

Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God:  
examining Fair Trade action by churches as a  
form of Public Theology.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

As a theologically inspired action that has captured the attention of a wide public, Fair Trade action by churches can be viewed as a successful form of Public Theology. Despite the popularity of Fair Trade, and the considerable Church involvement in its promotion, little attention has been paid by academic theology to the public impact of church support for Fair Trade. This research sets out to correct this oversight by bringing together the study of Fair Trade and Public Theology for the greater illumination of both. Using a qualitative study, consisting of twenty-five in depth interviews of community stakeholders and churchgoers, this research asks to what extent, and in what ways, this action is 'public' and examines the nature and content of the theology of the churchgoers in regard to Fair Trade.

This research contributes to the better understanding of the nature of support for Fair Trade. My investigation of the theology of the churchgoers indicates that their beliefs shape their understanding of what Fair Trade is. They view Fair Trade as an act of justice and as demonstration of Christian principles in action. The churchgoers' desire for Fair Trade to 'live up' to these theologically inspired ideals leads them to defend forms of Fair Trade practice that offer a distinctive alternative to mainstream trade. My analysis of Fair Trade action by churches complements the existing body of knowledge on Public Theology, by offering detailed example of the practical outworking of some of the key points of discussion within the discourse. Using Fair Trade action by churches as a case study of a specific form of Public Theology in practice, I indicate the ways in which engagement between the Church and a wider audience can be balanced with the exercise of a distinctive theological voice.

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## **Abbreviations key and notes**

### Abbreviations

FTO – Fair Trade Organisation

G8 – The Group of Eight (industrialised economies)

NGO – Non-Governmental Organisation

UK – United Kingdom

US/USA – United States of America

### Notes

The use of ‘Church’ refers to the Church as the body of all believers, whereas ‘church’ refers to the congregation who gather at a specific location.

‘Fair Trade’ is referred to as two separate words, with the exception of reference to direct activities of the Fairtrade Foundation or Fairtrade International, when it is referred to as one word.

The participants in my research (the Fair Trade activists I have interviewed) are referred to variously as: ‘interviewees’, ‘participants’ or ‘research participants.’ There are two cohorts formed of churchgoers and non-churchgoers. The churchgoers are referred to as: ‘churchgoing participants’ or ‘churchgoers.’ If it is clear that the reference is only to churchgoers, then they can also be referred to as: ‘interviewees’, ‘participants’ or ‘research participants.’

The non-churchgoers are referred to as: ‘community stakeholders’ or ‘non-churchgoing participants.’

## **Introduction**

This research brings together the study of Fair Trade action by churches and the discourse of Public Theology for the greater illumination of both. Fair Trade is a theologically inspired concept, which continues to be supported by a substantial church-based activist body.<sup>1</sup> It has captured the imagination of a wide audience beyond the Church, and hence, can be seen as a successful form of Public Theology in action. It is surprising, therefore, that the phenomenon of Fair Trade action by churches has not been subjected to a great deal of theological scrutiny. There has been a small amount of theological commentary on the public significance of church support for Fair Trade but no research has taken place into Fair Trade as Public Theology.<sup>2</sup> For both the study of Fair Trade, and of Public Theology, the time is overdue for this research. I have interviewed churchgoing Fair Trade activists to investigate both the ‘public’ nature of the action that they carry out and its ‘theological’ nature. The research examines the ways in which the action can be understood as ‘public’, looking at what the churchgoers do to engage with the wider community outside of the Church and how they interpret this engagement. Crucially, I investigate the connection between the churchgoers’ beliefs and the action that they carry out, seeking to understand the churchgoers’ ‘theology of Fair Trade.’ For both of these areas of investigation, I have found that the churchgoers have a distinctive contribution to make in the promotion of Fair Trade. The findings of my case study indicate that the churchgoers are prepared to access a wide range of both Church and secular networks in their promotion of Fair Trade, forming links between different sectors of the community.<sup>3</sup> This ability to connect people in the support of Fair Trade fits with an understanding of churches as repositories of social capital, uniquely placed in communities to bring together different sections of the population

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<sup>1</sup> See the section ‘Why is the practice of Fair Trade being treated theologically?’ in this introductory chapter.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Northcott (2007; 2011a; 2011b) who refers to the public significance of church support for Fair Trade.

<sup>3</sup> This is outlined in Section 3.1.

(Putnam 2000, pp.65-79). My investigation of the theology of the churchgoers indicates that faith shapes their understanding of what Fair Trade is. They view Fair Trade as an act of justice, inspired in large part by biblical conceptions of justice, and as demonstration of Christian principles in action.<sup>4</sup> The churchgoers' desire for Fair Trade to 'live up' to these theologically inspired ideals leads them to defend forms of Fair Trade practice that offer a distinctive alternative to mainstream trade. My analysis of the role of Christian faith in influencing the nature of Fair Trade activism makes a valuable contribution to the study of the Fair Trade movement. However, my bringing together of Fair Trade and Public Theology also serves to shed light on the discourse of Public Theology.

The research provides a case study of a specific form of Public Theology in action. My analysis of Fair Trade action by churches complements the existing body of knowledge on Public Theology, by offering detailed example of the practical outworking of some of the key points of discussion within the discourse. I indicate the need to balance real engagement between the Church and a wider audience with the exercise of a distinctive theological voice. I discuss the language with which Public Theology speaks, identifying Fair Trade as a form of translation of theological insight into a tongue that is accessible to an audience outside of the Church.<sup>5</sup> The experience of Fair Trade action by churches can, therefore, be analysed to provide evidence of the implications of such an act of translation. I bring my analysis into conversation with the literature of the discourse of Public Theology. The declared strengths of such close engagement between theology and a wide public, and also the warnings from within the discourse as to the pitfalls of the process, can be tested against this evidence. What is more, rather than focus my research on Church leaders as the instigators of Public Theology, my investigation is carried out at the grassroots. I listen to the voices of churchgoers and pay attention to their own interpretations of the action that they are carrying out

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<sup>4</sup> These views are discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>5</sup> As discussed in Chapter 7.

in support of Fair Trade.<sup>6</sup> To focus research into a form of Public Theology on grassroots churchgoers, as opposed to Church leaders, is rare indeed and offers an invaluable and original insight into the nature of Public Theology.

### **The key elements of the research**

#### Fair Trade

My research is a study of the action that is carried out by churchgoers to promote the concept of Fair Trade. I declare, from the outset, my own involvement in the promotion of Fair Trade. I first came into contact with the concept in the church that I attended in Liverpool, where several members of the congregation set up a regular Traidcraft stall selling a small range of fairly traded products.<sup>7</sup> My involvement in Fair Trade has increased over the years and, since 2010, I have served as the Coordinator of Fairtrade Yorkshire, the regional presence of the ‘secular’ Fairtrade Foundation.<sup>8</sup> From my experience of Fair Trade activism, I am aware of the considerable role that churchgoers and Church organisations play in the Fair Trade movement. Much of this presence is ‘hidden’ and the ‘secular’ presentation of Fair Trade has led both academics, and the general public, to underestimate the role of the Church in Fair Trade.<sup>9</sup> My awareness of this gap between what churchgoers and Christian organisations actually contribute to the Fair Trade movement, and what is publicly acknowledged, informs my motivation to conduct this research. My decision to examine support for Fair Trade within the discipline of theology represents an attempt to redress the imbalance. Rather than perpetuate the downplaying of theology in Fair Trade, this research reasserts its importance. However, the research represents a two-way flow; theology is

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<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 1 for an outline of the methodology of the research.

<sup>7</sup> Traidcraft is a Christian Fair Trade Organisation. See Johnson and Sugden (2001).

<sup>8</sup> See Lamb (2008) who discusses the work of the Fairtrade Foundation.

<sup>9</sup> The secular presentation of Fair Trade is discussed in Chapter 6.

important to Fair Trade but Fair Trade is also important to theology. My experience of witnessing the dedication of some churchgoers to the Fair Trade cause, and the extent to which they connect Fair Trade with their faith, has influenced my decision to conduct empirical research into the phenomenon. Because belief and action are so intimately linked in the church promotion of Fair Trade, the action serves as an example of theology reaching out to a wider audience. Hence, an investigation into Fair Trade action by churches can tell us much, not only about the promotion of Fair Trade, but also about the nature of theology itself.

Fair Trade is a form of ethical consumption orchestrated by the Fair Trade movement, a coming together of diverse partners including businesses, activists, Fair Trade Organisations (FTOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and producer cooperatives. At a fundamental level, Fair Trade aims to assist producers in poor communities to work their way out of poverty by gaining access to markets and trading on terms that are not exploitative (Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.6). This is achieved by means of Fair Trade practices which include: payment of a fair and stable minimum price for produce, payment of a social premium to benefit whole communities, long term trading partnerships, sustainable production and worker empowerment in the form of cooperative and democratic organisation (Nicholls and Opal, pp.6-7). Contrary to mainstream trade, the focus of Fair Trade is on the producer as opposed to the consumer. ‘A Charter of Fair Trade principles’, drawn up by two of the largest global FTOs (World Fair Trade Organisation<sup>10</sup> and Fairtrade International<sup>11</sup>), stresses the values that inform Fair Trade, stating: ‘Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade’ (cited in Raynolds and Bennett 2015, p.4). The largest and most well-known facet of the Fair Trade concept is Fair Trade certification; whereby products can be sold bearing a Fair Trade mark, or

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<sup>10</sup> See Rosenthal (2011, pp.160 and 168-9) for a brief description of the World Fair Trade Organisation.

<sup>11</sup> Formerly known as the Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International; see Nicholls and Opal (2005, p.8).

certificate, as guarantee to the consumer that Fair Trade practices have been adhered to (Nicholls and Opal 2005, pp.10-12). Certification allows for the involvement of large commercial businesses in the Fair Trade project, as transnational corporations, such as Nestle, have successfully applied to have some of their products certified (Bowes 2011, pp.11-12). The involvement of large market actors in the Fair Trade movement is referred to by academic commentators as the mainstreaming of Fair Trade (Le Velly 2015). In addition to the operation of ethical consumption schemes, the Fair Trade movement is involved in calling for change in mainstream trade by political means. Raynolds and Bennett (2015, p.4) point out that Fair Trade ‘critiques conventional trade relations, which for various reasons might be considered “unfair” trade.’ In addition to the positive changes that the Fair Trade movement makes, Fair Trade also serves as denunciation of mainstream trade. Hence, in the ‘Charter of Fair Trade Principles’ there is reference to a role for Fair Trade supporters ‘in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade’ (cited in Raynolds and Bennett 2015, p.4). This purpose of Fair Trade, in critiquing and campaigning against ‘unfair’ practices of the mainstream, brings with it some tension with the increasing involvement of large commercial organisations in the Fair Trade project.<sup>12</sup>

Despite the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, promotion of the concept by churches remains strong. Churches play a large part in the Fairtrade Towns movement, a phenomenon whose rapid growth has surprised even the most ardent of supporters.<sup>13</sup> Fair Trade activism springing from the churches is a significant and fascinating example of a movement from below. Growth of Fair Trade action by churches has occurred largely as a result of the enthusiasm of the laity, with minimal direction from Church leaders, and it remains an activity largely lay-led. In fact, Fair Trade, which continues to be supported by a largely church based activist body, is one of the most widely known forms of religiously inspired projects in the UK. It

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<sup>12</sup> As discussed in Chapter 8.

<sup>13</sup> See Nicholls and Opal (2005, pp.172-7) for discussion of the Fair Trade Towns movement.



is surprising therefore that the phenomenon of Fair Trade action by churches has not been widely studied. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the nature of support for Fair Trade in the UK without considering the role played by churchgoers and Christian organisations in the contemporary Fair Trade movement. This research addresses that gap in knowledge and it does so by analysing the voices of church based Fair Trade activists, the people who are responsible for the vitality of the Fair Trade activist body (Anderson 2015, pp.62 and 66). Such is the significance of the role of the Church in the Fair Trade movement, that much can be learnt about the nature of Fair Trade by its study from a theological perspective.

### Theology

This research is conducted within the discipline of theology. There are examples of research that has taken place into Fair Trade activism which examine the involvement of churchgoers (see, for example: Anderson 2015; Cloke et al 2011; Wheeler 2012). However, they do not do so from a theological perspective. This research represents a unique contribution to the study of Fair Trade support, and to Public Theology, in examining Fair Trade action by churches at a grassroots level through the lens of theology. Why situate this research in the discipline of theology and not explain the phenomenon of Fair Trade action by churches by means of a purely social scientific approach? I believe that, although social scientific study of Fair Trade action by churches can teach us much about the nature of the action, I need to engage with Theology in order to offer a fuller picture. This research looks at the ways in which the deeply held beliefs of the churchgoing participants shape, not only their motivation to get involved in the Fair Trade project, but also their interpretation of the concept of Fair Trade. It is not possible to fully understand the role of churchgoers in the Fair Trade movement without reference to the theological ideas which inform their involvement. The situation of my research in the discipline of theology produces a two-way trade. My research contributes to the body of knowledge on Fair Trade support by seeking to explain church support for

Fair Trade with reference to theology. However, this research also contributes to theology. Fair Trade action by churches provides evidence of a popular theologically inspired action which has captured the imagination of a wide audience beyond the Church. Examination of this action serves as a case study, which can contribute to extending our knowledge of the relationship between theology and contemporary society.

To some extent, the research pushes against what may be traditionally thought of as theology. The use of the term ‘theology’ could be problematic if theology is conceived only in terms of its study in the academy. How can the untrained churchgoers generate fresh insight into traditions and texts which have been the subject of intense academic scrutiny across two millennia? However, what is fresh in the theology of the churchgoers is the bringing to bear of the texts and traditions of the Church on the contemporary situation; a contemporary situation which is in constant flux. Astley (2002, p.3) describes ‘real theology’ as a dialogue between the traditions and texts of the Church and the lived experience of the believer. Changing situations and new experiences will produce new theology. This hermeneutical understanding of theology is advocated by Astley (2002) and I utilise his interpretation of Ordinary Theology as an integral part of the methodology of this thesis.<sup>14</sup> Astley (2002, p.55) stresses the connection between theology and personal faith, stating that ‘the person who does theology is involved *as a person*; her personal faith is central to her doing theology and is therefore transformative.’ For the ordinary theologian, the method of doing theology will look different to the practice of academic theology. The theologising of the churchgoer is less likely to tend towards the abstract and may well take the form of a conversation between the tenets of faith and the intuition the churchgoer gains from their experience of the world (Astley 2002, p.3). Ordinary theologians not only seek inspiration from theology to make sense of their lives, but they also contribute to a reforming of theology in the light of their experience of everyday life in ‘the world.’ As Astley (2002, p.149)

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<sup>14</sup> My use of Ordinary Theology as a methodology is discussed in Section 1.2.

indicates, the testing of theology against human experience provides vital inspiration for the Church and he recommends that academic theology pay more heed to the voice of the person in the pew. This research embarks on such a task. I believe that in being attentive to the voice of churchgoers our knowledge of theology can be expanded, not least, in the ways in which theology interacts with the wider world outside of the Church.

### Public Theology

As a former student of Professor Sebastian Kim, the editor of the *International Journal of Public Theology*, I have been inspired by the debates surrounding the role of theology in the public realm and the continuing development of the discourse of Public Theology. Secularisation and the rise of a personalised attitude to religion, that eschews the communal and societal for a privatised spirituality, have led to a marginalisation of the voice of the Church in public life (see, for example Cady 1993). Public Theology seeks to redress this imbalance and emphasise the public relevance of the Christian faith. Bradstock (2012, p.152) offers a description of Public Theology which captures the link between theological insight and the world outside of the Church. He states that ‘good “Public Theology” is precisely about showing how a theological perspective can contribute to the “common good”, about drawing upon the insights of faith and offering these as “gift” to the secular world.’ Whilst recognising the need for Public Theology, and the inspiration of its honest debates on the opportunities and pitfalls of bringing theology into the public realm, I have been surprised by the absence of illustration of what Public Theology ‘looks like.’ The discourse contains much discussion operating at a theoretical level or which takes the form of recommendation for best practice. However, Public Theology is in the business of working within ‘the world’ with all the complications that this entails. The discourse can learn from the experience of Public Theology in practice, offering real-world example for the theoretical arguments that are put forward. This research has a clear contribution to make to Public Theology in examining a

specific form of Public Theology, drawing on the experience of those who participate. In bringing the voice of the participants into conversation with the contributors to the discourse of Public Theology, I am seeking to validate, or to question, the claims that are made within the discourse; contributing to the debate and adding to the body of learning about Public Theology in action.

A key issue for the discourse of Public Theology is what is meant by the term ‘public.’ Differing interpretations of what ‘public’ life means will lead to differing outlooks on the role of theology in the public arena.<sup>15</sup> As a starting point, there is broad agreement within the discourse that Public Theology is not privatised religion; it fights against the confinement of the Christian Gospel to the private life of individuals (see, for example: Morton 2004, pp.25-6). Beyond this, there is little consensus between public theologians as to the definition of ‘public.’ In Chapter 3, in examination of the ‘public’ nature of the Fair Trade action by churches, I discuss different interpretations of ‘public’ which can lead to differing understandings of the role of Public Theology. The concept of social capital has an emphasis on coming together as a result of strengthening bonds within society (Putnam 2000). A role can be identified for Public Theology in providing bridging capital, which contributes to public life by bringing together the diverse elements which constitute the ‘public.’<sup>16</sup> However, other interpretations of ‘public’ possess more of an emphasis on division than on the coming together that underpins the concept of social capital. Habermas (1989) interprets the ‘public sphere’ as fractured and under constant encroachment from the dominant forces of the state and market. Such encroachment has the potential to destroy public life. Whereas ‘the public’ in the understanding of social capital is, or at least has the potential to be, cooperative, other interpretations of ‘the public’ portray a more divided society. For this fractured sense of ‘public’, the role of Public Theology may not be so much a ‘coming together’ as the creation of a space of

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<sup>15</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> As discussed in Section 3.1.

resistance or challenge to the status quo.<sup>17</sup> Public Theology as resistance may bring more division than a strengthening of bonds within society. The thinking of Kierkegaard (1978, p.91) and his view of ‘the public’ as a ‘monstrous nonentity’ can cause us to pause for thought.<sup>18</sup> What is the role of theology in this ‘public’ but to denounce the public itself? Although Kierkegaard’s view of public may be at one extreme of the debate, there is resonance between his view and some of the statements made by the research participants. There is also resonance with the views of those theologians who exercise substantial caution as to the extent to which theology should be willing to ‘go public.’

A common critique of Public Theology is that it is simply not theological enough; the emphasis being placed on the ‘public’ and the ‘theology’ left behind, drowned out by agendas prevalent in wider society (see, for example: Matthewes 2007, p.1). I argue that, although Fair Trade has a wide recognition from a public outside of the Church, it is theologically inspired and theology continues to guide the concept. To counter possible objections that Fair Trade is not sufficiently theological to be treated as a form of Public Theology, I will now set out my rationale for why the practice of Fair Trade is being treated in a theological manner.

### **Why is the practice of Fair Trade being treated theologically?**

There is a considerable body of scholarship examining the practice of Fair Trade from a social science perspective, however the concept has not received a great deal of attention from theologians. Fair Trade is now embedded in some sections of business practice and, one may ask, why study Fair Trade from a theological perspective rather than focus on business ethics or economics? In this section I will offer my rationale for treating Fair Trade theologically. Firstly, I will indicate that Fair Trade was established by the churches in response to theological imperatives. Secondly, I point out that the Church continues to influence the Fair Trade

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<sup>17</sup> As discussed in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.

<sup>18</sup> As discussed in Section 3.4.

movement through the work of Christian FTOs and thirdly, I argue that theology plays an ongoing role in Fair Trade through the theologising of churchgoing activists.

Fair Trade was founded by the churches. The pioneering organisations which they established to take forward the concept were themselves inspired by theological insight. The first example of, what we would now term, an FTO is the American retailer, Ten Thousand Villages, which was set up by the Mennonite church in 1946 (Nicholls and Opal 2005, pp.65-6). The organisation was established on a 'not for profit basis' and works with poor communities to provide a market for the handicraft goods that they produce. The founding principles of Ten Thousand Villages include a commitment to promoting a message consistent with Christian ethics. In the UK, the first FTO was established in 1974 by the Evangelical Alliance. Tearcraft also specialised in handicrafts and paid workers in poor communities a fair price for their goods, so that they could provide for their basic needs and those of their families (Hughes and Bennett 1998, pp.171-2). Dewi Hughes, a theological advisor to Tear Fund,<sup>19</sup> states that the aim of Tearcraft is 'to live out the biblical emphasis on giving the poor the opportunity to work themselves out of poverty. It also expresses the biblical concern that all are treated justly' (Hughes and Bennett 1998, p.171). Tearcraft worked only with producer groups that were led by evangelical Christians. A desire to broaden the scope of Fair Trade to reach producer groups from a diversity of backgrounds led to the formation of Traidcraft. The foundation principles of Traidcraft declare that 'Traidcraft is a Christian response to poverty' (Johnson and Sugden 2001, p.152) and they describe the work of the organisation with reference to the Kingdom of God and the stewardship of God's creation (Johnson and Sugden 2001, pp.152-5). Northcott (2007, p.183) indicates that the model of Fair Trade pioneered by Traidcraft 'arose out of an understanding of the ethics of the New Testament and the command of Christ to "love your neighbour as yourself".' The most well-known facet of Fair Trade, Fair Trade certification, was set up under

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<sup>19</sup> The Evangelical Alliance's international development aid charity.

Christian auspices. The Fair Trade coffee company Max Havelaar was established in the Netherlands by the Christian NGO Solidaridad and the liberation theologian Frans van der Hoff Boersma (Northcott 2011a, p.106). Boersma lived alongside coffee growing communities in Mexico and witnessed the poverty caused by the collapse of world coffee markets. Boersma argues that the Fair Trade model ‘doesn’t create artificial commercial conditions, but rather new ones based on justice’ (cited in Northcott 2011a, p.106). Max Havelaar created the first form of Fair Trade certification and this facilitated the sale of Fair Trade products in mainstream retail outlets; Fair Trade sales were no longer limited to churches and small specialist shops (Waridel 2002, pp.95-7). Once Fair Trade began to move out into the mainstream, the Church did not evacuate the practice of Fair Trade, it continued to exert influence through the continued involvement of Christian FTOs and activists.

The pioneering FTOs, such as Traidcraft, continue to play a strong role in the Fair Trade movement by setting standards which go beyond the minimum required by Fair Trade certification. Many of the FTOs were able to scale up their activities by switching from a ‘not for profit’ to a commercial footing, whilst still retaining their commitment to the rights and wellbeing of producers. This fusion of viable business with ethical motivation and practice serves as a functioning alternative to mainstream business models (Hutchens 2010, pp.80-2). The role of the Church in upholding the ethical standards of Fair Trade does not only operate at an institutional level. Grassroots churchgoers act as advocates for Fair Trade. Traidcraft does supply to mainstream retail outlets but it is still reliant on the work of its network of ‘Fair Traders.’<sup>20</sup> The network is constituted largely by churchgoers selling to their congregations. Grassroots churchgoers not only promote Fair Trade within churches but, as I outline in Chapter 3, they also play a significant role in promoting the concept to a wide audience outside of the Church. In Chapter 3, I identify close links between churchgoing activists and FTOs, such as Traidcraft. These links serve to

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<sup>20</sup> For discussion of Traidcraft’s Fair Trade network, see Grant (2001).

keep the largely churchgoing activist base of Fair Trade in touch with forms of Fair Trade which are close to the original, theologically inspired, ideals of the movement.

Theology plays an ongoing role in the Fair Trade movement. The Traidcraft essayists (Johnson and Sugden 2001) discuss the theology which inspired the organisation and continues to guide its business practice and decision making.<sup>21</sup> Theological insight is not only important to the leaders of organisations, it also shapes the attitudes of churchgoing Fair Trade activists towards the concept of Fair Trade. In Chapter 4 of the thesis, I outline how the churchgoing activists understand the work that they carry out in promotion of Fair Trade in relation to theology. For this group of churchgoers, their involvement with Fair Trade is to a great extent theologically motivated. Indeed, they state that promoting Fair Trade is one of the ways in which they act out their faith. As I argue in Chapter 4, the churchgoers' understanding of Fair Trade as a form of biblical justice, and as a demonstration of Christian values, shapes their view of the nature of the practice. The Church established the first Fair Trade schemes with reference to theological insight. It continues to influence the Fair Trade movement through the work of Christian FTOs and grassroots churchgoers and the voice of Theology plays an ongoing role through the theologising of both the leaders of FTOs and activists.

### **The focus of the research**

Fair Trade action carried out by churchgoers is examined as a form of Public Theology to shed light on Fair Trade activism and on Public Theology. In investigating this specific form of Public Theology, I am looking at both its 'public' nature and its theological nature. I shall now briefly outline the key questions that I wish to investigate. In terms of the public nature, I am seeking to answer the question: in what ways is Fair Trade action by churches

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<sup>21</sup> For the twenty-first anniversary of the establishment of Traidcraft, senior staff and trustees wrote a series of essays reflecting on the work of the organisation (Johnson and Sugden 2001).



‘public’? How does it reach out to the local community and what sectors of the community does it engage with? How then does the activity at a community level link with the wider Fair Trade movement and national and international actions for social justice? I bring the findings about the public nature of the action into conversation with my investigation into the theology of the churchgoers in relation to Fair Trade. The questions that I seek to answer are: to what extent do the Fair Trade activists explain what they do with reference to theology? What are their sources of inspiration and how does their support for Fair Trade fit with their wider theological beliefs, for example with their conception of the Kingdom of God? Finally, how does this theological outlook on Fair Trade shape their understanding of the Fair Trade concept, and hence, the nature of the work that they carry out?

In electing to focus this study on Fair Trade as illustration of Public Theology in practice, I am not indicating that Fair Trade is in any way a definitive example or the most preferable means of demonstrating the public relevance of faith. There are many other examples of widely known projects which originated by the inspiration of theological insight and have gone on to achieve wide public recognition: the provision of foodbanks, the hospice movement, or the work of organisations such as Christian Aid or the Jubilee Debt Campaign, to name a few. To some extent, all of the listed actions fulfil the essential criteria for my research which requires that the action under study is an example of ‘successful’ Public Theology; in that it originated from theological reflection and has moved out to reach a significant audience outside of academia and the Church. When I first became acquainted with the literature of Public Theology, I tried to form a picture in my mind of what Public Theology ‘looks like’, or might look like, in practice. Time and time again I came back to Fair Trade. It appeared to fulfil the criteria for a Public Theology and it came to mind so often because it is familiar to my own experience. My voluntary work as Coordinator of Fairtrade Yorkshire involves liaison with churchgoers who constitute the majority of the activist body in the region. My experience enables me to identify the pertinent in the research data and that includes aspects of church action for Fair Trade which fall short of serving as effective Public Theology. The action is a suitable

subject for study because of its engagement with ‘the world’ and the risks that this entails. Hence, Fair Trade action by churches can serve as illustration of both strengths and pitfalls of doing Public Theology. Although my own involvement in the action brings strength in being able to identify the pertinent, it also initiates a call for vigilance in working to high standards of reflexivity.<sup>22</sup>

Rather than focus on the involvement of Church leadership and top-level decision making on Fair Trade action by churches, my research examines the interpretations of the churchgoers who are involved in the action at a grassroots level. Two arguments have led me to decide on this focus. Firstly, the nature of Fair Trade action by churches as a grassroots movement cannot be fully understood without reference to the activists who carry out the action. I am interested in how the activists themselves interpret the action that they are carrying out in the light of their faith. Secondly, I have chosen to focus on research at the micro-level because of the argument, prevalent within the discourse of Public Theology, that Public Theology should not be confined to the Church leadership and academy but involve congregations (see, for example: Kim 2011, p.232). The implication of this is that churchgoers should not only be involved in the publicity of Public Theology, but that they should also be doing theology; personal and congregational theologising should all contribute to the action of Public Theology. To inform this aim, it is pertinent to offer an example of what grassroots church involvement in a form of Public Theology does, and does not, look like, including reference to the difficulties faced in attempting to demonstrate the public relevance of faith.

Another unusual aspect of this research is its emphasis on Public Theology as praxis. Public Theology is often considered as a discipline concerned with the work of theologians or Church leaders. In this understanding, it is the theologian or senior Church figure who carries out the work of generating theological insight and this is then disseminated, perhaps through the infrastructure of the media, to generate debate with a

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<sup>22</sup> This is discussed in the methodology chapter, Sub-Section 1.3.5.

wide audience. The insight may not even reach a mass audience as it could input into top-level policy discussions and its impact be achieved as part of a secular policy discourse. Indeed, much Public Theology may well look like this. However, for this thesis I wanted to focus on Public Theology as ecclesial theology, with the process of Public Theology involving members of congregations. This poses a problem in that theologians and Church leaders are in the business of generating theses and policy documents, which the researcher of Public Theology can access and analyse. The person in the pew does not set out the results of their theologising in such a manner. However, theology is speaking into the public realm, not only in the form of what Church leaders have to say, but in the form of what churchgoers do. Cloke and Beaumont (2012, p.43) identify a growing emphasis on praxis as part of a renewed role for the Church in the public realm, indicating that:

Christians are being encouraged to discover the meaning of faith in its practice, not just hearers of the word, but doers of the word, and in so doing the word is fleshed out in the context of contemporary circumstances.

This thesis contributes to the examination of Christian praxis but with a specific focus on the ways in which the praxis engages with a wide public; the publicity of the praxis as contribution to Public Theology.

### **The literature with which the research engages**

The focus of the research, on Fair Trade action by churches as a form of Public Theology, has to be carried out in conversation with multiple bodies of knowledge. As I have described above, the research makes a contribution to the discourse of Public Theology and therefore has to engage with the literature of the discourse. The work of academic public theologians is often carried out in conversation with analysis from disciplines outside of theology. My research engages with some of these conversation partners, particularly with analyses of the nature of the public realm from the social sciences and philosophy. In the same manner, the research contributes to the body of knowledge on Fair Trade and is therefore

engaged with analyses of Fair Trade from social scientific and historical perspectives. In the first and second sub-sections, I shall briefly outline some of the key sources from the bodies of knowledge with which I engage. In the third sub-section I shall refer to the small body of theological reflection on Fair Trade. Although fragmentary in nature, this provides pertinent insight to bring into conversation with the testimonies of the research participants.

### The discourse of Public Theology

The literature of Public Theology constitutes a key conversation partner for my research. It is clearly necessary for me to engage with those theologians who self-identify as public theologians and those who contribute to the *International Journal of Public Theology*. These theologians form the core of the discourse but I draw the boundaries of the discourse widely to embrace other theologians with whom the public theologians are in conversation. This includes two theologians whose work has had a great impact on theology in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries: Bonhoeffer (1955) and Moltmann (1967; 1974; 1990; 1999). Bonhoeffer and Moltmann have much to say on the engagement of theology with the public realm and this can contribute to contemporary discussion of Public Theology. There are also contemporary contributors to the discussion on the relationship between theology and public life, who do not self-identify as public theologians, but who nevertheless contribute valuable insight to the discourse and enrich the quality of the debate. In this category I would include Milbank (2006a; 2006b) and Matthewes (2007) who fulfil the role of interlocutors for the discourse, adding a necessary dose of suspicion. The discourse of Public Theology is largely characterised by debate as to the possibilities for engagement with a wide public and the need to maintain a distinctively theological voice in carrying out this engagement. The language with which Public Theology speaks and the threat of absorption of theology by powerful cultural forces within society are key points of debate. This research closely engages with these debates, and the

paradoxical elements which underpin them play a significant role in the argument in this thesis.

The discourse of Public Theology contains discussion of the nature of the public realm and this is carried out in conversation with social scientific analysis and philosophical commentary. Kim (2011, pp.10-26), for example, bases his outline on the nature of Public Theology on Habermas' analysis of the public sphere. Habermas' understanding of a public sphere under threat from the dominant forces of state and market shapes Kim's theological response, which centres on the contribution of the Church to building space for public debate. Another interpretation of what is taking place in the public arena is provided by the discourse of social capital and this has drawn the attention of a number of public theologians (for example: Baker 2009b, pp.47-53; Billings 2009, pp.27-31 and 36-42). Putnam (2000, pp.65-79), who has developed the concept of social capital, draws attention to the key role of religious communities as generators of social capital. The concept has been taken further by reference to religious and to spiritual capital and they provide a useful conceptual tool with which to analyse the role of theology in the public realm (Atherton et al 2011, pp.96-104; Baker 2007; Baker and Miles-Watson 2008). As a contribution to Public Theology, this thesis discusses different understandings of the term 'public' and how they have a bearing on interpreting Fair Trade action by churches. Hence, conversation partners of the discourse of Public Theology, such as Habermas (1989) and Putnam (2000), are also key voices with which this research engages.

#### Social scientific and historical commentary on Fair Trade

The research offers contribution to the understanding of the nature of support for Fair Trade and hence engages with social scientific commentary on Fair Trade activist support in the global north (for example: Nicholls and Opal 2005; Wheeler 2012). The issue of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade has dominated debate within the social scientific commentary. This issue is pertinent to my research, possessing a bearing on the role of theology in the

practice of Fair Trade. The increased involvement of commercial organisations in the practice of Fair Trade has, to some extent, threatened the original theologically inspired ideals of Fair Trade. It is important therefore for this research to interact with analysis of, and commentary on, the process of Fair Trade mainstreaming (for example: Goodman et al 2012; Jaffee 2011). In addition to the social scientific commentary on Fair Trade, I also draw on the work of Matthew Anderson who has studied the Fair Trade movement in the UK from a historical perspective. Anderson's recent 'A history of Fair Trade in contemporary Britain' (Anderson 2015) has acknowledged the contribution of Church organisations and churchgoers to the Fair Trade movement to a far greater extent than much of the previous commentary. Anderson concentrates on the macro-level and gives an overview of the nature of Fair Trade support in the UK. His work offers insights which are pertinent to my micro-level research, providing historical context to my local and particular study of the understandings of churchgoers who are involved in Fair Trade activism.

### The theology of Fair Trade

A third body of literature, with which my research engages, is theological reflection on Fair Trade. This literature is relatively sparse and fragmentary in nature; however, four theologians have made contribution to the theological location of Fair Trade. Unlike my own study, none of these contributions has a qualitative research element, rather they represent a bringing together of theology and general observation of the Fair Trade movement or the practice of Fair Trade. This provides useful insight with which to bring the voices of the churchgoers in my study into conversation. The work of Michael Northcott (2007; 2011a; 2011b) on Fair Trade emphasises its distinct difference from mainstream practice, it is a counter-cultural activity at odds with market logic. Luke Bretherton (2010, pp.175-209) is also wary of the influence of the market. He offers Fair Trade as one of three case studies analysing the role of Christians in political life, with an emphasis on faithful witness. He describes Fair Trade as political

consumption, providing pertinent warnings of the vulnerability of Christian witness in society to the dominant power of the market. Roger Ruston (2004, pp.40-58) does not discuss the Fair Trade movement, however he does reflect on the nature of the concept of Fair Trade, drawing on the thinking of Aquinas. His conclusion: that Fair Trade can be framed as Christian obligation, provides a useful contribution to theological thought on Fair Trade and there is resonance between his conclusion and the understanding of the participants in my study. Robert Song (2004) stresses the Eucharistic nature of Fair Trade, highlighting its role as witness to a different future; another reflection which has resonance with the statements of some of the churchgoers. In addition to the work of these four theologians, a source of theological reflection which has proved pertinent to my research is the series of essays written by trustees and board members of the Christian FTO, Traidcraft (Johnson and Sugden 2001). They reflect on the practice of the organisation in the light of the theology that informs it. None of the contributors to the theology of Fair Trade set out to research what the churchgoing activists themselves think that they are doing in carrying out their action. Therefore, there is no one significant contribution in the field with which to interact. However, drawing upon the fragmentary, but pertinent, insights of the small number of theologians who have engaged with the concept of Fair Trade can assist me in my task of bringing theology into conversation with the testimonies of the churchgoers.

