics in a parish, such as specific, rather than diffuse, relationships, and low degrees of emotionality. If such traumatic change takes place every seven or so years, it decreases parishioners' willingness to make the psychological investment required by 'umbrella community'. 'Canopy community$_2$' is the strong, default, magnetic pole that requires little emotional investment and therefore protects from the pain of leadership changes.

Let us make some suggestive hypotheses based on theory explored to this point. A 'sacred umbrella' parish that is growing may be damaged when there is contradiction between concepts in the parish's CS and that of the diocese; for example, when a diocese operates according to a generalist parish system paradigm, while a parish operates in a distinctive 'sacred umbrella' paradigm. If such a contradiction persists, the diocesan CS triumphs, diminishing any cultural elaboration. At the S-C level, the trust of parishioners, and therefore the ability of a pastor to lead change, may be lost very quickly. The parish's distinctiveness being lost, it subsequently may lose its capacity to attract new people, since, as we have seen, distinctiveness (and along with it, vision and direction) is the hallmark of both Parishes A and B that attract seekers.

The data, therefore, displays colourfully the potentially limiting structural reality that impinges on the parish, fragilising its S-C distinctiveness. This is important background as we turn from the diocesan 'macro-structure' to parish 'micro-structure', examining what the causal mechanism of leadership looks like here. What problems arise when there is a lack of leadership? How can leadership most successfully foster cultural elaboration?

5.2.2 Vision and Leading Change

There was evidence of explicit vision at Parishes A, B and C. One parishioner at Parish B said,

> Our priests have a vision... It's the first time I've belonged to a parish where I felt the priests really had vision and are willing to share that vision with us, and make us feel that we're part of it. So that I think is really important because you feel part of something wonderful that's happening. It's what keeps people here.[270]

[269] The way that priests and parishioners speak of the changes at Parish A is uniquely coloured by the cultural element of supernatural outlook that I shall discuss in the final part of this chapter.
[270] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

At Parish C, a parishioner said:

> I feel like [Parish Priest C] has a vision - I'm in a business environment and no one will do anything without a plan, a vision to aim, so I think it's so discouraging sometimes for us Catholics ... we think, 'okay, it's no point' whereas I feel here, there is a vision, and I think if it's achievable they'll get on board…[271]

Within the regular Catholic parish CS, it is unusual to have a stated vision, yet Parishes A and B both had one, and leaders at Parish C spoke in these terms. At all three parishes, in order intentionally to elaborate change at the S-C level, the concept of vision is introduced by agents. Having a vision allows a parish to articulate its S-C distinctiveness.

Articulating a vision is the first step towards implementing it at the S-C level. Pastor B describes this morphogenetic process, where a dominant culture is gradually displaced by an emerging subculture:

> As a pastor, this is the real art of leading change in a parish... The point is it's got to be gradual, it's going to be this gradual shift. …Rick Warren uses a great example. He talks about the houses in Louisiana, how they're built on stilts on the swamps. He says when a leg is beginning to rot out they put a new one in beside the old one, and let the old one just disintegrate and wash away. They don't take a sledgehammer to knock it out. And I think that's an important image of how culture shift works. Because it's often very slow, it happens slowly. And if you take a sledgehammer to it, people get hurt, more than perhaps would be necessary.[272]

The process of cultural elaboration at Parish C is not such a gradual shift, and we turn to consider this now.

Since the arrival of Parish Priest C, Parish C has defined its distinctiveness (or vision) fairly strongly as a parish dedicated to traditional liturgy. During the time of the case study, the parish

[271] Focus Group, 17 December 2017
[272] Interview, 17 June 2017

implemented eastward facing Masses on Sundays, which was a significant shift for the parish, with two main effects for S-C integration. One is the attraction of a small number of people who now travel to the parish owing to their preference for the liturgy. Another is the repelling and confusion of certain current parishioners. First, we examine the attraction of new parishioners.

> …there are people who've been here for 20-30 years - … some who have just been waiting, actually, for someone to encourage them and get them on board. …And we've also had a lot of new people come because of what we're doing and so... I think the combination of the two should give us a pretty solid base.[273]

> P1: I went to one of the first ones [Extraordinary Form Masses] in the morning, and there was just a handful of people. I've been back since then and I've seen the growth in popularity.
> P2: Yes, that draws people in from outside the parish, but there are parishioners who go there. Obviously [Parish Priest C] wants it to be a parish Mass, but obviously the Latin Mass enthusiasts travel in for it.[274]

> There is the heart of the Catholic Church here, many churches are not using this. We need it. We have Latin songs and Latin prayers. I heard Latin songs when I was a child, my grandma and grandpa [would] sing them. After that, everything gone. Now, it's coming back.[275]

People travelling from afar shifts the parish's S-C reality with the arrival of those ascribing to the new vision at CS level. A further shift is happening, supporting my observations in 4.2.3: Catholic identity validity is migrating from a geographic or customary connection to a parish, and rather towards a connection based on preference, choice and agency. Identity-legitimation, in a pluralistic world where worldviews are fragilised, is based on individual choice: even if one's worldview (paradoxically) is the traditional style naturally belonging to the world of the sacred canopy.

[273] Interview, 17 December 2017
[274] Focus Group, 10 December 2017
[275] Focus Group, 17 December 2017

The second major change at S-C level is the disruption to the dominant culture, as it is abruptly caused to give way to an emerging new one. For certain current parishioners, the changes have produced some bewilderment, captured well in this exchange:

> P1: I don't know what you mean by a Tridentine Mass.
> P2: It's the Mass as it was before the Vatican II changes.
> P3: Have you heard about the Extraordinary Form?
> P1: Not really, no. You see, to me, I didn't grow up with any of that and to me... forgive me for saying this, but I'm not interested. It's too much…
> P3: Oh dear. That's my Mass![276]

For others, this clash of cultures is almost like experiencing a different Church altogether:

> We used to have the Eucharistic ministers, we used to have the readers, we used to have all the altar servers, 7, 8 altar servers at a time on Saturday night. But we've lost that community spirit. People used to come up to me and say, 'I need this type of communion, or that', and we've lost all that. Now that spirit of the church has gone.[277]

> There's this lady …working class, lived in Southampton all her life. … she says things to me like, 'you never taught any of this to us when we were doing our Confirmation.' So she's struggling even more than me. She's 26 or 28 so she's never seen anything different to the modern.[278]

> I've felt very troubled this year. And I don't know why, what the answer is. … the one thing I have trouble with is the fact that the Second Vatican Council brought about various changes, and now we're kind of going back on some of those rituals. And we're returning by [Parish Priest C]'s will to go back to the Mass as it was. And first of all I thought to myself, I'm not too keen about this, and then I thought, when I did my First Holy Communion, they must have been doing it that way, and it didn't disturb me then.[279]

[276] Focus Group, 10 December 2017
[277] Focus Group, 16 December 2017
[278] Interview, 7 November 2017
[279] Focus Group, 10 December 2017

> P1: I might be the only one in church who doesn't like it but I'm being honest that's all.
> P2: You're not the only one.
> P1: I don't understand it and to me it's a dead language. Like saying the Lord's Prayer in Latin, I cannot do that. I want to think about the words as I'm saying it and I can't if it's in Latin. So I stand there and say it in English, because then I'm understanding what I'm saying.[280]

These examples reveal challenges to parishioners at the level of their deepest assumptions or 'imaginary' about how a Catholic parish works. Many phrases reveal confusion at the abrupt change at the CS level: "we've lost all that", "the spirit of the church has gone", "you never taught any of this to us", "we're kind of going back", "I don't understand it". This is classic destabilising referred to as "frame-breaking" in 4.2.3: basic assumptions about what is real and true have been challenged, causing anxiety: "I've felt very troubled this year." Where people's deepest, non-confrontable assumptions are challenged, we see the powerful forces of culture in action: what is taken for granted about how things work. Adopting Latin or a new orientation for the Mass implies CS level change that can be deeply challenging, since it "requires us to resource, re-examine, and possibly change some of the more stable portions of our cognitive structure – a process that Argyris and others have called 'double-loop learning', or 'frame-breaking'" (Schein, 2010: 27).

One parishioner attempts explanation by pointing out that change happens whenever a new priest moves into a parish:

> …it's been fascinating in terms of people from the city centre who have come here, because they like the Extraordinary Form. And people from [X Parish] have done movements both ways. And I imagine we've lost several... I don't quite know where they've gone. But isn't that normal? Isn't there a fallout when there's a new priest? … As happens in parishes, as I understand, a new priest moves in and undoes what the previous priest has done, and that is jolly hard for the people. And more so than ever here, they find it very difficult to change. They're not particularly flexible. And so I

[280] *Ibid.*

> think again, [Parish Priest C] was for them another challenge, because it was another priest with more ideas. I heard a couple of times, 'what's going to change this time?'[281]

There are perhaps two points to be made here: firstly, the observation concerning parish priest transitions – "a new priest moves in and undoes what the previous priest has done, and that is jolly hard for the people" – acknowledges the S-C upheaval when a diocese is unable to consider parishes' S-C distinctiveness in succession planning (see 5.2.1). But, secondly, the parishioner's comment does not distinguish the inevitable S-C movement that occurs when a new parish priest arrives, from the far more destablising, "frame-breaking" of CS level change, from one CS vision to another, seemingly contradictory one.