### **Thesis Outline**

My research analysis involves the bringing into conversation of the voices of the participants in my study with the three sources of scholarship described above. I aim to hold together these voices in conversation throughout my analysis. Therefore, the reader will not find the familiar thesis layout, which might consist of a division of the thesis between an outline of a discourse and its major contributors, a discrete description of research data and a separate section for analysis. As I have adopted a dialogical approach to my research, I have elected to hold together all the

voices and discourses in conversation in each thematic chapter. Following an outline of the methodology (Chapter 1) and a context chapter (Chapter 2), the remainder of the thesis takes the form of a bringing into conversation of the testimonies of the research participants with the discourse of Public Theology and interpretations of the contemporary situation from disciplines outside of theology.

Chapter 2 serves as a context chapter, describing both Fair Trade and Public Theology before analysis of the voices of the research participants is introduced. Rather than a purely descriptive approach, Chapter 2 offers characterisation of both Fair Trade and Public Theology in terms of the paradoxical emphases of the *engaged* and the *distinctive*. I stress the difference between the two emphases but also indicate that both are necessary for the functioning of Fair Trade and Public Theology. For Fair Trade, and all Public Theology, a holding in tension is required between *engaged* and *distinctive* emphases. This characterisation of Public Theology as a holding in tension of paradoxical emphases has an important role in the thesis and is referred to at stages throughout. The characterisation not only serves as description of Public Theology, it is also a tool of analysis to better understand the issues of contention within the discourse. The understanding of both Fair Trade and Public Theology as a holding in tension, points the way forward for Fair Trade action by churches and for the practice of Public Theology.

Through examination of Fair Trade action by churches as Public Theology, both the 'public' nature of the Public Theology and its theological nature will be investigated. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the public nature of the action, looking particularly at the networks that the participants interact with in their work on Fair Trade. Church-based and secular networks are utilised at community, national and international levels. Differing interpretations of 'public' are discussed in the chapter in relation to the variety of roles that Fair Trade action by churches fulfils in the public realm. The emphasis of social capital is on cooperation, achieved by strengthening bonds between diverse parties in society, whereas interpretations which highlight the contested nature of public space may well be associated with



strategies of resistance. I highlight reference to both cooperation and resistance within the testimonies of the participants, reflecting the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive. Fair Trade action by churches can be described in terms of social capital, particularly in relation to the Fair Trade Town scheme, which seeks to bring together diverse parties in a community. However, the participants' negative attitudes towards contemporary society indicate that Fair Trade action by churches cannot be described purely in terms of a coming together in cooperation. There is a role also for challenge of prevailing attitudes, and this challenge may engender division as much as it brings about the strengthening of bonds.

Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to examining the theological nature of this act of Public Theology. I investigate the theology of the churchgoers in relation to Fair Trade, looking at their sources of inspiration and how they understand their support for Fair Trade as fitting with their wider theological beliefs. In Chapter 4, I indicate that the theologising of the churchgoers shapes their understanding of the concept of Fair Trade in particular ways. Firstly, that they understand Fair Trade as justice and their conception of justice is in great part derived from biblical explanations of justice. Secondly, the churchgoers look upon the action that they carry out for Fair Trade as demonstration of Christian principles. Both the engaged and distinctive emphases are required for the Fair Trade action to serve as effective demonstration; it must be genuinely engaged with a wide audience and must live up to the principles that it claims to demonstrate. I relate the findings to the concept of the 'dual role' of Fair Trade in serving as practical outworking of a different form of trading and as a 'protest tool' denouncing the injustice of mainstream trade and urging change.<sup>23</sup> Chapter 5 is devoted to discussion of the theology of the churchgoers in relation to the Kingdom of God and the outlook of the participants is brought into conversation with Bretherton's (2010, pp.175-209) framing of Fair Trade. For these churchgoers, Fair Trade offers foretaste, or a contribution towards the

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<sup>23</sup> Bruce Crowther, founder of the Fair Trade Towns movement, describes Fair Trade as a 'protest tool'; quoted in Nicholls and Opal (2005, p.4).

building, of the Kingdom of God. In comparing the churchgoers' testimonies to the views of Bretherton, I identify two major points of difference. The churchgoers do not share Bretherton's concern to delineate Fair Trade as a 'provisional' concern and, whereas Bretherton's framing of Fair Trade as political consumerism places its emphasis on Christians acting as individuals, the churchgoers are more concerned with the collective action of believers acting as church. The churchgoers place a greater emphasis on engagement than does Bretherton; however, they share his concern that theology is vulnerable to dilution by powerful market forces. I indicate that the churchgoers are articulating a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology, so that Fair Trade can fulfil its role in demonstrating the values of the Kingdom of God.

The remaining chapters, 6,7 and 8, explore issues pertinent to all Public Theology and which constitute the key sources of contestation within the discourse. These chapters all shed light on the implications of a Public Theology which successfully breaks out of the confines of academia and Church leadership. Chapter 6 looks at the relationship between Christian and secular actors in the promotion of Fair Trade. I discuss the participants' support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade, but set this in relation to their view that Fair Trade action by churches should serve as demonstration of the true nature of Church. Tension between secular presentation and a distinctive witness can be resolved, in part, by an understanding of Fair Trade as translation of theological principles into a language that is widely understood. Chapter 7 unpacks this understanding of Fair Trade as translation, suggesting some valuable lessons for the discourse of Public Theology in maintaining acts of translation, that are genuinely engaged, but that also retain their distinctive theological message. I discuss the process of translation, arguing that it should be both dialogical and ongoing. I highlight the need for a distinctive message, enabled by the ability of theology to maintain contact with the translated concept. This link can only be maintained by the embedding of the action of Public Theology within the life of the Church. A significant task for Public Theology is to persuade churchgoers of the public relevance of their faith and this can only be

achieved by cultivating a fluency in speaking of public issues in the language of faith.

Chapter 8 focuses on the mainstreaming of Fair Trade and this serves as an illustration of the changing narrative of a translated concept over time. The mainstreaming of Fair Trade can be seen as a form of successful Public Theology in action. It represents the wide recognition of a theologically inspired concept which has moved out from the Church to influence diverse audiences, including sections of the mainstream market. However, I also point out the participants' concerns regarding the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. These fears highlight a danger that, over time, the distinctive theological message of Fair Trade could be lost. This has resonance with some of the warnings from theologians regarding the loss of distinctive witness in the process of translation of theology into a language widely understood. I draw on Anderson's (2013) challenging of the linear narrative of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, to make the case that the loss of the original theological voice is not an inevitable process. Vigilance is required to ensure that the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology are in balance. As an ongoing dialogical process, the translation of theological insight into a publicly accessible language can inspire a wide audience without loss of the original meaning, but this will require the active involvement of the Church.

I conclude the thesis with an outline of the contribution that the research has made to the academic description of the Fair Trade movement. In particular, highlighting the nature of church support for Fair Trade and the ways in which the Christian background of supporters may influence their understanding of the concept of Fair Trade and the movement. I then set out the conclusions that can be drawn from this in-depth study of one specific example of Public Theology, in order to better describe what it means to uphold the voice of theology in the public realm. Utilising these conclusions, I offer some thoughts on the future for Public Theology in the contemporary 'post-truth' environment of public debate. I draw the thesis to a close with suggestions for future research for Public Theology.

## **Conclusion**

My examination of Fair Trade action by churches as a form of Public Theology can shed light on both the nature of Fair Trade activism and contribute to the discourse of Public Theology more generally. The research is focussed at the grassroots, investigating how those churchgoers who carry out action for Fair Trade interpret what they are doing. As grassroots Public Theology, Fair Trade action by churches is Christian praxis. There is an emphasis in my research on what the participants *do* as well as what they *believe* and I stress the intimate connection between the two. My research questions investigate both the ‘public’ nature of Fair Trade action by churches and its theological nature. In terms of the ‘public’ nature, I look at how the action engages a wide cross-section of the local community and then effectively links this local action with partners at national and international levels. However, Public Theology must not only engage with a wide public, it must do so whilst remaining true to theological insight. This research therefore investigates how far the church based Fair Trade activists understand what they do as a theological act. I look at the sources of inspiration and how their support for Fair Trade fits with their wider theological beliefs. My analysis indicates that the theological outlook of the churchgoers shapes their understanding of the concept of Fair Trade. The churchgoers interpret Fair Trade as action for justice and as a demonstration of Christian principles. These interpretations are closely related to the churchgoers’ outlook on Fair Trade offering foretaste of, or contribution towards building, the Kingdom of God. Their views on the Kingdom of God represent a holding in balance between finding the Kingdom in the midst of the world and vigilance to guard that the theological values that underpin Fair Trade are not subsumed by the ‘worldly’ powers of the market.

I argue that both Fair Trade and Public Theology are characterised by the holding in tension of the paradoxical emphases of the ‘engaged’ and the ‘distinctive.’ Fair Trade action by churches must be *engaged* with a wide audience outside of Church circles. However, in that engagement, the action must stand as a *distinctive* alternative to the paradigms of the

mainstream. My research analysis uses the conceptual framework of the engaged and the distinctive to better understand the nature of support for Fair Trade and Public Theology. For the discourse of Public Theology, Fair Trade action by churches can serve as an example of the practical outworking of a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases. Nowhere is this more evident than in discussion of the language with which Public Theology speaks. I examine the secular presentation of Fair Trade as a form of translated theological concept and this sheds light on the process of translation. The research offers detailed example of the strengths, and some of the dangers, of the translation of theology into a language accessible to a wide audience. This is illustrated vividly in my discussion of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. In the process of mainstreaming theology has, to some extent, lost contact with the translated concept. This can be rectified but only by means of the active involvement of the Church. There are lessons for Public Theology: indicating just what it takes for theology to successfully engage with a wide audience outside of the Church, whilst at the same time serving as a call for vigilance to protect the distinctive values which serve as the true gift of Public Theology to the wider world.

## **Chapter 1: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will explain the methodology of my research, a methodology which in many ways offers an innovative approach. The concept of Public Theology has been extensively examined and commented upon by theologians; however, my research is unusual in subjecting Public Theology to empirical research. What is more, the focus of the research is at a micro-level, investigating the actions and attitudes of churchgoers involved in a particular form of Public Theology. Public Theology is often discussed in terms of Church leaders and the academia but this project takes seriously the prospect of a Public Theology which involves church congregations. Hence, a major task for the research is to analyse the actions and the God-talk of grassroots churchgoers. My decision to study Public Theology based on the experiences and accounts of members of congregations has strongly influenced my choice of methodology; the utilisation of the interpretations and techniques of Ordinary Theology. My methodology is pioneering in the way in which it uses Ordinary Theology to test Public Theology. However, the voices of the churchgoers are not the sole and ultimate authority for this research. The techniques for the study of Ordinary Theology require that the God-talk of ordinary theologians is brought into conversation with the texts and traditions of the Church. This facilitates a critical testing of Public Theology, but one which is faithful to theology and to the Church.

In Section 1.1, I indicate the ways in which my methodology is shaped by the context of Public Theology. The conversation at the heart of Public Theology influences my research, in that theology is brought into a relationship of mutual interrogation with analysis of the contemporary situation. The interdisciplinary nature of Public Theology; its balancing of critical inquiry with faithfulness to the traditions of the Church; and the requirement to be attentive to the actions and voices of churchgoers in the study of a mass form of Public Theology, are all discussed as ways in which

the Public Theology context shapes my methodology. In Section 1.2, I indicate how these assumptions shaped by the context of my research, go on to inform my choice of methodology: the approach of Ordinary Theology. The context and the methodology in turn shape the method of the research and in section 1.3, I explain my choice of method with reference to these influences. The stages of the research are detailed and I discuss issues surrounding the ability to generalise from the research findings and potential concerns regarding the values and prejudgements of the researcher. Finally, I discuss the impact and dissemination of the research, suggesting that this project is an example of doing theology ‘in public.’

## **1.1 The methodology and the context of Public Theology**

### 1.1.1 The context of Public Theology

In this sub-section, I will outline the basic nature of Public Theology and the methodological assumptions which proceed from this. Tracy (1981, p.340), whose thinking has proved highly influential in the discourse of Public Theology, states: ‘An interpretation of the Christ event in dialectical correlation to an interpretation of the situation remains [...] the primary task of every Christian theologian.’ My task in this study is to interpret Christian teaching in the light of the interpretation of a contemporary situation, in the form of Fair Trade action by churches. As this is a correlative relationship, both Christian theology and the interpretation of the contemporary situation are subject to change by the encounter. Kim (2011, p.3) stresses the centrality of dialogue in Public Theology, defining the discourse as ‘Christians engaging in dialogue with those outside church circles.’ The reference to dialogue underlines the two-way nature of the process. The bringing together of theology with an audience outside of church circles must be characterised by both sides listening to what is being said and then offering reply in the light of the conversation.<sup>1</sup> For theology, it requires

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed in Section 2.1.

openness to debate and a willingness to change, renewed in the light of its encounters with the world outside of the Church.

This emphasis on conversation within Public Theology shapes the methodology of my research. I am bringing together theology and analysis of a contemporary situation in a relationship of mutual interrogation. This is not simply ‘a bringing to bear’ of theology onto the practice of Fair Trade; rather, it represents an enrichment of both theology and the study of Fair Trade as a result of the mutual encounter. In the spirit of the conversation, this research does not position theology as immutable, a gold standard by which to judge other forms of knowledge, rather theology is open to the possibility of being changed in its encounter with conversations partners from outside of the tradition. Public Theology by its nature seeks to bring theology into contact with other academic disciplines and it is to the interdisciplinary nature of my research that I turn to next.

### 1.1.2 The interdisciplinary nature of the research

Drawing on Tracy’s (1981, p.340) description of theology, the relationship between theology and the contemporary situation can be understood as being at the heart of Public Theology. Therefore, it is vital for my research that I understand the nature of the contemporary situation of church action for Fair Trade. My research employs qualitative methods associated with the social sciences and my examination of the contemporary situation also requires recourse to interpretations formed outside of the discipline of theology. In the introduction to the thesis, I indicated that an aim of the research is to investigate the ‘public nature’ of the Fair Trade action. This requires an understanding of what is taking place in the public realm, and hence, my research brings theology into conversation with interpretations of the nature of the public realm from the social sciences and political philosophy. My research is also in conversation with scholarly commentary on Fair Trade, which has been produced from social scientific and historical perspectives. Public Theology enters into conversation with other academic disciplines with the aim of producing a theology that is



relevant to society, by testing theology against analyses of the contemporary situation. As my research is an act of Public Theology in itself, bringing theology and the contemporary situation into a relationship of mutual interrogation, it has to be interdisciplinary research.

### 1.1.3 Critical faithfulness

Thus far, I have stressed the open nature of Public Theology; its willingness to interact with parties outside of Church circles and preparedness to be changed in its encounters. As I shall indicate in Chapter 2, this open attitude, with its emphasis on theology's engagement with a wide audience, does not provide the full picture. I describe Public Theology as a holding in tension of two paradoxical emphases. One of these emphases stresses the open nature of Public Theology. However, within the literature of Public Theology there are many warnings that engagement can lead to a dilution of theology, a loss of its *distinctive* voice. In the process of engaging with a wide audience outside of the Church, theology can become more like the society with which it is engaged. The Church may begin to closely resemble 'the world' and its role in offering critique and an alternative to mainstream society may be lost. Hence, Public Theology cannot only strive for *engagement*, it must do so whilst being mindful of its *distinctive* nature. This balancing of *engaged* and *distinctive* emphases plays a significant role in my analysis of Fair Trade action by churches. It is pertinent to this methodology chapter as my research, as an act of Public Theology, must also seek to balance the *engaged* with the *distinctive*. My research is conducted in open inquiry, engaged with disciplines outside of theology but it is also respectful to the texts and traditions of the Church. Heeding the words of warning within the literature of Public Theology (see, for example: Bedford-Strohm 2007, p.246; Brown et al 2012; Forrester 2004), I do not wish to see theology undermined or diluted in its encounter with the contemporary situation. I believe that true engagement between theology and the knowledge of other academic disciplines can be mutually enriching and that theology can only be made relevant for a wide audience

by means of a dialogical relationship. However, these encounters do require vigilance, to ensure that the unique contributions which theology has to offer as a gift to wider society remain recognisable as a Christian voice.

Swinton and Mowatt (2006, pp.93-4) describe a holding in tension between critical inquiry and faithfulness to the traditions of the Church as ‘critical faithfulness.’ This acknowledges the divine inspiration of Scripture, whilst recognising that scriptural interpretation is embedded within specific contexts. Insight can be found in the critical dialogue between the texts and traditions of the Church and analysis of the contemporary situation. Green (1990, p.77) articulates the need for anyone engaged in theological reflection to acknowledge the tension between ‘faithfulness to the text of the tradition on the one hand, and contemporary relevance on the other.’ This tension is at the heart of my methodological approach and my research can be said to be carried out in the spirit of critical faithfulness. The research is ‘critical’ in that I am committed to open inquiry and an analysis of the contemporary situation, drawing upon multiple disciplines. Theology will be tested against these other forms of knowledge. Yet the research is also ‘faithful’, in that it is respectful of the texts and traditions of the Church, indicating their relevance to contemporary life. In doing so, I endeavour that description of the distinctive nature of faith is not lost.

#### 1.1.4 Understanding the actions and voices of churchgoers.

At a fundamental level, my research values the action and voice of grassroots churchgoers. I have endeavoured to respect their voice; subjecting it to testing by other conversation partners in the research, but also vigilant against it being undermined in the process. A key question for the discourse of Public Theology is: who does Public Theology? Many forms of activity deemed as acts of Public Theology do not reach beyond the confines of the academy or Church leadership. I believe that the participation of grassroots churchgoers is vital to establishing forms of Public Theology which have a wide public reach. However, members of

congregations are not given sufficient attention in the discourse of Public Theology. In order to recognise the contribution of churchgoers, a refocussing is needed towards micro-level investigation. As this research reveals, the process is not straightforward and there are pitfalls along the road towards creating a Public Theology involving congregations. However, I declare from the outset that I understand theology to be something that members of congregations do, and that ‘going public’ with that theology is open to, and desirable for, all people of faith in plural society.

I have stressed the importance of my focus on churchgoers and congregations; it remains for me to explain my reference to both ‘actions’ and ‘voices.’ In Section 4.2, I discuss the emphasis that the churchgoing participants place on faith as praxis. The theology of the churchgoers is inextricably linked with the action that they carry out. For these churchgoers, action for social justice is not an addition to faith, nor something which it merely encourages, it is an integral expression of faith. Hence, Public Theology can be as much about action as it is about reflection or pronouncement. This research seeks to examine the action of grassroots churchgoers and describe the links between this action and theology. The voice of the churchgoers serves to explain what those who are involved in the action of Fair Trade think that they are doing and how this action relates to their faith. The requirement to be attentive to the voice and actions of churchgoers plays a major part in my choice of methodology for this research: the approach of Ordinary Theology.

### **1.2 The methodology: Ordinary Theology**

The methodology of the research is innovative in the way in which it examines Public Theology by means of the study of Ordinary Theology. Public Theology is, in a sense, being tested by the voices of grassroots churchgoers; a necessary action if we are to take seriously the potential of Public Theology to achieve wide public impact by involving congregations in its support. Both the subjecting of Public Theology to empirical testing

and the examination of Public Theology from a grassroots perspective are unusual. This methodology is utilised to view Public Theology from a new angle and, as a result, produces fresh insight into the nature of Public Theology. In this section, I offer an introduction to Ordinary Theology (Sub-Section 1.2.1), before outlining the reasons why Ordinary Theology provides a suitable methodology for the study of Public Theology (Sub-Section 1.2.2).

### 1.2.1 Introduction to Ordinary Theology

Astley (2002, p.1) defines Ordinary Theology as ‘the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education.’ The aim of the approach is to analyse and learn from the theology of the grassroots churchgoer. The study of Ordinary Theology involves a testing of the God-talk of the churchgoer by the traditions and texts of the Church (Astley 2002, pp.103-4). According to Astley (2002, pp.103-4 and 108-9), the theology of ordinary churchgoers deserves to be treated just as other forms of theology, in that it should be subjected to critical study in the light of the norms of Christian belief. Astley (2002, pp.112-14) points out that the theology of the researcher plays a vital role in conducting the research, as it is needed to identify the pertinent within the God-talk of the churchgoer. All description of a subject’s theology will, by necessity, take the form of a dialogue between the subject’s theology and that of the researcher (Astley 2002, p.109). The hermeneutical nature of the process is acknowledged and, rather than bracket out prejudgements, the researcher reflects upon them and utilises them to the benefit of the research process. The dialogical and hermeneutical aspects of Ordinary Theology allow for a rigorous analysis of the accounts of churchgoers; without this there is a danger that their statements are accepted at face value, with little scope for evaluation of what is being said. As Astley (2002, p.122) indicates: ‘studying a person’s ordinary theology is *not* the same as agreeing with it.’ Indeed, the study of Ordinary Theology has placed a concentration on

revising practice, not only as a result of the Church learning from the strengths of the content of ordinary theologies, but also learning from where it falls short. Cartledge (2010) views the ability to identify suggestions for correction and revision in church practice as a key outcome of the process of ordinary theological analysis.

### 1.2.2 Ordinary Theology and Public Theology

In highlighting the appropriateness of using Ordinary Theology to test Public Theology, I will return to discussion of the assumptions which follow from the Public Theology context of my research (as detailed in Section 1.1). For the correlative nature of my research, its interdisciplinarity, critical faithfulness and commitment to understanding the actions and voices of churchgoers, I will indicate the suitability of my choice of methodology.

As I have described in Sub-Section 1.1.1, Public Theology is bringing theology into a correlative relationship with the contemporary situation. The study of Ordinary Theology can be said to be carrying out this same task, in that it is bringing the texts and traditions of the Christian faith into a relationship of mutual testing with the contemporary situation as embodied in the practice and God-talk of the believer. The dialogical nature of the study of Ordinary Theology renders it a fitting partner for the discourse of Public Theology. For Fair Trade action by churches, the methodology of Ordinary Theology enables me to investigate how the deeply held beliefs of churchgoing Fair Trade activists are embodied in the action that they carry out in church and in their daily lives. This is then brought into conversation with the traditions and texts of the Church, including the discourse of Public Theology.

Ordinary Theology's focus on the embodiment of faith in the daily lives of churchgoers is fitting for the study of a theologically inspired action for social justice, such as Fair Trade. In order to test Public Theology, I need to fully describe the ways in which this embodiment can be understood as 'public.' This will require an augmentation of Ordinary Theology with

interpretations of the nature of public life from disciplines outside of Theology, particularly the social sciences and philosophy. The churchgoers' descriptions of the embodiment of Fair Trade in their daily lives and worship are brought into conversation with interpretations of social life and of the Fair Trade movement. To offer a full picture of Fair Trade action by churches, the action must be set in the context of the wider Fair Trade movement. The movement is the subject of social scientific and historical study and this body of interpretation is a valuable conversation partner for this research.

The methodology of Ordinary Theology assists in my commitment to critical faithfulness. Ordinary Theology is a critical approach; analysis of the voice of churchgoers is used to test Theology. However, the God-talk of the person in the pew is not the standard against which other forms of knowledge are found wanting. As indicated in the previous sub-section, an integral part of the process of Ordinary Theology is in bringing the views of the churchgoer into conversation with the texts and the traditions of the Church. The analysis of the testimonies of churchgoers is not used as a stick with which to beat Public Theology. Rather, the voice of the churchgoers is a conversation partner with the existing body of knowledge on Public Theology. This research contextualises the God-talk of ordinary theologians within the traditions and texts of the Church, ensuring that the voice of theology will not be lost in the process.

In analysis of Fair Trade support, the ordinary churchgoers' understandings are vital because the movement has evolved largely from below; from laity, rather than clergy. As Astley (2002, p.162) argues, Ordinary Theology is the 'Church's front line' as it is lay beliefs that change first in response to a changing society; in listening to those beliefs the Church can formulate responses and learn how to change to become relevant to that society. Ordinary Theology is also pertinent to my research task given its emphasis on analysing, not just the churchgoers' expressions of doctrine, but also how their faith shapes, and is shaped, by their daily lives. As Astley (2002, p.20) states:

My faith cannot be properly described as mine unless it is rooted in my individual and communal commitments and acts: acts that are expressed and performed daily at my home and work and play, in my life choices and through the hard uphill slog of my flawed discipleship.

To understand church action for Fair Trade, it is this relationship between faith and the practice of daily living that needs to be examined; how Christian belief motivates the practice of Fair Trade support and, in its turn, how this practice contributes to the nature of the faith itself.

Ordinary Theology research has tended to focus on churchgoers' beliefs regarding doctrinal themes such as: Christology, Soteriology or Eschatology. So, it may come as a surprise to read of the methodology of Ordinary Theology being employed to examine Public Theology, particularly given my research focus on a specific *action* rather than a doctrinal area. My methodology challenges a narrow definition of Ordinary Theology which would limit it to matters of pure doctrine. To object to the application of Ordinary Theology to *action* is to impose too clear cut a distinction between belief and practice. As will be outlined in Chapter 4, the theology of the churchgoers and their support for Fair Trade is intimately linked. Theology is not only motivational but helps to shape their understanding of, and the nature of their support for, Fair Trade. The churchgoers' deeply held beliefs and the action that they carry out are locked together in a mutually reinforcing cycle. Faith motivates and informs action, the experience of which goes on to inform and enrich the faith of the churchgoers involved. Ordinary Theology plays its role in speaking into the discourse of Public Theology by examining the faith of the person in the pew; a faith which is integral to the action that they carry out as public witness. Having outlined my methodology and its appropriateness for the testing of Public Theology, I shall turn now to method, making explicit my choices with reference to my methodological assumptions and the methodology of Ordinary Theology.

## **1.3 Method**

### **1.3.1 Qualitative research**

As Silverman (2000, p.88) points out, the methodology of the research determines the choice of method. The bringing into conversation of analysis of a contemporary situation with theology requires the tools of social science, as theological descriptions of contemporary issues which do not engage with social scientific analysis can swiftly descend into the mere anecdotal. Astley (2002, pp.97-100) indicates that empirical research, both qualitative and quantitative, has a role to play in the study of Ordinary Theology. To best describe the phenomenon of Fair Trade action by churches requires the rich descriptive approach that can be facilitated by qualitative research. It was my intention from the initial research design that this exploration should generate new insights into the nature of church support for Fair Trade and of Public Theology. This generation of theory and new courses of action is identified as an important function of qualitative research (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, p.52). To best understand what is taking place in church action for Fair Trade I need to analyse what the participants themselves understand they are doing. Blaikie (2000, p.251) talks of a commitment within qualitative research to explore the viewpoint of those social actors who are being studied. This is a form of giving voice to the research participants and is an attempt to achieve understanding by means of identifying the participant group's own frames of meaning.

As my methodology involves a bringing into conversation of contemporary situation, Church tradition, and my own prejudgements as researcher, this requires a method that is capable of examining complex interaction. This is best suited to qualitative methods, as Swinton and Mowatt (2006, p.37) express: 'within qualitative research the quest is not for objectivity and explanation [...] but for *meaning* and a deeper *understanding* of situations.' A qualitative approach is needed to understand the subjective, complex and nuanced interpretations of the contemporary situation of



church Fair Trade action. My research focuses not only on the participants in the action but also on the local communities of which they are a part. To understand what is taking place requires an examination of the context of the Fair Trade action. Bryman (2004, p.287) indicates that analysis which requires an understanding of context is better suited to the qualitative approach, as opposed to quantitative studies which possesses a clearer focus on generating readily generalisable conclusions.

### 1.3.2 The case study

My research takes the form of a case study based on Fair Trade action by churches in the market town of Skipton, North Yorkshire. I elected for a case study approach as the research, in seeking to examine Fair Trade action as Public Theology, must focus on the ways in which the churches interrelate with a wide audience outside of Church circles. This includes the ability of churches to interact with diverse sectors of the local community in their work for Fair Trade. Therefore, I consider it important to examine the interrelation between Church and community in a defined geographical area. Blaikie (2000, p.215) points out that the case study is a means of organising data in a single social unit and this social unit is selected because its characteristics are fitting to the research question under investigation. The Skipton case study is apposite for my research as the town is a relatively cohesive community within an identifiable boundary. The churchgoers who are involved in the promotion of Fair Trade in the town tend to work together and the focus of their efforts to spread the message to the wider community is carried out largely under the auspices of the Skipton Fair Trade Town campaign. The impact of Fair Trade action by churches can therefore be assessed with reference to a specific geographical area. The use of the case study makes explicit the context in which the phenomenon under investigation is situated and is a tool best suited to the generation of ideographic knowledge. As Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.43) describe, the ideographic ‘presumes that meaningful knowledge can be discovered in unique, non-replicable experiences.’ The data is embedded

within a specific context and reference to this context assists to harbour nuance and complexity within the analysis. Alvesson (2002, p.125) points out that a major implication for the use of all interview results is that they cannot be wrenched out of the context in which they are gathered and presented as objective data. This flags up an important feature of both the case study, and of qualitative research as a whole; that its findings are not statistically generalisable.

### 1.3.3 Generalisation

Swinton and Mowat (2006, pp.46-9) discuss the problems associated with the generalisation of qualitative research. They admit that qualitative research findings cannot be readily transferred to other contexts, however this is not to say that they will not have resonance with those in situations which share similar characteristics. This resonance can challenge the ways in which situations are viewed. Swinton and Mowatt (2006, p.47) state that: 'qualitative research can therefore claim a degree of transferability insofar as it often raises issues and offers insights which reach beyond the particularities of the situation.' For example, Labanow (2006) describes a study of one church but states that the aim of the research is to offer general observation of the phenomenon of emergent churches by means of a detailed case study of one. The in-depth study of one case can produce findings which illuminate situations well beyond the confines of the locality by the utilisation of theoretical generalisation (Swinton and Mowatt, 2006, pp.48-9). There is no element of statistical replicability, rather the conceptual understandings uncovered by in-depth study can be applied to other contexts which share characteristics with the locality under study. For this research, the primary purpose of the collection and analysis of the rich interview data is to develop conceptual understandings regarding Fair Trade action by churches and the discourse of Public Theology. It is my intention that these conceptual understandings will have applicability well beyond the contexts in which the data has been gathered. The research is embedded within a specific geographical context but some of the findings will have

resonance, not only beyond the region in which the research was conducted, but also beyond the national setting. Church action for Fair Trade in the UK shares characteristics with similar action across many western countries and hence the findings may not be limited to a UK context.

The use of the single case study, although justified in terms of theoretical generalisation, does bring limitations to the research. Reference to the context of the research in the town of Skipton adds depth to the observations but it also highlights the particular nature of the locality. For example, Skipton is a market town in a rural setting and the majority of the population are middle-class.<sup>2</sup> Levels of diversity are relatively low. In the 2011 census for the Craven District (of which Skipton is the main town), 95% of the respondents identified themselves as part of the white British ethnic group (Office for National Statistics 2011b). This compares to the overall figure for England of 80%. Whereas 96% of the population of Craven was born in the United Kingdom; the figure for England as a whole is 86% (Office for National Statistics 2011c). In terms of religion, Christianity is predominant and the influence of the churches on the cultural life of the town is, as is the case in most market towns, much higher than in many urban areas. The 2011 census figures for Craven reveal that 67% of the respondents considered themselves to be Christian, as compared to 59% for England (Office for National Statistics 2011d). Those considering themselves to have no religion make up 23% of the population of Craven, which is not dissimilar to a national total for England of 25%. However, there is a large difference from the national total regarding those that state that they adhere to a religion other than Christianity. The figure for Craven is 2%, compared to a total for England of 8%. As I describe in Sub-Section 6.3.1, the churchgoing participants are mindful of other religions and seek to enlist the support of their adherents in their work for social justice. Despite this, attempts by the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group to broaden the

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<sup>2</sup> The household deprivation indices contained in the census are utilised as a measure for poverty. The census figures for Craven indicate that 81% of households are either not deprived in any dimension or in just one, compared to a total for England of 76% (Office for National Statistics, 2011a).

activist base for Fair Trade action to include people of a number of faiths, has enjoyed only limited success. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the population make-up of the district with its relatively small number of adherents to religions other than Christianity. The data has to be understood within its context. The experience of churchgoing Fair Trade activists in urban areas with higher levels of diversity could well be very different.

I have not attempted to balance out these biases in the structure of the research. Six of the interviews were conducted with churchgoers in the City of York but this was not for triangulation purposes. Although similar patterns were evident in the responses of both Skipton and York participants, the inclusion of the York interviews can be attributed to convenience rather than constituting any attempt to test the Skipton data against data from a different social setting. I did consider the possibility of two case studies as opposed to just one, with the other being located in an urban area with higher levels of demographic diversity. However, even if two case studies had been established, it would have been difficult to posit generalisable conclusions from the comparison between just the two studies. Attempts to correlate Ordinary Theology with demographic profiling are more appropriate to a quantitative study. This research will play to the strengths of the case study approach in offering the opportunity for a detailed study. Although not statistically generalisable, the detailed case study is capable of producing insight which can make significant contribution to the understanding of phenomena across a wide context. For example, the Kendal Project limited its geographical scope to a market town in the north of England (see Heelas and Woodhead, 2005). Its detailed data on religious life and attitudes generated theory as to the state of religious and spiritual activity and belief across the United Kingdom and beyond.

#### 1.3.4 Interviewees and sampling

I have carried out a total of twenty-five interviews with churchgoers and community stakeholders. The interviews were semi-structured to enable me to retain my focus on Fair Trade activity as an act of Public

Theology, whilst at the same time allowing for a level of flexibility. Cameron et al (2005, p.31) indicate that a key advantage of the semi-structured interview is the opportunity that it offers for the researcher to maintain openness to the participants' agenda. Being open to the agenda of the participants is an integral part of qualitative research in Ordinary Theology in fulfilling the commitment to listen to the voice of churchgoers. The semi-structured interview can accommodate complex explanation and, in its flexibility, initial remarks can be followed up during the interview to help build a detailed picture. Openness to the participants' agenda can also result in pertinent data being collected on themes which had not previously been considered by the researcher; assisting in expanding the researcher's horizons of inquiry and enriching the research.

The first six interviews were carried out with churchgoers who carry out action for Fair Trade in the city of York. These initial interviews identified some key areas of interest for the research, including the churchgoers' understanding of Fair Trade as justice and their concerns regarding the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. Analysis of these interviews helped shape the questions for the subsequent case study interviews. The research data from York has also contributed to the research of the theology of the churchgoers and their attitudes towards mainstreaming. Nineteen interviews were conducted in the case study town of Skipton. These are formed by two cohorts: churchgoers and the non-churchgoing community stakeholders. Fourteen interviews were carried out with churchgoers who are active in the promotion of Fair Trade. Of these, two were conducted with the coordinator of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group;<sup>3</sup> one interview took place at the beginning of the process and the other upon completion of the other interviews. The latter interview provided a useful means of clarification and comment upon the research findings. The thirteen Skipton churchgoers attend eight different churches in the town and neighbouring villages. Four of these churches are Anglican, two are Methodist, with one Baptist and a Roman Catholic. Ten of the churchgoers

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<sup>3</sup> The Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group is an activist body that coordinates the promotion of Skipton Fair Trade Town.

have worked closely with churchgoers from other churches across the town and seven of the churchgoers are part of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group.

The community stakeholders do not attend a church but they work alongside the churchgoers in their support of Fair Trade. I elected to include the community stakeholders as their contribution can shed light on the action that is carried out by the churchgoers, particularly with regard to the ways in which churches work with the wider community. The methodology of Ordinary Theology does not apply to the stakeholders. In the methodological scheme of the research, the data provided by the stakeholders acts as a form of triangulation for that provided by the churchgoers. The churchgoers' perceptions regarding the impact of their work on the community can be tested against the statements made by the stakeholders. The choice of who to select for interview was largely determined by the closeness of the working relationship between the stakeholder and the churchgoing participants. The community stakeholders include two school teachers who work with the churchgoers on Fair Trade work in their schools and who are also members of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group. One of the stakeholders is a councillor on Skipton Town Council and another is a local political activist, both are also part of the Fair Trade Initiative Group. The fifth of the community stakeholders is involved in the town's business partnership and has worked with the churchgoers to promote Fair Trade across Skipton.

My choice of interviewee was not determined by a scientific profiling process. As Silverman (2000, p.105) states; 'sampling in qualitative research is neither statistical nor purely personal.' To some extent both my choice of case study, and of participants, was governed by the nature of my research task. In order to answer my research question, I needed to gather data from specific types of sources. Silverman (2000, pp.104-5) talks of purposive sampling; the participants are selected because of their ability to yield data which is illustrative of a situation or phenomenon that the researcher wishes to investigate. My choice of case study was to a large extent determined by purposive considerations. In

order to examine the interrelation between churches and the local community and other forms of public, it was necessary to choose a locality where there was evidence of church-led activity on Fair Trade. The choice of Skipton as case study was also suitable in that there are a number of churches of different denomination all involved in the Fair Trade action. These churches work with each other in conjunction with the Fair Trade Initiative Group, which is itself formed largely by churchgoers. The Initiative Group concentrates on broadening the base of support for Fair Trade in the town, working closely with secular partners. I have been able to examine this network of activity to assess the impact of church action for Fair Trade across a wide community.

There have been influences upon my choice of case study and of interview participant other than the purposive. Logistics have come into play and, to some extent, my choices have been determined by what has been possible when taking into account the time and resources available within the limitations of the present study. Bryman (2000, p.100) discusses convenience sampling, in which a strong emphasis is placed on accessibility. With regard to my choice of case study, the Yorkshire location was chosen with accessibility in mind, in that, as Coordinator of Fairtrade Yorkshire, I was aware that there was an active Fair Trade group in Skipton and that many of the members were churchgoers. The Coordinator of the group, Margaret,<sup>4</sup> was interested in my research from the outset and proved an extremely useful contact, helping me in gaining access to the interview participants. Her knowledge of the Fair Trade activists in Skipton assisted me in the selection of appropriate participants, both churchgoers and community stakeholders. Snowball sampling was also a feature of the selection of participants. In this means of sampling, participants introduce the researcher to other participants, enabling access to individuals who share membership of identified communities or who possess shared characteristics or circumstances (Bryman 2004, pp.100-102). Margaret was able to introduce me to other church-based activists and

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<sup>4</sup> Margaret is a pseudonym, see Sub-Section 1.3.5 on research ethics.

stakeholders, including a member of the congregation at the largest Anglican church in the town. In turn that member of the congregation, Doreen, introduced me to another three participants.<sup>5</sup> The differing characteristics or background of the participants, such as the level of their involvement in Fair Trade action, or the Christian denomination of which they are a part, was not achieved by random or statistical means. Although there is a spread of denominational background amongst the participants, this can be attributed to convenience and snowball sampling, rather than as the result of profiling. The involvement of my personal background in the selection process for the interviews raises an important issue that I shall now discuss; the impact of the values of the researcher and the reflexivity required to ensure the rigour of the research process.

#### 1.3.5 Values and reflexivity

Bryman (2004, pp.21-3) argues that it is not possible to eliminate the influence of the researcher's own values and that they may well come into play at every stage of the research process. This fits with a hermeneutical outlook, whereby the pre-judgements of the observer are understood to always exert influence over the observer's understanding of what is taking place (Green 2010). The dialogical nature of Ordinary Theology, in bringing the voices of churchgoers into conversation with the traditions and texts of the Church, creates a significant role for the judgement of the researcher. As pointed out in Sub-Section 1.2.1, the judgements of the researcher are required to identify the pertinent within the God-talk of the churchgoers; the researcher's theology can be said to be in conversation with the theology of the churchgoer (Astley 2004, p.109). The identification of the texts and the traditions of the Church which are used to mutually test the voices of the churchgoers is also a matter requiring considerable judgement on the part of the researcher (Graham et al 2005, p.167). Given the significant role of the judgement of the researcher in the research process, it is necessary for a degree of transparency to be offered.

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<sup>5</sup> Doreen is a pseudonym; see Sub-Section 1.3.5 on research ethics.



The researcher should declare their background and beliefs so that the reader can determine the perspective from which the research is conducted. Swinton and Mowatt (2006, pp.59-61) indicate the need for the researcher to reflect on the ways in which their own values, beliefs and outlooks may influence the shape of their research. My own position as a Fair Trade activist will certainly have a bearing on my role as researcher; although my current activism is largely an engagement in the wider community, my interest in Fair Trade began in a church setting and I continue to work with church-based Fair Trade activists. This can be seen as both strength and weakness. A strength: in that my experience contributes to my ability to understand the meanings given to the Fair Trade action. As Swinton and Mowat (2006, p.60) state, the researcher can be viewed as: ‘the primary tool that is used to access the meanings of the situation being explored.’ It is also a potential weakness: in that well-formed preconceptions, could block my ability to be open to new meanings. To remain open, I must acknowledge those preconceptions and work to high standards of reflexivity.

Rather than present the research as value-free, it is best to acknowledge that it has been conducted within a specific set of values and to openly declare them. As a Fair Trade activist myself, although I point out some of the weaknesses of the concept, I am convinced that Fair Trade is a practice which is beneficial to society. This research proceeds from this standpoint rather than from a position of neutrality as to whether Fair Trade is a good thing or not. I declare also that, drawing on my experience as a churchgoing Fair Trade activist, I believe that action for Fair Trade is something that the churches should be carrying out. My own faith no doubt plays a role in my work as researcher, not least in discerning what I deem to be pertinent within the research data. I am an Anglican and more to the Catholic wing of the Church of England. Hence, I place significant value on respecting and upholding Church tradition, whilst also being mindful of the Church’s role in coming to the assistance of the wider world and particularly those people marginalised by society. This background has certainly contributed towards my motivation to embark on researching this

topic and has also shaped the project, influencing my choice of research question and methodology.

There is a need for vigilance in that pre-judgements do not preclude the generation of fresh insights. Alvesson (2002, p.171) offers a definition of reflexivity which addresses this issue, arguing that reflexivity takes the form of: ‘conscious and systematic efforts to view the subject matter from different angles.’ He recommends the use of different vocabularies which can be set to *challenge* one another and the preconceptions of both researcher and audience. In a sense, this has been built into my research from the outset. My correlative and interdisciplinary approaches create a space where diverse vocabularies are set in a mutual testing. Fair Trade action by churches is described from the viewpoint of the churchgoers who carry out the action but this vocabulary is *challenged* by the texts and traditions of the Church. Theological vocabularies are tested by vocabularies from academic disciplines outside of Theology and the discourse of Public Theology by Ordinary Theology. Such a multiplicity of vocabularies offers much scope for challenging the preconceptions of any of the parties (including my own). The varied discourses with which my research describes Fair Trade action, offer a widening of horizon when compared to the analysis of social reality by means of a single vocabulary or mind-set.

Alvesson (2002, p.172) recommends a ‘reflexive pragmatism’ which involves the researcher continually examining their assumptions and questioning the design of their project. In the spirit of a pragmatic reflexivity, I have endeavoured, within the logistical restraints of my research project, to remain open to new lines of inquiry. Certainly, my areas of questioning for the participant interviews were significantly changed by the experience of the six initial interviews. To offer one example, I was surprised by the prevalence of references to ‘justice’ in the description of Fair Trade given by the churchgoers in the six initial interviews. This led me to design more detailed follow up questions on the nature of Fair Trade as justice for the subsequent interviews. This facilitated an unpacking of what the churchgoers mean by ‘justice’ and

where they derive their conceptions of justice from.<sup>6</sup> This also introduced a new element to the research, in bringing the views of the churchgoers into conversation with theological and secular thinkers on the concept of justice.

In addition to working to high standards of reflexivity, the researcher can ensure the rigorous nature of their research by being continually mindful of research ethics. My research has been carried out in accordance with the University of Leeds Research Ethics Policy (University of Leeds 2013a) and I have followed the protocol on ‘data protection, anonymization and sharing research data’ (University of Leeds 2013b). The interviews were confidential, in that they were carried out in private, and all interviewees are referred to in the thesis by pseudonym. Given it was necessary to describe the role of some of the interviewees in their church or community, it may be possible for certain readers who possess some knowledge of the community to ‘work out’ who the pseudonym refers to. This possibility was made known to all the participants by means of the informed consent form. All participants were issued with an information sheet, given time to read this and ask questions, before reading and signing the consent form. They were informed that they could withdraw from the process at any stage up until one month after the interview taking place. The layout of this form was designed in accordance with the University of Leeds informed consent protocol (University of Leeds 2011). All the interviews were recorded as part of the research process and the transcripts stored securely.

### 1.3.6 Data analysis

The emphasis that I have placed on attentiveness to the voice of the participants has shaped the process of selection of the data for analysis. As stated in Sub-Section 1.3.4, the experience of the initial interviews in York helped to reshape the questions for the subsequent interviews. Semi-structured interviewees allow space for the unanticipated to appear within the data. These unanticipated topics and remarks may offer fruitful insight and can lead to a reshaping of the coding categories to capture additional

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Sections 4.3-4.5.

value for the research. An example is provided by the churchgoing participants' negative reactions to the nature of contemporary society;<sup>7</sup> an aspect of the content of the data that I had not predicted. This led to the creation of a coding category on the nature of society and an additional area of analysis for the research. The interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed to form a rich picture of the contemporary situation of Fair Trade action by churches. As part of the process of analysis, initial findings were brought into conversation with pertinent texts and traditions of the church and interpretations of the contemporary situation from disciplines outside of theology.

### 1.3.7 Impact and Dissemination

It is the aim of Public Theology to reach beyond the academy and Church leadership to a wider audience. This research project, as an act of Public Theology in itself, reaches beyond these constituencies to involve church congregations and the Fair Trade movement. I have paid attention to the impact of the research at all stages of the project. Rather than bolting on an impact element to my research, I view it as an integral part of the process. The emphasis placed on impact fits with my commitment to consideration of the actions and voices of grassroots churchgoers. At the research design stage, I held a series of four workshops with church groups to outline the proposed shape for the research project and receive feedback on my proposals. The workshops were funded by a small grant I obtained from the University of Leeds in my role as Postgraduate Impact Fellow. The workshops helped to develop the questions for the research interviews. For example, issues surrounding the perceived need for a 'secular' presentation of Fair Trade Towns groups were raised in two of the workshops. I developed questions which would explore this issue of a 'secular' presentation for church action for Fair Trade and the resultant analysis is discussed in Chapter 6. The impact workshop that I carried out in Skipton proved particularly influential in shaping the direction of my research. At

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in Section 3.4.

the workshop, I observed a discussion between the churchgoers about the work of the different churches on Fair Trade and how this fitted with the wider community of the town. My observations contributed to the development of the research questions regarding the relationship between the church action and the wider community, the analysis of which is discussed in Chapter 3. The richness of the discussion at the workshop also played its part in my decision to select Skipton as the location for my case study. One viewpoint which was expressed by churchgoers at all the impact workshops was that there was a considerable job of work to be done to persuade congregations to support Fair Trade. The attendees indicated that neither Church hierarchies, nor many members of their own congregations, viewed Fair Trade as a natural fit with the life of the Church. Hearing of the widespread nature of this situation, I devised interview questions which would explore the nature and extent of support for Fair Trade from congregations and from the Church leadership and structures.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout the process, I have given talks on my research to church and Fair Trade groups with a view to encouraging a change in the practice of church action on Fair Trade, in the light of my findings. I have also drawn on my findings to input into the Leeds Anglican Diocese Appreciative Inquiry. The inquiry investigated the work on Fair Trade carried out by churches in the Diocese and was designed to inform decision making on the Diocesan Mission, with a view to better supporting the work that is taking place at the grassroots. It was interesting that, at least for the purposes of this inquiry, Fair Trade action by churches was described as ‘mission’ as opposed to ‘social responsibility.’ Thus, the framing of the inquiry had resonance with my research from the outset, the view of Fair Trade as mission chiming with my finding of the churchgoers viewing Fair Trade as a form of demonstration of Christian principles.<sup>9</sup> This research has the potential to achieve a high level of impact with church and Fair Trade communities. Churchgoers, members of the clergy, church leaders, and activists within the Fair Trade movement, will have practical use of, or at

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<sup>8</sup> Analysis of this is discussed in Section 7.2 and 7.3.

<sup>9</sup> As outlined in Section 4.6.

the very least, some interest in its findings. Because I am committed to promoting Public Theology, it is beholden on me to make the findings as truly public as possible. I will endeavour to use the communication networks of the Church and of the Fair Trade movement to make the findings widely known. The level of interaction with the key publics that I have described mean that, in effect, the research has been conducted 'in public' from design through to dissemination.

### **Conclusion**

My methodology is shaped by the context of Public Theology. Springing from its correlative nature, this research is interdisciplinary and conducted in the spirit of critical faithfulness. The research focus on a Public Theology which breaks out of the confines of academy and Church leadership to involve congregations, leads me to a commitment to be attentive to the actions and voices of grassroots churchgoers. In turn, these assumptions influence my choice of methodology, the approach of Ordinary Theology. The use of this methodology for my research represents an innovative approach, whereby Public Theology is tested by Ordinary Theology. The views of the churchgoers, when brought into conversation with the texts and traditions of the Church, will generate fresh insight into the nature of Public Theology; empirical research conducted at grassroots level providing a means by which to view Public Theology from a different angle. This way of investigating Public Theology is vital if Public Theology is to fulfil its potential of embracing congregations in order to achieve a wide public reach. In the outline of my method, I have highlighted how the assumptions arising from the context of Public Theology, and my Ordinary Theology methodology, have influenced the choices I have made. I have chosen a qualitative research approach as this is appropriate to the task of describing complex phenomenon requiring interaction between multiple disciplines and sources of knowledge. I have argued for the use of the case study as a means of generating theory. Although the findings of the research are in no way statistically generalisable, they may have resonance

for situations which share similar characteristics and be applicable beyond their context by means of theoretical generalisation. Reflexivity is required in my role as researcher, particularly given my experience as a churchgoing Fair Trade activist. This experience can be utilised to discern the pertinent in the data and the sources of knowledge with which to interact. However, I am aware that my previous experience may have generated pre-judgements which could block my ability to identify new horizons. Reflexivity is required to remain open to fresh possibilities. Alvesson's (2002, p.171) definition of reflexivity, with its emphasis on the researcher setting out to view the subject matter from multiple perspectives, is helpful. My methodology, with its emphasis on bringing together multiple sources of knowledge, or multiple 'angles' of perception, can ensure a reflexive approach. My research is of an impactful nature and involves the participation of churches and the Fair Trade movement. Their participation provides a means by which my academic theology can be conducted 'in public.'

In this chapter I have outlined that both the context of my research, Public Theology, and the methodology of Ordinary Theology, are correlative in nature. Public Theology and Ordinary Theology subject the texts and traditions of the Church to a mutual testing with an interpretation of the contemporary situation. In this testing, theology should be open to the contemporary situation, being prepared to undergo change. However, the encounter should not be such that the distinctive voice of theology is lost. The emphasis of theology on open 'engagement' and its emphasis on 'distinctive' witness are in a paradoxical relationship and need to be held in tension within the research. In the next chapter, I will explore the holding in tension of these paradoxical elements in relation to both Fair Trade and to Public Theology.

## **Chapter 2: The paradoxical emphases of Public Theology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides context for my task of examining Fair Trade action by churches as a form of Public Theology; it sheds light on the nature of Public Theology and makes connections between Public Theology and Fair Trade action by churches. I characterise Public Theology as a holding in tension of paradoxical emphases. I have chosen to term these the ‘engaged emphasis’ and the ‘distinctive emphasis.’ The engaged emphasis of Public Theology is discussed in Section 2.1, and in Section 2.2, I indicate how this emphasis relates to Fair Trade action by churches. This format is paralleled in that of the next two sections: in Section 2.3, I discuss the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology, and in Section 2.4, I point out how this emphasis can be applied to Fair Trade action by churches. In Section 2.5, I outline my characterisation of Public Theology as a holding in tension of the two paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive. Both are necessary to the effective functioning of Public Theology, and rather than the one winning over the other, the emphases must be held in tension. In the final section, I identify the practice of Fair Trade as just such a holding in tension of paradoxical emphases. I conclude the chapter outlining how the shared characteristics of Public Theology and Fair Trade can be used as a framework by which to better understand both the nature of Public Theology and Church support for Fair Trade. The paradox at the heart of Public Theology can be seen more clearly when Public Theology and Fair Trade action by churches are brought together.

### **2.1 Public Theology: The engaged emphasis**

Public Theology, if it is to successfully present theological insight to a wide audience outside of the Church, must enter into a genuine



engagement with that audience. In this section, I will outline three facets of the engaged emphasis within Public Theology. Firstly, Public Theology is dialogical in nature, characterised by open conversation and a preparedness to change. Secondly, in order to converse with a wide audience, Public Theology must speak in a language that is widely understood, and thirdly, I identify a role for Public Theology in bringing together diverse sections of society in conversation. This goes beyond the assertion of a theological voice in the public realm, to an emboldening of public life itself.

In the previous chapter, I referred to Kim's (2011, p.3) description of Public Theology as a dialogue. Public Theology is essentially conversational; it is not only about talking; it is also in the business of listening. For Kim (2011, p.230), to do theology in public is not literally about where it takes place; it is about its availability for public scrutiny. Theology should be made accessible to a wide public, in order that it may listen, critique and discuss. This method of public conversation opens theology to response, including both wider understanding and criticism. Theology is prepared to share its insights to influence and change those with which it is in conversation and, ultimately, to bring about change in society. However, for true dialogue to take place, not only must theology set out to change others, it must itself be prepared to be changed by its encounters. Markham (2003, p.1) argues that theology should learn from sources outside of the Church. These sources, rather than being viewed as a distraction from core theology, can be seen as integral to the task of making theology relevant to wider society. Markham (1999, p.139) points out that any contribution made by the Church to public debate should be made with humility and the understanding that only God knows the ideal means of human organisation. The notion of the conversation at the heart of Public Theology is outward looking and open. It represents a striving for genuine engagement with a wide audience outside of the Church.

For theology to speak within an increasingly diverse public arena, it will need to translate the insights of faith into a language more widely understood. As Graham (2013, p.151) states of Public Theology: 'the discipline inhabits the boundary between the religious and the secular and

its language undertakes an act of “translation” in order to communicate to a non-specialist audience.’ Certainly, in Western Europe, in a context of wide diversity of belief, the majority of the population no longer have a basic grounding in the study of the Bible; its language, narratives, and approaches may appear alien. Although there is some space for Public Theology to reference religious texts in the public arena, without their setting in a context of translation, biblically-based ethical insights are unlikely to be widely understood. This said, Public Theology will need to be fluent in both the language of faith and its translation into a language widely understood. Following Tracy's (1981) model of accountability to different publics, the accountability of Public Theology to the Church requires that it shares its faith-based insights with that public in the language of the tradition. Bedford-Strohm (2012, p.283) points out that this introduces an element of the bilingual, whereby the process of Public Theology requires both the language of faith and of secular discourse. In Chapter 7 of the thesis, I will discuss the notion of Fair Trade as the demonstration of a theologically inspired concept, in the form of translation into a language that can be widely understood. The process of translation possesses an engaged emphasis, as it represents the striving of Public Theology to reach out to a wide audience in genuine conversation, utilising a shared language.

Some public theologians identify a role for Public Theology in bringing together diverse sections of society in conversation. Kim (2012, p.269), for example, describes Public Theology as a ‘catalyst in providing a forum for all concerned bodies to engage in critical inquiry and open debate.’ Public Theology as a catalyst represents more than offering contribution to public debate, rather it facilitates and emboldens the debate itself. Storrar (2011, pp.40-3) also identifies a role for Public Theology in encouraging public debate. He is conscious of a public sphere which is under threat by the growing power of the market in global society. Storrar (2011, p.41) argues that Public Theology needs to ‘protect and expand the forums in which a diverse public conversation can take place and public opinion can be formed.’ Public Theology as facilitator of a coming together of different sectors of society has resonance with the outline of the concept

of social capital offered by Putnam (2000). Putnam (2000, pp.65-79) indicates the role of religious citizens and organisations as a considerable repository of social capital, with the potential to contribute to the binding together of communities as a source of societal cohesion. This role stresses the engaged emphasis of Public Theology, as theology's engagement with a wide public extends beyond contact with that public, to a building up of the public space itself.

## **2.2 The engaged emphasis for Fair Trade action by churches**

As an example of a form of Public Theology, Fair Trade action by churches can be characterised by the dual emphases of the engaged and the distinctive. In this section, I will indicate how the engaged emphasis of Public Theology relates to Fair Trade action by churches. I will take each of the three facets outlined in the previous section: the open conversation of Public Theology, the translation of theology into a language widely understood and the role for Public Theology in bringing together diverse sections of the population, and, in turn, discuss their relevance to Fair Trade action by churches.

In the introduction to the thesis, I discussed the significant role that Christian organisations and churchgoing activists play within the Fair Trade movement. It is significant for Fair Trade action by churches as a form of Public Theology that its work is carried out, not as an exclusively Christian project, but in open engagement with the wider Fair Trade movement. The movement is formed by a coming together of multiple actors, including: activists, NGOs, FTOs, solidarity groups (such as the Cooperative movement) and trade unions as well as businesses, both small and large, ethical and mainstream. This leads Anderson (2015, p.3) to describe Fair Trade as 'one of the most diverse social movements of the twentieth century.' The diverse actors within the Fair Trade movement are, in effect, in conversation with each other. The different elements which make up the movement offer their own contributions and perspectives and, to some extent, are themselves shaped by the encounter with the other elements. For

example, through the Fair Trade movement, activists are able to bring their own perspective to the operation of this form of market practice and also assist the shaping of the way in which Fair Trade is presented in the public arena. The contribution of activists to the shaping of the movement may be filtered upwards through the networks of faith communities, NGOs or FTOs. This open engagement within the Fair Trade movement will lead to changes in the standpoint of the actors involved. The views of Fair Trade activists may ultimately lead to change in the practice of large market actors and, conversely, the contact that the activists have with the market actors may reshape the way that they think or the strategies that they envisage for the future of the movement. By means of this conversation between multiple partners, the concept of Fair Trade is itself open to change as a result of the coming together of diverse voices. The Church, in the form of churchgoing activists and Christian NGOs and FTOs, is in conversation with a wider audience outside of Church circles through its participation in the Fair Trade movement. It contributes its unique theological insights to the practice of Fair Trade. However, the Church is also open to learning from the experience of its work on Fair Trade, with theology open to change in this encounter.

The language with which Public Theology speaks is pertinent to Fair Trade action by churches. As I have discussed in the introduction, theology has inspired and continues to guide the practice of Fair Trade. Through the influence of theology over the Fair Trade movement, theology gains a voice in the public realm as the message of Fair Trade has now engaged a wide audience well beyond Church circles. However, as I indicated in the previous section, for theology to be understood by a wide audience it has to be translated into a language that is accessible to a diverse public. To a great extent, the presentation of Fair Trade to a wide audience is not carried out with explicit reference to theology. As I shall discuss in Chapter 6, the publicity of Fair Trade can be characterised in terms of a secular presentation. This does not refer to a simplistic understanding of 'secular' as the banishing of the religious from public life. Rather, it allows for a significant religious presence but under the auspices of a movement which

is accessible to all, regardless of their religious beliefs, or absence of them. The language used to promote the concept is inclusive to all sectors of society. Williams (2012, pp.2-3) makes a distinction between what he terms 'programmatic' and 'procedural' secularism. 'Programmatic secularism' is associated with a removal of the religious from public discourse and its relegation to the private sphere; whereas 'procedural secularism' allows for the coming together of multiple parties, including religious voices, in 'a crowded and argumentative public square' (Williams 2012, p.27). The decision of churchgoers and Christian organisations to adhere to the secular presentation of Fair Trade is influenced more by a procedural secularism, than as the result of a programmatic attempt to remove religious influences from the Fair Trade movement. Indeed, Christian organisations and the churchgoing research participants are broadly supportive of the secular presentation for its ability to reach out to a wide cross-section of the population. As I outline in Chapter 7, the secular presentation of Fair Trade can be understood in terms of the translation of theology into a language that is widely accessible. Genuine engagement can only take place when all parties can speak with a shared tongue. The willingness of Fair Trade action by churches to contribute to a movement which presents itself in a secular manner, represents an emphasis on open engagement for Public Theology.

A final sense in which Fair Trade action by churches can be characterised by the engaged emphasis of Public Theology, is in its ability to bring together diverse partners. The Fair Trade Town scheme requires that different sectors of the population come together in order to promote the values of Fair Trade (Nicholls and Opal 2005, pp.172-5). This works, not only to the benefit of Fair Trade, but also to the local community which has embarked on the campaign to become a Fair Trade Town, Village or City. Malpass et al (2007), in their research on the Bristol Fairtrade City campaign, highlight the contribution of the campaign to building a positive image, or self-image, of the city. In Section 3.1, I detail the use of a multiplicity of networks in the promotion of Fair Trade by the churchgoers in my case study town. The Fair Trade Initiative group in Skipton, which

oversees the Fair Trade Town scheme, brings together different sectors of the community, including churches, local government, community groups and local traders. Once again, there is resonance with Putnam's development of the concept of social capital and the role that he identifies for faith communities in bringing together diverse sections of the community (Putnam 2000, pp.65-79). More specifically, the churchgoers in the case study can be said to provide bridging capital which, as Billings (2009, p.29) describes, is outward looking and contributes to the strengthening of bonds within a community. This role for Fair Trade action by churches in bringing together different sections of a community has a clear emphasis on engagement.

### **2.3 Public Theology: The distinctive emphasis**

Public Theology is a balance between emphases. Thus far, I have stressed the emphasis on open engagement and indicated its relevance to Fair Trade action by churches. In this section, I will now discuss the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. Open engagement brings with its risks; in its preparedness to change, theology is rendered vulnerable, in that the distinctive theological message of Public Theology may be diluted or subsumed in its encounter with a wide audience. I will discuss the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology in relation to: concerns regarding the level of openness of theology, concerns associated with the translation of theology into an accessible language and the role for Public Theology as resistance and challenge to the status quo.

A key debate within the discipline of theology centres on the level of openness of theology to critique and reformulation. Not all theologians are as enthusiastic as Kim for an opening up of theology to scrutiny. Matthewes (2007, p.1) for example, accuses most public theologies of allowing the secular world to set their agenda. In its preparedness to be changed in its encounter with a wider public, theology could lose its distinctive voice. The agenda is no longer determined by theology but by its conversation partners. In this sense, the public conversation is limited

because the voice of theology has been diluted, or even drowned out, by the dominant forces of secular discourse.

The translation of theology into a widely accessible, shared language, represents a step of removal from the original biblical rooting of theology. With this there are risks that in the process of translation theological insights are lost. The distinctive message of the Church is put at risk in its melding with other voices, some of which possess an influence over society which is considerably stronger than the voice of the Church in the public realm. The fear of loss of distinctiveness, by speaking in a language not directly from the Christian tradition, has led to criticism of the shared language approach. Bradstock (2012) identifies a need for faith based language in the public sphere and is critical of those who recommend that only secular language be used. The requirement that all theological language be translated into the language of secular discourse is, according to Bradstock, no longer acceptable.

The concept of social capital possesses a firm emphasis on engagement. However, theologians have developed the concept to include the notion of spiritual capital, which has something of a distinctive emphasis. The contribution of faith groups to the strength of both local and national life can be termed religious capital (Atherton et al 2011, p.98). To better understand the contribution of faith groups to the strengthening of communities, reference to religious capital can be complemented by the concept of spiritual capital. Baker (2007, p.200) argues that, through the use of the concepts of religious and spiritual capital, debate can take place as to what motivates faith communities to public action. Spiritual capital, in the form of religious ethics and values, is the catalyst which can drive religious people and communities to carry out public action contributing to the strengthening of bonds within communities. The values which constitute spiritual capital represent a distinctive contribution to public life from religious tradition and texts. However, the relationship between religious and spiritual capital is not always straightforward. Baker (2007, p.200) discusses the contribution of religious capital to the benefit of the public good; the generation of this religious capital often takes the form of

contribution to secular policy initiatives. However, Baker (2007, p.200) points out a source of tension in the preparedness of spiritual capital to 'critique accepted norms, values and methodologies if these go against the fundamental value of human dignity and worth made in the image of God.' There is dissonance here, in that the very spiritual capital which can act as source of motivation for religious capital, can also act as a source of prophetic denunciation of the norms of society to which the religious capital is contributing. Whereas the engaged emphasis identifies a role for theology in bringing sections of society together, the distinctive emphasis may engender division. The distinctive emphasis of Public Theology prioritises the clear voice of religious values. These values could well contradict prevalent values in society and, rather than focus on the finding of common ground and a preparedness of theology to change, there may be a role for Public Theology in serving as counter-cultural contrast to mainstream values.

#### **2.4 The distinctive emphasis for Fair Trade action by churches**

The distinctive emphasis of Public Theology can be identified in examination of Fair Trade action by churches. In this section, I shall discuss the three aspects of the emphasis on the distinctive nature of Public Theology outlined in the previous section: concerns regarding the level of openness of theology, concerns associated with the translation of theology and the role of Public Theology as challenge to the status quo. I will indicate how each of these three aspects influences Fair Trade action by churches.

Fair Trade has undergone a massive transformation, from niche practice limited to sections of the Church and a few key allies, to playing a role in the mainstream economy. This has brought with it risk, that the ideals of Fair Trade which have been shaped by theology, and which underpin its practice, are rendered vulnerable in this encounter with a wider public. In particular, the move of Fair Trade activity from the care and protection of churchgoers and FTOs, to the involvement of large-scale



market actors, has brought with it considerable risk. Why talk of open engagement in terms of risk and vulnerability? As I shall outline in Chapter 8, although the activists in my research study, on the whole, welcome this mainstreaming of Fair Trade, they express concern at the potential for ethical standards to be diluted. They identify signs that Fair Trade is moving away from its original theological rooting and this engenders concern with some of the practices of the contemporary Fair Trade movement. The churchgoers in this study are not alone; social science analysts and commentators on Fair Trade also detect such a drift from the original message of Fair Trade as a result of its progressive mainstreaming.<sup>1</sup> Calls for a return to the original ideals of the Fair Trade movement from activists and academic commentators stress the importance of the distinctive emphasis of Fair Trade. For the research participants, although Fair Trade is closely engaged with multiple partners and market actors, its level of openness to the influence of its conversation partners should not be such that the original ideals are undermined. Fair Trade must maintain a distinctive difference from the mainstream to serve as a vehicle for change towards a more just economy. Both participants and academic commentators point out that if standards are diluted, then the ability of Fair Trade to come to the assistance of millions of producers will be diminished. Similarly, the work of Fair Trade activists in bringing about trade justice through political change will be undermined, if the practice of Fair Trade does not exemplify justice.

The understanding of Fair Trade as justice informs what is distinctive about Fair Trade.<sup>2</sup> Fair Trade is different from the mainstream because it is motivated by principles of justice, rather than the logic of the mainstream economy. This distinctive value of justice can serve to bind society together or it can act as a source of division. Spiritual capital as critique may set faith communities against the structures of society which are deemed to be unjust. Rather than a 'bringing together', spiritual capital,

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Section 8.1.

<sup>2</sup> The participants' understanding of Fair Trade as a form of justice is discussed in Chapter 4.

in upholding a distinctive emphasis, can set faith communities in opposition to sectors of society. In the case of Fair Trade, this is most likely to occur as critique of the mainstream market. Northcott, in his theological reflections on Fair Trade, emphasises the role of Fair Trade as critique of the market, to the extent that it represents a form of resistance to it. He states that: ‘the Fair Trade movement represents the most significant form of resistance to the exploitative and inequitable effects of the international trade regime’ (Northcott, 2007, p.182). Northcott (2007, pp.182-6) does not view Fair Trade as a mechanism with which to guide markets, rather it represents a theological counter-cultural alternative, so as to challenge them; he is here stressing the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. As a form of resistance to the market, Fair Trade has to look radically different from the mainstream. Northcott (2007, p.184) warns against the potential loss of the original ideals of Fair Trade with the expansion of Fair Trade certification involving large business corporations. He argues that Fair Trade practices ‘arose as an expression of a distinctively Christian account of justice and fairness’ (Northcott 2007, p.185). This Christian account of justice and fairness represents the spiritual capital which motivates churchgoers who carry out action in support of Fair Trade. For Northcott, the purpose of Fair Trade is not to engage with the market to achieve a compromise position of a fairer means of managing the existing structures. Rather, the purpose is to denounce the structures of economy and society as unjust, to bring radical change as an alternative to the capitalist system. Milbank (2006a, p.231) also views Fair Trade as an alternative to the capitalist economy. He frames Fair Trade as part of his concept of ‘gift-exchange’, which introduces ethical consideration into all exchanges involving commodities or labour. Milbank does not envisage justice in the global economy being achieved by the amelioration of market conditions under capitalism. Rather, he calls for universal gift-exchange as a radical alternative to capitalism. His reference to Fair Trade as an example of such gift-exchange positions Fair Trade in counter-cultural opposition to the mainstream economy.

Setting mainstreamed Fair Trade alongside Milbank or Northcott’s vision for Fair Trade serves to highlight the difference between the engaged

and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. Mainstreamed Fair Trade possesses an engaged emphasis, working closely within the market, utilising the system and bringing about a conversion to the Fair Trade system on the part of major market actors. Mainstreamed Fair Trade is an open conversation, where both market actors and the nature of Fair Trade itself are reshaped in the encounter. Churchgoers carrying out action in support of Fair Trade bring together diverse partners in the Fair Trade conversation; working alongside the market, state and civil society, with the result that they constitute a repository of religious capital. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Northcott's framing of Fair Trade as an act of resistance is wary of the open conversation and objects to the reshaping of Fair Trade. What is important in this framing of Fair Trade, is that the original theological rooting, the values of justice and fairness, remain at the heart of the practice of Fair Trade. They are not in conversation with the values of the market; they stand in stark contrast to them, in order to highlight the injustice of the mainstream. Northcott and Milbank place greater emphasis on the distinctive nature of Fair Trade, whereas mainstreamed Fair Trade possesses more of an emphasis on engagement.

### **2.5 The paradox of Public Theology**

I have described the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology and how they relate to Fair Trade action by churches. There is tension between the two emphases and they can appear contradictory. A stress on the distinctive emphasis may lead to a Public Theology which looks very different to one with greater emphasis on engagement. Whilst acknowledging this tension, the two emphases are not entirely oppositional. Both are necessary for Public Theology; there is a level of co-dependence for genuine engagement and distinctive witness. The engaged and distinctive emphases are in a paradoxical relationship. Rather than solution be found in choosing between genuine engagement or distinctive witness, Public Theology must represent a holding together of both emphases.

Public Theology has a duty to the Church to reflect the distinctive nature of Christian theology. Therefore, the biblical theme of the preferential support of God for the poor and marginalised is one which we would expect to see highlighted in much Public Theology. Graham (2004, 395-8) discusses a tension within Public Theology between an emphasis on the 'universal' which seeks to bring all sectors of society together towards shared goals and the 'preferential' which seeks to stand in solidarity with the poor and marginalised. It is tempting to equate the engaged emphasis of Public Theology with 'the universal' and the distinctive with 'the preferential'; indeed, there is much overlap. However, support for a preferential Public Theology which comes to the assistance of those marginalised by society may well require an engaged emphasis, as well as constituting distinctive witness. Storrar (2011) highlights the need for Public Theology in an increasingly globalised world. The weakening of the nation state in the global order has led to the opening of a vacuum, in which there is an absence of democratic control over economic activity. Storrar (2011, p.41) argues that theology has a duty to create space for public conversation. This possesses a strong emphasis on engagement, identifying a role for Public Theology in bringing diverse parties together. Storrar (2011, p.31) argues that public conversation is not limited to the Church leadership and the powerful but also embraces those marginalised by the global economy. The conversation provides the opportunity for the powerful to hear the anger of the poor and marginalised and for policy and practice to be reformulated as a result. Its purpose is the fulfilment of preferential aims to assist those marginalised by the global economy, including migrants, refugees and asylum seekers (Storrar 2011, p.42). The emphasis on the distinctive nature of Public Theology, in fulfilling a biblical imperative to assist the marginalised, is, in Storrar's vision, facilitated by the engaged emphasis of Public Theology in bringing together diverse parties in conversation. Both emphases are necessary and are held together within the same action. The role of theology in initiating public conversation to assist the marginalised is by no means limited to the macro-level. Reader (1994, pp.83-8) suggests a role for church congregations in bringing together sections of the community to enable conversation on the

moral dimension of public issues. He is concerned that the growing power of the market has served to limit recourse to the moral in public discussion. This role for congregations represents both emphases; the engaged, in that such coming together aids cohesion of the local community, and the distinctive, in that theology's voice in conversation offers challenge to the prevailing logic of the market and can come to the assistance of the marginalised.