Pastor B recognises above that cultural elaboration is needed such that we are likely to see shifts at the CS level. Yet, his recommendations involve an incremental change process that is less likely to cause anxiety-inducing destabilisation. The change processes at Parishes A and B suggest that, while change will always unsettle, the disorienting experience of parishioners not recognising what they are hearing and seeing as belonging to the Catholic Church they know, can be limited. In the following two sections, we will continue to explore what it looks like to implement a vision socio-culturally, and the effects of not undertaking this implementation.

5.2.3 Leadership at the S-C Level

In 3.6.2, we noted the generative mechanisms behind Parish B's intentionally developing the cultural characteristic of leadership. When we break down the characteristic of leadership at Parish B, we find three features at the S-C level: organisational structure, healthy conflict and leadership 'pipelines'. To avoid confusion, 'structure' is often a reality considered at the CS level. Here, I use the term 'organisational structure' to refer to the S-C reality of how the parish organises itself. We explore each of these in turn to uncover how they contribute to socio-cultural integration at Parish B, but also what happens at the S-C level when they are absent.

Organisational Structure

Chaos from an abundance of activity and parish rooms booked to capacity triggered Parish B to develop organisational structure in order to bring greater cultural coherence at the S-C level.

[281] Interview, 16 December 2017

Parish D is an example of another large parish that is experiencing the complexity of organisation of very large churches (cf. Keller, 2006: 2-6). When leaders add a defined identity, vision and direction, the need to embed this socio-culturally increases the need for organisational structure.

Parish Priest D comments on the current confusion,

> …everybody is willing, everybody's kind and everybody's wanting to do things; I think it's about getting those structures in place. And one thing I've been learning [from] Divine Renovation[282] … is that actually those structures are support structures. How do we support the key people and how do those key people support the next layer…? So that's … one of my primary objectives … to start to get some of those structures in place so that people know who's making decisions and how those decisions are communicated and how they're able to ask questions and how they're able to get some guidance. … I don't want to be critical of my predecessor because it's not meant in that way, but I don't think there's a clearly articulated vision of where the parish is moving towards. …there's lots of energy … to move things forward … [but] there's not always a great harnessing of that energy to go in the same direction. I mean sometimes you're going here, there and everywhere.[283]

Some parishioners comment that they cannot understand why so many staff should be employed and why volunteers cannot be relied upon,[284] revealing an outlook of parish models where multiple groups operate with no overarching common direction. One organisational diagram lists 88 parish activities under seven headings (each of the seven groups supported by an Evangelisation Strategy Group member). The activities of the parish are supported by ten, mostly part-time, paid members of staff. It is generally recognised that the Evangelisation Strategy Group is not fulfilling its leadership function very effectively, and the parish, as Parish Priest D indicates above, has been in the process of moving towards a new organisational structure:

[282] A ministry for parish renewal in the Catholic Church, see www.divinerenovation.org
[283] Interview, 25 April 2018
[284] Field Notes, 4 February 2018

> I mean I think this ESG has just got so complicated really. …We do more ... sorting out activities within the pastoral centre, whether it's a bingo night, whether it's a night of light. That brings people off the streets. Shrove Tuesday pancakes. And the parish party. That is a group of people that just get together, organise it. That to me is more to do with the parish than having a meeting of the ESG.[285]

> …the ESG have asked [ministry leaders] to report their activities to a link person on the ESG so that's the way they were connected in. I think depending on personality that's worked or it hasn't worked. So the ESG people who understood that they were there to promote and to get information and things but they weren't sort of operation management task sort of thing have got more out of this than those that are trying to you know do more as a sort of management thing.[286]

> They seem to do thinking upstairs somewhere but there's not much engagement. We all get on you know in our groups, we're all getting on with what we're doing. Each of them in theory has a role, but there's not much contact between the two. [A lot of] operational activity falls directly under [Parish Priest D] … I very, very seldom have contact with the ESG. [They occasionally ask for a report] and I'll send a few points as to what we're doing. But there's no real kind of engagement with what does this mean, or where's it going.[287]

We have commented on the CS confusion and contradiction at Parish D; this inevitably leads to S-C lack of cohesion too. The need for vision and structure is clearly seen in the following two comments:

> …there is a sense now of trying to join up all the catechesis activity from Baptism right the way through, so that can be seamless. Because what's tended to happen is there's a lot of silo thinking. With pressure, and getting people to volunteer, people tend to carve out 'this is my space and this is what I do, I do it so many Sundays and that's it and leave me alone'. There used to be too much of that sort of thing. And I think we're

[285] Interview 1, 23 March 2018
[286] Interview 2, 23 March 2018
[287] Interview, 28 February 2018

> beginning to break that down a little bit. But that needs a lot more attention with many of our different activities.[288]

> I know that internal communication has always been a challenge and I guess it always will be. I think it would be lovely just to be aware of what everybody's doing. The fact that there are 200 volunteers, I had no idea, it's amazing. … The newsletter is pretty bland, with the same old stuff every week. It doesn't really give you the remotest idea about what really's going on. How many ladies are doing the beautiful flowers, who's cleaning the church, why's the church so clean, how's that?[289]

A final point about organisational structure relates to pastoral care of parishioners, which cannot be achieved solely by the parish priest, as we shall see in 5.2.4. Parish B organises itself smaller, into small groups that support personal transformation:

> I think part of holding that together is a small community in a large community, which is what discipleship groups and Connect Groups are about. People that you get to know really well, and you can depend on in times of illness, and when you need something, and you don't always have the priests right there. It gives you that sense of community, that you can know that there are people that love you.[290]

These seems to achieve more success than the small communities in 4.1.5, where the personal transformation characteristic was strikingly absent. We have noted that 'umbrella community' is closely tied to personal transformation, and here, we see how the leadership characteristic, too, enables them both.

Healthy Conflict

Examples from Parish D above demonstrate how a lack of leadership can create confusion, lack of communication, blurred lines, silo mentalities and lack of accountability at the S-C level. In Parish B's own experience, lack of structure led to what they called 'unhealthy' culture, as one staff member recalls:

[288] Interview, 28 February 2018
[289] Focus Group, 25 April 2018
[290] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

> …there was gossip behind people's backs, and people didn't like each other, and arguments, and... you tried to avoid certain people. Nobody knew what each other's ministry was doing, you know. … there was no support for each other.[291]

Similar confusion at Parish D may risk leading to similar conflict: "you're going here, there and everywhere", "thinking upstairs… not much engagement", "I very, very seldom have contact", "meetings for the sake of meetings". At Parish B, the same mechanisms that generated an intentional focus on leadership helped them solve some of the conflict issues. Parish B parishioners employ the term 'healthy conflict' (cf. 3.6.3) to identify 'unhealthy' behaviours and proactively address them. It is an approach that seems characteristic of diffuse, family-style relationships, where people feel close enough to address such concerns. One Connect Group leader shares his experience where another leader on his team needed to be asked to step down because of their lack of availability.

> One of the things that I share - and I'm positive about - is yeah, we actually asked someone to leave, and it worked - things worked out with that - you know, it wasn't just that this person was pushed out the door, it was a conversation we had and it was healthy and we don't even think about it now, we don't think that it happened, because there's been so much grace from God in that.[292]

Employing the concept of 'healthy conflict' allows the agency required to implement change at the S-C level, recognising that this cultural elaboration will not always be smooth, but that incremental, intentional change process can minimise anxiety and disruption. Parish D may experiment with these features of the leadership characteristic to reveal if they address the S-C issues they are facing.

Leadership 'Pipelines'

5.1.3 revealed Parish D's problems in handing onto the next generation. Failure to develop new leaders has two different consequences: leaders remaining in the same role for years with no one else coming through; and no volunteers come forward, predetermining they are not needed.

[291] Interview, 5 June 2017
[292] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

Parish B has developed a 'Game Plan', which provides a pathway for anyone who joins the parish. Intentional apprenticing of new leaders is a feature of Parish B's leadership culture.

> I think one of the things that makes this parish work is, we've got a vision in place, and then there's follow up. So people come in and then they're welcomed. They're invited to Alpha. And once they go through Alpha, there's a Connect Group. And there's leadership within the Connect Group and there are discipleship groups. … the plan is people will always have somewhere to go. It's not a parish where you start off and you have to just come to an end because there's no follow up programme. …what was it Fr X said? - we're going to be fishers of men and there will be no catch and release! I like that. That is the vision for this community. There is constant follow-up and involvement. And top-down leadership, I know as a Connect Group leader, we actually have authority to do things. We don't have to constantly go to [Pastor B] or X or whatever. We have a certain amount of autonomy about what we can do within the structure of Connect Group.[293]

> All of our ministries have a leadership pipeline. So we have people that we raise up into more influential roles and more responsibility than other people on the team because they have the capacity and desire for it. …I just asked a young girl to come on as my apprentice. Apprenticeship is a big value of our parish culture. She'll basically be my right-hand person, she'll be with me whenever I'm doing anything, developing anything, she'll have input into it, she'll ask questions, she'll understand the ins and outs of how I do what I do.[294]

> One of the things [the leaders of one ministry] did last year was they met with everybody - they said … we'll talk about what we've noticed, what can grow and what we can do to help you do that and that was really helpful. It's not easy to do. These are people we're in ministry with, we're friends with, we're in a ministry where there's skill and talent involved, and there's also hurt feelings, egos... it was prescriptive, it was helpful, and it was something I could take my time to do. Individual care.[295]

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[293] *Ibid.*
[294] Interview, 5 June 2017
[295] Focus Group, 13 June 2017

> The Speechcraft programme is supposed to give you coaching in short speeches so how to introduce a person, how to thank a person, how to speak on any topic for three minutes. … It was a hoot, it was funny. Then we had Living your Strengths… by doing the Living your Strengths programme here in the parish, people said 'I can name it, I know what my top strengths are'. [...] And then we get into things like Connect Groups, and we're able to coach kids and teens on how to do those things. 'Why don't you introduce the speaker, why don't you say grace, why don't you give a talk?' We have kids who are 11, 10 giving talks in Connect Groups.[296]

At Parish B, 'structure with heart' has enabled easier access into ministry at the parish.