We can see that the tension between the engaged and the distinctive is not such that there is a battle between the two which requires resolution in one element winning over the other. The need for theology to speak with a preferential voice certainly requires that it be distinctive and true to biblical theology but, unless it is truly engaged within society, it will bring little benefit to the poor. Within Public Theology there is a co-dependency between the emphases even though, paradoxically, a stress on one of the emphases, at the expense of the other, can lead an act of Public Theology to take on a radically different form. Public Theology requires that the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and distinctive be held in tension. Both requirements must be acknowledged and the potential for over emphasis on one element, at the expense of the other, should engender continual vigilance.

There are surprisingly few examples offered in the literature of Public Theology of a mass form of Public Theology involving congregations and achieving high public impact. However, Kim (2011, p.153) offers one such example with his description of the Make Poverty History Campaign. The campaign serves as an example of Public Theology which succeeds in a holding in tension between the engaged and distinctive emphases; bringing diverse partners together in a preferential project. Make Poverty History mobilised a wide public in the UK to urge its government to use its voice in the G8 summit; to speak up for the poorer communities of the world in the spheres of trade, aid and international debt. The Church played a crucial role in initiating the campaign and bringing together the partners to advocate for the poor in the context of a meeting of powerful decision makers. The project was established with reference to theology,

for example, the Jubilee legislation (Leviticus 25) was a source of inspiration for the call to forgive interest payments on some of the international debt owed by the world's poorest countries. Kim's citing of this project as an example of Public Theology is pertinent. It is public, in that it reaches out beyond the Church and the academy, and it is theological, in that it is inspired by theology and is carried out by churchgoers as a means of bringing change towards a more just economy and society. 'Just' in this context is informed by scriptural references to the justice of God.

The Make Poverty History campaign serves as an example of a holding in tension between the engaged and the distinctive emphases. It is engaged within the public sphere, bringing together diverse parties, working with secular actors and in conversation with the powerful forces of the state and the market. However, its aim is preferential and its willingness to both co-operate with powerful forces, but also to challenge them in the name of the poor, helps to retain the distinctive theological motivation, despite exposure within the public realm. There are clear parallels between Make Poverty History and the Fair Trade movement. Both are underpinned by theology but engaged within the public arena, drawing on the support of religious and secular partners to bring justice for the poor. The role of the Church is crucial to both. Such a bringing together of the Church with other public actors requires a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. A crucial difference between the two, is that Make Poverty History was a time bound project of a year in length (designed to expire with the passing of the G8 summit), whilst church action for Fair Trade has been active since the 1940s and is an ongoing concern. Because of the longevity of the Fair Trade concept, it is possible to discern the dynamic nature of the holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases, as I shall discuss in Chapter 8. Although the two different emphases of Public Theology can result in debate and conflict within the discourse, Public Theology is reliant on both elements for its proper functioning. For Public Theology to be truly public, it must effectively engage with an audience outside of the Church and academy. For Public Theology to be truly theological, it must be distinctive, recognisably

Christian and not subsumed by the values of the contemporary situation. All Public Theology requires that the two paradoxical emphases are held in tension.

## **2.6 The paradox of Fair Trade**

As I have outlined in Sections 2.2 and 2.4, Fair Trade action by churches can be described in terms of the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The action must hold the two emphases in tension, for example, in Chapter 5 I describe the manner in which the churchgoing participants hold the engaged and the distinctive in tension in their understanding of the relationship between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God. A benefit of framing Fair Trade action by churches as a form of Public Theology, is to utilise the conceptual framework of the engaged and the distinctive emphases as a means of better understanding Fair Trade action by churches. The literature of Public Theology, which highlights the inherent tension at the heart of 'doing' Public Theology, can inform this investigation. The conceptual framework of the engaged and the distinctive not only characterises Public Theology; the practice of Fair Trade possesses its own specific form of holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases and these are inherent within the definition of the practice. Just as Public Theology can be characterised as the holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases, so too can Fair Trade.

The aim of Fair Trade is to change the nature of trade, to bring about a fair and just trading system, and this impels a close contact with key players in the market. However, it will not succeed in its aim unless it remains distinct from the market within which it operates. To promote the fair and just, Fair Trade must itself be just. In its close contact with the market, the Fair Trade movement runs the risk that its values are diluted to such an extent that it can no longer offer a distinct contrast from the mainstream market which the Fair Trade system was established to critique. This is the essential paradox of Fair Trade. The emphases of the engaged and the distinctive characterise the nature of Fair Trade but they are

paradoxical. Stress on either the engaged or distinctive emphases of Fair Trade push the concept in different directions. At one end of the spectrum, a strong emphasis on engagement, to the exclusion of the distinctive, will lead to a mainstreamed Fair Trade which plays a strong role in the mass market but is barely distinguishable from it. At the other end, emphasis on the distinctive nature of Fair Trade, to the exclusion of engagement, will produce an ethically-pure Fair Trade characterised by justice but which is little known outside of a small community of ethical purchasers. Its scale will be such that it cannot assist all but a small number of producers and its ability to bring about change will be severely limited.

The paradox within Fair Trade is indicated by academic commentary on the Fair Trade movement. For example, Barrientos et al (2007, p.54) point out that the social movement behind Fair Trade has been to a large extent responsible for the expansion of the concept. However, this expansion has brought Fair Trade into ever closer contact with the mainstream market which the social movement was set up to work against. The paradox was encapsulated from the early days of Fair Trade in the description of its working ‘in and against the market’ (Barratt Brown 1993, 156-176). Raynolds and Murray (2007, p.223) refer to this dictum in outlining inherent tension within the concept of Fair Trade:

Fair Trade seeks to operate simultaneously *against the market*, campaigning for changes in conventional trade practices and challenging North/South inequalities, and *within the market*, creating more egalitarian trade between Northern consumers and Southern producers. [Italics my own].

Raynolds and Murray (2007, p.223) characterise this duality as a tension between the role of Fair Trade as a social movement and as a tool of corporate reform. Indeed, Fair Trade does fulfil a dual role of actualising change in the form of a scheme of ethical trading that benefits millions of poor producers and of pointing to future change by highlighting the injustice of unfair trade.<sup>3</sup> Raynolds and Murray (2007, p.233) are fearful that,

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Section 4.7.



without vigilance, Fair Trade could be absorbed by the market. This would take the form of a withering away of the social movement at the expense of corporate action; Fair Trade would essentially become a form of Corporate Social Responsibility. Raynolds and Murray's description of Fair Trade highlights the hybrid nature of the concept, which holds together, within one movement, a diversity of actors, aims and courses of action. They describe Fair Trade in terms of contradiction, stating: 'the key challenges facing Fair Trade arise from the inherent contradictions embedded within this initiative between movement and market priorities' (Raynolds and Murray 2007, p.223).

The inherent contradiction described by Raynolds and Murray resonates with the engaged-distinctive dichotomy. The engaged emphasis equates with high levels of engagement 'with' and 'within' the market. It may be associated with corporate action and the ethical consumption scheme. Conversely, the distinctive emphasis can be seen as embodied by the social movement and calls for change in the structures of trade. However, the picture is more complex than this. There is a high level of interdependence between the different aspects of Fair Trade. The churchgoers in the study express the benefits of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade in terms of the raising of the profile of the concept.<sup>4</sup> The increased profile has facilitated more effective campaigning and advocacy for systemic change. Support for the ethical trading scheme has not only assisted millions of poor producers it has also drawn attention to 'unfair trade.' The history of Fair Trade is one in which diverse parties, ideas and courses of action interact in a relationship of mutual dependence. For this reason, rather than characterise the relationship of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Fair Trade as one of outright contradiction, I identify them as paradoxical.

Some of the social science commentary on the Fair Trade movement reveals frustration on the part of the authors at the hybrid nature of Fair Trade, with its diversity of partners, multiple means of engagement and

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 8.1.2

ways of working. Hussey and Curnow (2013), are critical of the involvement of mainstream corporations in the practice of Fair Trade. To ensure a distinctive identity for the Fair Trade movement, they recommend that engagement with the mainstream market come to an end and that Fair Trade focus on demonstrating an ethically-pure trading system which can then be up-scaled, not by increasing sales, but by acting as a rallying call for political change. They are, in effect, challenging the holding together of the engaged and distinctive emphases within the same concept. For Hussey and Curnow, what is important is that Fair Trade retain a distinct identity as a protest movement with no corporate element. Anderson (2015, p.150) challenges academics who claim that Fair Trade suffers from inconsistency in its ideology and identity. Rather, he characterises Fair Trade in terms of compromise, stating: ‘throughout Fair Trade’s history, how the movement has defined issues of fairness has been the result of a process of negotiation and compromise’ (Anderson 2015, pp.149-150). Anderson argues that the central aim of Fair Trade, that of achieving fairness in the global trading system, is a matter that requires ongoing repositioning. Even though the Fair Trade movement is in the business of compromise, this does not necessarily negate its role in demonstrating a vision of just trade. Raynolds and Murray (2007, p.223) ascribe the rapid rise in Fair Trade sales to the ability of the concept to: ‘combine visionary goals with practical engagements in fair and sustainable trade.’ Fair Trade is characterised as, at once, practical and visionary.

Fair Trade is a paradox, the coming together of two emphases, the engaged and the distinctive. This paradox was there from the outset, encapsulated by the maxim ‘in and against’ the market. There is an element of competition between the emphases, leading commentators to view Fair Trade as contradictory. However, I argue that it is necessary for the paradoxical emphases to be held together within Fair Trade. At best, the emphases can be complementary and, however much they may appear at odds, both are necessary. Fair Trade is defined by the paradox, it is in the market but standing against it, it is working alongside it but distinct from it, informed by radically different values.

### **Conclusion: Bringing Fair Trade and Public Theology together**

I have argued that Public Theology is characterised by the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive. The stressing of one emphasis, at the expense of the other, will lead to radically different outcomes. In one sense, the emphases are in tension; however, they are both necessary to the effective functioning of Public Theology. Rather than envisage one emphasis winning over the other, both must be held together within the same action; a holding in tension is required. I have discussed the ways in which the characterisation of Public Theology as a holding in tension of paradoxical emphases applies to Fair Trade action by churches. Indeed, the practice of Fair Trade itself can be characterised by the holding in tension of paradoxical emphases, inherent within the definition of the practice. Having indicated that Fair Trade and Public Theology share this particular characterisation, how then can this be taken forward to describe Fair Trade action by churches? Firstly, the shared characterisation is offered in evidence to support the framing of Fair Trade action by churches as a form of Public Theology. In the introduction to the thesis I set out the rationale for treating Fair Trade theologically. The involvement of theology in the Fair Trade movement, taken together with the public nature of the Fair Trade concept, serve as evidence that Fair Trade action by churches can be examined as Public Theology. The grappling of the Fair Trade movement with the issues of engagement versus distinctive example, contributes additional evidence. The concerns of the Fair Trade movement are exactly those of all Public Theology, an attempt to balance genuine public engagement with a distinctive counter-cultural voice.

My second utilisation of the shared characterisation follows directly from the first. If Fair Trade action by churches is conceived as a form of Public Theology, then it is possible for both the Fair Trade action and the discourse of Public Theology to learn from each other. The Fair Trade action can learn from Public Theology in its discussion of the balance between engaged and distinctive emphases and Public Theology can learn from the Fair Trade action, as it serves as an example of Public Theology in practice, complementary (or at times contradictory) to the theoretical

content of the discourse. Fair Trade action by churches can serve as a case study to shed light on the presentation of theology in the public realm and, in particular, the challenges faced in balancing genuine public engagement with the retention of a distinctive voice, rooted in theology.

Thirdly, Fair Trade action by churches is a complex phenomenon which brings together diverse elements. The shared characterisation of both Fair Trade and Public Theology as the holding together of paradoxical engaged and distinctive emphases serves as a unifying theme. The tension between the engaged and the distinctive affects every aspect of Fair Trade action by churches. It is dealing simultaneously with the challenges which arise from the inherent paradox of Fair Trade as working ‘in and against’ the market and it is dealing with the challenges attendant to all Public Theology; engaging in open engagement with a wide public, whilst maintaining distinctive witness. Within church action for Fair Trade the paradox of Fair Trade and the paradox of Public Theology are not discrete. Indeed, there is an intimate connection between the two. The distinctive emphasis of Fair Trade is represented by the original ideals of the movement and these were motivated and informed with explicit reference to theology. The theological concepts which underpin Fair Trade are rendered vulnerable in their engagement with a wider public and, in this, the paradox of Fair Trade and the paradox of Public Theology are one and the same. Throughout the thesis, I will return to the engaged-distinctive dichotomy, as it provides an important tool to describe what is taking place and to achieve understanding of the nature of Fair Trade action by churches. In the next chapter, we will witness the playing out of the engaged-distinctive dichotomy in analysis of the ‘public’ nature of Fair Trade action by churches.

## **Chapter 3: The public nature of Fair Trade action by churches**

### **Introduction**

A key question for my research is: in what ways is Fair Trade action by churches ‘public’? In this chapter, based on my research case study of church Fair Trade action in Skipton, I demonstrate the public nature of the action by virtue of the strong links that are forged between the churches and the local community through their work on Fair Trade. The research participants actively seek to promote Fair Trade in the public realm, using both church based and secular networks; such networks are utilised at local, national and global levels. Firstly, I will outline the ability of the churchgoers in my study to access a wide range of networks at the community level to communicate the message of Fair Trade. I then discuss the contribution of the churches, and churchgoers, to Fair Trade action in the local community, including the key role that they play in the Fair Trade Town project. These projects give churches the opportunity to work together with diverse partners across whole communities. The contribution of the Church, in forging bonds between different sectors of the community in its work on Fair Trade, can be described in terms of social capital. This concept provides a useful means by which to understand the benefit that the Church can bring to local communities; however, it is not without its limitations, not least because of its lack of emphasis on the need for challenge to the existing structures of society, to combat injustice. This challenging of the status quo cannot be entirely characterised as a bringing together of people; in practice, it may well engender division. To some extent, the development of the concept of spiritual capital serves to rebalance this limitation of social capital. Spiritual capital, the religious values which motivate people of faith to generate social capital, introduces an emphasis on distinctive witness with which to balance the engaged emphasis of social capital.

Although the evidence of my research suggests that the church action for Fair Trade has a high level of engagement with the local community, it is not parochial. Rather, it is outward looking, with the majority of the participants being conscious of the need to identify and exploit wider networks, including ones which enable the linking of ethical consumption with political projects. There are two sides to the public nature of Fair Trade action: an emphasis on bringing people together to work on a joint project; complemented by an emphasis on calls for political change and challenge of the existing order. Fair Trade action by churches can take on a role of resistance to the powerful cultural forces in society. In effect, the nature of Public Theology is determined by differing interpretations of the meaning of 'public.' In this chapter, I contrast the cooperative view of 'public' presented by the concept of social capital and interpretations of 'public' which portray a more contested and fractured public realm. The former possesses an emphasis on engagement, and the latter will engender a response from Public Theology of resistance to the prevalent views in society, as it has a more distinctive emphasis. Analysis of the research interviews reveals that both of these understandings of public, and their corresponding courses of action for Public Theology, can be supported by the statements of the participants. Rather than the participants being divided into two camps, to some extent, all of them describe the action that they carry out with reference to both the engaged and the distinctive emphases.

### **3.1 Churches and Fair Trade action in the community**

In this section, I examine the role of churches in the promotion of Fair Trade in my case study community of Skipton. I indicate that churchgoers utilise both church based and secular networks in the promotion of Fair Trade. The ability of the churchgoing participants to bring together diverse sections of the community to work on the Fair Trade project demonstrates a role for the Church as generator of social capital. This is exemplified in the Fair Trade Town scheme, whereby churchgoers generate the bridging capital necessary to link different parts of the

community to support a common cause. Fair Trade action by churches represents an opportunity for theology to add its voice in the public realm by working closely alongside multiple and diverse partners.

### 3.1.1 Utilising church and community networks

The interviews reveal the willingness, and enthusiasm, of the churchgoers to utilise the networks available to them in order to promote Fair Trade. Rather than forge new ties, or operate by means of discrete Fair Trade networks, the churches involved in the study have tended to utilise pre-existing networks. These include their own church structures and ecumenical networks, such as Churches Together, but also secular networks with which the church comes into close contact, for example: local youth groups and schools, political bodies, local media, businesses and community organisations. In addition to utilising the networks that are regularly used as part of the life of the churches in my study, the churchgoers as individuals have multiple allegiances to a variety of locally based organisations and they are prepared to draw upon the resources that these organisations can offer, to benefit Fair Trade and other social justice causes. These connections involve membership of political parties, organisations such as ‘Rotary’ or business networks, for example, the Skipton Town Partnership. To illustrate the variety of networks involved in church Fair Trade action I will draw on one of the interviews from my study. Margaret (who attends an Anglican church in a village close to Skipton) details the multiple ways in which she promotes Fair Trade in the village community. She refers to engaging the local school on Fair Trade issues by utilising the church’s connections; the Vicar and two members of the congregation are Foundation Governors. In addition to addressing the church’s own youth group, Margaret also speaks of promoting Fair Trade through other youth and play groups within the village. There are links also to the Parish Council (the political governance of the village) through members of the congregation who sit on that body and plans have been drawn up to work towards the community becoming a certified Fairtrade Village. Other organisations

Margaret engages with include the Women's Institute and the Mothers' Union and Margaret also plans to involve uniformed organisations, such as the Scouts and Guides.

These patterns of behaviour, with churchgoers utilising both the church's, and the individual's, pre-existing connections and networks in order to promote Fair Trade, are typical for almost all of the churchgoers in my study. This supports the work of Wheeler (2012) who carried out a series of interviews with Fair Trade activists to examine the nature of Fair Trade support. Her findings challenge the model of Fair Trade consumption based purely on individual consumer choice and highlight the importance of collective structures in the support of Fair Trade. Fair Trade support can only be understood by taking into account the web of social relations upon which it is reliant. Research conducted by Cloke et al (2011) stresses the important role that churches play in promoting Fair Trade within the communities of which they are a part. Their findings (largely drawn from interviews with participants in the Bristol Fair Trade City campaign) tally with my analysis, in that churchgoers, and the networks that they have access to, are identified as important drivers of Fair Trade activity. Cloke et al (2011, p.105) make the point that many of the churchgoers who promote Fair Trade in their own churches also seek to promote the concept to a much wider audience. As I shall indicate, the success of church support for Fair Trade depends not only on the social relations particular to a given church, or even of a network of churches, but also a multiplicity of networks based in the local community and with connections beyond.

### 3.1.2 The means of engagement

With such a diversity of audience to address, it is perhaps not surprising that the participants in my study refer to a range of means of engagement for the promotion of Fair Trade in the local community. Spreading the message of Fair Trade includes giving talks in schools, to youth groups and to meetings of community organisations. It also includes speaking with local community leaders to influence policy, for example



with Parish or Town Councillors. Through regular dialogue between Fair Trade activists (the majority of whom are churchgoers) and the Town Council, the civic commitment to Fair Trade has been increased. One example mentioned by the participants was the branding of the Christmas light switching on ceremony in 2014 as 'Make it a local and Fair Trade Christmas.' A competition was held for local schoolchildren to design a poster for the event and over two thousand people attended. Through the lobbying work of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative, the Town Council has also committed to serve Fair Trade refreshments at its own meetings. Another means by which churchgoers promote Fair Trade in the town is by dialogue with local businesses both directly and through the Town Council and Skipton Town Partnership. Businesses, such as small cafes and bed and breakfast facilities, have been encouraged to provide Fair Trade refreshments and there is a good working relationship between the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative and a dedicated Fair Trade retail business which has a shop in the centre of Skipton. The group publicise the shop and several of the churches sell their products, alongside Traidcraft goods, on their regular church stalls. A wide public is engaged by means of organising events in the town. During the annual Fairtrade Fortnight several of the town's churches hold events, such as coffee mornings, meals or talks which are publicised to the wider community utilising the media. In Fairtrade Fortnight 2014 the town was visited by a Fair Trade banana farmer from Colombia, who met with school students and the public at community events, and this was publicised in the local media.

One of the most visible forms of the promotion of Fair Trade by churches in the town is the provision of Fair Trade products by means of both retail and catering facilities. A large Anglican church runs a café in an extension to the church and this is open most days and serves Fair Trade refreshments and some food products. A Methodist Church in the town centre also runs a similar café and both are patronised by the general public of the town. The Christian bookshop in the town centre runs a café, which is open daily, and this too serves Fair Trade refreshment and displays Fair Trade signage. In terms of the retail of Fair Trade goods, most of the

churches in the town run stalls usually held on Sundays. Cheryl, who attends the town centre Methodist church, explained that she has provided goods from the church stall for school Fair Trade committees at the local secondary schools, to sell on to their students. This provision of Fair Trade products by churches in the town provides a very visible form of promotion. I asked Angela, a non-churchgoer, how effectively the churches put across the Fair Trade message and she based her answer on this form of provision, stating:

*They (the churches) are obviously getting the message out quite clearly and effectively, for me to know that I can go to St. Andrew's Church and that at the café [...] they serve Fair Trade coffee, tea and snacks and things and they are obviously promoting there in some ways. So they must be, for me as a non-churchgoer to know about it.*

These means of engagement represent an outward looking approach. Rather than promoting Fair Trade solely to groups related to the Church and likeminded partners, the engagement is an attempt to reach a more diverse public. The work carried out in schools, presence at civic and community events, and the running of the numerous Fair Trade cafes and stalls, are all forms of voluntary action. Anderson (2015, p.135) states that ‘the existence of the Fair Trade movement is consistent with a particular sense of “British citizenship.”’ This is associated with volunteering and community groups and characterised by social networks. Rather than Fair Trade taking the form of a straight forward relationship between retailers and consumers, it is a movement of diverse partners. Anderson repositions the narrative of Fair Trade, deemphasising the role of consumer choice and in its stead stressing Fair Trade as a movement; a multiplicity of conversation partners in a web of social networks.

### 3.1.3 The initiating role of the churches

From the outset of my research, it became clear that the churches' contribution to the overall pattern of Fair Trade activity in the case study town of Skipton was significant. Both in terms of the numbers of activists, and the intensity of the activity carried out, churchgoers dominate. This is not untypical of the pattern of Fair Trade support in the UK, as Anderson (2015, p.62) points out. Vanessa, a Fair Trade activist in the town, who is not a churchgoer, remembered her early experience of supporting Fair Trade in Skipton:

*It dawned on me fairly quickly that everybody else who was active in Fair Trade in Skipton was a churchgoer, everybody, almost without exception.*

Although the churchgoers on the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group have made a strenuous effort to recruit members from non-church backgrounds, it is still the case that the churches are by far the most active institutions in the promotion of Fair Trade in the town. Angela (a non-churchgoer) stated that it was important for the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group to engage closely with churches as they constitute a sizeable receptive audience for the Fair Trade message.

*Obviously, if you've got all the different churches in Skipton being represented, you can reach a really big audience [...] it is a good way of reaching the audience, because you've got a large number of people attending all the churches here in Skipton.*

In her interview, Vanessa extended her observations to include other social justice issues. She contrasted the situation in the market town of Skipton with the urban environments that she had lived in (such as London and Newcastle), commenting that there was far less action in support of social justice carried out in the market town. According to Vanessa, when action for social justice does take place in the town:

*Anything that does happen, happens through the Church, it seems.*

The running of the town's foodbank, which distributes free food to some of the poorest residents of the town, is not publicised or labelled as a church action and, indeed, the administrators of the foodbank work closely with secular partners. However, just as is the case with Fair Trade action in the town, churchgoers play a major part in initiating and coordinating the activity.

This initiating role of the churches is not purely a result of the numbers of motivated churchgoers who are willing to be involved; there is also a cultural element at play. Reader (1994, pp.83-8) discusses the ways in which churches can work in partnership with different sectors of local communities. In outlining his identification of the church as dialogical community, he sees a clear role for the church in bringing different parts of the community together in conversation. This should not take the form of the church imposing its views on others, rather it should offer resources to initiate and facilitate action. Reader (1994, p.85) identifies two key advantages that the church possesses in being able to initiate community action, he asserts that:

We should not underestimate the straightforward significance of possessing property that is normally used for public purposes, nor that of being able to bring people together, not just for worship, but for discussion.

Both of these facets of the church's cultural role in the community have proved important in the development of Fair Trade action in Skipton. Many of the Fair Trade events and talks have been held on church property and the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative meetings are held at the Methodist church in the centre of the town. Reader's reference to the church's cultural role of bringing people together is pertinent to the situation in Skipton. The churches have been able to initiate projects, such as the Fair Trade Town campaign or the foodbank, because it is viewed as culturally acceptable for them to bring together partners, in order to achieve community benefit. In a large urban setting, there may be other actors who could fulfil this role, however in the Shropshire setting that Reader describes, or in Skipton, there

are fewer organisations that could feasibly initiate such projects. In answer to the question ‘how do you view the role of the churches in the Fair Trade Initiative group?’ Casper, a local politician who is not a churchgoer, says:

*They are the leaders I feel. The advantage is that you have got a ready-made organisation of supporters who, although they may only be a small group, they are a knowledgeable group who have contacts in all parts of the community.*

Casper’s comment on the advantage of prominent involvement from churchgoers is pertinent, in that he identifies the networking ability of churchgoers as a key resource for the Initiative. Casper is, in effect, identifying churches as a source of social capital. The churchgoers, although they are conscious of the need to present Fair Trade to the local community in a broadly secular manner, state that the Church should be playing a leading role in the Fair Trade movement. For example, churchgoer, Bella asserts:

*Because it (Fair Trade) is a Christian value, I think as Christians we should be taking a lead.*

#### 3.1.4 The Fair Trade Town

Fair Trade Towns are by their very nature concerned with strengthening bonds within communities. Fair Trade Town status is awarded upon achieving a set of criteria (Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.173). These criteria are based on the successful engagement between the Fair Trade Steering Group and key audiences: local government, businesses (both branches of large corporations and the small business sector) and the media, to engage a broad cross-section of the population. In this way, the Fair Trade Town is designed to encourage the partners who come together to form the Steering Group to engage with a wide audience and present the message of Fair Trade to sectors of the community that might not otherwise hear it. Malpass et al (2007) point out the benefits of a Fair Trade City campaign in strengthening community identity and they also indicate the

significant role played by churchgoers. This is certainly the case in Skipton where the majority of members of the Steering Group are churchgoers.<sup>1</sup> To a great extent, this is mirrored nationally for the UK and many other countries, indeed, Anderson (2015, p.66) credits the support of churchgoers with the success of the Fair Trade Town concept.

The campaign for Fair Trade Town status can be viewed as an opportunity for church based activists to reach a wider public, as Julie, a churchgoer in my study explains:

*I guess there is a need to get Fair Trade out of the churches and into the local community. In towns being declared Fair Trade status, that is one way of promoting it and getting it out of the churches.*

My research reveals that all of the churchgoers who are members of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group have also been active in the process of applying for Fair Trade church status for their own churches. In the UK, all the different Fair Trade status awards (such as Fair Trade church, place of worship, school, university, town, city and region) are all administered by the same body, the Fairtrade Foundation, and all follow a pattern of requirements, with evidence required against a set of criteria. Hence, many churchgoing activists have gained experience of Fair Trade status from their involvement with Fair Trade churches, which they can then use in their work for Fair Trade Town status. Clearly church based Fair Trade activists have much to contribute to Fair Trade Towns; their ability to access church and secular networks can play a major role in facilitating the bringing together of the diverse actors required to deliver Fair Trade Town status. In my Skipton case study, not only are the majority of the members of the Fair Trade Initiative Group churchgoers, but the campaign for Fair Trade Town status was initiated by Churches Together. This ecumenical umbrella group then formed the exclusively Christian, One World Week Group, from which the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group was drawn. Once the campaign for Fair Trade status began in earnest, then the group adopted its ‘secular’

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<sup>1</sup> In Skipton the Fair Trade Town Steering Group’s role is carried out by the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group.

stance and reached out to find non-churchgoing activists and forge connections with secular organisations.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.1.5 Fair Trade action by churches and social capital

In Chapter 2, I discussed the concept of social capital which has been developed by Putnam (2000) and focusses upon the bonds which unite communities. Putnam's stress on the importance of strengthening the ties between different sectors of society is influenced by his identification of the increasing individualisation of American society; an individualisation which threatens social connections, and hence, the overall health of society. Putnam (2000, pp.65-79) identifies faith communities as a significant source of social capital; the Church has a role to play in restoring social connections to create a healthier, less atomised, and more sociable, society. My outline of the means of engagement of Fair Trade action by churches (Sub-Section 3.1.2) offers a picture of vibrant voluntary community action. Putnam (2000, pp.116-133) indicates the close association between volunteering and social capital. In their essentially social nature the means of engagement of Fair Trade action by churches are examples of the 'doing with' that Putnam (2000, pp.116-117) views as being at the heart of social capital. My discussion of the initiating role of churches in the promotion of Fair Trade (Sub-Section 3.1.3) demonstrates the ability of the churchgoers in Skipton to bring together different sectors of the community, representing the generation of social capital. The framing of Fair Trade action by churches in terms of social capital can assist in my task of describing the public nature of the action. In particular, this framing highlights that the benefits of Fair Trade are not limited to producers and consumers, but extend to the whole community in which Fair Trade promotion takes part. The high level of activist support for Fair Trade Town schemes from churchgoers, and their initiating role in the process, positions the Church as repository of social capital and, particularly, the bridging capital to link the different sectors of a community together to work on a common project. The

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<sup>2</sup> The secular presentation of the Initiative Group is discussed in Section 6.2.

discourse of social capital makes for a good fit with the engaged emphasis of Public Theology. There is resonance between the strengthening of bonds that constitute social capital and the public conversation as a coming together of diverse parties. Both the discourses of social capital and of Public Theology view the Church as well placed to facilitate such a coming together in conversation.

### **3.2 The limitations of social capital as a frame**

A framing of church action for Fair Trade solely in terms of social capital cannot fully describe what is taking place. Atherton et al (2011, p.101) value social capital as an analytical framework for examining the churches' role in public life but they also point out the limitations of the concept. Notably, it is criticised for its social conservatism. The focus of social capital is on traditional understandings of what is a social good, in terms of strong community bonds creating the conditions for economic prosperity within the pre-existing economy. This focus is to the exclusion of the questioning of the economic order and the need for alteration to the structures of the economy or society. Bourdieu (1986) offers an analysis of social capital which emphasises the reciprocal benefits to be gained by individuals in cultivating their stock of social capital. There is a marked difference in emphasis between Bourdieu's description and that of Putnam. Putnam, although admitting that social capital has many and varied forms, tends to view motivation for contribution to social capital in terms of altruism, or an inherent sociability, whereas Bourdieu discusses tangible benefits that can accrue from cultivating a network of connections. Bourdieu acknowledges a link between social capital and other forms of capital, such as economic and cultural capital. Hence, for Bourdieu, social capital is more about reinforcing class biases within society than bringing different sectors of a community together. The critique of social capital offered by Bourdieu serves to problematise the use of the concept as a catch-all solution for the ills of society. For Fair Trade action by churches, reference to social capital does capture the community mindedness of the



Fair Trade Town project. However, the use of the concept of social capital to describe forms of support for Fair Trade which call for radical change and question the ways in which society is ordered, can prove problematic.

For Fair Trade action by churches, there is not a clear cut either / or regarding its contribution to increasing bonds in the existing society or the need for radical change of societal structures. At times, there is conflict between these two aims. For example, the Fair Trade Town certificate urges a coming together of local activists and retailers. In the case of small businesses this is an uncontroversial aim; however, discomfort is expressed by some of the churchgoers in my study regarding the business practice of supermarkets and large corporations,<sup>3</sup> to the extent that they do not regard large retailers or corporations as partners or allies in the Fair Trade Town campaign. There is no consensus within the Fair Trade movement as to whether the Fair Trade project is primarily concerned with the challenge of power structures or whether its major focus is on amelioration of the worst effects of the market. Although the Fair Trade movement today has to some extent entered the mainstream, both of the elements of being ‘in’ and ‘against’ the market are still there and there is debate within the movement as to degree to which the practice of Fair Trade should reflect either one, or other, of these elements. As I have indicated in Section 2.1, the framing of Fair Trade action by churches in terms of social capital fits with the engaged emphasis of Public Theology. Whereas, the role for Fair Trade in calling for a radical change in structures is more closely related to the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. This questioning of the structures of society resonates with Northcott’s (2007, p.182) interpretation of Fair Trade as resistance to the exploitative trade system; an interpretation which would receive approval from many of the churchgoing participants in my research.

For the churchgoers in my study, the benefits of Fair Trade action by churches in bringing the community together and in linking the church with the wider community are widely acknowledged. However, some of the participants call for radical change in the system of trade, even if this will

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<sup>3</sup> This will be discussed more fully in Section 8.1.

alienate some sections of the community. Ann, a local Vicar, argues that the church should not shy away from politics.

*I think the Church is inherently political. Christ was extremely political and I just think that we have, over the years, we have pretended that we are not [...] the Church has an absolute obligation to speak out, and against, the unfairness and injustice of the world.*

Brandon, an Anglican churchgoer, discusses at length in his interview the injustices of the trade system and the problems that hamper international development. He expresses that for fair trading to become a reality this will require the developed world to “restructure the way the world operates.” Brandon concludes that the Church cannot avoid talking about and addressing societal issues. Of those who argue to the contrary, he asserts:

*If Jesus had lived his life like that then they wouldn't have crucified him; because he was attacking the status quo and he was attacking vested interests.*

Ann and Brandon are not the only churchgoers in the study to recognise a radical side to Fair Trade which may not result in agreement from all sections of society. The majority of the churchgoers refer to the need for the Church to speak against injustice, however controversial this may prove. This is the call for the Church to follow in the footsteps of the Christ who comes to bring ‘not peace but division’ (Luke 12: 49-53). This verse from Luke highlights that the teachings of Jesus cannot be solely understood as a bringing together of all people; the call for justice will bring division within society more than it will bring unity. Hence action for social justice cannot be understood purely with reference to the concept of social capital. Social capital measures ‘the good’ purely in terms of the ability to strengthen bonds, the concept begins to falter when confronted with action for social justice which aims towards ‘the good’ or ‘the just’ but results in a divisive outcome for society.

The development of the concept of spiritual capital has assisted in extending the concept of social capital beyond discussion purely in terms of

strengthening bonds within communities.<sup>4</sup> Social capital generated by faith communities can be defined in terms of religious capital (the strengthening of bonds within communities as a result of the bridging capital of religious actors) and in terms of spiritual capital, which stresses the values that are motivational in generating religious capital. These values, which are embedded in the texts and traditions of faith communities, both motivate and shape the action that is carried out. However, rather than fully solve the problem of the divisive result of action for justice, spiritual capital can serve to highlight it further. The values behind spiritual capital can indeed motivate church action which results in a strengthening of bonds within communities and society; but they do not always. Baker (2007, p.200) points out that these values can also critique the norms of society. This will most likely take the form of a critique of societal structures. Such a critique is inherently controversial as it challenges powerful vested interests, which in turn will react to safeguard their position. As Kim (2011, p.12) indicates, the media should in theory promote debate within liberal societies, but to the contrary, he indicates that they: ‘have often played the role of judge, asserting their own verdict rather than allowing the public to engage in a healthy debate.’ Church projects such as Fair Trade and the provision of foodbanks are lauded when framed in terms of charitable provision. However, when the Church begins to ask questions as to why there is unfairness in trade, or why families are so poor that they have to access their food from foodbanks, then this can provoke criticism from the media; in turn influencing large sections of the general public. This level of division will be discussed in Section 3.4, where I refer to the negative connotations to the word ‘society’ expressed by the churchgoing participants. Rather than viewing society solely as a ‘coming together’ of diverse parties, the churchgoing participants view it negatively as a system driven by values which are alien to Christian values of peace and justice. Atherton et al (2011, p.98), talking in the context of social and welfare provision, refer to a disjunction between religious values and mainstream policy discourse. They go on to state that ‘there is perhaps discomfort at the intensity of the

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in Section 2.3.

vocabulary used when faith groups want to talk about not only what they do, but *why* they do what they do' (Atherton et al 2011, p.99).

The statement from Brandon, quoted above, which points out that Jesus challenged the status quo and vested interests (and hence, so should the Church) will not resonate with all supporters of Fair Trade, nor with most members of the public; however, it is a statement which indicates his religious motivation. Whereas religious capital is in the business of strengthening bonds in society in accordance with the discourse of social capital, it appears that the spiritual capital, which motivates and nourishes the religious, can lead the believer to a questioning of the status quo. This questioning can result in challenge and resistance to views prevalent in society, engendering division as much as coming together around shared values. In a sense, religious capital and spiritual capital represent the paradoxical emphases of Public Theology. Religious capital possesses an emphasis on engagement, as it represents the work of faith communities in bringing multiple parties together to work on projects of common interest. Spiritual capital balances this urge for engagement with an emphasis on the distinctive values which motivate the believers' involvement in projects for social justice. I have highlighted the role for Fair Trade action by churches in networking within communities to achieve both a coming together of diverse parties and the presentation of a distinctive message. My study reveals that this networking is not limited to the local community but reaches out to effectively connect the community with national and global partners.

### **3.3 Utilising wider networks**

In this section, I describe the ways in which the churchgoing participants connect their community-based promotion of Fair Trade with national and international networks. This attempt to bring together the local and the global, and the global north with the global south, can be understood as a form of social capital 'writ large' (Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.174). I outline the concept of linking capital whereby the relatively powerless are

linked with the powerful by a third party, such as the Church, which has contact with both. Action to support the powerless can result in the strengthening of some societal ties but the loosening of others. Fair Trade action by churches not only assists those marginalised in the global economy through its ethical consumption scheme but also with recourse to political action. However, such calls for political change can be divisive and do not fit neatly with the view of Fair Trade action by churches as a repository of social capital.

### 3.3.1 The types of wider network utilised

In outlining the churchgoers' utilisation of networks in the promotion of Fair Trade I have, thus far, concentrated on the ability of churchgoers to access local networks which range across different sectors of the community. However, this is not the whole picture; as the local networks that are being accessed are themselves connected with wider networks. Wheeler (2012) stresses that support for Fair Trade can only be understood if one takes account of its social setting in the midst of institutional frameworks. These frameworks are not specifically local and, although they have a local presence, they are networked at a national, and increasingly at an international, level. FTOs, NGOs and international campaigning organisations all play a key role in networking local communities with other actors working on global issues. Davey (2001, p.102) reminds us that the Church itself is a networked body and argues that:

The local life of the Church cannot exist in isolation – while responding to local conditions, the local church is informed, empowered and supported by other localities and meeting-points within the wider mesh of relationships that is the Church.

The networks of the Church and those of NGOs and FTOs are not necessarily discrete. For example, Christian NGOs, such as Christian Aid, CAFOD and Tear Fund utilise the wider networks of the Church to achieve their aims. The research participants not only refer to accessing the

networks of Christian NGOs but also secular organisations, such as Friends of the Earth, Oxfam and Global Development Now. NGO networks link church action for Fair Trade with large numbers of like-minded activists and help to embed Fair Trade within a wider context of development, environmental or anti-poverty action.

An important influence upon church action for Fair Trade is the work of the FTOs, particularly the Christian faith-based organisation, Traidcraft. They are an integral part of the Fair Trade movement and, to some extent, determine and shape the standards expected of Fair Trade. The majority of the participants in my study mention the work of these organisations, often stressing their importance in setting an example to mainstream trade, including mainstreamed Fair Trade business practice.<sup>5</sup> Traidcraft's vision, business practice and its understanding of Fair Trade are communicated to Fair Trade activists through its website, publications, campaign material and through the Fair Trader scheme. The scheme supplies Fair Trade goods to local representatives who sell them through stalls at church services or events (Grant 2001). The vast majority of Fair Traders are churchgoers who sell through the churches and the majority of the churches involved in my study set up stalls to sell Traidcraft goods. The stalls give the organisation visibility to whole congregations and this activity is reinforced by posters and worship materials supplied to churches.

Another influential organisation which operates within Fair Trade networks, and also contributes significantly to building and strengthening those networks, is the Fairtrade Foundation. Activists are in many respects automatically engaged within the Foundation's network, by virtue of its overseeing and award of the Fair Trade status certificates, such as Fair Trade church and Fair Trade Town. Most of the participants refer to this organisation, either in the context of certification, or in connection with the highly visible Fair Trade Fortnight activity.<sup>6</sup> The Foundation is primarily a certification body, awarding producer groups, and the corporations that

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<sup>5</sup> See Sub-Section 8.1.8.

<sup>6</sup> See Wheeler (2011) for discussion of the important role played by Fairtrade Fortnight in raising the profile of Fair Trade.

work with them, Fair Trade status for their products. The holding together of an activist body with a certification body can assist activists to gain a voice within the practice of Fair Trade; particularly pertinent in the era of Fair Trade mainstreaming. The Foundation provides two-way communication channels between the grassroots and the organisational level and, crucially, provides a network of communication between activist groups, joining together Fair Trade churches, towns and schools at regional and national levels.

Church Fair Trade action holds together elements of both the local and the global, making connections to inform a local public on global issues and to participate in transnational coalitions to bring change in the global trading system. This local-global dimension has considerable resonance with the reflections of Davey (2001), who identifies a new role for the church in the era of globalisation, offering a stable place-based presence, whilst acknowledging the considerable global influences on localities and, where appropriate, challenging the negative impacts of the globalised economy. Action for Fair Trade offers the opportunity for local churches to examine global economic issues, and offer solidarity to their global neighbour, whilst at the same time carrying out their role of being church in the local community. Fair Trade action, when integrated with the life of the church, can form part of its witness to the locality and its day to day mission. Through the Fair Trade church stall, a Fair Trade service, or a coffee morning, global issues and concerns can be made present in the most localised and familiar of settings. Many of the networks which the churchgoers access to scale-up their political action do themselves have a global reach. The Fair Trade movement is itself a global movement; the Fairtrade Foundation is networked as part of Fairtrade International, the international Fair Trade labelling organisation (Nicholls and Opal 2005, pp.127-140), and Traidcraft, and many FTOs, are linked together through the World Fair Trade Organisation (Rosenthal 2011, pp.168-9). Nicholls and Opal (2005, p.174) point out that discussion of social capital tends to relate to local or national contexts. They argue that, given the transnational nature of Fair Trade, the social capital that it generates can be understood as

operating on a global basis. Locally based activities such as Fair Trade Town schemes can generate social capital not only in their own locality but also in producer communities. The promotion of Fair Trade strengthens links within local communities and between communities; including bridging between communities in the global north and producer communities in the global south. The Fair Trade Towns movement is now an international network with Fair Trade Towns being declared in the global south, including in Brazil, Costa Rica, Ghana and the Lebanon (Fair Trade Towns 2017); thus contributing to blurring the global north-south divide in the Fair Trade movement.

### 3.3.2 Linking capital

The ability of Fair Trade action by churches to link together community action and local networks with the wider networks of the Church and FTOs and NGOs, can be understood as a form of linking capital. The concept of linking capital has to do with power and involves the ability of individuals and groups to access organisations with decision making powers (Baker 2009b, p.49). For the Skipton case study, local activists in this north of England market town are far from the centres of power which determine the workings of the global trade system. However, by efficiently networking with a wide range of organisations which have national and global reach and access to decision makers, the Skipton activists can play a role in influencing the global system. Cameron et al (2012, p.112) stress the importance of the regional, national and global Church networks which render the Church as repository of, not only social, but linking capital. Billings (2009, p.29) refers to linking capital in the context of organising to build capacity to ‘challenge or confront.’ With its emphasis on power and recognition of power imbalances there is a tension between Billings’s framing of linking capital and the understanding of social capital as strengthening bonds within community and society. Linking capital will result in joining communities together with networks from outside of the community, in this way it represents a strengthening of ties.



However, it is not difficult to imagine that recognition of power imbalances, and the intention to challenge, will not only result in the strengthening of some ties but the loosening of others. Church action for Fair Trade is set in the context of a global trade system in which communities feel powerless when faced with the forces which dominate it. A coming together with the purpose of challenging the global trade system, will bind those who are challenging but will result in division when confronting the vested interests of the system and those who support it. The linking of local with national and international networks facilitates such a challenge to the status quo.

### 3.3.3 Political action

The promotion of a system of ethical consumption can draw attention to the need for change but it is not sufficient. The churchgoing participants refer to an important role for the Fair Trade movement, not only in demonstrating a system of ethical trade, but also in calling for political change to bring about justice in the structures of trade. The existence of Fair Trade serves to publicise that mainstream trade is ‘unfair.’ Stefan goes as far as to say:

*Fair Trade is not the answer but it's a good pointer to what we are talking about: justice issues[...] If the Church had got behind the trade justice campaign it could have made a difference but most people didn't want to even think about it.*

In this statement, Stefan is focussing on Fair Trade in the narrow sense of the ethical consumption scheme, whereas most of the churchgoers view the Fair Trade movement as encompassing political calls for trade justice. However, it is interesting that for Stefan trade justice is more important than ethical consumption. For him, the major purpose of the ethical consumption scheme is as a ‘way in’ to educate the public about trade issues and mobilise a political campaign. Dubuisson-Quellier et al (2011), in their research on activists promoting ethical consumption projects in France, highlight the ability of the activists to work within local networks and effectively connect their promotion of ethical consumption schemes to wider political

programmes. The effectiveness of this strategy is dependent on the ability of activists to gain access to national and international networks. The participants in my study have multiple allegiances; they are not only churchgoers and Fair Trade supporters, they are also members and activists for organisations such as Christian Aid or Oxfam. Not only are churchgoers willing to engage with local networks in their support of Fair Trade, they are also willing to connect these with wider networks to which they share allegiance. Materials used by the churchgoers, produced by Traidcraft, the Fairtrade Foundation or campaigning NGOs, stress the need to tackle structural injustice in the trade system. The churchgoers in my study distribute lobbying postcards produced by these organisations. These are directed to political leaders, powerful international organisations and to the CEOs of transnational corporations. The majority of the churchgoers have also taken part in publicity stunts and demonstrations in order to draw attention to political campaigns.

As the comments from Ann and Brandon in Section 3.2 illustrate, the churchgoers acknowledge the need for political solutions to the problems of trade injustice in addition to the promotion of ethical consumption. These political campaigns are confronting the workings of the mainstream economy head on and are therefore emphasising the distinct difference between a trade guided by values of justice and fairness and the mainstream trade guided by the values of the market. The political campaigning facet of the Fair Trade movement can also speak into the dichotomy at the heart of the Fair Trade movement, as expressed in the dictum ‘in and against the market’ (Barratt Brown 1993, pp.156-176). The operation of the ethical consumption scheme in coming to the assistance of poor producers fits with the work of Fair Trade within the market mechanism. However, it is a double-edged sword, as Stefan indicates, the operation of the ethical consumption scheme can be seen not only as way to assist the poor directly by use of the market mechanism, it can also be viewed as a denunciation of mainstream trade. The existence of Fair Trade contrasts with the ‘unfair trade’ of the mainstream. Calls for political change in the structures of trade are linked with this denunciation of unfair

trade and together represent the ‘against the market’ facet of the Fair Trade concept. The churchgoers point out that one of the benefits of carrying out activism in support of ethical consumption, and particularly in support of products which carry the widely-known Fairtrade mark certification, is that it is open and accessible to a wide cross section of the public. It does not require complex explanation and its method of purchasing consumer goods is one with which the vast majority of the population are familiar. Conversely, in the UK political campaigning is alien to much of the population and issues of trade justice are complex and can prove divisive. Issues of trade justice certainly emphasise the distinctive nature of a ‘just’ trade and explicitly critique the mainstream; they can therefore be associated with the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. The divisive nature of political action will at times bring it into tension with the engaged emphasis of Public Theology; engendering not so much a ‘coming together’ as a setting of one section of society up against another.

### **3.4 Fair Trade action by churches as resistance**

In contrast to the framing of Fair Trade action by churches as a form of social capital resulting in societal cohesion, the action can be seen as creating a space of resistance. Radical commentators on globalisation, such as Hardt and Negri (2000, pp.393-413) view the only possible response to the powerful forces of global capitalism as resistance. Cooperation with such forces could only result in being overwhelmed by the powerful logic of the market. There is an element of radical change within the concept of Fair Trade. Reynolds and Murray (2007, p.223) state:

Fair Trade has emerged over recent years as a powerful critique of conventional global inequalities and a promising initiative supporting alternative globalisation ideas, practices, and institutions grounded in social justice and ecological sustainability.

They emphasise Fair Trade’s role as critique of the global economy and view it as an alternative, based on radically different values. To return to the views of Northcott, his framing of Fair Trade is such that it offers

prophetic denunciation of the global economy. As Raynolds and Murray, Northcott (2007, p.184) views Fair Trade as an alternative to the mainstream, dedicated to ‘reshaping and resisting neo-liberal approaches to world trade.’ Atherton (2007, p.249) characterises Northcott’s outlook on Fair Trade as a critique of the global trade system and the suggestion of a Christian alternative to empire.

Perhaps a surprising finding of my research was that the participants tend to view contemporary ‘society’ in a negative light. Their critique of society resonates more with the Fair Trade of radical change and resistance than it does with the concept of social capital. Rather than view society as essentially good, or at least neutral, they see it as antagonistic to the values of social justice. This suggests that there are more problems with the nature of society than can be solved by the strengthening of bonds. In answer to the question ‘in what ways are your views of society shaped by your faith?’ the majority of the churchgoing participants (eleven of the nineteen) give expression to a negative view of contemporary ‘society.’ The following statement from Cheryl is typical of the negative trigger given by the use of the word ‘society’:

*I think that sometimes I look at society and wonder where we have gone. I think there are a lot of parts of our UK society, that, as I get older, I get more disillusioned with.*

Antonia views society as characterised by injustice:

*I get frustrated by society; it is a Christian duty to shout out about injustice.*

For the majority of the churchgoers, ‘society’ is not viewed in the sense of a neutral public, waiting to take action only if it were correctly informed.

Rather, considerable opposition to the work of social justice and the values that underpin it are anticipated by the churchgoers. Those churchgoers who go on to explain the nature of opposition to the work for social justice tend to focus more on structures of society than on the values of the individuals. For example, Ann states:

*I would say that my faith leads me to look at society in terms of the way we organise ourselves as not the best it could be.*

Ann's critique of society focuses on its materialistic nature and she is critical of consumerism and, what she identifies as, a fixation on economic growth. This is framed in terms of political and economic leadership rather than individual values. Of course, there is an intimate connection between the two, in that societal structures can shape the values of the individuals within society. Cheryl's answer to the question illustrates this connection:

*I find that our politicians are leading us into a very greedy, self-centred way of thinking and I think we have become more materialistic, more isolated and more self-obsessed as a nation.*

Her reference to 'politicians' points to a structural cause of societal malaise and yet, although she identifies 'society' with 'nation', there is an element of critique of the values of individuals or perhaps the values of individuals as influenced by the collective.

Of the eleven churchgoing participants who are critical of the nature of 'society', seven of these go on, not only to criticise the global economic system, but to question its entire validity. This position is in accord with Northcott's view of Fair Trade as denunciation and outright rejection of the mainstream economy. Felix, for example, is critical of the values that lie behind the international economy and calls for the Church to speak out. He adds:

*There is a reluctance for churchgoers generally to get involved in matters of economics, because for the most part they don't understand them, and especially the clergy. They are committed to the contemporary belief in growth. The Church should challenge economic growth as criteria for success; but they are not. Churchgoers will rally round when there is a disaster but ignore the fact there is an ongoing problem.*

Felix is clearly critical of the lack of initiative from the Church in challenging the mainstream economy and, in Chapter 7, I will discuss the

churchgoers' call for the Church to take ownership of action for social justice such as Fair Trade. What is pertinent to this discussion is the level of questioning of the values of the mainstream economy. Felix criticises growth strategies, not as part of a logistical critique, but as a fundamental questioning of the values that underpin the global economy. For Felix, although economic growth is essential for the operation of the capitalist system, he rejects growth as morally wrong. He criticises the greed, waste and environmental degradation that he associates with the economic system. There seems little room for 'guidance' of the current economic system or amelioration of its worst effects. Felix, like Northcott, rejects the mainstream system; Fair Trade is a counter-cultural alternative to it, rather than a tool for reform.

The churchgoing participants identify the struggle for social justice as a minority preoccupation within society. This minority position is not exclusively religious as the churchgoers identify secular partners for justice, however they are few in number when compared to the overall population.<sup>7</sup> On the whole, the churchgoers view the majority of the population of the UK as unsympathetic to the concept of justice for the poor. Cheryl comments on the nature of British society:

*We are so self-obsessed. We can't even join the European Union without having arguments and I think both my experience, and my Christian faith, see the world as much bigger than our little island, and our little place, and so I think that what I am trying to say is that as a society we don't look outwards enough.*

This call for an outward looking attitude stands in contrast to what Cheryl identifies as a prevalent narrative in the UK; one which conflates membership of the European Union with rights for immigrants, ethnic minorities and even with international development, viewing all of them with deep suspicion. For supporters of progressive movements, such as Fair Trade, this narrative, which has proved compelling for many sections of the British population, is problematic and constitutes an oppositional movement

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 6.3.2.

to calls for social justice. Although the churchgoers perceive that they face considerable opposition, they are in no way minded to back down as they view their work for social justice as an integral part of their faith.<sup>8</sup> There is something of the Kierkegaardian ‘for a crowd is the untruth’ about the statements of the churchgoers in relation to society and public attitudes towards Fair Trade and other social justice issues (see Kierkegaard 1975, pp.94-101). To stay on the course of supporting what is just, the churchgoers have to reject prevalent views in society. The churchgoers observe division within society. This divide is between those people and institutions that uphold the values of peace and justice and those who support the structures that reject or act contrary to those values. The divide is not described in harmonious terms; the duty of those who believe in social justice, is to fight for it, and all the churchgoers interviewed refer to significant opposition in the face of this.

The critique of ‘society’ from the churchgoers does speak into the discourse of Public Theology. There is a marked difference in emphasis from the framing of Public Theology as contribution to the generation of social capital to a Public Theology which denounces society as unjust. The notion of ‘public’ is essentially different in the two contexts. ‘Public’ in the former context has more of the feel of ‘community’ with an emphasis on what binds us together rather than what divides us. There is an element of an emptiness waiting to be filled in this sense of public. It is a waiting public, ready for the Church to intervene and bring people together through the insights of theology which will receive a receptive hearing. At the opposite end of the spectrum we have the ‘public’ of Kierkegaard. In his understanding, the public does not represent a coming together nor does it have the potential to do so, as according to Kierkegaard (1978, p.90), it is: ‘a monstrous abstraction, an all-encompassing something that is nothing, a mirage.’ The nothingness that Kierkegaard (1978, pp.90-6) refers to is not a characterisation of a neutral public, rather it represents an absence of responsibility on the part the public. The public is the impenitent crowd and

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<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4.

the crowd is untruth (Kierkegaard 1975, p.94). For Kierkegaard, the public signifies not the collective but the absence of communal life. Indeed, the concept of ‘the public’ only plays its role once all trace of community has been eroded. Kierkegaard (1978, p.91) states: ‘Only when there is no strong communal life to give substance to the concretion will the press create this abstraction “the public”, made up of insubstantial individuals who are never united or never can be united in the simultaneity of any situation or organisation and yet are claimed to be a whole.’ Membership of the public requires no duty or responsibility and Kierkegaard (1978, p.93) goes so far as to state: ‘not a single one of these who belong to a public is essentially engaged in any way.’ What does this sort of ‘public’ mean for Public Theology? There is little element of a coming together around shared values, as the public is not characterised by values, only untruth. There is not even the opportunity for the voice of theology to be heard in public debate as there is no real public debate. There is only a lack of consideration and empty pronouncements, facilitated by an absence of responsibility, a hiding within an anonymous crowd. The role of Public Theology here is to unleash theology against ‘the public.’ It is to awaken individuals from a slumber of acceptance of the nothingness at the heart of ‘the public.’ It is to challenge the prevailing logic and absence of responsibility and, first and foremost, it is a Public Theology of resistance.

### **3.5 The contested Public Sphere**

The churchgoers’ calls for political change to the structures of trade, critiques of the mainstream market and a view of society at odds with social justice are all associated to some degree with division within the public sphere. Morton (2004, p.29) describes a public space characterised by difference rather than shared values. He makes a distinction between ‘public’ and ‘community.’ In contrast to the divided public, community is understood with reference to shared values. The discourse of social capital could easily be applied to ‘community’ understood this way. Morton (2004, pp.33-4) also talks about ‘two publics in one’ and this contrasts the position



of the powerful and powerless in society. Their positions and experiences are so qualitatively different that they lack the shared language for discourse. For Fair Trade, the producers represent the powerless and economic actors, including consumers, the powerful. Morton refers to the work of the public theologian Duncan Forrester in standing in the gap between the powerful and powerless and church action for Fair Trade can be seen as just such a work of Public Theology. However, this recognition of power imbalance, to the extent that the two can barely be described as sharing the same discourse, has a difference in emphasis from Nicholls and Opal's (2005, p.174) description of the Fair Trade Towns network. In this description, the emphasis is one of engagement with the networks of the global south and global north coming together to constitute a social capital 'writ large.' This analysis cannot offer a full picture of what is taking place as it does not acknowledge the immense power imbalances between the networks of the global south and the global north.

The understanding of a divided public is confirmed by Habermas' (1989) description of the contested public sphere, under threat by the powerful forces of the state and the market. The public sphere represents a gathering of diverse parties which can act as a bulwark against the powerful forces. In this interpretation of the nature of 'public' Fair Trade is, in effect, offering a space for the emboldening of the public sphere. The public sphere is a shared space in which parties are forced together, but the commonality is in the space rather than in the substance. The public sphere must cope with difference and the competing aims of the different parties. Habermas (1989) argues that in western society daily life is dominated by the state and, increasingly, by the market. The public sphere must create space to challenge the dominance of the two most powerful forces. Ultimately, Habermas is pessimistic about the potential for resisting the power of the market in liberal economies; the rise in the morality of the market will destroy the values of the actors within the public sphere. The negative opinions of the churchgoers towards society reflect Habermas' concerns that the values of the market are overwhelming the public sphere. Ann's observations regarding the pervasion of consumerism in society and

Felix's criticism of a fixation on economic growth are examples of this concern.<sup>9</sup> This view of the public space in which church action for Fair Trade operates is characterised by contestation; it is a place of difference. A Church response to this difference could be fulfilled by Kim's (2011, p.22) recommendation of building a space for public discussion, acknowledging a divided 'public' but one with which it can enter into 'critical dialogue and debate.' However, the Church's role in a contested public sphere may also require intervention with a different emphasis; one which seeks to challenge injustice with prophetic denunciation and the promotion of an alternative, distinct message at odds with the prevalent views within society. This view of 'public' space goes beyond the acknowledgement of contestation and frames 'the public' as a battleground of values.

Which analysis better fits church action for Fair Trade? Is it a significant repository of social capital poised to inspire a receptive public or is it a valiant fight in the battleground of a contested public, or even a fight against the public itself; the truth of justice ranged against a public of untruth? There are reflections of all of these in the statements of the research participants. Certainly, their reference to the Fair Trade Town project reflects considerable success on the part of the churchgoers in bringing together diverse sections of the community. The success of the churchgoers in bridging between the Church and the secular, between different sectors of the community and between the local and the global, does in many respects fit well with Putnam's judgement of religious groups as considerable repositories of social capital. On the other hand, the churchgoers' consciousness of resistance to Fair Trade, and their understanding of the work for justice as a minority concern, fits with a contested view of the public space. To return to the understanding of Fair Trade and of Public Theology as a holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases; just as both are necessary but posed in a paradoxical relationship, so too are these different understandings of public. Fair Trade action by churches is a form of public engagement for the Church. There is

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<sup>9</sup> These statements are discussed in Section 3.4.

a willingness to contribute to public life, in bringing together diverse sectors of the community and thus strengthening the bonds within society. In carrying out this engagement there is a corresponding concern for the distinctive element of Fair Trade, underpinned by the theologically informed original ideals of the Fair Trade movement. By necessity, this leads to challenge of the structures of society and a corresponding backlash by sectors of that society. Just as Fair Trade works 'in and against' the market, so too it works 'in and against' society. The message of Fair Trade affirms a coming together of people, transcending economic and geographical location. Yet it also underlines division between the just and the unjust, highlighting the difference in experience between the rich and the poor. As the majority component for the activist body for the Fair Trade movement in the UK, churchgoers hold together both of these vital aspects for Fair Trade; engaging with a wide public and speaking out against injustice.

### **Conclusion**

The public nature of church Fair Trade action is demonstrated by the ability of churchgoers to utilise a wide range of church-based and secular networks to engage the local community. The action is public to such an extent that churchgoers provide a vital contribution to Fair Trade activity across whole communities, including to Fair Trade Town projects. In my case study community of Skipton, churchgoers have taken a lead in bringing together different sectors of the community in order to promote Fair Trade. Their contribution to the local community, in terms of strengthening bonds, can be understood as part of the wider analysis of the Church as a repository of social capital. The concept of social capital is useful in that it assists in the analysis of the contribution that churches can make to public life. The imbalance that the concept of social capital places on the engaged emphasis of Public Theology can, to some extent, be rectified by the concept of spiritual capital. In stressing the importance of the religious values that motivate the generation of social capital, the distinctive emphasis of Public

Theology is acknowledged. However, for my task of describing church Fair Trade action, a framing in terms of social capital does not offer a full picture. Churchgoers promote Fair Trade in the public realm, not only to bring together diverse sections of the community in a common project, they also do so to draw attention to injustice and to combat that injustice by calling for structural change. The research participants express negative views of society, in the light of their experience of opposition to action for social justice and observation of the prevalence of the logic of the market. This has resonance with an understanding of the public sphere as contested space. It is a very different public from the one which emphasises a coming together in community or even to debate in civility. It is a public deserving of denunciation and challenge.

There is a dichotomy at the heart of the public nature of Fair Trade action by churches. The action possesses an engaged emphasis in bringing communities together, strengthening bonds between diverse parties, facilitating joint projects and building bridges between the global north and the global south. Simultaneously, it possesses a distinctive emphasis in denouncing injustice, calling for political change and resisting the encroaching power of the market in a contested public sphere. Fair Trade action brings unity, solidarity, debate and division. All of these outcomes are part of the public nature of Fair Trade action and they relate to the different understandings of the concept of 'public.' The understanding of 'public' within the discourse of social capital has a marked difference in emphasis from the understanding of a contested 'public' sphere in which the values of the market must be challenged by outright resistance. The evidence of the research interviews is that both engaged and distinctive emphases are present. The participants' attitudes towards the Fair Trade Town project reflect the engaged emphasis of Public Theology in bringing diverse sections of the community together to promote Fair Trade. At the same time, the 'public' nature of the action embraces political change, challenge and resistance to a society which is viewed as oppositional to the work of social justice. The different emphases contained within the concept of 'public' highlight the difficulty in doing Public Theology. There is a

danger that an imbalance between the emphases may pose a threat to theology. An over-emphasis on the engaged element may lead to an unquestioning acceptance of the nature of society and an inability to challenge prevalent values, posing a threat of the co-option of theology by dominant discourses in society. Conversely, an over-emphasis on the distinctive element may render theology vulnerable in the face of the opposition of society, it may appear alien and ultimately be rejected, leaving theology without an effective voice in the public realm. For a genuine Public Theology, theology must be made relevant to a wider public whilst remaining faithful to Christian tradition and belief. In this chapter I have discussed the 'public' nature of Fair Trade action by churches; the ways in which the action is publicly relevant, given the different interpretations of the concept of 'public.' I shall now move on to examine the action as an expression of Christian belief, seeking to answer in what ways can the action be understood as theological? I will apply the understanding of Public Theology as a holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases, to stress the twin requirements of a theology that is both relevant and capable of offering distinctive witness.

## **Chapter 4: The theology of the churchgoers**

### **Introduction**

For the Church to offer its voice in public conversation, any form of Public Theology must not only be effectively engaged with a wide public, it must also be sufficiently robust theologically, in order to give distinctive witness, faithful to the traditions of the Church. In this chapter, I examine the theology of the churchgoers in my study in relation to Fair Trade, utilising the techniques of Ordinary Theology. For the framing of church action for Fair Trade as a form of Public Theology, my aim is not only to demonstrate that the churchgoers' support for Fair Trade is theologically informed and motivated, but also to discern how the nature of the theology shapes the churchgoers' views of Fair Trade.

Despite the secular presentation of the Fair Trade movement, the evidence of these interviews indicates that the churchgoers' support for Fair Trade is theologically motivated.<sup>1</sup> The churchgoers possess an action-orientated theology, which requires that beliefs must be enacted in the practices of everyday life. This interpretation of theology as praxis shapes both of the two overarching themes that I have identified as common to the testimonies of the churchgoing interviewees. These themes are: the understanding of Fair Trade as a form of biblical justice and as a means of demonstration of Christian principles to a wider public. I discuss the implications of both of these themes in terms of their influence on the churchgoers' views of the nature of Fair Trade. An implication of understanding Fair Trade as justice is that it is not a form of charity, rather, it should be seen as a Christian obligation. Another implication is that the churchgoers are reluctant to draw boundaries around Fair Trade; thus, they readily meld their work on Fair Trade with other action for justice, joining with many organisations, and moving beyond ethical consumption, to embrace action for wider transformation. I conclude my discussion of Fair

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<sup>1</sup> The secular presentation of Fair Trade is discussed in Chapter 6.

Trade as justice with an outline of the relationship between this particular understanding and the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology (Sub-Section 4.5.3). Justice at the heart of Fair Trade is theologically inspired and constitutes a distinctive emphasis, in that it is distinct from mainstream practice and values. However, Fair Trade as justice cannot be characterised solely in terms of the distinctive emphasis. Fair Trade as part of the wider work for social justice requires that the Church work with a network of partners from diverse religious and non-religious backgrounds. The emphasis on engagement is manifested, in that the work of the Church on social justice projects presents an opportunity for theology to engage with wider society, offering a chance for voice of theology to be heard by sectors of society where it would otherwise be silent.

The second theme, of understanding Fair Trade as an act of demonstration of biblical principles, relates closely to the first, in that justice, and core principles which spring from it, are the subject of such demonstration. Together with demonstration of justice and the prophetic denunciation of injustice, other principles discussed by the churchgoers include the love of neighbour and the right stewardship of God's creation. The implications of this understanding of Fair Trade as demonstration are in some senses paradoxical. To demonstrate biblical principles to a wide public, church action for Fair Trade must be effectively engaged with that public, whilst, simultaneously, it must remain distinctive, so as not to be subsumed by the values of the world. In the final Section (4.7), I discuss the dual role of Fair Trade as practical assistance and exemplar for an alternative form of trade, informed by values radically different from the mainstream. Both of the roles require the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology.

#### **4.1 Fair Trade and biblical interpretation**

All the churchgoers in my study refer to the Bible as their source of motivation and inspiration in their support of Fair Trade. Rather than claim Fair Trade as the derivation of a particular interpretation of the Bible, they

all view church action on Fair Trade as clearly supported by biblical evidence. For these churchgoers, the battle is not between competing understandings of the texts, but between those who choose to pay heed and those who choose to ignore them. Social justice is in no sense separate from the Gospel; it is indivisible from it. For example, one of the participants, Heather states:

*It's all about social justice issues, the Bible, isn't it? That's what it is all about really.*

Incredulity is expressed regarding Christians who do not place social justice central to their faith. The following statement from Margaret is typical:

*I can't see how you can be a Christian and not support Fair Trade. I find it really difficult when I come across Christians who don't support it, because I think hang on a minute here, what is your faith all about?*

In terms of theology, the statements of these churchgoers on biblical reference to poverty, and issues of justice, are not dissimilar to the views expressed by Jim Wallis (2005; 2006) or John Howard Yoder (1998). They do not view the Biblical texts as being in any way problematic on issues of social justice; they are, if anything, unequivocal. For these churchgoers, the life and teachings of Jesus point to the struggle for social justice. Indeed, a lack of support for the work for social justice is equated with an ignorance or outright rejection of biblical teachings. In answer to the question 'why do you think there are some churchgoers who haven't made the connection between Christian faith and Fair Trade?' Julie suggests:

*Maybe it's related to knowledge of the Bible. A frighteningly high percentage of churchgoers don't open their Bible from one Sunday to the next...there is ignorance in that direction.*

Sources of biblical inspiration include verses relating to fair treatment of workers from the Law and from the Book of James. More widely, the prophets Hosea, Amos, Malachi and Isaiah are cited for their cries against injustice in the form of unfair treatment of the poor and oppressed. From



the Gospels, the Parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) and the Sheep and the Goats (Matthew 25:31-46) were the most frequently cited as evidence of a biblical imperative for coming to the assistance of those marginalised in society. The majority of the participants cited one or more of these sources; however, all of the churchgoers refer to general biblical principles. These include the dignity of the human made in the image of God, God's preferential love for the poor, the love of neighbour and Jesus' concern for the outcast. A minority of the churchgoers (five of the nineteen churchgoers interviewed) refer only to general biblical principles rather than specific narratives. In discussion of Ordinary Theology, Astley and Christie (2007, p.26) identify a pragmatic approach to theology, stating: 'in matters theological, many people only take what they need.' Indeed, some of the most committed activists that I interviewed articulated theologies limited to general principles and there appears little connection between sophistication of theology and depth of commitment. However, to convince congregations of the necessity of action in support of Fair Trade as part of the mission of the church, it may be necessary to expand upon general principles.<sup>2</sup>

In 'only taking what they need' (Astley and Christie 2007, p.26), the participants in my study are expressing a primary concern for action as opposed to meditation or the collection of theological knowledge for its own sake. Biblical interpretation is seen primarily as motivation and guidance for action. This has resonance with the view of Astley and Christie (2007, p.26) who state that:

What matters most for most people in theology is not 'right doctrine' but 'right (religious, spiritual and moral) practice': in particular, letting the story of Jesus have its way with them.

In the participant interviews this concern for right course of action above right doctrine expresses itself in two ways: the interviewees devote far more time to discussing the right course of action as opposed to what they consider to be right in theory and, secondly, many of the churchgoers make statements which indicate that what is important to them is that beliefs

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<sup>2</sup> See Section 7.2.

should be acted out. For these churchgoers, belief without practice is no belief at all.

#### **4.2 Faith as praxis**

The following statement from Keith is typical of the views of the churchgoing participants on the need for belief to be closely linked to action.

*The church has a far greater impact when it's seen to be doing something, and standing up for something, than simply promoting its beliefs; because, if beliefs are not backed by action, there seems little point believing them.*

For these churchgoers, faith and action are so closely related that praxis, an expression of deeply held beliefs through practical action, is of primary concern. Graham et al (2005, p.170) outline a 'theology-in-action' as praxis; theology is described as "performative knowledge", that is, a way of knowing that is inseparable from doing.' Support for Fair Trade fits within the participants' understanding of faith as praxis, offering an opportunity to express the tenets of faith by practical means. Heather explains:

*It (Fair Trade) is so closely linked with justice and peace and also trying to live out our faith, trying to do things, not just sort of having the faith, but acting on it.*

Heather's reference to the living out of faith underlines that, for these churchgoers, faith is not about discussion of the abstract; faith must be appropriated and expressed practically in the life of the believer. Cloke and Beaumont (2012) identify a turn towards the practical in the Church's role in postsecular society. Faith is being expressed in the public realm through Christian participation in social projects such as Fair Trade, and these are often carried out in conjunction with actors and agencies from outside of the Church. Graham (2013, pp.251-89) argues that Public Theology can be seen as a form of apologetics for the postsecular era, with Christian involvement in the public realm being viewed as an opportunity to present

and defend Christian truth claims. Proselytising is a problematic activity in a plural, multi-faith environment, and hence, the practical turn for Public Theology places its emphasis on ‘doing’; the demonstration of faith as opposed to verbal assertion. Graham (2013, p.294) states that: ‘new understandings of apologetics are displacing a modernist cognitive model which emphasises the priority of assent to propositional truths, and positing the object of apologetics as an invitation to participate in a way of life.’ For the research participants, the Christian faith is viewed in terms of a ‘way of life’ and Fair Trade is one means by which the Christian way of life can be realised in the everyday actions of the believer.