> …when I got here, everyone was responsible for their own volunteers, and they still are to a certain degree. But we had no centralised process. If you come into the parish, and you walk up to someone and say, 'hi, I'd like to volunteer, how do I get involved?' They go, 'oh, well, hm, I don't know, I'm not sure, you could go and talk to that person because they might need someone!' Right?! So for example, we put in … a centralised process. So we say, 'you fill this out, email it or drop it off, there's a couple of different ways', then it gets processed.[297]

Leadership at Parish B implements vision socio-culturally through the repetition of vision in multiple different ways, as one parishioner (who was not entirely behind the parish vision) comments:

> I think part of why we've adapted or able to change is that there's often a good sales pitch that goes with it. [Laughter.] There's preparation, and things are intentionally done. Whether you agree with them or not, you know that someone has probably intended to make the changes, it's not haphazard and they're going to prepare you. Whether you agree with it or not.[298]

It becomes clear that the personal transformations that generate 'umbrella community' and confident evangelisation, sustained by authenticity, are enabled by the leadership characteristic

[296] *Ibid.*
[297] Interview, 9 June 2017
[298] Focus Group 2, 14 June 2017

at Parish B. Experimentation by introducing some of the features noted here would be illuminating for Parish D, to determine if such a characteristic would help them achieve greater coherence at the S-C level.

We have hazarded caution around the managerial style both from a theological perspective (a "go-getting" reliance on technique that is not "anteriorly contemplative" cf. 2.1.5) and we might also caution it sociologically (Bellah et al. warn about the "calculating managerial style" taking the place of "moral ecology", (2008: 48)). At the same time, parishioners of Parish B describe this approach as "structure with heart", as "organisation that flows out of love" (cf. 3.6.3). In dominant 'canopy community' cultures, where a generalist identity for a parish is undisputed, little vision or leadership in a parish is required. Yet, when a parish adopts a distinctive identity, this needs to be implemented socio-culturally, and to achieve this, vision and leadership are indispensable. The extremes of management that is manipulative or mechanistic are avoided when the contemplative dimension is present, when the 'transformation perspective' resists a naturalist, exclusive humanist approach, and when an outlook of personalism and human agency is adopted (cf. 2.3.1).

5.2.4 Role of the Priest

A new 'social imaginary' of parish culture is emerging through the five cultural characteristics we have been considering. At Parish B, the leadership characteristic seems to be critical in implementing S-C level change; it enables invitation and mission, which itself is enabled by 'umbrella community', generated by personal transformation. As we consider the role of the priest, we are turning to important questions of structural relations. Importantly, we have held the position that structural relations are not unchanging (see 2.2.2): agency influences and changes structure. Here, we see in the data, under the leadership characteristic, the elaboration of the priest's relation to laity. This is a long distance from the 'canopy community', 'parish civilisation' worldview painted by Hervieu-Léger in 1.3.2. Such a Catholic parish culture in her depiction concerns "a totalitarian system of behaviour", governed by unspoken "guidelines", a sense of one's "place", and "the vigilant control of the clergy." Such a world has not existed for decades, and yet many vestiges of the clergy-lay structural relations remain in the Catholic parish 'social imaginary'. Certainly, there are a range of expectations of parish priests. One parishioner in Parish C summed it up,

> For some, they just want the priest to be there and do the Mass and that's it. For some, they want the priest to be there to visit when I'm sick. For others, I've noticed it with the Filipinos - they will often kiss the ring or the hand of the priest. There's a reverence, a 'pedestal mentality'. There's a whole multitude of different expectations.[299]

Yet, with the uncovering of the leadership characteristic, a new clergy-lay relationship is emerging, involving structural change. This relies importantly on the agency of the priest (cf. 2.2.3) and cannot be achieved without his intention of the relationship shifting. Parish B parishioners speak of delegated authority in leadership of ministries and Connect Groups. One comments,

> I find with [Pastor B], he empowers us. He encourages us to step out of our little box and see the bigger picture, and gives us confidence in who we are and what we believe, because he believes. And has faith and confidence in us to share things and lead groups, and come to groups like this. I think it's important to empower people, to ask people to give a witness, to join a group, people love to be asked, they do, they really do.[300]

Pastor B acknowledges that it redefines the relationship of the parishioner to the priest:

> They're taking ownership and they're going with it. And they don't need me to babysit them, to tell them what to do, so what do I have to do? Tell them they're doing a great job. Thank them. That's changed a lot. Previously it was always, 'Father, what do you think? Should I do this?' People coming and asking me questions and now I wouldn't even know the answer, I wouldn't know what to tell them. But people don't even bother asking anymore. Probably because they know they wouldn't get a good answer. I think it's mostly because there's a greater sense of ownership. And the fact that the staff that really support them in ministries ... I always try to direct - even if I may know the answer - try to redirect to the person who's supporting their ministry. So it really has changed the relationship, it's redefined the relationship of parishioner to priest.[301]

[299] Interview, 2 November 2017
[300] Focus Group, 14 June 2017
[301] Interview, 17 June 2017

Such a shift is partly necessitated by the implementation of structure discussed in 5.2.3. More prominent leadership is needed to implement distinctive vision, and such socio-cultural elaboration cannot be achieved by a single leader. Similarly, as indicated in 5.2.3, a single pastor cannot personally care for hundreds of individuals: smaller communities of pastoral care are needed. The shift from a generalist parish with no vision to a 'sacred umbrella' parish with distinctive vision is certainly behind this structural, relational change. The shift affects the nature of priestly ministry. Pastor B comments that his focus is less on one-to-one ministry, as would be characterised by a chaplain, and more on leadership: "preaching, giving sacraments[302], meetings, and investing in key staff".[303]

> A priest once challenged me on the model of priesthood I was presenting, that we can't be caught up doing most of our ministry as one-on-one ministry with people, because we'll never get anywhere. He said, well, how then do we get the smell of the sheep on us? … I'd say no, we get the smell of the sheep by administering the sacraments, the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the sacrament of the sick. Maximising your presence at the weekend at Mass by going around, greeting people... I'm always usually in the foyer before Mass, at the door after Mass, talking to people. And even by being involved in Alpha. For the most part, I like to be in a small group when I can. That's front line.[304]

This is a difficult transition to make since, when many people are experiencing personal transformation, there is a greater one-on-one demand on the priest. Pastor B comments,

> … you have a lot of people want to come and see you because God is working in their life but then the obvious thing is I can't fall into that, as much as I would like to. We've got to push people towards Connect Groups where people can support each other.[305]

Interestingly, 'canopy community$_2$' equally emphasises lay leadership, yet this emphasis is not triggered by implementing distinctive vision: rather, it originates more from a pastoral theology

[302] He comments there are greater sacramental demands. On a day during Advent or Lent, "sometimes we'll have 3, 4, 5 priests going non-stop [hearing Confessions], all throughout the day. It's unbelievable" (Interview, 17 June 2017).
[303] Interview, 17 June 2017
[304] *Ibid.*
[305] *Ibid.*

of empowering laity. This approach is seen at both Parish C (in the previous dominant culture) and at Parish D (in the current culture). We will examine each in turn.

At Parish D, lay leadership is most commonly referred to in the parish as 'collaboration'. However, it is marked by a seeming lack of confidence and, strikingly, is impacted by the lack of vision, leadership and structure at Parish D. The lack of S-C coherence means that some groups still refer to the need to invite a priest to "give the religious input."[306] When asked at what point Jesus or matters of faith were introduced in one catechetical group, one catechist said that the deacon did an excellent job of speaking about them.[307] This seems in keeping with the lack of confidence experienced in the area of evangelisation, discussed in 5.1 above.

At Parish C, we see a shift from one form of lay leadership (canopy community$_2$-style) to a new form. Parishioners are nostalgic about how the parish was run in the past:

> When we started the first Parish Council, we were on it, I was the Chair. And we were on the Deanery Council. We ran the church. And all the priests did was give us the religious aspect of things. He said yes, or you can do that, or this is the way the Mass is going to go. And the Parish Council actually run the parish. And it was thriving.[308]

In both parishes, 'canopy community$_2$' lay leadership involves a separation in the parish between "the religious aspect of things" (provided by the priest) and everything else (run by the laity, "we ran the church"). Parish Priest C's vision leads him to disband the Pastoral Council at Parish C, in order to implement a new vision. This requires no less intense lay involvement than that of the previous dominant culture, and yet, for certain parishioners, the Pastoral Council is symbolic of shared authority and leadership in the parish.[309] This structural action, therefore, registers confusion about Parish Priest C's desire for lay leadership.