Graham (2013, p.294) finds resonance between this ‘way of life’ apologetics and Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus, stating: ‘this epistemology of apologetics assumes faith as “habitus”: a practical wisdom that gives shape to the world and orientates Christians in their actions and behaviours.’ The understanding of faith as habitus assists in capturing the seamless link between belief and action that the participants describe. Adherence to the truth claims of Christianity and participation in action for social justice are not in tension in any way for these churchgoers. Their outlook eschews a traditional liberal-evangelical divide, whereby profession of Christian truth claims is viewed as an activity in competition with the work for social justice; as if the one to a great extent excludes the other.<sup>3</sup> Faith as habitus underlines the importance of faith as the motivation and guidance for carrying out the work of social justice. Bourdieu (1984, p.166) describes the internalisation of the habitus so that it becomes ‘a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions.’ For these churchgoers, the Christian faith is such a disposition. Embedded in the life of the believer, it serves to initiate right practice. However, as Graham et al (2005, p.194) indicate, this is not a one-way process. The habitus shapes practice, but the experience of carrying out this practice, in turn, assists in reshaping the nature of the habitus.

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<sup>3</sup> See Moltmann (1974, p.22), who describes such a polarisation.

Following from the churchgoers' emphasis on theology as praxis, I have identified two key themes which underline the connection between the theology of the churchgoers and the work that they carry out in support of Fair Trade. Firstly, that Fair Trade is understood as action for justice. Their conceptions of justice are drawn to a great extent from biblical sources and they identify justice as central to the Christian faith. The churchgoers' understanding of Fair Trade as justice is closely related to their emphasis on theology as praxis, as it is both rooted in theology and is decidedly action-orientated. Secondly, the churchgoers view Fair Trade as an act of demonstration of Christian principles. This too represents the elements of praxis with the acting out of the core theology of the Church. Informed as it is by principles central to the Christian faith, such as justice, the love of neighbour and the right stewardship of creation, Fair Trade enacted in the lives of Christians can act as a form of public demonstration of Christian principles in action. I shall now outline in turn these two themes and, for each, discuss the implications of these understandings for the nature of the work that the churchgoers carry out on Fair Trade.

### **4.3 Fair Trade as justice**

For the great majority of churchgoers in my study (seventeen of the nineteen churchgoers), Fair Trade is explicitly framed in terms of justice. This reference to justice points beyond a political understanding to a Christian view of justice, derived largely from the biblical texts. The following statement from Cheryl is typical of the connections that are expressed that link Fair Trade and justice:

*Fair Trade to me is about justice and as far as I'm concerned  
Christianity is about justice and speaking out for the poorest in the  
world.*

In identifying the centrality of justice informing the practice of Fair Trade, there is agreement between the participants and the views of Northcott. Northcott (2007, p.185) stresses the Christian roots of the concept of justice driving Fair Trade, arguing that:

There is no universal logic that can require rational assent to the principles of Fair Trade. Fair Trade is a set of practices that arose as an expression of a distinctively Christian account of justice and fairness.

Northcott (2007, pp.184-5) urges the Fair Trade movement to hold on to the centrality of justice. He is wary of any decrease in this emphasis, as he envisages a diminished ability on the part of Fair Trade to offer critique to the mainstream economy, if the original Christian insight is lost. None of the churchgoers in the research study refer explicitly to their understanding of justice as being distinctively Christian. However, it is clear that they are drawing on biblical resources in order to give meaning to the concept. All the churchgoers who describe Fair Trade as a form of justice, go on to link this to 'justice' as a biblical theme, for example Julie asserts:

*To me it is a question of justice and you have got that throughout the scriptures; that we live in a world that is not fair and, to me, it is so unfair that, if you are born in one part of the world, you going to be poor and, if you are born in the West, you are going to be so much more advantaged.*

Julie's reference to poverty is typical of the churchgoers' responses in that she links the concept of justice with God's concern towards the poor; a connection indicated by many theologians. Gorringer (1999, p.16), in discussion of the concept of justice derived from the Old Testament, argues that:

Justice consists, in the first instance, in loyalty to the covenant which binds two parties. When one of the two parties is Yahweh, the God who frees slaves, then justice is seen to involve standing up for the poor.

In this understanding, loving God is to be expressed by the Christian in the love of justice for the poor. The churchgoers' support for Fair Trade is guided foremost by the opportunity that Fair Trade offers to actualise justice

for the poor. The expression of this connection is not limited to individual churchgoers. The Christian FTO, Traidcraft, also stresses the role of Fair Trade in bringing about justice. Philip Angier (2001, p.84), former Chief Executive of Traidcraft, states that ‘God’s bias to the poor’ is a guiding principle of Traidcraft, as is expressed in the organisation’s Mission Statement. For the churchgoers in my study, Fair Trade is more than just an opportunity to show kindness, its positioning as an act of justice means that the values of Fair Trade, with their bias to the poor, are equated with the values of God.

For those churchgoers who explain where they find biblical inspiration for the concept of justice, the most frequently cited sources are from the Old Testament. They include numerous references to the right payment and treatment of workers within the books of the Law. Westlake and Stansfield (2004, pp.40-1), who outline a Christian response to exploitation in the textile trade, draw on this legislation.<sup>4</sup> They identify an Old Testament social system, guided by justice and compassion, which urges right treatment by employers towards their workers. The words of the prophets also inspire the churchgoers in their association of Fair Trade and the biblical call for justice. For example, Keith states that, of all the books of the Old Testament, he draws the most inspiration from Amos and Hosea. He comments that:

*The whole of their message is about justice and righteousness and caring.*

Through these prophetic texts, Keith is motivated to carry out action for justice and, for him, they are offering indication as to what the primary outcome of the Christian faith should be. Of course, a clear theme running through the works of the prophets is not only the upholding of the righteous

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<sup>4</sup> Examples of the legislation include: Deuteronomy 24:14-15, Leviticus 29:13 and Leviticus 25:17.

justice of God, but also the denunciation of injustice, and this too plays a role in the work that Keith carries out in support for Fair Trade.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4.4 The distinctive conception of justice**

The churchgoers, in characterising Fair Trade as an act of justice, are drawing upon biblical resources and interpreting the concept of justice in the light of God's preferential concern for the poor. In this sense, there is resonance with Northcott's (2007, p.185) argument that Fair Trade is rooted in a distinctively Christian conception of justice. However, this is not to say that the characterisation of Fair Trade as an act of justice is limited to Christians. There are many Fair Trade supporters who do not profess the Christian faith but identify Fair Trade as work for justice. Business ethicist, Geoff Moore (2004, p.77) argues that justice is the basis on which many of the principles of Fair Trade are founded. Given the influence of the churches within the Fair Trade movement, perhaps it is not surprising that justice plays a central role in Fair Trade. This can be viewed as successful Public Theology, in that biblically inspired Christian practice has been translated to gain the attention of a wider public. However, I would add a note of qualification to Northcott's description of Fair Trade as an expression of a distinctively Christian account of justice. The message of Fair Trade as justice for the poor has credence beyond the Church, and there are secular sources of inspiration which can influence, not only non-churchgoers' conceptions of justice, but also those of churchgoers. These secular sources of inspiration can be drawn upon, to complement the biblical, in shaping conceptions of justice.

The churchgoing participants make numerous references to concepts, which although related to their understanding of justice, are phrased using the language of secular discourse rather than that of the Bible. The secular references themselves may well be derived from religious sources, but blended with, and shaped by, other sources of knowledge.

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<sup>5</sup> The role of prophetic denunciation in church action for Fair Trade will be discussed in Sub-Section 4.6.2.

Churchgoers do not theologise in isolation, but in their own context, as individuals embedded within a largely secular society. Naturally, in thinking through their own theology, they will draw upon influences which are prevalent in society, particularly if they can make connections between those influences and biblical principles. Two themes which are referred to in the interview responses, and which rely upon the use of secular language in their explanation, are equality and human rights. Both these themes are used to support the biblical understanding of justice. For example, Ann has a strong theme of equality running throughout her interview. In answer to the question ‘what is it about Fair Trade which makes it a suitable cause for churchgoers to support?’ Ann argues that, as the Church is characterised by “inclusivity”, it is right for Christians to offer fair treatment to all workers in the global economy. Ann advocates for Christian support for Fair Trade from this position of equality, equating equality in the eyes of God with an imperative for economic equality. Her emphasis on equality is not taken directly from Scripture, although she blends her argument with biblical reference. It is certainly possible to argue, as Forrester (2001) in ‘on Human Worth’, that equality is a goal which can be derived from biblical principles. However, Ann’s use of language would indicate that she is influenced, not only by biblical references, but also by a secular discourse of economic and social equality.

Five of the nineteen churchgoers refer to human rights in their discussion of justice. Cheryl speaks of rights at length and talks of the need for the Church to be guided by respect for human rights. She refers to the rights of producers in the developing world in the same breath as the need for the Church to respect the rights of gay people in the gay marriage debate.

*We have just had a church meeting all about gay marriage and that was really interesting. I am not saying it is Fair Trade but it is also about justice and human rights and Christ standing alongside the outcasts.*



Cheryl positions justice and human rights as central to her understanding of 'mission.'

*For me I actually started working overseas as a missionary, so the whole concept of mission has got quite a weighted understanding for some people, and to me, my mission is more about Fair Trade and justice and human rights than it is about proselytising and evangelism. So, it depends where you see mission is. My mission, the mission I hope the church is involved in, is about justice and human rights and, if that is at the core of your faith and your belief, then that is where Fair Trade sits with us.*

Cheryl is clearly influenced by the human rights discourse and, just as Ann's theology is blended with her belief in equality, so Cheryl integrates her understanding of human rights with her reflections on biblical justice. We should guard against making too great a distinction between the human rights discourse and biblical accounts of justice, indeed, Schreiter (1997) argues for human rights to be understood as a form of global theology. However, Cheryl's use of language would indicate that her theology is influenced by liberal thought which, in addition to biblical influences, is present also within the discourse of human rights. Ann and Cheryl have not chosen these concepts at random, or because they have a particular prejudice towards them, rather they refer to equality and to human rights because they have made connections between these concepts and a biblical understanding of justice. Some theologians make explicit the connections between theology and human rights. For example, Markham (2003, p.1) argues that theology should be prepared to learn from sources outside of the discipline. Markham (2003, pp.62-70) cites the discourse of human rights as an example of a form of thinking which can complement theological understanding. In doing so, he points out the close relationship between the discourse and theological principles, linking human rights with the concept of humankind created in the image of God (Markham 2003, p.65).

Brandon takes the human rights theme a step further by referring to his belief in the protection of the liberty of the individual. However, rather

than unselfconsciously blend this with his description of biblical theology, he acknowledges a difference in source for his belief.

*I probably do have other views on society that are guided by more secular things, that are guided by the enlightenment, you know, individual liberty and things like that. Perhaps not necessarily so much there in the Bible, but I don't see them as being in conflict with my Christianity.*

Elsewhere in his interview, Brandon clearly expresses that the biblical call for justice is an integral part of his faith. Given this, it is unlikely that he would hold views which ran contrary to this requirement for justice. Therefore, for Brandon, enlightenment notions of the flourishing of the individual through freedom of action correlate with his theological outlook. Individual freedoms, even for the most communitarian in our society, still have a strong intellectual and emotional pull and, for the contemporary thinker, it is difficult to envisage the application of the biblical concept of justice without reference to the respect of the freedom of the individual. Sagovsky (2008, pp.145-160) identifies the need for Christian conceptions of justice to relate to liberal thinking on the freedom of the individual in order to combat injustice in global society. He argues that the thinking of the economist, Amartya Sen is useful to the application of Christian conceptions of justice in contemporary society. Sen's thinking forms a strong link between human freedom and justice (Sagovsky 2008, pp.155-9). His capabilities approach to international development assesses the ability of an individual, or community, to gain access to the resources needed in order to lead a flourishing life. This is not limited to material resources, but also addresses quality of life issues, such as: levels of participation in the political process, access to decision making regarding conditions in the work place, possibilities for social mobility or the enjoyment of meaningful leisure time. For Sen (1999, p.5), the freedom of political participation is not just a means of creating the right environment for development to take place; it is an integral part of development. Sen (1999, p.288) stresses the intimate link between the structures of society and the enhancement of capabilities and hence individual freedoms. In this way, Brandon's call for

political change in order to bring about social justice (which he views as being derived from a biblical concept of justice) and his belief in individual liberty (which he states is derived from an enlightenment understanding) can be reconciled. In the work of Sen, freedom and social justice are inextricably linked. The capabilities approach is used to guide the practice of development NGOs, such as Oxfam and Christian Aid, and hence some of the thinking behind it may well influence, and indeed complement, churchgoers' understandings of justice.

Expression of the language of equality, human rights and individual freedom in the churchgoers' interpretations of the concept of justice, serves to highlight that assessing the distinctiveness of the Christian concept of justice is a complex task. The views of the churchgoers who carry out action for justice are the result of an ongoing conversation between theological and secular ideas. It is worth stressing that these churchgoers have chosen to mention equality, human rights or individual freedom because they have made connections in their thinking between these concepts and the need for justice. In this sense, rather than acting as a distraction from formulating a distinctively Christian conception of justice, for these churchgoers, these concepts serve to enhance their understanding. The churchgoers' bringing together of biblical and secular concepts mirrors the process of the conversation at the heart of Public Theology. The engaged emphasis of Public Theology is represented by the openness of theology to learning from discourses outside of the discipline. The edges may be blurred, such that it is not possible to discern a 'black and white', theological versus non-theological dichotomy. For all the three examples given above, although these discourses draw on a wide range of secular sources of knowledge, religious thought has played a key role in their development. Too great an emphasis on the engaged role of Public Theology would result in theology being overwhelmed by discourses dominant in wider society. The warning of Milbank (2006b) to assert theology as the master language, so as to protect it from dilution from other discourses would be pertinent. However, the research participants articulate a distinctive view of justice which is derived from biblical knowledge; their

reference to concepts such as human rights serve to complement this distinctive outlook rather than to dilute it. The churchgoers' explanation of justice with reference to human rights, equality, or individual liberty, can assist in making the biblical concept of justice more relevant to a wider public. A public which may be more familiar with these concepts than they are with the language of the Bible.

#### **4.5 The implications of understanding Fair Trade as justice**

There are implications in the framing of Fair Trade as justice in terms of how this theological understanding influences the churchgoers' views on Fair Trade and the action that they carry out. In this section, I will identify two significant implications: firstly, Fair Trade is not viewed by the churchgoers as a form of charity but as an obligation, and secondly, Fair Trade is conceived as an integral part of wider action for justice, and therefore, the churchgoers are reluctant to draw tight boundaries around the practice.

##### **4.5.1 Fair Trade is not charity**

A major implication of this focus on Fair Trade as justice is that it is not seen as 'charity'. For most of the churchgoers that I have interviewed, to understand it as such, is insulting to the producers, who are perceived as being disadvantaged by the global economy to such an extent that Fair Trade can only be seen as an attempt to level the playing field. Fair Trade is not about 'giving' to the poor out of kindness or generosity; it is about allowing the poor to have that to which they are entitled. Keith points out that:

*Jesus said that the labourer is worthy of his hire, that the workman deserves his pay. Everyone is entitled to their dignity of earning their own way and not being the victims of charity.*

It is interesting that Keith views ‘charity’ in this context in such a light that he perceives that it renders the recipients as victims. Keith sees the strength of Fair Trade in reinforcing, rather than undermining, the agency of the producer in poor communities. He also stresses another aspect to the rejection of Fair Trade as charity, in that it should not be viewed as a voluntary act of kindness; rather, it is incumbent on all Christians to support it.

*If the Kingdom of God is righteousness and justice and peace, then doing that which is fair [...] has got to be part of it. If I am prepared to let someone work and not get a decent living when I could do something about it, to me that is actually working against the ethics of the Kingdom of God.*

This is a key theme for the churchgoers in my research project. Although Fair Trade is operating within the market mechanism, it is not about choice. The churchgoers identify a moral obligation to support Fair Trade to register protest against, and correct, injustice. The theologian Ruston (2004, pp.40-58), in his discussion on human rights and the image of God, chooses Fair Trade as a case study, in which he discusses the thinking of Aquinas on rights. He concludes that, in Aquinas’ view, actions towards justice can be understood as a manifestation of the image of God; these actions are Christian obligations. Ruston (2004, p.58) goes on to state that, viewed in this light, support for Fair Trade is not an option but an obligation. The churchgoers’ understanding of Fair Trade as obligation influences their practice in the promotion of Fair Trade. It drives them in their persistence to convince the congregations of which they are a part to support the concept. For these churchgoers, it is not optional for Christians to support Fair Trade, it is a Christian duty.

#### 4.5.2 Fair Trade as part of wider action for justice

Another implication of the framing of Fair Trade as work for justice is that, rather than being viewed as distinct, Fair Trade is perceived as one action for justice amongst many. There is no strict boundary around Fair

Trade, trade justice or other economic, environmental or social justice issues. The following statement by Cheryl is typical of the way in which Fair Trade is mentioned in the same breath as other justice issues:

*Whether it is Fair Trade, whether it is development of any sort, whether it's human rights. I think all of these are part of my Christian principles.*

This holistic approach demands more than ethical consumption. The purchase of Fair Trade products is a starting point for involvement with social justice issues, but this needs to be carried out alongside lobbying and campaigning for change. This may take the form of countering practices carried out by large corporations, including calling for government intervention and international regulation, to tackle injustice. As outlined in the previous chapter, most of the churches in my study take part in educative and campaigning actions in support of Christian Aid and this work is viewed as complementary to, or inseparable from, the action carried out in support of Fair Trade. Many of the interviewees also mentioned their support of the campaigning activities of other NGOs, for example: Oxfam, Global Justice Now and environmental groups, such as Friends of the Earth. Support for Fair Trade is not only mentioned alongside work for trade justice and international development issues but also anti-poverty action in the UK. Several of the churches in Skipton are involved with the provision of a local food bank (which is administered by the Baptist church in the town) and a number of the participants in my study referred to this work and made explicit connection between this and support for Fair Trade. Cheryl talks about her view of Fair Trade as being part of the work for justice, and hence, difficult to divide from other action with the same end in sight.

*Where does Fair Trade start or Christian Aid stop? I don't know. But we will have Christian Aid partners who will come and talk about their work, so there is quite a lot of overlap. It is hard to know where the church starts and stops and Fair Trade, Traidcraft, Christian Aid all merge into one.*

### 4.5.3 Justice and the engaged-distinctive dichotomy

In terms of the engaged-distinctive dichotomy within Public Theology, the understanding of Fair Trade as justice grounds church action for Fair Trade in distinctive Christian witness. Fair Trade was inspired and motivated by a Christian account of justice and the fundamental connection between Fair Trade and biblical justice is recognised by the research participants, highlighting the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. However, it would be wrong to characterise the view of Fair Trade as justice purely in terms of the distinctive emphasis. As I have indicated in Section 4.4, the churchgoers' understanding of justice, although derived from their reading of the Scriptures, is also enhanced by the influence of secular discourses. These discourses, such as human rights, are themselves a product of religious-secular interaction. Hence, this represents a form of engagement between theology and other sources of knowledge. Engagement is not confined to the academy and Church, it crosses over into public debate and exists as part of the churchgoers' lived experience 'in the world.' An implication of understanding Fair Trade as justice is that Fair Trade is not strictly delineated but is positioned by the churchgoers as part of the wider work for social justice.<sup>6</sup> This possesses an engaged emphasis, in that Fair Trade action by churches is not working in isolation, but as part of wider movements, whose members come from a variety of religious and non-religious backgrounds. Working alongside wider movements exposes the theology of Fair Trade to influence from a multiplicity of discourses. This exposure does not necessarily render theology vulnerable, indeed it could act to its benefit by reinforcing the relevance of theology in the public realm. Church action for Fair Trade must be true to its underpinning in a theology of justice but, if that theology is to exert influence in society, it has to engage with wider movements. Both distinctive and engaged elements of Public Theology are required.

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 4.5.2

## **4.6 Fair Trade as demonstration**

### 4.6.1 The living out of faith

The second major theme emerging from my analysis of the theology of the churchgoers is the emphasis the churchgoers place on Fair Trade as demonstration. Church action for Fair Trade is described in terms of demonstration of Christian principles, such as: God's justice for the poor, the love of neighbour and the right stewardship of creation. For these churchgoers, Fair Trade presents an opportunity to enact the principles which are at the heart of the Christian faith. Chloe, for example, describes Fair Trade as follows:

*It is living out a thoroughly biblical approach to dealing with people.*

For Chloe, Fair Trade is a suitable cause for Christians to support because it offers the opportunity to 'live out' biblical principles. The theme of Fair Trade as a demonstration of Christian principles fits with the churchgoers' emphasis on theology as praxis, as described in Section 4.2. Action for social justice carried out in the public realm serves to embody the beliefs which motivate it. My finding that the churchgoing participants view Fair Trade as demonstration tallies with the research of Cloke et al (2011, p.100), who stress the practical outlook of church-based Fair Trade activists, stating that: 'Fair Trade presents an important device by which Christians can enact aspects of their faith.' There is resonance here with Graham's (2013, pp. 251-89) view of Public Theology as a form of apologetics; action which serves to explain and validate the tenets of faith.<sup>7</sup> In her interview, Naomi explains that she sees Fair Trade in terms of demonstrating the teachings of Jesus:

*It (Fair Trade action) is carrying out what Jesus would have done. It is very difficult to think of it in those terms with Jesus having lived two thousand years ago. What really matters is still the same; that*

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in Section 4.2.



*every person is given respect, and is shown care, and our transactions with others should be respectful, and honourable, and should be showing love. That was just as important in a market in Palestine two thousand years ago as it is when you go to Sainsburys today.*

For the churchgoers, Fair Trade offers the opportunity to demonstrate to a wide public what the justice of God means. In carrying out God's work for justice through Fair Trade, the churchgoers understand that, not only are they demonstrating what just trade looks like, they are also offering a critique of mainstream trade. In the very act of demonstrating a just form of trade, they are also denouncing the unjust nature of exploitation within the international trade system. Fair Trade has a prophetic role to play.

#### 4.6.2 The prophetic role of Fair Trade

Simply by virtue of its existence, Fair Trade highlights that there is injustice in the system of global trade. In this role to highlight injustice Fair Trade possesses an element of the prophetic. Drawing inspiration from the book of Amos, Westlake and Stansfield (2004, pp.83-8) identify the need for a prophetic voice in the international trading system. They call on Christians to speak out about exploitation of the poor by the rich and to challenge the status quo. The churchgoing participants understand that Fair Trade as demonstration of justice must encompass the denunciation of injustice. In her interview, Julie states:

*Well there's a lot in Scripture which talks about injustice, in particular the eighth century prophets asking people to have a concern for the poor, and not to cheat, and to give fair measure.*

The justice of God is counter-posed with the values of the mainstream trade system. Chloe, in talking of the 'breaking in' of the Kingdom of God asserts that:

*God cares about justice and it's not going to carry on in this shocking travesty of justice forever.*

This role for Fair Trade, as a means by which to denounce the values of the mainstream, is underlined by some of the theological commentary on Fair Trade. Northcott (2007, pp.183-4) contrasts the ethic of the law of love, evidenced in the Christian Fair Trade organisation Traidcraft, with the exploitative practices of multinational corporations. Citing 1 Corinthians 12-14, he argues that the law of love, governing Christian concern for poor, provides the difference between a politics that can be described as sacred and the politics of empire. The positive values that some of the theological commentaries find embodied in the practice of Fair Trade find their mirror opposite in the values of the mainstream economy. For example, Song (2004, p.395) describes church action on Fair Trade as an expression of Eucharistic community and contrasts its values with those of the market. An emphasis on cooperation in Fair Trade, of valuing the human relationships between the consumer and the producer, serves to demonstrate the ethical paucity of mainstream trade where, according to Song, the human element is lost and the producer is objectified.

Thus far, I have discussed the theological underpinnings of Fair Trade in relation to the concept of justice. However, there are other key biblical principles which the churchgoers in the study look to as sources of inspiration in the support of Fair Trade; to the extent that they describe their action in support of Fair Trade as a demonstration of these principles in practice. I shall now discuss two of the biblical principles which featured in the research interviews: the love of neighbour and the right stewardship of creation.

#### 4.6.3 The love of neighbour

Following justice and the prophetic denunciation of injustice, the love of neighbour is the next most commonly cited biblical principle in the research interviews; referred to by ten of the interviewees. Fair Trade is viewed by the churchgoers as a means by which to love our neighbour and it serves as a demonstration to the wider world of the principle in action. Reference to the love of neighbour is not made in a 'bolted on' manner,

rather it is expressed as central to faith and fits in many ways with the understanding of Fair Trade as justice. When asked ‘what is it about Fair Trade that makes it a suitable cause for Christians to support?’, Heather immediately frames this support in terms of the love of neighbour:

*I think we are encouraged to think about our neighbours and how they are living, and whether we are helping them, and trying to support people wherever they are, and whatever their circumstances, and not just closing our eyes and carrying on in our own little world.*

The churchgoers have a broad understanding as to who our neighbours are. In answer to the same question, Brandon states:

*Well I come back to ‘love thy neighbour’ and ‘thy neighbour’ is anyone in the human race and therefore we should be looking out for those people less fortunate than ourselves. The developing world has got major problems of poverty, corruption, sanitation, huge issues, that need to be tackled.*

This broad definition of the neighbour as “anyone in the human race” is, to some extent, echoed by theological reflections on Fair Trade which point to the interconnected nature of the global economy. Reflecting on the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), Westlake and Stansfield (2004, pp.8-18) argue that the workers who produce the goods we consume are effectively our neighbours. Although the parable refers to a physical meeting of the victim and the Samaritan on the road to Jericho, the workers are in a sense close to us, because we benefit from the fruits of their labour on a daily basis. Northcott (2011b, pp.79-80) reflects on the interconnectedness of the global economy. People who live on the other side of the globe may become our neighbour, not in terms of their physical proximity, but by virtue of the journeys created by the needs of global trade. This can take the form of journeys of goods in the supply chain, or by flows of capital or even of industrial pollution. Northcott (2011b, p.80) describes Fair Trade as a means by which to love the global neighbour. For Northcott (2011b, p.81), Fair Trade is ‘a work of love’ in which the exploitative

relationships of the mainstream economy are transformed ‘into relationships where humanity and the earth are loved as neighbourhood.’

For the churchgoers in the study, their reference to the love of neighbour is closely connected to their understanding of Fair Trade as justice. To offer love to the producer is to bring justice in correcting the disadvantages they face in the global market place. The churchgoers’ view of theology as praxis leads them to understand the concept of the love of neighbour, not so much in terms of a command to preach ‘love thy neighbour’, but as an imperative to act it out. Fair Trade is, therefore, a means by which to love the global neighbour and to demonstrate to a wide public what this love means in the context of global society. Northcott (2011b, p.81) also highlights the role of Fair Trade in serving as a demonstration to humanity of a practical activity, motivated by love. This he views as publicity of the Christian concept of love. Although the churchgoers are not averse to the idea of the Church ‘speaking out’ or preaching on the love of neighbour, for them, the more powerful witness is this publicity of love; the outworking of obedience to the command to ‘love thy neighbour.’

#### 4.6.4 Fair Trade as right stewardship

Eight of the churchgoers in the study link the practice of Fair Trade directly with care for the environment and frame Fair Trade in terms of sustainability. They go on to explain this in theological terms, for example, Brandon argues that:

*We are very much stewards of God’s creation, that we need to be looking after God’s creation. The whole issue of sustainability, and making sure that we do things today that our grandchildren are not going to curse us for, is all about making sure that we nurture the resources in the world.*

This view of Fair Trade as right stewardship is one that is emphasised by Traidcraft. The Traidcraft Foundation principles refer to the work of the

organisation as ‘affirming the call to all people to steward and develop the creation’ (quoted in Johnson and Sugden 2001, p.152). Chris Sugden (2001, pp.6-7), former Chair of the Foundation Trustees of Traidcraft, argues that it is God’s intention that humankind acts in His image, to exercise dominion over the earth, its creatures and resources. Sugden stresses that this intention does not sanction a reckless control; rather it is a call for humankind to image God’s own care for creation. He highlights the importance of the concept of stewardship; human beings are the stewards of God’s creation and, as such, all are entitled to a share in the resources of that creation. Sugden argues that, in a fallen and sinful world, stewardship has become corrupted. This has resulted in a straying from right relations between human beings and between human beings and God’s creation. The fallen nature of humankind has resulted in uneven access to the world’s resources with the poor suffering at the expense of the rich. According to Sugden, an integral part of the Christian mission is to work to reverse the corruption of stewardship; to combat the sin that destroys relationships. Once again, there is a close connection with the concept of biblical justice; the right stewardship of creation requires that all resources are available for humanity as a whole to enjoy, hence, ensuring that every person has their fair share. For the churchgoers in the research study who refer to the stewardship of God’s creation, and indeed for Traidcraft, Fair Trade serves as a demonstration of right stewardship. It highlights to a wide public the destructive influence of the mainstream global economy on God’s creation, whilst serving as practical demonstration of a form of trade which treats creation with respect.

#### **4.7 The dual role of Fair Trade**

The understanding of Fair Trade as demonstration of biblical principles shapes the churchgoers’ views on Fair Trade. Firstly, in order to demonstrate biblical principles to a wide public, Fair Trade has to effectively engage with that public. Fair Trade cannot exist in isolation or be limited to Church circles and likeminded allies. Its practice must be

sufficiently engaged with the mainstream economy, and society, so that it can serve as an effective demonstration of biblical principles in action. Secondly, to demonstrate justice, the practice of Fair Trade must itself be just. To demonstrate biblical principles in action, it must be true to those principles and offer a distinctive witness, rooted in the counter-cultural principles of the Scriptures, and hence, distinct from the values of the world. Clearly there is potential for tension between these two implications of the theological framing of Fair Trade as an act of demonstration of biblical principles. The demonstration of Christian principles, which the churchgoers view as central to the purpose of church action for Fair Trade, requires a holding in tension of the emphases on engagement and distinctive witness. These emphases are related to what can be identified as a dual role for Fair Trade. Fair Trade is the practice of a viable form of trade within the real economy, coming to the assistance of millions of producers in poor communities. Whilst carrying out this practice, it also serves as demonstration of a distinctively different way to trade, which urges the mainstream economy to change.

The most widely known role for Fair Trade is as help and support to poor communities. Here, the aim is to actualise change towards a more just society. The consumer pays a little extra and that benefit is passed on to the producer, in the form of a fair price paid for their produce (Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.6).<sup>8</sup> In addition, they receive a Fair Trade premium which is paid to the community and is spent on improving the quality of living for the whole collective (Nicholls and Opal 2005, pp.6-7). Fair Trade offers other means of support, such as the promise of long term trading relationships and empowerment in the form of greater say over the means of production, often achieved by the formation of producer cooperatives (Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.7). All of these measures serve to benefit the producer, helping them to lift them and their families out of poverty by means of sustainable livelihoods. Thus, Fair Trade offers a practical means to assist millions of producers in poor communities. Bruce Crowther, the

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<sup>8</sup> The benefits to the producer are outlined in the introduction to the thesis.

founder of the Fair Trade Towns network, is keen to point out that this practical help is not essentially a form of charitable giving. Crowther states that ‘people see it as charity, but it is not, it is justice. We have to get rid of the charity way of thinking’ (quoted in Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.4). He identifies a dual role for Fair Trade; ‘one it is helping people immediately and changing their lives; then, there is the bigger picture where it is a protest tool.’ In connection with the aim of Fair Trade to strive for justice, it is not only directly assisting a section of the poor; it is also fulfilling a prophetic function, in denouncing injustice in the wider global trading system. By its very existence, it is acting as exemplar, which shames the actions of mainstream trade, whilst offering hope that a different, more just, way of trading is possible. For many members of the general public, and indeed many churchgoers, the role of Fair Trade as practical help is the one that they perceive as Fair Trade’s primary purpose. Conversely, for the pioneers and leaders of the movement, the role of symbolic witness to a more just economy is more important. Barratt Brown (1993, p.156), himself one of the early pioneers of the movement, describes the formation of what we now know as Fair Trade as the establishment of an alternative trade. That is, an alternative to mainstream consumer society, rejecting exploitation and positing the possibility of a new economy based on fairness and respect for the rights of producers (Barratt Brown 1993, pp.156-76). The majority of the churchgoers in the study also view Fair Trade as a means by which to demonstrate the necessity of change in the wider economy. As can be seen by the quotes from Ann and Brandon in Section 3.2, these churchgoers recognise that ethical consumption is not enough and that the changes that need to be made to ensure justice will require changes in the structures of the economy.

This dual role of Fair Trade as practical help and as prophetic exemplar requires a holding in tension of different influences within the Fair Trade movement. Angier (2001, pp.82-3) expresses this in terms of verses drawn from the Sermon on the Mount. He frames this duality in terms of the metaphors of the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and the city on the hill (Matthew 5:14). In the interpretation of the salt metaphor, Traidcraft is

viewed as an ‘agent of change’ mixed within the stew but affecting the taste by its distinct flavour. In the city on the hill metaphor, Traidcraft supporters are drawn out of the world to work apart for a purpose distinct from worldly values. The city on the hill reflects the distinctive nature of Traidcraft’s witness, and the salt, its interaction with the market. Angier, rather than viewing the metaphors as a contradiction, sees them as complementary, as might well be indicated by their appearance in adjacent verses within the Sermon on the Mount. The need to hold the two roles of Fair Trade in tension has crucial implications for the practical operation of Fair Trade organisations such as Traidcraft. Angier (2001, pp.84-5) discusses the implications of the organisation’s Foundation Principle of showing a bias to the poor. In putting this principle into action risks must be taken and this will lead to a level of vulnerability. To offer an example, the requirement to follow a bias to the poor may lead to a commitment to work with a very poor community where levels of efficiency in production may be comparatively low. Practically, considerations motivated by a bias to the poor must be balanced by requirements for sound management and security in order that the business is sustainable; however, as Angier (2001, p.85) comments: ‘if we surround ourselves only with security and safety, I do not see how we can live out a bias to the poor.’

There is a relationship between the dual role for Fair Trade and the holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The emphasis on engagement and the role of Fair Trade as actual, practical help are evidenced in the research interviews. The churchgoers largely welcome the mainstreaming of Fair Trade and they stress the importance of receiving wide public recognition.<sup>9</sup> As stated in the previous chapter, the churchgoing activists go out of their way to achieve high levels of public engagement, presenting Fair Trade to a wide public utilising both Church and secular networks. They also acknowledge the need to ‘secularise’ the message of Fair Trade to be able engage with a wide cross section of society.<sup>10</sup> This drive for engagement to forward the role for Fair Trade as

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<sup>9</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 8.1.2.

<sup>10</sup> As discussed in Section 6.2.



practical help is, in some senses, in tension with the role of Fair Trade as exemplar to shame the market or the 'protest tool', as Bruce Crowther describes (quoted in Nicholls and Opal 2005, p.4). For this role, Fair Trade serves a counter-cultural example which exposes the exploitation inherent within the mainstream system. This role can be associated with the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology; what is of primary importance in serving as counter-cultural example, is that the practice of Fair Trade is distinctly different from the mainstream. Too close an engagement with the mainstream will only serve to taint its witness, rendering it a less effective, or inadequate a tool, by which to denounce the exploitative practices of the market. The words of warning from Northcott (2007, pp.184-5) are pertinent; Fair Trade must not engage too closely with the market and expose its ideals to the mainstream, for fear of being subsumed by mainstream values.

The dual role of Fair Trade was inherent from the outset of the movement and is evident in contemporary Fair Trade practice. Rather than one of the two roles winning out over the other, the history of the Fair Trade movement has been one of a holding in tension of these dual roles. Similarly, the requirements for the demonstration of biblical principles; the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology, both need to be heeded and balanced for Fair Trade to serve as witness to the Gospel. Although there is an association between the role of Fair Trade as practical help and the emphasis on engagement, and a corresponding association between the role of counter-cultural exemplar and the distinctive emphasis, this picture is not entirely clear cut. For Fair Trade to act as practical help, it does need to be informed by ethical values to make a difference in the lives of producers in poor communities. Fair Trade practice which is too accommodating to the values of the mainstream will fail to offer effective help to producers and serve only as a corporate marketing message. In theological terms, Fair Trade which is not influenced by biblical principles, if it does not have justice and the love of neighbour at its heart, will surely fail to help the producers that it was established to support. Conversely, a Fair Trade that is not engaged is unlikely to influence the public or the

market. Large corporations will not be influenced by Fair Trade, and the public will not be minded to purchase Fair Trade goods in sufficient quantity to make a difference to the lives of producers in poor communities, if those goods occupy only a tiny (albeit ethical) niche in the market. Similarly, a wide public will not be influenced by the Church's demonstration of the outworking of Christian principles, if Fair Trade is confined within church or niche ethical circles. This would limit the ability of the Church to convey the message of justice that church action for Fair Trade has to offer, to the extent that the Church is merely talking to itself.

### **Conclusion**

The churchgoers in my study readily refer to theology and draw inspiration from biblical texts in explanation of their support for Fair Trade. For them, Fair Trade is clearly supported by biblical evidence and the interpretation of the texts is straightforward, bearing an unequivocal message of an imperative to act for social justice. There are many sources of biblical inspiration but a number of the churchgoers (albeit a minority) are content to refer only to general biblical principles. To some extent, the churchgoers 'only take what they need' from Scripture to carry out their Christian duty; which is much more about right practice, obedience to the Gospel imperative for action, than it is a focus on right doctrine for its own sake (Astley and Christie 2007, p.26). Despite the myriad narratives and biblical themes which the churchgoers draw upon, two clear themes emerge from the theology of the churchgoers in relation to Fair Trade: the understanding of Fair Trade as justice and as an act of demonstration of Christian principles.

The great majority of churchgoers refer explicitly to Fair Trade as a form of justice and this conception of justice is derived to a large extent from biblical texts; there is a particular emphasis on the Old Testament, especially references to God's preferential concern towards the poor. In this, the churchgoers' statements support Northcott's (2007, p.185) description of Fair Trade as a 'distinctively Christian account of justice.'

However, I exercise a note of caution in that justice is perceived as being central to the concept of Fair Trade, regardless of the religious background of its supporters. Moreover, the churchgoers in my study also refer to concepts such as equality, human rights and individual liberty, which, although they may be informed by theology, are also shaped by secular discourse. The churchgoers' use of language indicates that they are influenced by secular narratives in formulating conceptions of justice. It is important to bear in mind that these narratives are chosen because the churchgoers identify connections between them and a Christian account of justice. The narratives represent a blending of theological and secular knowledge: the teachings of the Church and the lived experience of the churchgoers. They are produced in conversation and hence indicate that the churchgoers' concept of justice encompasses both the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology. There are implications in understanding Fair Trade as a form of justice and these indicate how theological understandings influence the churchgoers' views on Fair Trade. Firstly, Fair Trade is not seen as charity, it is about correcting injustice and should be viewed as an obligation, as opposed to a voluntary act of kindness. Secondly, there are no strict boundaries around Fair Trade; it is one act for justice amongst many and its work can easily meld with other work for social justice, both for international development and for any anti-poverty action. This removal of boundaries leads the churchgoers to view Fair Trade as moving beyond ethical consumption, to include campaigning and lobbying for structural change in the trade system. It represents a balance between the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology. Campaigning for social justice has an engaged emphasis in that it is often carried out in coalition with diverse partners and involves a coming together of different outlooks and sources of knowledge. However, it is also distinctive, in that the action coalesces around a position which challenges the prevailing outlook in society and in the economy.

For the churchgoers in the study, Fair Trade provides a means by which to demonstrate key Christian principles, including the justice of God and His preferential concern for the poor. Not only can Fair Trade serve to

demonstrate this outworking of biblical principles of justice, but by its very existence, it acts as prophetic denunciation of injustice. The churchgoers refer to the demonstration of other core biblical principles which are closely related to the outworking of justice, including the love of neighbour and the right stewardship of God's creation. There are two practical implications of this understanding of Fair Trade as demonstration of biblical principles. For Fair Trade to demonstrate biblical principles to a wider public, it has to engage effectively with that public, whilst at the same time, in order to demonstrate justice, the practice itself must be just, remaining true to biblical principles and offering a witness which is distinctive from the values of the world. There is a tension between these two implications, which is to some extent mirrored by the tension between the dual roles of Fair Trade: as a practical support for the poor and as a protest tool to bring about transformation of economy and society. It is tempting to view the practical role of Fair Trade as closely allied to the engaged emphasis of Public Theology and the protest role as closely allied to the distinctive emphasis. However, the reality is less clear cut, with distinctive witness needed to assist, and make meaningful, the practical role and, without effective engagement, any attempt to bring about transformation of the structures of economy and society will be doomed to failure. For church action for Fair Trade to work as Public Theology, the two counter-posing forces, of the engaged and the distinctive, must be held in tension. Both are required to fulfil the dual roles of Fair Trade as practical assistance and as agent of transformation.

## **Chapter 5: Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God**

### **Introduction**

The understanding of Fair Trade as justice, and as a demonstration of Christian principles, assists the churchgoers in making a connection between Fair Trade action by churches and the Kingdom of God. The churchgoers identify Fair Trade as embedded within the Church's work for justice; justice being a core value of the Kingdom of God. The understanding of Fair Trade as demonstration of Christian principles has resonance with an outward looking Kingdom theology, which seeks to bring the values of the Kingdom into public life. For Moltmann (1990, p.340), life for the Christian is not one of 'waiting' for the return of Christ but a living in anticipation of that event which involves 'reaching out to the active shaping of life.' This active shaping involves the Church in the work of reordering public life in expectation of the Kingdom of God. Kingdom theology is 'public' theology, in that concerns regarding the ordering of public life, including the structures of society, politics, and economics, are central to faith. Moltmann (1999, p.211) argues that the primary purpose of the Church is not to exercise concern for its own members but to 'publicly maintain the universal concerns of God's Coming Kingdom.' The outward looking urge of the theology of the Kingdom of God is understood by the churchgoing participants. The evidence from the interviews is that the churchgoers do make the connection between the Kingdom of God and the work that they carry out for Fair Trade. In this chapter, I will outline the nature of those connections, discussing the two interpretations articulated by the participants: the contribution of Fair Trade action by churches towards 'building the Kingdom of God' and Fair Trade viewed as demonstration of the Coming Kingdom of God. Demonstration of the Kingdom of God requires a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology; it involves close engagement between Church and world, for the purpose of presenting distinctive Kingdom values. I discuss the views of Bretherton on Fair Trade, arguing that his cautious approach offers

some challenge to the view of Fair Trade as demonstration of the Coming Kingdom of God. The participants do not share his level of guardedness regarding the engagement between theology and public life; however, they do echo his concerns that theology must be protected against the powerful force of the market. I conclude the chapter with a section analysing the view of Fair Trade as demonstration of the Coming Kingdom in terms of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology.

### **5.1 Connecting Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God**

The participants were posed the question ‘what is the relationship between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God?’ Of the nineteen churchgoers, fourteen expressed that they had made a connection between Church support for Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God. The remaining five did not express any objection to the concept of linking Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God, rather they struggled to articulate a connection due to a lack of previous reflection on Kingdom theology. Once again, there was no correlation between depth of theology and commitment to Fair Trade; amongst the five churchgoers who failed to express any connection were two of the most active supporters of Fair Trade. Nevertheless, the fact that fourteen of the churchgoers articulated a connection between support for Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God is significant. It is further evidence of the churchgoers’ willingness to connect their support for Fair Trade with their faith and to think through this connection with reference to theology. The churchgoers’ attempts to relate their work on Fair Trade with a key theological concept fit with Astley’s (2002, p.3) description of ‘real theology’ as a dialogue between lived experience and the traditions and texts of the Church. Indeed, Astley (2002, p.20) indicates that faith is rooted in the commitments and actions of the individual churchgoer. He stresses the importance of testing theology against the background of human experience. Learning from such a process can serve to enrich the academic discipline of theology and the practice of the Church.

The churchgoers' emphasis on theology as praxis is pertinent to the connection that they make between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God. As I highlighted in Section 4.2, the churchgoers place their emphasis on faith as doing, rather than as meditation or doctrine. For these churchgoers, Jesus' declaration of the Kingdom of God initiates a requirement for the believer to *act* in accordance with the values of the Kingdom. There is theological support for this outlook, for example, Bauckham and Hart (1999, p.202) discuss the action-orientated nature of Jesus' references to the Kingdom. They state that to pray the words of the Lord's Prayer 'Thy Kingdom come' is not an end in itself but a commitment to activism. For the fourteen churchgoers in my research project this call to action forms the basic connection between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God. Fair Trade is one means by which the churchgoer, as an individual, and as part of the Church, can 'act' in obedience to Jesus' declaration of the Kingdom. One of the participants, Duncan, in answer to the question 'what is the relationship between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God?', argues:

*It (Fair Trade) is working out in practical ways the basic concerns of God's love for the world, which is what I think the Kingdom of God means; God ruling over us. God's values, God's concerns being dominant in our lives [...] Fair Trade is one way of expressing that.*

The churchgoers' understanding of Fair Trade as demonstration of Christian principles fits with this "working out in practical ways." The values of the Kingdom are to be demonstrated by Fair Trade as a public witness. In Duncan's description above, he talks of the expression of God's values, and this expression is not for personal edification, but is aimed towards demonstrating the values of the Kingdom to a public wider than the Church.

The churchgoers' understanding of Fair Trade as justice forms an important link in making the connection between the Kingdom of God and Fair Trade. Fair Trade as a form of justice is a means by which the Kingdom can be demonstrated in the worldly economy. As Duncan expresses:

*The Kingdom of God is about justice and fullness of life and that is what Fair Trade is aiming to do.*

The churchgoers do not have a problem with equating Fair Trade practice with the values of the Kingdom. Fair Trade is adequate to the job because it is underpinned by the same values as those present in the Kingdom. For Doreen, the core practice of Fair Trade in ensuring a fair reward, or fair price paid to the producer, is present within the Kingdom of God. She states that:

*In the Kingdom of God everybody is treated with respect and that they get just rewards for labour. So, that is one of the things that Fair Trade stands for, that people are treated fairly, regardless of their situation and in the Kingdom of God there would not be the inequalities that we fight against in modern day society.*

The churchgoers' linking of Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God through the centrality of justice is echoed by the Traidcraft essayists. Sugden (2001, pp.10-11) sets out how the activities of the Traidcraft organisation reflect biblical themes. He argues that the organisation's work for justice in the global trade system serves as a demonstration of the values of the Kingdom of God. He asks how the global economy would be ordered, if the Kingdom of God were to come overnight, and he finds the answer in a trade characterised by justice. Sugden suggests that, because the Kingdom has already entered this world in the person of Jesus Christ, then Christians should work to demonstrate the values of the coming Kingdom. This demonstration must take place in context and, for Sugden (2001, p.10) working for trade justice represents the 'frontier' between the Kingdom and the mainstream economic order. Sugden (2001, p.11) views work for justice as pointing towards Jesus Christ and, through belief in his Resurrection, Christians can live in the certain hope that the values of the Kingdom will ultimately be triumphant.

All of the fourteen churchgoers view the Kingdom as possessing great significance in this life; present in some sense in earthly existence. For these churchgoers, the Kingdom is not relegated to a spiritual realm but



has bearing on social, political and economic life. The moral failings of the mainstream economy and the purpose of the Fair Trade project are indeed measured by the churchgoers' understanding of the values of the Kingdom of God. Their measuring of the mainstream economy against the values of the Kingdom of God emphasises the prophetic role of Fair Trade. Indeed, Moltmann (1999, p.252) talks of Kingdom-of-God theology interfering in society 'critically and prophetically, because it sees public affairs in the perspective of God's Coming Kingdom.' The participants' understanding of Fair Trade as justice for the poor is connected with their view of the Kingdom of God as a Kingdom for the poor. The significance of the Kingdom for this life is in its radical reversal of outlook of the ordering of society from that which benefits the rich, to that which places the wellbeing of the poor first and foremost. For the participants, this informs their desire to put the needs of producers from poor communities at the heart of Fair Trade, reversing the priorities of the mainstream where capital and profit take precedence over the rights of producers. Moltmann (1999, p.253) emphasises the role of the poor in the theology of the Kingdom of God:

All Kingdom-of-God theology becomes for Christ's sake a theology of the liberation for the poor, the sick, the sad and the outcasts. So Kingdom-of-God theology doesn't just enter the already existing public forum of its given society. It brings to light publicly the people whom society pushes into the underground or into private life.

The participants' support for the central role of the producer in the Fair Trade project represents an attempt to envisage a different form of economy; one which is informed by justice. The mainstream economy anonymises the people who produce the goods that are consumed, to such an extent that consumers are unaware of their existence. For the participants, Fair Trade represents an attempt to bring into the light poor communities that are forgotten in the global economy and ultimately to bring them just reward for their labours.

## **5.2 Building the Kingdom of God**

Having established that the churchgoers do link their support for Fair Trade with the theological concept of the Kingdom of God, I shall investigate how the churchgoers view the relationship and the ways in which this assists them in their work on Fair Trade. Reflecting key theological debates around the nature of the Kingdom of God, there is a clear division between the responses of the fourteen churchgoers who make a connection between support for Fair Trade and the concept of the Kingdom of God. The nature of the Kingdom of God is the subject of much theological discussion, particularly regarding the question as to whether the Kingdom is established within human history or in life beyond the eschaton. Attempts to define this duality, of the here and now and the life to come, have led to divisions between theologians as to the nature of the Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Although all the fourteen see the significance of the Kingdom of God for this life, there is division regarding the relationship of the Kingdom to the life to come. Seven of the churchgoers express their understanding of the significance of the Kingdom of God referring only to the present life, whilst the other seven give reference to the Kingdom of God pointing to the life to come. However, two of the participants amongst the latter seven express reluctance to give what they regard as undue attention to the next life; for them, the biblical imperative is to bring about justice in this life and reference to the next is largely perceived as a distraction from the real task at hand. In his interview, Brandon checks himself when referring to the life to come.

*It is one of those things I know we say “Thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven.” Thinking about what the Kingdom of God is like in Heaven, I don’t do a lot of that, I think I will find out about that when the time comes.*

He then goes on to stress the importance of the Kingdom of God to the here and now. Fitting with their view of theology as praxis, the significance of

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of these divisions see, for example: Doyle (1999); Perrin (1963).

the Kingdom is as a call to action, rather than as a doctrinal indication of the life to come.

Few theologians would deny the biblical emphasis on social justice, however there are some who argue that Jesus' declaration of the Kingdom is a call to evangelism, rather than to work for justice within society; viewing the two as distinct activities. Doyle (1999, 276-295), for example, is critical of Moltmann's eschatological views which stress the role of working for social justice within history as anticipation of the Kingdom of God. For Doyle (1999, p.291), 'evangelism is the way we are to express both our present dissatisfaction with the status quo and our hope.' Wallis (2006, p.9), himself an evangelical Christian, is critical of this outlook and states that the significance of individual conversion is for the believer to demonstrate the Kingdom of God in the midst of the world. For Wallis (2006, pp.35-78) this bringing of the Kingdom into the world is achieved by means of the Church's work in standing alongside the poor. In interview, Antonia strongly expresses her belief in the immediacy of God's Kingdom and is critical of reference to the next life.

*We're wanting to create the Kingdom of God now. It's not something in far off Heaven it will be alright. I believe this is the Kingdom of God right now [...] we should all be working for a better world. This is why I am so passionate about Fair Trade because it is clearly working for a better, fairer world for the producers.*

For Antonia, and six of her fellow participants, the Kingdom of God is not seen as a future consummation but as current obligation: to build the Kingdom of God in the here and now. In this sense, although Fair Trade is understood as a demonstration of Christian principles, it is not so much demonstration of the Kingdom of God, but direct contribution to establishing the Kingdom on earth. This view does not involve a looking forward to the Parousia, rather, the goal of humanity is to work towards the establishment of the Kingdom within history. This outlook places a great deal of faith in human endeavour and is associated with the belief in a

trajectory of progress in society. There are few theologians who adopt such a view, however there is some resonance between the position of these churchgoers and that of Teilhard de Chardin. De Chardin (1955) advocates for a theology reliant on the progress of humanity. Influenced by the science of evolution, he argues that human society will evolve to an elevated state, where it can join together with the Godhead for the ultimate goal of fusion at the ‘omega point.’ His emphasis is on the work of humanity; its progress ultimately establishes the Kingdom of God, rather than it being ushered in by divine intervention at the Parousia.

The churchgoers’ belief in an obligation to work towards building the Kingdom of God on earth places faith in human endeavour and they understand Fair Trade as an integral part of that endeavour. Amy states that:

*I think Fair Trade is part of the journey and part of the experience of life which I would like to think is working towards God’s Kingdom on this earth. I personally think it is an essential part of it.*

Theologians who espouse an historical eschatology are critical of such a call for humanity to build the Kingdom of God in the here and now. According to these theologians, the continued progress of human society is not assured and inevitable setbacks in working towards society’s acceptance of the values of the Kingdom will only serve to demotivate Christians.

Wolterstorff (2004, p.92) argues that hope for the establishment of the Kingdom of God should never be equated with faith in what he terms a ‘dynamic within creation.’ For Wolterstorff, living in hope is hope for Christ’s redemption and does not rely on the success of political programmes. However, the responses from the seven churchgoers who view it as the obligation of every Christian to build the Kingdom in the here and now, do not indicate optimism and an exaggeration of the possibilities of human endeavour. Rather, they tend to state the enormity of the task and air towards despondency. For example, Antonia admits that she is invariably “frustrated by society” and there are several statements from

these churchgoers which indicate that they regard the actions of the Church as inadequate to righting the wrongs of contemporary society.<sup>2</sup>

A more widespread understanding of the role of Fair Trade as offering foretaste of the Kingdom of God, rather than as contribution to building the Kingdom itself, would release the churchgoers from feelings of inadequacy when faced with so great a scale of injustice. Bauckham and Hart (1999, p.198) argue that Christians should not regard themselves as ultimately responsible for the moral progress of society. They state that: ‘the conditions for the possibility of progress in this world are furnished by the reflexive hope for God’s transcendent future upon the here-and-now’ (Bauckham and Hart 1999, p.198). In her interview, Chloe is conscious of the inadequacy of her action, but expresses hope for the ultimate outcome with the following words:

*God cares about justice and it’s not going to carry on in this shocking travesty of justice forever. Which is good, because the world is pretty powerful, and I don’t feel very powerful, but to know what the endgame is going to look like, means I am motivated now to do as much as possible towards making that a reality.*

An understanding of what the “endgame” looks like, and the knowledge that this will be the ultimate reality, can inspire and motivate Christians to action. It can also sustain them when economy and society appear characterised by overwhelming injustice.

### **5.3 Demonstrating the Coming Kingdom of God**

Seven of the churchgoers express the connection between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God in terms of the practice of Fair Trade offering a demonstration of the values of the Kingdom when practically applied within economy and society. Fair Trade is offering a foretaste of the Kingdom by demonstrating what an economy guided by the Kingdom values of justice

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<sup>2</sup> The negative reactions of the churchgoers to the state of contemporary society is discussed in Section 3.4.

and compassion looks like. The churchgoers who hold this view emphasise the partial nature of the demonstration; this is not the Kingdom in fullness, nor is it the application of the values of the Kingdom to the whole, or even large sections, of the earthly economy. Brandon describes the partial nature of the demonstration in terms of “pockets.”

*So we don't necessarily have the Kingdom of God here on earth, but there are pockets of it, and we do see it in action.*

Chloe also describes the demonstration with reference to “pockets” and she is explicit about its purpose.

*We are making little pockets of Heaven happen here on earth. Fair Trade is one of those pockets. It is one way in which we can model what the Kingdom of God looks like.*

This view of the role of Fair Trade as demonstration of the Kingdom accords with the reflection of Song (2004, p.395) who describes Fair Trade as ‘witness to resurrection life.’ In its demonstration of the values of the Kingdom of God, the practice of Fair Trade is offering the world a glimpse of the economy of the New Jerusalem, an eschatological foretaste of the Kingdom. Song believes that, because the practice of Fair Trade is based on partnership and cooperation, rather than competition and impersonal relationships prevalent in the mainstream economy, it reflects the nature of Eucharistic community. Song (2004, p.395) states that: ‘the first criterion of discernment is not its effectiveness in reforming the world but its aptness as a symbol of the world renewed in Christ.’ He acknowledges that Fair Trade, in constituting a tiny share of the overall economy, is an inadequate response to the injustices of global trade. Yet this inability to bring transformation to the global trade system in the here and now does not prevent Fair Trade from serving as a sign post to a different future; acting as witness to a life renewed beyond the eschaton. Song’s reflection is useful, not only in that it rescues Fair Trade from an unrealistic and impossible requirement for flawlessness, but also that it frees Fair Trade from the ultimate burden of responsibility for eradicating injustice from international trade.

Belief in the view that Christians do not bear the ultimate responsibility for the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God does not, of necessity, lead to the adoption of an 'other-worldly' attitude. Such other-worldly attitudes view the world as entirely separate from the Church of all believers; society is doomed, and hence, requires no assistance from the Church. However, hope in an eschatological future is far from other-worldly and urges the wholehearted dedication of the Church, and of the individual believer, to assist society by means of demonstration of the values of the Kingdom. For Wolterstorff (2004, p.95), life in hope of the Coming Kingdom entails a continual struggle for justice. The seven churchgoers who do talk of Fair Trade in terms of demonstration, or foretaste, of the Coming Kingdom appear no less committed to working for social justice, but they find strength in their belief that ultimately injustice will be put right with the Coming of Christ. Many theologians stress the connection between living in hope of the Coming Kingdom and the work for social justice. This societal element to the theology of the Kingdom of God makes it particularly pertinent to theological reflection on Fair Trade. To seek the Kingdom of God requires the desire to see the transformation of the world in accordance with the values of the Kingdom. Such a transformation includes reformation of the structures of society, including its politics and economics. Several of the Traidcraft essayists emphasise that the Christian calling to demonstrate the values of the Kingdom is one which extends to the demonstration of a reordering of society in accordance with the justice of God. For example, Grant (2001, p.115) argues that praying for the coming of the Kingdom goes beyond the transformation of the individual to praying and working for transformation of the powerful and Sugden (2001, p.3), in citing the Lord's Prayer, states that the mission of Jesus Christ is in working for God's will to be done in all human endeavour, in the stewardship of creation.

The churchgoers in the study understand the societal emphasis of the Kingdom of God, either to offer foretaste or to build the Kingdom in this life. What is required is an application of the values of the Kingdom to contemporary society. This is not to say that there is not a clear role for

individual Christians in working in accordance with the Kingdom ethic. The participants discuss changes that must come about in society in order to bring justice but they also emphasise the role of individual behaviour. This extends to Christians acting in their personal lives and in their contribution to the collective witness of congregations. Ann, for example, states:

*The Kingdom of God, as I see it, is what happens when people are living [...] as God intends us to live. Where you get people who are seeking to live in fairness with one another, seeking to look out for each other, put other people's needs first, you get little glimpses of the Kingdom of God.*

Chloe identifies the impact of the Coming Kingdom on Christian living in this world, not only in terms of contributing towards a more righteous society, but in learning as individuals so as to be fit for the Kingdom beyond history.

*We [Christians carrying out action for Fair Trade] are practicing for our roles in the Kingdom of God, where justice will be done as a matter of course.*

This has close resonance with the thinking of Matthewes (2007) who describes Christian citizenship based on his interpretation of Augustinian theology. Matthewes (2007, p.168) views the involvement of Christians in society as a form of training for citizenship in the Coming Kingdom. This outlook represents a considerable shift in emphasis from the theology expressed by the participants who view Fair Trade as part of building the Kingdom on earth. The building of the Kingdom outlook places the ultimate responsibility for achieving righteous outcomes in society with the Church. Whereas the views expressed by Chloe represent a move away from responsibility for, and reliance upon, society for achieving the ultimate outcome: the Christian (acting both individually and collectively as Church) focuses on their own actions. Their responsibility is defined by their own suitability for the Kingdom of God. Moltmann (1967, p.217) talks in terms of obedience, referring to an 'obedient readiness to face the future' and facing the future requires action in the here and now.



To be fit for the Kingdom of God, Christians must engage with society. They can represent the values of the Kingdom by working for change in society towards the embodiment of those values, and they must also live out those values. Duncan describes this living out of the Kingdom in the following manner:

*Any person who is doing something really positive for somebody else is actually incarnating the values of the Kingdom.*

This eschatological vision of the Coming Kingdom is paradoxical. The believer is required to look to the vision of the Coming Kingdom as inspiration and guide to all their action. However, far from a turning away from the world to focus on the Kingdom beyond the eschaton, it is in working for the benefit of this world that the believer becomes fit for the next. The Coming Kingdom urges involvement in the world, not a rejection or despair of it. Paradoxically, although urging immersion in the world, continual focus on the Coming Kingdom guards against the world and its values providing the standard by which Christian action is judged. Not only does this prevent feelings of inadequacy on the part of Christians carrying out action for justice, it also sets a check against over-accommodation with the values of the world.

Fair Trade as demonstration of the Coming Kingdom possesses both the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The emphasis on engagement is represented by the requirement for demonstration. Obedience to the requirement leads Christians to engage with a wider public, so that the Kingdom can be experienced, if only partially, in the midst of the world. This eschatology is firmly rooted in the here and now and is in no sense 'other-worldly.' Indeed, Moltmann (1999, pp.251-4) identifies working for social justice as the core of living in anticipation of the Coming Kingdom. As Chloe identifies, it is in working for the benefit of this world that the believer becomes fit for the next. Therefore, demonstration of the Coming Kingdom requires close engagement with society but must possess the distinctive values of the Kingdom of God. As fallible as it may appear, Fair Trade is fit to demonstrate the Coming

Kingdom, as it is informed by the Kingdom value of justice. A focus on the values of the Kingdom will assist in holding in tension the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology. Fair Trade is engaged with the world to the extent that it is immersed in wider society and its economy. This strong emphasis on engagement is balanced by the distinctive emphasis, represented by the values of the Kingdom of God. These are the standards by which all the efforts of believers, acting as individuals or as Church, are judged. Holding on to distinctive Kingdom values will allow Fair Trade action by churches to be immersed within society, and yet in this immersion it will be protected from absorption by the dominant values of the world.

#### **5.4 Bretherton's framing of Fair Trade**

Bretherton's (2010, pp. 175-209) discussion of Christian involvement in Fair Trade poses a challenge to the view of Fair Trade as demonstration of the Coming Kingdom of God. He cites Fair Trade as an example of effective political engagement for Christians; however, this engagement is concerned with the welfare of the provisional order rather than as eschatological experience of the Kingdom of God. His views are at odds with those of the churchgoing participants in two key respects. Firstly, the churchgoers do not share Bretherton's concern to protect theology from too close an identification with the 'provisional' nature of Fair Trade. To the contrary, the churchgoers argue that theology and Fair Trade are not linked closely enough. For Bretherton, theology serves to motivate Christians in their involvement in Fair Trade but this involvement is not, in itself, an expression of theology. Bretherton's Fair Trade as political consumerism represents a theologically informed call to public action, whereas the churchgoers are effectively describing Fair Trade action by churches as a Public Theology. Secondly, Bretherton (2010, p.176) keeps a close focus on the actions of the Christian as an individual ethical consumer. The response of the Church is the summation of these individual actions.

Conversely, the churchgoing participants have a clearer focus on collective support for Fair Trade, in acting together as church.

#### 5.4.1 The identification of Fair Trade with theology

Bretherton (2010), in his work 'Christianity and Contemporary Politics', explores the possibilities for Christian engagement in politics in plural liberal democracies. He is concerned to avoid two potential pitfalls in the relationship between the Church and political life. On the one hand, Bretherton (2010, pp.1-2) does not wish to see a Church that is withdrawn from political life; a privatised religion, disengaged from society. On the other, Bretherton (2010, pp.1-6) expresses concern at the prospect of the Church being subverted by its involvement in political life, under threat of co-option by either state or market. In his work, he draws on three case studies to illustrate Christian engagement with politics which point the way to meaningful, but distinctive, engagement. Bretherton's (2010, pp.175-209) analysis of the Fair Trade movement forms one of these case studies and he elects to categorise Fair Trade as a form of 'political consumerism.'<sup>3</sup> Bretherton (2010, p.175) identifies Fair Trade as a Christian witness in globalised society. Taking part in this form of political consumerism offers the Christian the means by which to show neighbour love in the global marketplace (Bretherton 2010, p.176).

In Bretherton's (2010 pp.1-6) view, to avoid the loss of the distinctive nature of theology, the Church must guard against its co-option by state or market by setting firm boundaries. Adapting an Augustinian understanding of the relationship between Church and society, Bretherton frames the political actions that form the basis of his case studies in terms of the earthly city, in contrast to the city of God. Although Christians are no longer bound by the earthly city, they do have a duty towards it, as in the words Bretherton (2010, p. 4) they 'share in and benefit from the peace and prosperity of Babylon, i.e., the prideful and sinful earthly city.' This

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<sup>3</sup> See Bretherton (2010, pp.176-8) for his definition of political consumerism.

outlook strongly influences Bretherton's view of Fair Trade. He states that: 'practices such as Fair Trade [...] are ways in which the church pursues the peace of Babylon, all the time recognising that this peace is a contingent, relative and earthly peace' (Bretherton 2010, p.4). Such an understanding enables Bretherton to recognise the opportunity that Fair Trade offers the church in playing a constructive and concerned role in global society. However; it also places limits on how Fair Trade is interpreted theologically; Fair Trade is a practical tool to be used for good but it is not a demonstration of the Kingdom of God, rather it is firmly rooted in the earthly city. Theological concepts, such as the love of neighbour, motivate the Christian to political involvement but the carrying out of political consumerism is not a Public Theology. Bretherton (2010, pp.184-7) understands the counter-cultural role of Fair Trade, in contradicting the way in which mainstream trade, with its inequalities and lack of regard for human welfare, operates. This counter-culture only goes so far; it is not the counter-culture of the teachings of Jesus. Fair Trade offers critique of the status quo but it suggests only provisional improvement of the existing order. Fair Trade, in this view, cannot be embedded within the life of the Church, as it is firmly embedded within contemporary, worldly society. More explicitly, it is integrated within the economic system, not an alternative to the capitalist system, but a part of it. As Bretherton (2010, p.189) states: 'Fair Trade is by no means a panacea, neither does it offer a wholesale alternative to global capitalism; rather, [...] it is a contradiction pointing the way to the remedial improvement of an existing order.' This framing of Fair Trade stands in contrast with that of Northcott (2007, pp.182-6), who views Fair Trade as acting as an alternative to capitalism. In Bretherton's interpretation, Fair Trade is in the business of ameliorating the excesses of the capitalist system but it is working from within. Bretherton (2010, p.199) describes Fair Trade as a form of politics 'that provisionally tries to humanise capitalism.' Bretherton's interpretation fits most closely with a fully mainstreamed Fair Trade, with its main purpose that of amelioration. However, he downplays the role of Fair Trade as alternative or critique of the mainstream economic order. For Bretherton, although a

useful practical response for Christians, Fair Trade is part of the fallen world, and its fallen economic system.

Bretherton's interpretation of Christian support for Fair Trade is useful for provoking thought and discussion on attempting to create a witness that is both engaged and yet distinctive. In terms of the level of caution exercised regarding Church engagement with Fair Trade, there is a considerable dissonance between the views of the research participants and those advocated by Bretherton. The participants do not express Bretherton's caution regarding the over-identification of Fair Trade with theology or the practice of the Church. Indeed, the churchgoers argue that Fair Trade should be more closely identified with theology and that the Church should take ownership of Fair Trade.<sup>4</sup> The theology of the churchgoers is of an outward looking nature and they view theological interpretations, such as their understandings of the nature of the Kingdom of God, as seamless to the action that they carry out for social justice. Regarding the relationship between Fair Trade and the Church, the churchgoers do not express any reserve at close identification between the two. For example, Naomi argues:

*The Church should get out there more and be involved [...] To do that they should be less churchy and more Fair Tradey.*

For Bretherton, with his level of concern regarding the distinctive nature of the Church, this remark from Naomi would be anathema. Naomi is, in a sense, calling for a closer relationship between the Church and the world, than that advocated by Bretherton. For Naomi, in order to offer effective witness, the Church must place greater emphasis on the engaged rather than the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. The churchgoers' theology is not purely a motivation to action, it is an integral part of the action. If Fair Trade is building the Kingdom or offering demonstration of it, it is an integral part of their understanding of the Kingdom. The churchgoers are learning about Fair Trade through their belief in the Kingdom of God and they are also learning about the Kingdom through their work on Fair Trade. Bretherton's Fair Trade as political consumerism is a theologically informed

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<sup>4</sup> As discussed in Section 7.3.

call to public action; whereas the churchgoers are describing an example of Public Theology.

Perhaps we should not be surprised at the churchgoers' identification of the Gospel with Fair Trade; to the extent that Fair Trade is viewed as demonstration, or the building in this world, of the Kingdom of God. I selected the interviewees on the basis of their active support for Fair Trade in a church setting, and hence, it is unlikely that they would share Bretherton's reservations regarding bringing the Church into too close a contact with the practice of Fair Trade. However, just because this group of churchgoers does not express any concern at the close of identification of Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God, that is not to say that Bretherton's concerns are not without any validity. Given Fair Trade's operation within the market mechanism, there is certainly scope for the practice of Fair Trade to fall short of Kingdom values. Bretherton provides a useful reminder for vigilance; however, I would accuse him of over-caution. It is not possible for the Church to effectively witness in the public sphere without this rendering the Church vulnerable; Public Theology is a risky business. Church engagement with the world is, by necessity, bringing the Gospel into contact with the values of the world. Indeed, the subject of any form of Christian involvement in wider society runs the risk of being tainted by those values. Even the glimpses or pockets of the Heavenly Kingdom demonstrated by the Church are not of themselves perfect; there will always be an element of falling short.

The theological reflection on Fair Trade offered by Song (2004, pp.394-5) is pertinent in addressing Bretherton's concern. Song (2004, p.395) is aware of the limitations of Fair Trade, including accusations that it is a token response, inadequate to tackling injustice and that it is operating within the prevailing capitalist economic order. However, Song believes that because the practice of Fair Trade is based on partnership and cooperation, rather than competition and impersonal relationships prevalent in the mainstream economy, it reflects the nature of Eucharistic community. Fair Trade may well be an inadequate response to the injustices of the global trade system; however, Song (2004, p.395) states that 'the first criterion of

discernment is not its effectiveness in reforming the world but its aptness as a symbol of the world renewed in Christ.’ Although Fair Trade may have flaws in practice; to be involved in the world is to open up to risk, but this risk is necessary to any engagement with the world in which Christians are called to reflect the values of the Kingdom.

#### 5.4.2 Supporting Fair Trade as church

A second source of difference between the statements of the churchgoers and Bretherton’s outlook springs from Bretherton’s emphasis on Christians supporting Fair Trade as individuals. Bretherton refers to Christians being motivated to carry out action in support of political consumption, however there is an absence of reference to them doing so as church. Support for Fair Trade is not discussed at a congregational, denominational or Church level. The participants however, want to see congregations declare their support for Fair Trade, as is the requirement for Fair Trade church certification. All the churchgoers interviewed express the need for a strong collective response, with churchgoers coming together as congregations to support Fair Trade and they, in turn, receiving support from Church hierarchies. Fair Trade should be embedded within the life of churches rather than being perceived as an issue peripheral to the concerns of congregations and hierarchies.<sup>5</sup> This support for Fair Trade as church is not inward looking; the churchgoers see it as a public witness. According to the churchgoers, congregations that support Fair Trade should use their position in the communities of which they are a part to promote Fair Trade, not only as individuals coming together but using the collective voice of the church.

All such reference to collective action by churches is absent from Bretherton’s account. This stands in contrast with the reflections of Song and Northcott which position Fair Trade firmly within the life of the church and stress its role as public witness. They do so by bringing support for Fair

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<sup>5</sup> This will be discussed in Section 7.3.