> …we spent [Fr X's] time here putting everything back in place, making the place more transparent, more accountable. [Parish Priest C] came in and it all fell apart really. There is no Pastoral Council, there is no Finance [Committee] really. There is no transparency.

[306] Field Notes, 15 February 2018
[307] Interview 1, 23 March 2018
[308] Focus Group, 16 December 2017
[309] Field Notes, 19 September 2017

> He is the ultimate ... I suppose, dictator, really... Whatever he says goes, he does whatever he wants to do.[310]

Certainly, Parish Priest C, with his distinctive vision for change in the parish, understands the leadership changes required to implement it socio-culturally: he expresses his desire for extensive lay involvement. Yet the abruptness of change (cf. 5.2.2) seems to affirm in some parishioners' minds his commitment to traditional, authoritative clergy-lay structural relations.

> He decides and that's it![311]

> P1: Different sort of vision, but he's got a very pontifical style. He's totally in contrast.
> P2: Very old style clericalism.
> P1: Yeah, very old style, old fashioned. And people don't like it. They march with their feet.[312]

> And it's been a complete contrast since [Parish Priest C] has come because he does everything the way he wants to do it whether everyone's happy or not. And lots of people did leave when [Parish Priest C] came, because they said, 'we don't want Mass this way.' But then also, lots of people have joined.[313]

On the other hand, others note the traditional mindset of some parishioners, and how Parish Priest C is attempting to change it.

> Their expectation of a priest - for a lot of people, he's pedestaled. And he'll tell us what to do and we'll do it. And I think what [Parish Priest C] is trying to do, is to try to adapt or change that a bit. But he's in a difficult position, it's not an easy place to be.[314]

Indeed, like a stubborn dominant culture or pre-theoretical 'imaginary', structural relations are challenging to shift. A staff member at Parish D remarks,

[310] Focus Group, 16 December 2017
[311] Interview, 14 December 2017
[312] Focus Group, 16 December 2017
[313] Interview, 7 November 2017
[314] Interview, 2 November 2017

> I've had a couple of parishioners say things like, 'if I need something, I'll go directly to [Parish Priest D] or [Fr X]'. But that's part of the assertiveness of the parishioners, 'I don't need you in my life!' But that's older, more confident folk.[315]

Parish E probably represents the most traditional, 'canopy community' clericalist view of priesthood, where the priest is seen almost to epitomise the parish in himself:

> We've been on about getting Father decent CCTV so he can open the church more often.[316]

This clerical streak is intriguingly coupled with a strong sense of ownership of the parish. The parish priest shares his living space (dining room and kitchen) with parishioners and many have keys to let themselves into the presbytery.[317] Parishioners tend to the house and the wider property as if it were their own, organising a rewiring, polishing brasses, washing up, leaving food in the fridge. When an earlier priest wanted to sell the parish's antique furniture, I am told that parishioners sat in the house in protest, claiming, "it is our parish".[318] One parishioner takes ownership to the extent of speaking of ownership of the priest as if he were a presbytery fixture:

> …there is our house, our community and we feel very much a part of it now. … Yes, it's our place. I think the important thing - the most important thing - is that we have our own parish priest. Oh, we've got to share him with the university, and that's a sign of the times, but we have a priest who is our priest, designated our priest, and we can go to him with our worries. He's like the father figure. I think that's what holds the whole community together.[319]

In the light of this attitude, Parish Priest E comments on what it will take to introduce change,

> You know if you want to grow the parish … a lot of it's all to do with relationship and whether people trust what you're doing and where you're going … So I don't think

[315] Interview, 28 February 2018
[316] Focus Group, 29 May 2018
[317] Field Notes, 17 May 2018
[318] *Ibid.*
[319] Interview, 21 May 2018

there's any sort of resistance but I know that Lancashire people - they are quite stubborn. And that's part of why they kept their faith as you know because this is where we've all done it. So I think it's more the fear aspect rather than people being protective about what's their little responsibility or anything.[320]

As clergy-lay structural relations shift from 'canopy' to 'umbrella' social imaginaries, we see them represented in varying forms at each of the five parishes. At Parish B, the pastor, as leader of a large church, has delegated a lot of authority, while spending a lot of time ensuring vision is clear at the CS level and that, at the S-C level, groups and ministries align to vision. In Parish A, while the leadership culture is less developed, the pastor strongly and intentionally models the other four cultural characteristics and staff and parishioners follow his lead. Authenticity is strong here, and, perhaps counterintuitively, the sense of obedience towards the priest, which is stronger than in any other parish. Parish D is on the brink of making changes which will give greater direction to staff and parishioners, and, it is hoped, reduce incoherence at the S-C level. Parish C experiences some competitive contradiction as strong direction from the parish priest clashes with strong opposition from some parishioners. Parish E is a curious combination of traditional clericalism with a strong sense of lay ownership of the parish. Every context will provide its own varying relationships between CS and S-C integration. Success in Parish B's strong leadership culture may be experimentally replicated in other parish contexts.

Since Vatican II, lay collaboration has entered parish Cultural Systems and has tended to be emphasised in pastoral theology. We have seen this in data from Parishes C and D. 'Canopy community$_2$-style' lay collaboration implemented at S-C level is not enough to shift a parish from 'canopy' to 'umbrella' and reverse its decline. We have seen it tends to lack confidence in invitation and mission, and tends to separate the religious from the secular in parish life. In contrast, lay leadership in Parish B is rooted in 'umbrella community' that is generated by personal transformations. Lay leadership, without these additional characteristics, will achieve nothing except maintenance of the 'canopy community', presiding over even greater decline.

5.2.5 Conclusions

We have painted a picture where, in order for parishes to thrive in a pluralist, secular$_3$ culture, distinctive, 'sacred umbrella' communities can be formed, adopting cultural characteristics

[320] Interview, 31 May 2018

such as authenticity and personal transformation that generate diffuse community where people discover purpose and belonging, and may invite others from outside. Our explorations in 5.2 have revealed how important the cultural characteristic of leadership is at Parish B in enabling an 'umbrella community' to be formed. In the face of "objective cultural constraints" (Archer, 1996: 69), Parish B demonstrates how through the leadership characteristic, deeply engrained dominant culture may be displaced by emerging new culture, or in other words, the contours of a 'social imaginary' may shift into a new "taken-for-granted shape of things" (Taylor, 2004: 29). While this may give rise to competitive contradiction, morphogenesis can also occur while maintaining high levels of CS integration, as Parish B demonstrates: through careful management, the elaboration of culture may happen through contingent complementarity, minimising anxiety and trauma (*ibid*.: 219-222; cf. 5.2.2).

We have explored the role of leadership in implementing distinctive vision, structuring activity and regulating the family-style 'umbrella community' behaviour that develops (5.2.3). This characteristic brings with it significant shifts in clergy-lay structural relations, necessitated by the requirements of implementing distinctive vision at the S-C level. Here, clerical/lay distinctions are downplayed in order, instead, to highlight emerging cultural characteristics of a new parish social imaginary: personal transformation, 'umbrella community', confident evangelisation and authenticity.

Yet, behind these emerging new possibilities loom the structural constraints of a hierarchical Church that can be terminal to a parish 'umbrella community' (5.2.1). Without a corresponding vision at the diocesan level, 'canopy community$_2$' characteristics can become even more deeply entrenched, as parishioners refuse to make the psychological investment required by an 'umbrella community' that may fall apart with a change in leadership. While there is great potential for Catholic parishes to thrive as 'umbrellas', these are ultimately devastatingly fragile unless supported by a corresponding diocesan vision.

5.3 Supernatural Outlook

One cold All Souls day in early November, I arrive half an hour early for Mass at Parish C. Parish Priest C, the deacon, and a large number of cassocked altar servers are rehearsing for the Extraordinary Form Mass that is about to take place. A coffin is situated in the middle of the sanctuary. The choir is rehearsing. Around 20-25 people start to gather into the church. A

small girl kneels wearing a mantilla. The Mass is ethereal, mysterious and undeniably beautiful. The silence during the elevation of the host and the chalice is striking. Towards the end, the coffin is incensed, and two women near the front of the church film it on their phones.

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This account is very different in style from that told in 3.6.2 of 'praying the campus' at Parish A. Here, the event is generated by experience of "unpleasant vibes", "things that… go wrong – the sound system would go down", and Pastor A's intuition about spiritual warfare. In other words, supernatural outlook at Parish A is generated by subjective experience alongside belief about spiritual realities. There are different generative mechanisms behind the supernatural outlook characteristic at Parish C. But, at an ideational level, both speak of radical trust in transcendent reality. We could of course give this label to any liturgical, sacramental or prayer-centred event in the parishes, since all are practices that are empty without God's action. But under this heading I am selecting practices, discourses or events that, in the context of Catholicism, impress as even more 'radical' (perhaps because less common) in affirming the 'transformation perspective' – that personal transformation radically relies upon divine action. Parish A demonstrates most clearly that, when this characteristic is introduced at the CS level, it can effect cultural elaboration through becoming embedded into S-C reality.

5.3.1 Liturgy and Cultural Dissonance

While Parish C adopts such cultural characteristics as invitation and mission, and supernatural outlook, they are both marked by an absence of the authenticity characteristic so embedded at Parishes A and B. Therefore, they take on a different quality. The invitation and mission characteristic, for example, is deeply liturgical in nature, and cannot be understood outside of the liturgy. The liturgy as the supreme place of encounter with Christ in many ways *is* the place of evangelisation. The introduction of every Mass celebrated *ad orientem* from Advent 2017 underlines this fact.[321] Such objectivity – the certainty that Christ is there and ministering to his people – gives great confidence and little room for doubt. There is no experience, here, of Taylor's 'cross-pressure' (cf. 1.1.6) and we are closest here among all the parishes to a "closed take" certainty. Everything else in the life of the parish needs to be oriented around the central truth of the liturgy.

[321] Field Notes, 2 December 2017

> [The liturgy as] the worship of God, the worship of God by Christ-God - that whole divine *perichoresis* - of worship that we're drawn into, that we participate in. Now, if that is true… then the way in which we encounter Christ must primarily be in the liturgy. That isn't to say that private prayer isn't important but actually, I *know* that I have encountered Christ in the liturgy, in a way that I cannot be sure objectively that I have encountered Christ in my private prayer, which could just be me talking to my imaginary friend. Now I'm stating that in extreme terms.[322]

> Something in us says, this is attractive, this is beautiful. I think liturgy has the capacity to deliver that - in a way that is not immediately apprehensible, I don't think liturgy works on that level - as a pedagogical tool, at least not in terms of human pedagogy. When it's used pedagogically it fails.[323]

> I think that putting on things that are beautiful, particularly for people whose lives are quite difficult, and grinding, and hard, and poor, and largely unattractive - offered baubles, offered dancing lights by society - things that are actually profoundly ugly - to offer things that are not profoundly ugly, that at the profound level have the genius of sobriety of the Roman Rite, is actually deeply attractive.[324]

As we have already seen in 5.2.2, at the S-C level, from some parishioners, there is a very positive response:

> I think with the liturgy, you feel like it's really disposing you to receive the grace of that sacrament. And you really feel like you're worshipping God. Somehow it's drawing you in to that dynamic of worship. For me, it's the reverence... You can't generate that by yourself, you need those supports.[325]

For others it is bewildering. Earlier priests "haven't had the [Parish Priest C] focus on the sacraments. And for some, it is honestly a 'switch-off'. They'll find that formality too rigid. Partly because they haven't had that opportunity to see it belongs to a bigger picture."[326]

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[322] Interview, 14 December 2017
[323] *Ibid.*
[324] *Ibid.*
[325] Focus Group, 17 December 2017
[326] Interview, 2 November 2017

In the context of wider culture, prioritising such objectivity is challenging and potentially dissonant to the postmodern person. Its role in the parish's CS is a large cognitive leap from the immanentist, secular$_3$ culture we have defined. Parishioners attempt to engage with varied success:

> [At an event outside the parish] they sang the Salve Regina. And twelve months ago I would have rolled my eyes and gone, 'oh, I'm not singing this, I don't know Latin, I don't care about this, this isn't ... I can't get into this.' But because I've learnt a lot this year, it's opened my ability to participate prayerfully in some of the more traditional services. Which is a good thing, but the problem is, I'm frustrated that [Parish Priest C] has pushed anything modern to one side.[327]

> I have to say, honestly, I find it difficult. I honestly come away and feel I haven't been at Mass. I feel I've spectated rather than participated. I've come into the Church [as a convert] so I've no experience of this at all. I came to the Extraordinary Rite on Thursday... In my naivety, I was quite looking forward to hearing a lovely Latin Mass. And of course, I didn't hear anything. That's a big culture shift for people. But [Parish Priest C] would say - and I've learnt loads from him - liturgy is one of our greatest teachers. And I agree with that. If you're prepared to reflect on it, there are some things you can gain from it.[328]

The approach not only resists Parishes A and B's epistemological alignment with the culture, it adopts a wholly opposite position. Parish clergy hold a strong position that the worship of God should never be reduced for the sake of supposedly reaching the person more effectively, and that signs and sacramentals in the Mass awaken the whole person – not just their intelligence – to receive grace.[329]

> I think that's why liturgy is important in the context of a new evangelisation in a post-Christian society, where actually proposing some of the moral standards or some of the other truths, is actually really quite difficult. I'd almost say that liturgy can in society

[327] Interview, 7 November 2017
[328] Interview, 16 December 2017
[329] Field Notes, 2 December 2017

> be more readily kerygmatic than many other things. Proclaiming Jesus is Lord in whatever way - the classic kergyma - might be actually really problematic. Doing something really very odd, but something obviously other, and beautiful, pointing beyond itself, I think could actually be quite engaging.[330]

The cultural characteristic of invitation and mission is, then, construed uniquely at Parish C through the supernatural outlook characteristic; the subjective is eschewed and "something obviously other" is embraced. Within the range of positions between Hunter's caution against 'cognitive contamination' and Shibley's 'cultural accommodation' (cf. 4.2), the position of this parish falls squarely in Hunter's court. Parish C would seem to distrust the inherent atheism of modernity à la Schindler and Rowland, and the image of the Extraordinary Form Mass enabling parishioners to turn their backs on poverty, struggle and squalor and face towards Heaven, is an explicit image of a 'Christ against culture' approach.[331] The balance is certainly weighed away from relevance and towards distinctiveness. There seems to be a dissonance in this approach that is unyielding to modern culture, even forcing an opposition between Christ and culture that could result in atheism, as per Maritain's warning (2.1.6).

Yet, precisely by adopting a distinctive vision, Parish C cannot avoid employing authenticity. Its style of parish life yearns to be sheltered by a sacred canopy that no longer exists. Its approach seems to lean towards rejecting the pluralistic, epistemic relativism that allows them to build a sacred umbrella in the first place, in place of 'closed take' certainty. Beneath the ancient canopy, certainty is 'given' rather than chosen. Beneath the postmodern umbrella, nothing is 'given' except 'expressive individualism', and if certainty is required, it must be chosen. Certainty, beneath the umbrella, is subjectivised, fragile, and clung onto doggedly.

On one Saturday evening in October, a Holy Hour takes place before Mass, attended by eight people. The atmosphere is silent and reverent, and a beautiful smell of incense lingered. People go to Confession. Towards the end of the Holy Hour, other parishioners start arriving and some commotion ensues. People greet each other in the hallway and walk noisily into church. Some people half-genuflect and then sit down to speak to each other. The social atmosphere noisily replaces the reverence, and the Blessed Sacrament is reposed.[332]

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[330] Interview, 14 December 2017
[331] Field Notes, 2 December 2017
[332] Field Notes, 14 October 2017

Here, S-C reality clashes with the newest concept introduced at the CS level. Through the theological lens, modern culture is louder than what Rowland has termed the "culture of the church". 'Cross-pressure' reveals itself, uninvited, in the noise of people formed in this culture, who unwittingly challenge the certainties of this 'sacred umbrella'. Maritain makes the point that in a disenchanted world, it is more possible to live without Christ than it is to live without modern culture, since experientially we are steeped in the latter but not the former. It remains to be seen whether Parish C's approach – in a neighbourhood highly populated by Nones – will reap evangelistic fruits.

5.3.2 Obedience, Authenticity and Dependence on Prayer

In 1.2.1 and 2.2.5, I explored through Taylor how authenticity, an ideal in need of "retrieval" (Taylor, 1991: 23), is distorted when human life is considered purely subjective or self-defined; rather, authenticity is inherently "dialogical" (*ibid.*: 33). If one has no horizon against which to define oneself, one quickly falls into insignificance and meaninglessness. In 2.2.5, we recognised, too, the advantages of the hierarchical, structural context in which a Catholic parish finds itself, in terms of providing plausibility structures.

In other words, significant and fixed 'horizons' are essential at balancing and moderating the authentic distinctiveness of a 'sacred umbrella'. Horizons can take the form of God, the teachings of the Catholic faith, and/or the authority of the bishop. The horizon may loom larger or smaller depending on the outlook of the parish: in Parish C, the supernatural reality of the liturgy looms large enough to provide 'closed take' certainty; in Parish E, certain cultural subgroups view the parish priest's dominant role in the parish as sacrosanct (cf. 5.2.4); in Parish A, the reality of supernatural forces means that 'praying the campus' is integral to the success of the evangelisation retreat (cf. 3.6.3). While there are many aspects to the five parishes that are entrepreneurial and innovating, there is also a limit to the 'independent citizen' self-reliance (cf. Bellah et al, 2008: 40). Even in those parishes where the emphasis on authenticity is strong, it gives way at some point to the inescapable structural reality of the Catholic Church.

Nowhere is this seen more vividly than in the change of leadership at Parish A (cf. 5.2.1), where authenticity has bred relationships that are diffuse, intimate and emotionally-charged. 3.6.2 and 5.2.1 demonstrate how, in a parish so marked by the authenticity characteristic, a decision from

'beyond' the 'sacred umbrella' both cuts to the heart and is accepted. Parishioners' reactions are remarkable for their lack of "expressive individualism": "we have to be obedient to him".[333]

Such an acceptance seems to be rooted in the parish's strong emphasis on prayer, and therefore, trust in God. Trust in God through prayer is a horizon that mitigates against "go-getting" activity, and the threat of an overly mechanistic, managerial approach. 3.6.2 spoke of the fruitfulness attributed to Adoration in Parish A's offices. Parish Priest E, too, spoke of the need for a radical reliance on prayer. Interestingly, he speaks of this not in terms of a reliance of the objective fixity of Catholic tradition; but rather, in terms of the power of the Holy Spirit that can be unpredictable:

> I can see confidence growing in the parish community. But the biggest challenge is recognising our need for the Holy Spirit. Because we could build the apparatus and the infrastructure for developing things but without the Holy Spirit it's just our own work. So it's learning how or trying to understand how to open the community to a wider, deeper experience of the Holy Spirit really. And not being afraid of that. I think we in the Catholic Church, we know how the Holy Spirit works in the sacraments and in particular objective experiences and that's manageable and we can control that in a certain sense. But just giving the Holy Spirit freedom you know to do things which we can't imagine or expect but that's quite frightening. If you have your own prayer and devotional life and the way we do things as a parish to learn to surrender that's going to be the hardest challenge. You know from a cultural Catholic position, that's going to be hard and how you keep the whole community on board with that. Some of the younger ones who I think yes would be up for that. But for some of the older ones who are actually the faithful ones who have kept the community going it's - not terrifying them - and actually saying how they've lived their faith has borne much fruit in their life and they've been the faithful ones. So I think from a pastor's point of view it's how we as a community begin to engage with that.[334]

5.3.3 Conclusions

[333] Focus Group, 25 May 2017
[334] Interview, 31 May 2018

The supernatural outlook characteristic is closely tied to personal transformation, a conviction that such transformation relies radically on divine action. It is therefore an outlook that is present in all parishes where the personal transformation characteristic is evident, but it is most distinctively embedded in the S-C reality at Parishes A and C. We note, however, that is looks different at each parish.

At Parish A, the authenticity characteristic might suggest a 'sacred umbrella' that is defensive against outside interference. Yet, the opposite seems to be true. Combining authenticity with the supernatural outlook characteristic, Parish A is conscious of its fragility as a 'sacred umbrella', accepting change from a horizon beyond itself with an 'open take' trust in God.

At Parish C, we observe a sacred umbrella that conceives of its own supernatural outlook with 'closed take' certainty. For an umbrella that behaves as a canopy, it may be more difficult to accept the horizons beyond: the inescapable realities of pluralism, and even of ecclesial structures that do not conform to its worldview.

Supernatural outlook provides the needed counterbalance to authenticity – when a parish recognises authenticity is at play. Parish Priest E's comment demonstrates that supernatural outlook cannot be equated with certainty or objective fixity: "giving the Holy Spirit freedom … to do things which we can't imagine or expect … that's quite frightening". In keeping with sacred umbrella reality, 'open take' trust in God is required.

5.4 Hypotheses

We can now summarise our findings into five hypotheses concerning the cultural characteristics and their links to either growth or decline at each of the parishes.

At Parish A, personal transformation is enabled through the structure of the evangelisation retreat, in the context of an atmosphere of trust, safety and of the pastor's modelling of authenticity. This generates 'umbrella community', giving rise to confident invitation, resulting from a desire for others to share a similar experience. Authenticity is moderated by supernatural outlook, which magnifies personal transformation and highlights dependence on God.

At Parish B, personal transformation is enabled through the structure of Alpha, in the context of an atmosphere of trust, safety and of the pastor's modelling of authenticity. This generates 'umbrella community', giving rise to confident invitation, resulting from a desire for others to share a similar experience. Leadership is the enabling characteristic at Parish B, critical to the effective implementing of vision at S-C level.

At Parish C, there are no clear signs of the personal transformation or authenticity characteristics. Despite determined attempts at promoting 'umbrella community', strong cultural conditioning resists morphogenetic elaboration. While the invitation and mission characteristic is strongly present at the CS level, it has been falteringly embedded at the S-C level. Similarly, while a distinctive vision for the life of the parish is introduced at the CS level, rapid and abrupt change at the S-C level leads to some competitive contradiction. The supernatural outlook characteristic is strongly present, although with a 'closed take' outlook.

At Parish D, attempts to create 'umbrella community' have sidestepped the personal transformation characteristic. Strong 'canopy community$_2$' culture (e.g. privacy of personal faith) opposes attempts both to build 'umbrella community' and to move towards invitation and mission, causing the parish to gravitate towards relevance above distinctiveness, and towards timid 'undercover evangelisation'. Authenticity is present in a sometimes-distortive way that introduces contradiction at the CS level. Lack of organisational structure means that CS vision cannot be successfully implemented at the S-C level.

At Parish E, the personal transformation and authenticity characteristics are largely not present, and yet the parish is able to generate 'umbrella community' thanks to socio-demographic realities. Here, 'canopy community$_2$' culture likewise prevents confident invitation and mission. Structural, clergy-lay relations are difficult to shift as the parish maintains an intriguing combination of traditional clericalism with ownership of the parish and priest. Supernatural outlook is evident with an 'open take' openness to God's action.

Conclusion
Why Parishes Have Failed to Thrive, and How They Might Still Do So

While completing my case study in Parish E, I came across a history of the parish from the 1930s to the 1950s. It depicted a community whose religious and social lives were woven together, intensely close-knit, religiously and socially vibrant. There is the fairly extravagant crowning of the May Queen (a First Communion girl) and her retinue each year; the fully-attended 7:30am daily Masses; sodalities such as the Guild of the Blessed Sacrament (women who clean and care for the altar); the Children of Mary (girls from 16 years old) and the Guild of St Agnes (girls from 11). Each of the latter take their turns to pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament during the Forty Hours devotion, the Children of Mary wearing blue cloaks and white veils and praying in twos. There are Blessed Sacrament processions, senior and junior youth groups, the Catholic Men's club that never opens until after Mass, Benediction and devotions are finished and whose accounts in 1954 show a large amount of money spent on Mass intentions. It would be "unthinkable to enrol in an evening class on a Thursday because that was Benediction night" (St Joseph's Parish, 1996: 14). A parish Amateur Operatic Society formed in 1958 produced high quality Gilbert and Sullivan productions every year.

This 'parish civilisation' model, where religious and social life are intricately entwined in a Catholic parish operated well in the 1950s, when the Church succeeded somewhat in creating "a subculture strong enough to withstand the pressures of the engulfing culture" (Berger, 1982: 20). Yet, such a distinctive, homogenous, national socio-cultural reality did not fully appreciate its own large and heterogenous population which, behind its ghetto walls, would not withstand the context of a "fragilised", diverse and complex secular$_3$ culture. Structurally, the Catholic Church still stands, yet in skeletal form in comparison to its robust 1950s plausibility structures.

These seismic structural changes ransacked the Catholic parish 'social imaginary', and the 1950s scene detailed above is unimaginable in the twenty-first century. And yet, while the Catholic parish's dominant culture has been whittled away by secularising forces, little has been attempted intentionally to elaborate that dominant culture in a such a way that it might have a chance of thriving in the twenty-first century. At the "adaptive unconscious" level of

the ‘social imaginary’ (J. Smith, 2009: 106), many vestiges of the earlier, dominant imaginary remain.

At the CS level of many Catholic parishes, the Church’s call to evangelisation is notionally present. Pope Francis’ clarion call, not only gives permission for, but pleads for radical change:

> I dream of a ‘missionary option’, that is, a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelisation of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation. (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 27)

At the outset of this thesis, I adopted the following two research aims:

- To identify indicators of an evangelising culture in a parish setting;
- To explore how cultural factors influence a parish’s ability to evangelise.

In order to achieve these aims, I broke them down into the following four objectives:

1) To investigate theories of culture, specifically, how the culture of a group of people can be identified and defined;
2) To study the culture within a sample of parishes through various methods of sociological research;
3) From these findings, to identify the factors that contribute towards evangelisation and growth; and those that contribute towards maintenance and decline;
4) To outline practical steps that parishes can take towards cultural change.

In the process of research, I realised that objectives 3 and 4 were impossible to achieve within my theoretical framework (cf. 3.1.2). My third objective was based on a positivist assumption that generalisable laws could be uncovered from a sample of parishes. My fourth objective was premised on this incorrect ‘generalisable law’ assumption. Instead, what I have been able to generate is five separate hypotheses, listed in 5.4 above, about what contributes to growth or decline for each parish. Throughout Chapters 4 and 5, I have been able to identify common cultural characteristics between parishes, suggesting the mechanisms generating such characteristics, and making theoretical connections, which, in some cases, would need further

empirical verification. I have suggested where parishes may wish to experiment with the mechanisms identified, but I have been clear that, only a parish's unique context, with its structural and cultural factors, will determine the fruitfulness of these mechanisms.

I used Chapter 1 as a literature review to outline the contours of the British landscape in which the Catholic parish finds itself, and which it is called to evangelise. I gave an overview of the evidence for the rise of those of no religion ('Nones'), and of Christianity's decline in general, and of disaffiliation from Catholicism in particular. I employed the thought of historical philosopher Charles Taylor alongside the data to suggest the contours of the (non)religious landscape of Britain. Finally, I turned to the Catholic parish, considering qualitative research from France and the USA as well as Britain to propose what might be the effects of secularisation on the parish since the 1960s.

In Chapter 2, I explored the sociological proposals presented in Chapter 1 from a theological standpoint, determining both that modern culture is redeemable, and that the sociological features of a parish that thrives are compatible with Catholic theology (and that in certain grey areas, it is possible to mitigate risk). From there, I defined more precisely my CR sociological position, using this to define how I would approach structure, agency and culture (SAC) in my empirical research. This standpoint allowed me to scrutinise and qualify sociological theories posed in Chapter 1. I adopted theories where I was able adequately to adapt them to account for SAC, which is particularly needed when applying theory to the context of a Catholic parish, where the power of institutional structure cannot be overlooked. Finally, I made comments on the methodological and anthropological approach I would take, as a bridge into empirical methods.

In Chapter 3, in order to meet my second objective, I outlined the parameters of my research before introducing the selection of the parish case studies, outlining methods, defining my own role as researcher and stating how the data would be analysed. I was able, at the end of Chapter 3, to hypothesise the cultural characteristics that were leading to growth in Parishes A and B. This data would then be used as a lens through which to analyse the data of the remaining three parishes.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I explored data from all five parishes through the lens of the cultural characteristics uncovered in Parishes A and B. This helped me form three further hypotheses concerning the areas of growth and decline in Parishes C, D and E (cf. 5.4).

Below, I present my findings about the Parishes A – E in summary form. While we have been able to reach no generalisable laws from these findings, we have identified cultural characteristics related to growth and decline in the five parishes studied, along with the mechanisms behind them – causal structures of the social phenomena that make them work (cf. 2.3).

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The five parishes hold in common a recognition that some form of cultural elaboration is needed in order to grow, or at least maintain their existence. This fact in itself is a sign of systemic and cultural change within the Catholic Church, where parishes traditionally are part of a largely unchanging, homogenous, generalist system that "targets the middle" (cf. T. Bruce, 2017: 7; 1.3.3) and treats parishes and priests alike interchangeably. Yet, all five are pursuing change, each involving a new, emerging basis of identity legitimation (cf. 4.2.3) where default, inherited or 'vicarious' options for religious practice are rejected in place of individual choice and agency. Paradoxically, this is true even for Parish C, whose worldview is more in keeping with the sacred canopy which, in a pluralistic world, nevertheless is no longer 'given' and must be chosen.

Throughout the thesis, I have hypothesised that a parish, no longer sheltered by the 'sacred canopy', may withstand the corroding acids of secular$_3$ culture by forming a distinctive 'umbrella community' (cf. 1.2.3). Data from Parishes A and B suggest that the strongest forms of 'umbrella community' are generated by communal experiences of personal transformation and sustained by small groups (4.1.1); they involve a high degree of emotionality, family-style relationships that are proximate and diffuse (4.1.1); and that language is an important "micro-foundation" (Ammerman, 2018: 31) that sustains the plausibility structures of these 'umbrellas' through everyday conversations. 'Umbrella communities' are importantly distinctive, providing a "satisfying morally orienting collective identit[y] which provide[s] adherents meaning and belonging" (Smith, 1998: 118), and where identity can be concretised in relation to 'out-groups' (cf. 5.1.2).

'Umbrella community' in parishes emerges from what I have termed 'canopy community$_2$', parish community that evolved in the 1970s and 80s, and that maintains a strong, gravitational pull for Catholic parishes in North America and Britain alike (4.1.7). Evolving from the 1950s 'canopy community' described above, 'canopy community$_2$' parishes, having lost their social functions and retaining only their spiritual ones, found themselves "groping for relevance" (Dolan, 1985: 449) and forming community life that aimed to transcend differences, becoming open to all (cf. 1.3.2; 4.1.4). Data from Parish D demonstrates how the spiritual and social can become uncoupled: personal faith is intensely private, and at the S-C level, community gatherings can avoid faith. At the level of social integration, 'canopy community$_2$' risks becoming formal, anonymous and fragmented, and relationships marked by specificity and low emotionality (cf. 4.1.5). In Parishes B and D, Catholic groups with social and charitable functions (designed in a 'canopy community$_2$' era) increasingly struggle in the postmodern milieu. 5.1.3 demonstrated outlooks of older generations and traditional groups in these two parishes frustrated in their efforts to motivate younger generations to adapt their lives to these groups. We are witnessing generalist parishes with low distinctiveness: precisely the type of religious community that is unattractive to the twenty-first century seeker (cf. 1.2.3).

This explains why all five parishes are, in different ways, seeking to shake off the damaging effects of 'canopy community$_2$', yet its strong structural and cultural dominance can be a powerful, irresistible force (cf. 4.1.7, 4.2.3, 5.2.5). At the S-C level, 'canopy community$_2$' cultural elements have a strong, precognitive hold in terms of parishioners' 'social imaginary' concerning the parish (cf. 2.2.5) that are resistant to elaboration. Unconscious assumptions may be held so deeply that destabilising them can lead us to choose maintaining perceptions that falsify evidence around us, rather than accept the anxiety involved in questioning our assumptions (cf. Schein, 2010: 27; 4.2.3).

Data from Parishes A and B suggests that the cultural characteristic of authenticity is powerful in achieving cultural elaboration. It creates conditions for personal transformations to occur, which are critical in achieving 'umbrella community'. Authenticity underlies the identity-legitimiser shifts from Mass attendance only (ascription) to personal transformation (choice) (4.2.3). Promoting this characteristic aligns a parish epistemologically with the wider culture (because "the ultimate criteria of lifestyle validity is individual choice" (Smith, 1998: 103)), and the basis of whatever distinctive worldview is then chosen. While the authenticity characteristic is not evident at the S-C level in Parish C, it remains inescapably the foundation

of its identity as a traditional Catholic 'sacred umbrella'. Yet the data at Parishes A and B indicate that adopting authenticity as a cultural characteristic pays dividends in terms of the high commitment of parishioners, which in turn strengthens 'umbrella community' (4.2.1, 4.2.2).

Engagement, if it is to have a redemptive purpose, accommodates to the wider culture's style and mode, in order to be recognisable (2.1.7). In Taylor's terms, we can accommodate to the *framework* of the "secular present" without adopting its content (Taylor, 2007: 516; cf. 1.2.1). Adopting a pneumatological and kairological treatment of history, where God remains present through the Spirit in every age (cf. Ratzinger, 1969: 116), modern culture may be redeemed (2.1.6). A 'Christ transforming culture' approach allows "many ordinary believers … [to] succeed in being *both* secular *and* religious" (Berger, 2014: xii), without forcing an opposition that would logically and inevitably lead one to atheism (cf. Maritain, 1969; 2.1.6). This is the "missionary impulse capable of transforming everything", in Pope Francis' words. 3.6 gives multiple examples of how Parishes A and B are successfully achieving this.

While 'umbrella community' provides belonging and meaning and is therefore attractive to the seeker, growth relies upon invitation. While all five parishes registered evangelisation at the CS level, only those who were able to integrate it socio-culturally saw fruitfulness in terms of confident invitation. Invitation is dependent on individuals' agency, and confident agency requires more than CS ideas: embedding ideas socio-culturally, at the level of 'imaginary' is essential (5.1.1). Data from Parishes A and B suggest that experience of personal transformation is more powerful than conviction from ideas (3.6.1). Data from Parishes C, D and E demonstrated that when a 'canopy community$_2$' imaginary is powerfully at play, agency is more likely determined by these cultural elements (where differences are downplayed, all beliefs are considered equal, relevance is more important than distinctiveness, and evangelisation is 'undercover') than ideas espoused at the CS level (cf. 5.1.1, 5.1.2). Coherence between CS and S-C levels is needed, in order for the call to evangelisation not to have a disorienting impact. Considering Parish A's experience of explicitly elaborating away from the default 'canopy community$_2$' reality, we hypothesised that British reticence about faith could not be solely to blame (5.1.1).

Such coherence between CS and S-C levels is achieved at Parish B through the enabling mechanism of leadership. Change can be attempted at the S-C level, but without careful and

intentional leadership, disruption and competitive contradiction can arise, as witnessed in Parish C (5.2.2). As well as managing change, leadership is needed at Parish B to regulate the family-style, 'umbrella community' behaviour (5.2.3). This emphasis on intentional leadership entails shifts in structural relations between clergy and laity (5.2.4).

Closely linked to personal transformation is the characteristic most evident at Parishes A and C – supernatural outlook – which involves a radical trust in transcendent reality and divine action. This characteristic could only be recognised thanks to an openness to the possibility of metaphysical realities (2.2.1). Only an 'open take' emphasis on the possibility of metaphysical reality could reconcile a supposedly paradoxical combination at Parish A of authenticity with obedience (5.3.2). We noted that it is a characteristic that takes on a different flavour depending on whether or not a parish is open to the authenticity characteristic, or to 'cross-pressure' (5.3.1).

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Implied behind this thesis has been a growing conviction that the futures of Catholic parishes are at stake unless they renegotiate themselves as 'sacred umbrellas' oriented to providing belonging and collective identity sought by the postmodern person. Parishes A and B demonstrate how they engage with postmodern social outgroups, without sacrificing their core beliefs, and in so doing, are catching a piece of cloth stripped from the 'sacred canopy' and refashioning it into a 'sacred umbrella' (1.2.3). They maintain confident distinctiveness, while staying authentically engaged with those outside. While 'umbrella' identity is limited in its scope thanks to structural factors and entrenched dominant culture supported by those structures, evidence from Parishes A and B propose that such cultural elaboration poses a chance of success.

My thesis envisages a sea of such umbrellas (1.2.3) where distinctive visions set them apart from each other, but where they are commonly marked by 'umbrella community', generated in the case of Parishes A and B by personal transformation, enabled by the cultural characteristic of authenticity.

What, then, are the implications for this thesis beyond the parish? Throughout, I have indicated the fragility of the parish as 'umbrella' in the context of a hierarchical Church which in its nature is structured as a 'sacred canopy'. I have argued that while Catholic parishioners

increasingly operate according to a market mentality (1.1.5; 1.3.3), parishes continue to behave like – and are treated by dioceses as – 'generalist' organisations that target the "middle" (T. Bruce, 2017: 7). This reality, along with the territoriality principle (1.3.3), while propping up a failing parish, may at the same time forestall attempts by a parish to be distinctive, despite evidence that distinctiveness leads to thriving in the post-secular culture (1.2.3). Those parishes that make attempts towards distinctiveness can suffer from 'tall poppy syndrome' (cf. Smith, 1998: 94) in diocesan life. One parishioner at Parish C commented:

> And the other thing of course is what he's doing here doesn't seem to have approval from other priests in the town. So he's on his own. There's no mention of what we do here in anybody else's newsletter. Which is slightly against the idea of a Pastoral Area. That's the worrying thing. If the other clergy don't want to know, you're out on your own.[335]

In a generalist diocesan system, one priest is interchangeable with another (5.2.1), sacramental provision is seamlessly made available to the majority, cultural ascription trumps personal transformation, and parishes succumb to the gravitational pull of 'canopy community$_2$' cultural characteristics. The regular movement of priests by default entrenches these characteristics, heading off parishioners' psychological investment that is required for deep-rooted change (5.2.1).

My thesis challenges dioceses to a new outlook: to view the diocese not as one 'umbrella' in itself with one evangelisation or pastoral strategy, but as a sea of umbrellas, with strategies developed at the grassroots level; to view parishes as 'umbrellas' with distinctive visions and expertise to evangelise their particular context, each with demographic uniqueness; to undertake thoughtful succession planning with regard to leadership that supports the distinctiveness of each 'umbrella' (5.2.1); to recognise the emergence of new identity-legitimisers more suited to living faith in a culture of 'expressive individualism' and to develop outlooks and policies accordingly.

To conclude: at the crux of the problem of how Catholic parishes have failed to thrive in the twenty-first century secular$_3$ culture are two realities. First, the radically shifted culture that is common ground held by both believers and nonbelievers (1.2). Second, that, while the wider

[335] Focus Group, 16 December 2017

culture has radically shifted, the culture of the parish has remained largely the same (1.3), ossifying forms of the past, and failing to respond to the new mission field beyond its Catholic parishioners (2.1.1). In short, the common ground of the immanent frame held by Catholics and nonbelievers alike means that few are attracted by the current reality of the Catholic parish. Yet secular$_3$ culture, far from being an enemy of religious faith, holds out a remarkable opportunity: it is possible to reframe the model of parish life in such a way that invigorates Catholics and attracts nonbelievers, a truly "missionary impulse" (EG, 27). Parishes A and B demonstrate that this is a real possibility, and in this thesis, I have shared the cultural characteristics evident in these parishes, along with mechanisms behind them, in the hope that any parish that desires change may experiment with them. In doing so, they may "suitably channel" their "customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures … for the evangelisation of today's world" (*ibid*.), too.

Appendix 1: Parish / Researcher Agreement

Project Title:
Evangelising Parishes: What impact does the culture of a Catholic parish have on its ability to evangelise?

[*Parish Name*]

[*Case Study Dates*]

Context

This three-week case study forms part of a wider doctoral study on the impact of a parish's culture on its ability to evangelise. The link between effective evangelisation and the inner flourishing of a community has been demonstrated in studies of late secularisation [Bruce 2014]. Studies show that the flourishing of a Christian community is essential for faith to be passed on and communities to grow. Two case studies are being undertaken in parishes where there is evidence of considerable growth. Three further case studies will be undertaken in parishes in which there is a range of less growth or decline. Case studies are taking place in the USA, Canada and the UK. This case study seeks to research the culture of a community that is successfully evangelising and growing.

Case Study Aim

[DELETE AS APPROPRIATE]

- To identify cultural indicators that are key to an evangelising parish through undertaking a study of the parish's culture [*OR]*
- To study the culture of a [*demographic details*] Catholic parish

These cultural indicators will be determined through attempting to uncover "shared basic assumptions" that are held by a majority of parishioners and taught to new members [Schein 2010:18]. These basic assumptions are what can be described as the 'essence' of a culture and are often subconscious assumptions or unwritten rules.

Breakdown of Case Study

	week 1	w/e	week 2	w/e	week 3	w/e	
Dates							
stage 1							
stage 2							

Stage One

Duration:

- Two weeks

Methods:

- Participant observation / immersion in culture
- Interview key leaders in parish

Participant observation involves the researcher taking part in the daily life of the community, listening, observing, questioning and trying to understand the lives of the individuals and the life of the community.

Interviews will be undertaken with staff and volunteers who are leaders within the parish. Leaders are key culture bearers in the parish. Interviews will last around one hour and will concern the cultural values of the parish as the interviewee sees them.

Stage Two

Duration:

- One week

Methods:

- Participant observation / immersion in culture

- Focus groups with range of people in the parish

Focus groups allow for discussion and interaction between 6-10 parishioners. 3 or 4 focus groups will be undertaken with a range of people from the parish. Focus group members will be invited from the same demographic in the parish (i.e. a group of highly engaged people or a group of actively disengaged people). This approach is designed to encourage openness of discussion among participants.

Notes to Parish:

1. **Data Collection**

All data (i.e. audio files of recorded interviews, transcripts) will be saved on password-protected recording device and later uploaded onto a password-protected account on the St Mary's University servers. Since all interviewees will be known, there will be no difficulty in identifying records for exclusion, if requested. Only Hannah Vaughan-Spruce and her supervisor, Professor Stephen Bullivant, will have access to this data.

2. **Presentation and Publication of Data**

In presenting or publishing data, all individual participants will be referred to pseudonymously. The case study parishes will not be named or identified, and places will be anonymised. The above will be true of data used in the resulting thesis as well as in any potential future published work.

3. **Individuals' Participation**

Those who take part in the study either in an interview or a focus group must be at least 18 years of age and a member of the parish. Their participation is wholly voluntary and they may withdraw from the project at any time. Information and a written agreement will be provided to each participant ahead of time.

4. **Impact of Study**

The study of parish's culture aims at uncovering the underlying assumptions that determine ideas, values, and behaviour in a parish, and to this end, it lays bare the culture of a parish. It may potentially reveal unexpected realities or subcultures. To mitigate risk to the parish, final data analysis will be made available only to parish leadership in such a way that they will have

autonomy over how to respond (or not) to the findings. It will also be made clear to participants that this study is not a clinical study (i.e. culture change is not an intended outcome, but rather a deeper understanding of the culture). Parish leaders may wish to act on the data that is gathered in order to change culture, but these decisions are outside the realm of the study.

I understand the nature of the study and agree to the participation of [*Parish Name*].

Signed: _____ (Pastor/Parish Priest, [*Parish Name*])
Date:

Signed: _____ (Researcher, St Mary's University, UK)
Date:

Appendix 2: Interview and Focus Group Schedules

Semi-structured interview outline

I'm going to begin by asking some very basic demographic questions.

1. Please could you tell me how long you have been a member of X parish.

2. What is your involvement or role in the parish?

I’m going to ask some questions about the culture of the parish. Please feel free to share whatever information you wish. I have some quite general 'prompt' questions, which might be useful in structuring the conversation, and I might occasionally interrupt to clarify certain things. If at any time you would like to take a break, please let me know, and we can pause the recording.

3. In your experience, what is it like to come to / to work at X parish?

4. How does the parish see itself in relation to the outside community in which it is based?

5. What does it mean to belong in X parish? How does someone know that they belong?

6. How would you describe the way people relate to each other in the parish?

7. In your view, what improvements could be made in the way people relate to each other?

8. Thinking about big decisions that are made that affect the whole parish — how are these made?

9. If your parish had any unwritten rules, what would you say they are?

The interview will also include questions about the meaning of certain practices or behaviours observed by the researcher during the previous week in the parish.

10. Is there anything else you would like to observe about your experience of X parish?

Focus group outline

I'm going to begin by asking each person to give some very basic demographic information.

1. Please could you tell me how long you have been a member of X parish.

2. Please briefly describe your involvement in the parish.

Over the past X weeks, I have been observing certain key values that people at X parish seem to share. I would like to present each of these to you to ask for your views on them.

- Is this a value that is embodied in this parish?
- Why / why not?
- For each value, please share examples or stories that you think prove or disprove this value.

[Each of the following values will be either: an espoused belief repeatedly heard in the parish; a slogan or catchphrase; a key word; a moral from a story that is often told.]

VALUE 1 - Discussion

VALUE 2 - Discussion

VALUE 3 - Discussion

VALUE 4 - Discussion

VALUE 5 - Discussion

VALUE 6 - Discussion

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