Trade together with the practice at the heart of Christian worship, the Eucharist. Song (2004, p.395) describes church action for Fair Trade as a form of Eucharistic witness. The relationship of care between the consumer and the producer in Fair Trade is true to the values of the Eucharist. For Song (2004, pp.396-7) practices such as Fair Trade illustrate that the Eucharistic communion is not private and separate from the world, they can be: 'seamlessly worked out in the world in ways that do not thereby cease to be Eucharistic in fundamental identity.' Northcott (2011a, pp.109-110) discusses the concept of Eucharistic eating. This festal celebration is the enactment in community of a different way of living. When fair traders come together to consume Fair Trade products, for example when Fair Trade drinks are shared following a service, their sharing takes on a festal element which points beyond the activity of drinking and eating, to the demonstration of justice. In the Eucharistic reflections of Northcott and Song there is also an element of the eschatological. In the Eucharist, those who partake are offered foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God; the world is transformed within the space of the Eucharistic community and reshaped to the values of the Kingdom of justice, peace and love; offering demonstration of the New Jerusalem. Sheldrake (2001, p.89) argues that 'the Eucharist also makes space for living "as if." It is a space in which God speaks to human beings and acts upon them out of their future.'

There is a marked difference in emphasis between Bretherton's cautious approach to Christian support for Fair Trade and the churchgoers embrace of Fair Trade action by churches. The churchgoers do not share Bretherton's conclusion that Fair Trade should not be closely identified with theology. For the churchgoers, theology is not just motivational but is acted out in support for Fair Trade. Rather than focus on the flaws and worldliness of Fair Trade, the churchgoers' views are closer to those of Song who, although admitting the inadequacy of Fair Trade, views it as fit to reflect the values of the Kingdom of God. Bretherton's emphasis on the individual is also rejected in favour of collective action as church, witnessing to the wider community. The churchgoers recommend an embedding of Fair Trade within the life of the church, including its teaching



and worship. In this there is resonance with the reflections of Song and Northcott who describe church support for Fair Trade as Eucharistic practice. Their reference to the Eucharist not only underlines the coming together of the congregation in support of Fair Trade but also a collective witness to the values of the Kingdom of God.

#### 5.4.3 Fair Trade and market influences

Bretherton's recommendation for caution in bringing theology closely into conversation with worldly forces is not without any resonance with the views of the participants. Bretherton's (2010, pp.1-6) concern is that the Church's participation in social action is not co-opted by the most powerful forces in society: those of the state and market. Here, he is in agreement with the analysis of Habermas (1989), in envisaging a public sphere under continual threat of absorption by state and market.<sup>6</sup> Fair Trade in working within the market, and hence, in cooperation with market actors, is particularly vulnerable to influence by the logic of the market. It is from this predominant market logic that Bretherton wishes to protect theology in Christian involvement in Fair Trade. On this point, there is some agreement between Bretherton and the churchgoing participants. As I shall outline in detail in Section 8.1, the churchgoers express some concern at the growing influence of supermarkets and transnational corporations over the Fair Trade movement. They question the motivation of corporations that apply for Fair Trade certification for their products. It matters to the churchgoers that support for Fair Trade is motivated by the core values that informed Fair Trade from the outset, those of justice and the love of neighbour. If commercial actors within the Fair Trade project are subject primarily to the logic of the market, then this serves to undermine the overall nature of Fair Trade as an integral part of the work for justice.

Having acknowledged the common ground between Bretherton's views and the statements of the participants in relation to the fear of the

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<sup>6</sup> As discussed in Section 3.5.

power of the market, there is a crucial difference. The concerns that spring from the rising power of the market in the Fair Trade movement lead the churchgoers to a different conclusion than that of Bretherton. Rather than create some distance between theology and Fair Trade because Fair Trade is perceived to be tainted by market influence, the reaction of the churchgoers is to identify a role for church activism to act in counter-balance to the rising power of the market.<sup>7</sup> The churchgoers have a sense of ownership of the movement. They are conscious that the initial Fair Trade projects were church based and that Christian values informed and motivated the movement. Their reaction to a loosening of the hold of the original values of Fair Trade is to fight to reclaim the heart of the movement. Despite the influence of the market, for these churchgoers, Fair Trade is still fit to demonstrate the values of the Kingdom of God. Rather than seek to protect theology by keeping it well away from any market influence, the significance of Christ's declaration of the Kingdom of God at hand, is to urge theology out into the world.

### **5.5 The Kingdom and the engaged and distinctive emphases**

Demonstration of the Coming Kingdom is not a black and white contrast between worldly society and a rarefied Kingdom which bears no relationship to that society. There is an intimate relationship between this world and the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is a society, as Felix points out:

*The whole concept of the Kingdom of God is a society of justice and compassion and Fair Trade is concerned precisely with that.*

The churchgoers in the study are able to talk of the Kingdom offering a measure for the way society should trade because the Kingdom is relational; trade and other forms of cooperation will need to take place, albeit characterised by different values. Paeth (2008, p.147) points out that 'the Kingdom of God, as a kingdom, implies actual social conditions through

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<sup>7</sup> See Section 8.3.

which the principles that rule are made manifest in the world.’ The connection between the Kingdom of God and contemporary society is reinforced by the theological understanding of the new world beyond the eschaton being resurrected from the old, rather than created from nothing. Sheldrake (2001, p.88) points out that the Kingdom’s origins are in human history, it draws from the world, but one which is spiritually transformed. The Kingdom is not an entity wrought by earthly destruction, rather it is the fulfilment of justice, peace and love in the world.

The intimate connection between the Kingdom of God and the world can lead to complexity in the demonstration of the values of the Kingdom to wider society. It certainly serves to guard against a simplistic understanding of the Kingdom as complete contrast to society. The Church is called to work for the reconfiguration of society in accordance with the values of the Kingdom, values which are counter-cultural to the values of the world. However, as they are to be demonstrated within the world, the demonstration cannot be wholly untainted by worldliness. Fair Trade, as the participants point out, acts as demonstration of the Kingdom of God because it is guided by the Kingdom values of justice and love of neighbour. However, it is demonstrated within the worldly economy and is still reliant on the operation of the market for its practice. The market, of course, operates with its own logic and values; it is therefore not possible for Fair Trade to operate in a manner perfect and untouched by the values of the world. Demonstration of the Coming Kingdom of God requires balance; Christ’s declaration of the Kingdom at hand urges engagement, indeed immersion, within the world. The Church cannot shrink from the world so that it can remain untainted; it must draw up close. However, Christian action cannot be guided by values which are no different from those of the world; to offer effective witness, its values must be distinctive. Theologians have emphasised the tension inherent within the demonstration of the Kingdom. Tillich (1987, pp.309-310) refers to the churches as the ‘representatives’ of the Kingdom of God within history; he views this task as a holding in tension between an awareness of living within society and living in expectation of the Coming Kingdom of God. Paeth (2008, p.158),

in describing Moltmann's view of the Church as an 'exodus community', states that the Church must remain open to the culture of society but it must not lose its distinct identity by being subsumed by the prevailing culture. For Fair Trade action by churches, discernment is required to know where to strike the balance between close engagement with society and the adoption of a counter-cultural stance which stresses the distinctive difference of the values of the Kingdom of God.

Given Bretherton's concern that the Church and its values are vulnerable to the power of the market, and that fears are expressed by the churchgoers regarding the power of the market over the practice of Fair Trade, what should the response of church action for Fair Trade be? The understanding of church action for Fair Trade as a holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases can assist us here to formulate a response to Bretherton's concerns. The Traidcraft essayists illustrate such a holding in tension with their reflections on the practice of the Christian FTO (Johnson and Sugden, 2001). The essayists acknowledge the risks associated with working within the market. They describe a balanced approach between cooperation with the market and obedience to the guidance of the values of the Kingdom of God. Stuart Raistrick (2001, p.126) former Chair of the Traidcraft Board, states: 'we must see ourselves not as overthrowing the market system but working within it.' He acknowledges the ability of free markets to provide a way out of poverty for poor communities in the developing world. However, Traidcraft's Christian basis does make it significantly different from mainstream commercial companies. As Angier (2001, pp.84-6) points out, Traidcraft is guided by its mission statement to 'show a bias to the poor' and it has a duty to speak out against the injustices that take place within the economic system. The Traidcraft essays offer a nuanced picture of Fair Trade as theological witness and this may be attributed to their nature as a reflection on the actual practice of running a Fair Trade business. Johnson (2001, p.37) talks of the imperative to balance the competing interests of producers, consumers and staff and indicates the need to compromise, in order to apply ethical principles, whilst coping with the realities of the market. Indeed, this

holding in tension of the ethical and the practical, of theology and the market, of the world and the Kingdom of God, characterises much of what is said in the Traidcraft essays.

The aim for balance demonstrated by the Traidcraft essays is one which can be applied to Fair Trade action by churches as a whole. The balance is not an easy one and, in striving to achieve it, one has to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of the engaged-distinctive dichotomy. The holding in tension is an ongoing task which will not find resolution. Society is in flux and, with every change, a renewed balance will need to be sought to achieve a witness which is at once engaged and yet distinctive. A successful holding in tension will require vigilance from the Church to ensure that the action that it takes to promote social justice reflects the values of the Kingdom of God. In identifying a role for the Church in fighting for the heart of the Fair Trade movement, to remind it of the original values which underpin it, the churchgoers are exercising such vigilance. What the churchgoers are articulating is, in effect, a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology; to ensure that Fair Trade remains fit to demonstrate the Coming Kingdom of God.

### **Conclusion**

For the majority of churchgoers in my study, there is an intimate connection between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God. This is assisted by their emphasis on theology as praxis and their understanding of Fair Trade as justice and as demonstration of biblical principles. There is division amongst the churchgoers as to whether they are called to build the Kingdom of God upon earth or whether they are to offer foretaste of the Coming Kingdom of God. The understanding of Fair Trade as a demonstration of the Coming Kingdom fits with the churchgoers' outward looking impulse but can guard against despondency when faced with the scale of injustice in the world. Although partial, and inadequate to the task of achieving a total transformation of society within history, Fair Trade can

offer witness to life in the Kingdom. This is by virtue of the concept being informed by the Kingdom values of justice and love of neighbour.

Demonstration of the Kingdom of God possesses both the engaged and distinctive emphases that I have identified as a characteristic of all Public Theology. It requires an openness to society and yet must possess the distinctive values of the Kingdom. Concentration on demonstrating these values guards against adopting the values of the world.

Bretherton's discussion of Christian support for Fair Trade as a form of political consumerism is pertinent to my research. He adopts a cautious approach and positions Fair Trade as provisional improvement for the earthly city, separating it from foretaste of life in the Kingdom of God. The churchgoing participants do not come to the same conclusion. Rather than recommend a guardedness in associating the practice of Fair Trade with theology, they are keen for the two to be identified with each other.

Whereas Bretherton focuses on Church support for Fair Trade as the sum of individual action, the churchgoers view Fair Trade support as a collective work of congregations and the Church as a whole. Nevertheless, there is some resonance between Bretherton's thoughts and those of the churchgoers in relation to the values of the Kingdom being rendered vulnerable to market influences. Whilst acknowledging this concern, I do not share Bretherton's conclusions. The opportunity presented by church action for Fair Trade to forge an outward looking, engaged, Public Theology should not be lost. It is a strength in the position of the churchgoers that they are eager to bring theology closely alongside their practice for social justice. However, Bretherton's warning regarding the power of the market is apposite, and therefore, vigilance is required. The churchgoers' interpretation of Fair Trade as demonstration of the values of the Kingdom of God represents a theology which is engaged with contemporary society. Their concerns regarding the power of the market, and call to reassert the centrality of justice in the Fair Trade movement, represents an awareness of the need for distinctive theological witness. The churchgoers are, in effect, articulating support for Fair Trade as a Public Theology and one in which

the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive are held in tension.

## **Chapter 6: Fair Trade and the secular**

### **Introduction**

The research participants are wary of a strict Church / world dichotomy. This is manifest in their understanding of their role, not in the keeping of the values of the Kingdom separate from the world, but of demonstrating those values in the midst of the world. In this chapter I explore further the relationship between Church and world in Fair Trade action by churches. I do so with reference to the presentation of Fair Trade in a 'secular' manner, a presentation which is supported by Church organisations and by the research participants. As I have indicated in the introduction to the thesis, Christian organisations and activists continue to play a significant role in the Fair Trade movement. They work alongside activists from religions other than Christianity and those of no faith. The participants' lack of emphasis on a religious / secular divide is connected with their theological outlook, which on the whole does not recognise a strict Church / world binary. Rather, with Bonhoeffer (1955, p.195), there is an emphasis on encountering God in the world. Whilst the presentation of Fair Trade has been in a sense 'secularised', in other respects the Fair Trade movement has retained a strong degree of Christian influence. Furthermore, whilst the participants wish to see the retention of the secular presentation of Fair Trade they also make apparently contradictory calls for Fair Trade action by churches to serve as a witness to the true nature of Church. Rather than view this contradiction as incoherency on the part of the churchgoers, it can be understood as an expression of the tension between the engaged and distinctive emphases at the heart of Public Theology.

### **6.1 The secular presentation of Fair Trade**

In this section, I will offer a brief outline of the secular presentation of Fair Trade, before moving on to discuss the participants' views in the subsequent sections. Firstly, I will explain my use of the word 'secular' to



describe the presentation of Fair Trade. As I have indicated in Section 2.2, 'secular' in the context of the 'secular presentation of Fair Trade' does not refer to the removal of religious influence. Indeed, it allows for a significant religious presence, but one which plays its role in the wider Fair Trade movement; a movement that is accessible to any interested party, regardless of their religious belief or lack thereof. The inclusive nature of the movement requires that its promotion is conducted in a language that is accessible to all. Therefore, the language of faith is rarely used to describe Fair Trade in any context outside of church circles. However, the secularisation of Fair Trade, which has seen the concept move out of a Christian niche and into mainstream consciousness, does not follow a clear pattern of loss of influence for the Church in the Fair Trade movement. There is certainly no sense in which Fair Trade is responding to a programmatic secularism which, as Williams (2012, pp.2-3) describes, seeks to remove religion from the public realm. Rather, the secular presentation of Fair Trade is more akin to a procedural secularism, whereby the Church acknowledges that, if it is to add its voice in a plural public space, it cannot expect preferential treatment (Williams 2012, pp.2-3). It is one voice amongst many. As is the case with the secular presentation of Fair Trade, procedural secularism may lead the Church to speak in a language accessible to people of many different faiths and of none, in order that it may be better understood in a plural society.

To give context to the discussion, I will briefly outline the history of the secular presentation of Fair Trade. Anderson (2015, p.66) describes a distinctively Christian presentation of the concept of Fair Trade in the UK of the 1970s and 1980s and this was largely driven by Christian international development NGOs. Anderson views their support of Fair Trade as part of a wider attempt by Church organisations to demonstrate the relevance of Christian values to contemporary global society. He identifies a turning point for the Fair Trade movement in the UK in the early 1990s, when a shift occurred away from explicit reference to the Christian faith in the presentation of Fair Trade, to the largely secular message of Fair Trade that has continued up to the present day. The secularisation of the

presentation of Fair Trade has developed in tandem with the mainstreaming project, whereby the concept has moved out of a niche market occupied by churchgoers and likeminded allies to involve large corporations and supermarket chains. Mainstreaming required a change in the way that the Fair Trade concept was promoted. Fair Trade before the 1990s appealed to quite specific, and relatively limited, demographics which included regular churchgoers who attended socially conscious churches and supporters of Christian international development organisations. Fair Trade was also bolstered by secular organisations, such as Oxfam, and social solidarity orientated initiatives, for example Twin Trading, which shared the church based supporters' view of an imperative for social justice.<sup>1</sup> The mainstreaming of Fair Trade involved an appeal to a much wider audience. Anderson (2015, p.44) points out that religion had to be deemphasised as part of the Fair Trade message in order to fit into to the professional marketing of Fair Trade products. The motivation for the purchase of Fair Trade goods was no longer encouraged with reference to the language of faith.

The Fairtrade Foundation administers and promotes the Fairtrade certification mark in the UK and also plays a coordinating role for activists in the promotion of Fair Trade (see Lamb 2008). Anderson (2015, p.65) comments on their attitude to reference to the Christian faith in the marketing of the organisation:

While Christian ethics have continued to motivate individual supporters, and voluntary organisations, they have not been integral to the modern identity of the Fairtrade Foundation. There remains a perception that openly Christian language could alienate the general public.

The Foundation presents itself as a secular organisation, however, there are many Christians represented within its membership; for example, seven of

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<sup>1</sup> See Barratt Brown (1993, pp.156-76) for a description of the Fair Trade movement (or Alternative Trade as it was often referred to in the period) in the 1980s and early 1990s and the supporter organisations which bolstered it.

the fifteen member organisations are Christian (Anderson 2015, p.142). Traidcraft, as an avowedly Christian organisation describing itself in its foundation principles as a ‘Christian response to poverty’, might reasonably be expected to uphold the use of the language of faith in its marketing.<sup>2</sup> However, Traidcraft, which refers explicitly to Christian theology for its own strategic and governance purposes, does not include the language of theology in most of its marketing.<sup>3</sup> Even in the first years of its operation, Richard Adams, the founder of Traidcraft, aimed to present the organisation in a secular manner. He regarded this as essential to reach a wide customer-base; Adams observed: ‘I was very conscious of how “Christian language” might alienate people’ (quoted in Anderson 2015, p.57). As I outline in Section 8.1, the desire for Fair Trade to reach its widest possible audience leads FTOs and activists to support the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. Mainstreamed Fair Trade is by its nature ‘secularised’ Fair Trade: to drive up sales reference to Christian ethics in its marketing must be replaced by more commercially acceptable language. Rather than a concentration on presenting Fair Trade to an ‘ethical’ minority, mainstreamed Fair Trade must aim firmly for the majority population which does not partake of religious worship on a regular basis and is largely unacquainted with biblical language. The removal of the language of faith from the presentation of Fair Trade goes beyond marketing and extends to internal discussion and presentation within many FTOs, Christian NGOs and the churches themselves.<sup>4</sup> The secular presentation of Fair Trade is well established within the movement and exerts a considerable influence over Fair Trade activists, including those who carry out church action for Fair Trade.

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<sup>2</sup> See Johnson and Sugden (2001, pp.152-5) for Traidcraft’s foundation principles.

<sup>3</sup> The exception being its resources for use in church.

<sup>4</sup> The influence of the secular presentation of Fair Trade over activities that take place within churches will be discussed in Section 7.3.

## **6.2 Secular presentation and Fair Trade action by churches**

In my case study town of Skipton, the secular presentation of Fair Trade in many respects mirrors the national picture. The vast majority of the Fair Trade activists in Skipton are churchgoers, including the majority of the members of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group, which coordinates the promotion of Skipton as a Fair Trade Town. However, the Initiative Group presents itself as a secular organisation. Margaret, the coordinator of the group states:

*I do not agree with Fair Trade being associated with the Church or Christianity, because I think that makes it exclusive and puts a lot of people off. And they think well, you know, it's all these do-gooders who go to church that are pushing Fair Trade. When actually it should be something that is embracing all faiths, not just the Christian faith, but also everybody, whatever their stance is, no faith, or agnostic, or anything.*

Margaret is conscious of the image of the group and therefore thinks it important that it outwardly presents a secular message, even though the composition of the group is largely Christian. Margaret is not the only participant to stress the importance of maintaining a secular image for the Fair Trade movement in Skipton. In total, eight of the thirteen churchgoing participants in Skipton offer words of caution that Fair Trade should not be viewed by the public as being exclusively associated with the Church.

From analysis of the interviews, the activities of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative Group can best be described as a religious-secular mix, rather than decidedly secular. The religious influence on the group is manifest in terms of its membership; the fact that the majority of its members are churchgoers has significance beyond motivation and contributes to the shaping of its activities. As I have described in Section 3.1, the churchgoers utilise a wide variety of networks in their support of Fair Trade. The type of networks used are determined by the churchgoers, which, in effect, creates a bias towards church networks and those of like-minded groups and organisations which may share some of their core

principles with those of the churches. The Initiative Group's meetings are held in a Methodist church in the centre of the town and church based Fair Trade activity is mentioned in the media releases to the local newspaper. Indeed, the group plays a supportive role to churches that have Fair Trade church status or that are working towards it. On the other hand, the churchgoing members of the Initiative Group all view the group as essentially secular. Clearly this secularity is not such that references to religion are removed from the group's activities, indeed it relies on the support of churches and church based networks for its existence. Rather, it is secular in the sense that its public presentation avoids reference to religious language and churches are not presented as having a coordinating role in the Initiative.<sup>5</sup> The reasoning behind this is that the churchgoers wish to portray the town's Fair Trade activity as open to all regardless of background. Secular presentation manifests itself in the choice of venue for public meetings and activities. The Initiative Group has decided to hold these open events in secular spaces (for example the Town Hall) rather than church buildings. Margaret cites this as part of the rationale for the group linking with the town's roster of annual festivals, which are held in public spaces in the town.

The views of the five non-churchgoing community stakeholders interviewed are insightful. They all acknowledge the considerable input of churchgoers into the support of Fair Trade in the town. The churchgoers are viewed by the stakeholders as 'leading' the group, carrying out the majority of the work and shaping its strategy. The stakeholders are conscious of a church culture in the promotion of Fair Trade and cite regular reference to Fair Trade activities carried out by churches and their networks. However, for all the five stakeholders this was largely unproblematic; all find the Initiative Group welcoming and inclusive and they point out that the language of faith is never referred to in meetings. All of the five state that the connection between the Christian faith and support for Fair Trade had never been explained to them by members of the group, or indeed, by any

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<sup>5</sup> Even though it could be argued that they do, this is downplayed in publicity to the wider community.

churchgoers. Another key theme which came across in the stakeholder interviews was that the church support for Fair Trade was viewed largely in terms of the commitment of churchgoing individuals, rather than the Church generally conceived. As Vanessa states:

*It is individuals who go to church who are promoting Fair Trade, rather than the Church is promoting Fair Trade, definitely.<sup>6</sup>*

On the whole, the secular presentation of Fair Trade is supported by the churchgoers I interviewed. The most common comment given in explanation is an expression of fear that too close an identification between the Church and Fair Trade would prove off putting for the majority of the general public. Antonia states:

*I don't think it (Fair Trade) should be described as a Christian thing as it could turn others against it.*

The churchgoers who express this fear are conscious of the role of Fair Trade in coming to the assistance of producers in poor communities; the producers' interests are best served by a secular presentation of the Fair Trade message in order to appeal to the widest possible support. Malpass et al (2007), in their research on the work of the Bristol Fair Trade City group, state that, although many of the supporters of the Fair Trade City campaign were themselves churchgoers, reference to religion was minimised and secular partners were sought in order to attract a wider audience to the campaign and not to limit it to a Christian niche. Four of the participants in my research go on to refer to declining church attendance to support this view; churchgoers are no longer a sizeable enough group to make a concept such as Fair Trade viable without reaching out to a wider audience. A related argument expressed by the churchgoing participants is the perceived need not to exclude people of different backgrounds from support of Fair Trade. Rather than the practical argument of the need to maximise support, this outlook concentrates on a moral imperative to adopt an inclusive approach. Five of the churchgoing participants make this category of appeal

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<sup>6</sup> This issue of church action for Fair Trade being viewed as in some way separate from the institutional Church will be discussed in Section 7.3.

and all of them link it with a requirement not to alienate believers of religions other than Christianity. When adherents of other religions are discussed by the churchgoers they are treated as a discrete category of supporters (or potential supporters) rather than being viewed together with the general public.

The churchgoers' support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade possesses a strong emphasis on engagement. What is important for these churchgoers is that the theological values which underpin Fair Trade reach the widest possible audience and this can only be achieved by speaking in a publicly accessible language. The distinctive theological values, of justice and love of neighbour, are not necessarily lost in secular presentation and the churchgoers' concentration upon them serves to balance the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. In the next section, I will discuss the allies that the Church works with in the secular Fair Trade movement. What is important for the churchgoers is that these allies share their support for the distinctive values of justice and love of neighbour that lie at the heart of Fair Trade.

### **6.3 Working with allies**

#### **6.3.1 Religions other than Christianity**

Of the nineteen churchgoing participants, nine refer to a need for Christians to work together with the adherents of religions other than Christianity.<sup>7</sup> Margaret, as leader of the Fair Trade Initiative Group, is particularly concerned to involve the Muslim community of Skipton in the work for Fair Trade in the town. She has addressed a Muslim women's group and found the attendees supportive. It must be taken into account that the communities of adherents to religions other than Christianity in the town

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<sup>7</sup> No specific question was asked in the interviews regarding religions other than Christianity, therefore the introduction of this subject by the participants was purely of the participant's own choosing.

are relatively small.<sup>8</sup> However, attempts to involve adherents of other faiths in the Fair Trade activity in the town have not resulted in any significant involvement from members of those faiths. Two different motivations are expressed by the churchgoers for wanting to reach out to believers of other faiths to encourage them to join the work on Fair Trade. Firstly, they are viewed as natural allies. This is explained with reference to shared principles, for example, Julie argues:

*Well, for a Christian it (Fair Trade) is a part of our faith, but also folk of other faiths. Some of the things we hold dear, peace and justice, surely they must be in the life of all right thinking people.*

Julie identifies the attributes of the Kingdom of God, of peace and justice, as shared with adherents of other faiths. To some extent, all of the nine participants who refer to other faiths view their adherents as allies, or potential allies, in the work in support of Fair Trade. In effect, this places them in a category separate from the general population and closer to those who hold Christian beliefs. There is no reference in any of the interviews to any antagonisms between the different faiths, nor are they viewed as a form of competition. For example, there are no expressions of concern that Christian influences upon Fair Trade might be undermined by the influence of other faiths.

The second motivation for reaching out to adherents of religions other than Christianity, is that this is something that church action for Fair Trade should be doing in order to foster an image of an inclusive Fair Trade movement. For Margaret, the involvement of the Muslim community of Skipton in Fair Trade action would assist in addressing her concern that Fair Trade could lose support by being perceived as Christian. In this outlook, the support of religions other than Christianity is viewed as symbolic to the wider population that Fair Trade is not limited to, or dominated by, the Church. Anderson (2015, p.64) discusses attempts by the Fairtrade

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<sup>8</sup> Only 2% of the population of Craven District is constituted by adherents of religions other than Christianity according to the 2011 Census. This compares to a figure for England of 8% (Office for National Statistics 2011d).



Foundation to be inclusive to adherents of all faiths. Anderson (2015, p.64) observes that: ‘increasingly the Foundation now talks about “a vibrant network of faith communities” rather than singling out Christian support for Fair Trade.’ The publicity of the Foundation in emphasising ‘faiths’ to some extent obscures the reality of the relative strength of Christian support compared to that of all the other religions combined. Anderson (2015, p.64) points out:

While “a shared discourse of faith” has been identified as a successful strategic option open to campaigners, to date, most faith-based Fair Trade campaigns have centred on Christian networks.

Anderson’s comments on the national Fairtrade Foundation have resonance with my research findings. Although both the Fairtrade Foundation and the activists in my study go out of their way to stress the inclusivity of Fair Trade to all faiths, support for Fair Trade remains predominantly Christian.

### 6.3.2 Partners in justice

The churchgoers identify three areas of support for Fair Trade activism in the form of: the Church, adherents to other religions and those who do not identify as being part of a faith community but who nevertheless share the values of Christian supporters of Fair Trade. This is described by five of the churchgoers in terms of a shared understanding of the concept of justice. Julie, in her statement given above, refers to “right thinking people” who value peace and justice. She initially uses the phrase in relation to people of faith but goes on to extend this to people who do not subscribe to a faith. Mary also identifies a category of support for Fair Trade which extends beyond faith communities:

*I think anybody who is concerned about the welfare of the human race is as likely to be interested in something like Fair Trade as the churches are.*

It may be tempting to view these categories of “right thinking people” and “anybody who is concerned about the welfare of the human race” as being

universal. However, statements made elsewhere in these interviews indicate that this is not the case. These categories are not understood as default positions for the public at large. Rather, support for the work of justice, whilst perceived as being open to anybody regardless of their religious background, is viewed as facing opposition. Julie identifies considerable work to be done in order to persuade the public of the desirability of Fair Trade and other actions for social justice. Margaret, when commenting about supporters who have no religious affiliation, but who are motivated by what she identifies as the shared values of “human rights, generosity and justice”, goes on to state:

*I am pleased that they feel that way. Not everybody does feel that way; they are in the minority.*

This view of support for the work for social justice as a minority preoccupation is reinforced by the participants’ comments in answer to the question ‘in what ways are your views of society shaped by your faith?’ as discussed in Section 3.4. The churchgoers react to the word ‘society’ in a negative manner, regarding it as characterised by values opposed to biblical values such as justice and the love of neighbour. Although the churchgoers’ criticisms tend to focus on the structures of society they do refer to structures influencing public opinion. The ‘public’ in this sense is viewed as oppositional to the work for social justice, influenced as it is by prevailing discourses, such as the logic of the mainstream market. The non-religious partners for justice identified by the churchgoers are not simply a cross-section of the general public. They represent only a small minority section of society which shares the values of those upheld by faith communities. The churchgoers’ focus is not on a Christian / non-Christian or religious / secular divide, nor is it viewed as an attempt by Christians, or people of faith, to influence a neutral secular public. The divide is between those people who support the values of justice and love of neighbour and those who stand against such values, by supporting the unjust structures of society.

The values that underpin Fair Trade are clearly central to the churchgoers' understanding of the concept. This is to the extent that, rather than identify partners on the grounds of their religious confession, they identify them on the basis of their support for these values. The churchgoers' agreement with the secular presentation of Fair Trade can be related to the engaged emphasis of Public Theology. The agreement springs from a desire for the Church's work on Fair Trade to reach the widest possible audience and to appear inclusive. However, the engaged emphasis is balanced by the distinctive emphasis, represented by the churchgoers' identification of their allies on the basis of shared values. Although these values are shared with key partners, they are distinctive, in that they are counter-cultural to the values of the mainstream. For these churchgoers, the values of justice and love of neighbour that inform Fair Trade serve as a unifying force for the Fair Trade movement. It is a movement united by shared values. I shall now discuss the concept of secular spiritual capital which can shed light on this sharing of values between religious activists and their non-religious partners.

### 6.3.3 Secular spiritual capital

A focus on the concept of spiritual capital can illuminate this discussion on the relationship between the churchgoers and partners who share core values.<sup>9</sup> Spiritual capital takes the form of the values that motivate faith communities to generate religious capital (Baker 2009a, p.111). Spiritual capital brings benefit to the wider community outside of religious groups, not only in its generation of religious capital, but also in terms of insight into the solving of social problems. Parallels can be drawn between the values of biblical justice which act as spiritual capital for the churchgoers' involvement in Fair Trade and values of justice which motivate secular actors in their involvement. As Baker and Miles-Watson (2008, pp.457-8) point out, just as spiritual capital motivates faith communities to generate religious capital, so too secular spiritual capital can

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<sup>9</sup> The concept of spiritual capital is discussed in Section 3.2.

motivate non-religious actors to generate social capital. They indicate that secular spiritual capital is constituted by ‘those values, visions and ethical systems that motivate engagement with social capital as a whole’ (Baker and Miles-Watson 2008, p.457). Spiritual capital and secular spiritual capital do not exist in separate realms. As evidenced in the Fair Trade movement, the values that motivate the churchgoers and the values that motivate many non-religious Fair Trade activists are closely related. Indeed, within the movement non-religious actors have to some extent been influenced by a biblically inspired concept of justice, just as churchgoers have been influenced by secular conceptions of justice.<sup>10</sup>

Baker and Miles-Watson (2008, p.458) stress the connection between spiritual capital and secular spiritual capital with reference to Swinton’s broad definition of ‘the spiritual.’ This embraces the identification of a purpose to life, the possession of ethical values and outlooks which involve a form of reaching beyond the self. They identify these factors as important in motivating engagement in civil society, and hence, the generation of social capital. The concept of secular spiritual capital is helpful in describing what is taking place in the Fair Trade movement, in that it links the motivation of faith communities and the motivation of non-religious Fair Trade activists. Spiritual capital and secular spiritual capital are different from each other, but there is cross-fertilisation. When taken together, the concepts of spiritual capital and secular spiritual capital serve to emphasise a key similarity in the motivation of both religious and non-religious activists: that ethics and values underpin the involvement of both groups in the action that they carry out in support of Fair Trade. The concept of secular spiritual capital serves to underline that cooperation between the Church and non-religious partners is not a coming together at random. Rather, it is a coming together motivated by shared values. In the next section I will examine the theological thinking of the

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<sup>10</sup> The influence of secular conceptions of justice on the participants’ understanding of the concept is discussed in Section 4.4.

churchgoers which leads them to embrace those of other religious confessions, and of none, as partners in a movement of shared values.

#### 6.3.4 The churchgoers' theology and partners in justice

Not one of the interviewees expresses concern that religious influences within Fair Trade are being challenged by activists who are not from a faith background; nor that Christian influences are in any way challenged by an appeal to other faiths. This lack of concern regarding a Christian / non-Christian divide is connected with a theological outlook that understands the work of the Church as being carried out in the world and not separate from it. The churchgoers' acknowledgement of a shared motivation for justice by Fair Trade supporters, including people of other faiths and non-religious partners, is a manifestation of this refusal to recognise a simple binary divide. In her interview, Mary speaks of her journey of faith in which she has moved away from a view of the Church as strictly delineated from the world. She has come to focus her attention on carrying out work for social justice but no longer views this as the exclusive project of the Church. Mary mentions both unjust actions by members of the Church and passionate dedication to justice by some people outside of it. She sums up these thoughts with the words:

*I find as I get older I make less and less distinction between churches and human beings.*

This has led Mary to understand her spiritual devotion and learning as taking place as much in the secular world as in the Church. She states that:

*If I really want to follow the Gospel, wider society is as much in need of my time and prayers as anybody else.*

Naomi identifies working for justice, in the form of ethical consideration of the ways in which money is spent, as being of greater importance than formal religious observance:

*People are cross at us because we are not staying in our little church box. That we go to worship in church and it doesn't matter what we spend our money on. It absolutely matters. It actually matters more than whether we go to church or not.*

Although not all the participants would go as far as Naomi, all of the responses indicate that the churchgoers' understanding of working for the Gospel includes work that is carried out in wider society alongside non-religious partners. It is interesting to set this outlook alongside the views of Bretherton (2010, pp.175-209) on church action for Fair Trade.

Bretherton's caution in strictly delineating the Church from the world in Christian involvement in Fair Trade is nowhere echoed by the churchgoers in this study. Green (1990, p.143), in discussion of the work of the Church, states that it must be 'intent on finding God already at work in the world into which it is moving.' For the churchgoers in this study, Fair Trade reflects the work of God within the world. Fair Trade has a worldly setting but this does not mean that it is 'worldly'; it reflects that of God within the world. There is some resonance with the ethics of Bonhoeffer (1955, p. 197) and his assertion that 'sharing in Christ we stand at once in both the reality of God and the reality of the world.' Bonhoeffer (1955, pp. 196-207) rejects the conception of Church as separate from the world with its aim to avoid contamination by worldly forces. Indeed, the churchgoers, rather than heed Bretherton's caution in protecting Church from world in its action for Fair Trade, urge the Church out into the world.

Seven of the churchgoing participants make an observation that some activists from non-religious backgrounds can display great dedication to the cause of social justice. They observe the contrast between this dedication and a much more lukewarm response from some churchgoers. The following comment from Stefan is typical of this line of thought.

*There are many people who don't subscribe to religion who actually set a better example than the churches.*

In complement to my argument that the churchgoers' standpoint regarding non-religious partners is shaped by their theological outlook, there is also an

element of their theological outlook being shaped by their encounters with non-religious activists. This is certainly true for Mary, who has dedicated much of her time to carrying out work for social justice in many different settings and this has brought her into contact with many non-religious workers for justice. Muers and Britt (2012, p.224), in examination of the motivations of volunteers at a homelessness centre in Leeds, found that one research participant theologised in order to make sense of the different motivations of the volunteers at the centre. The centre, although a church project, attracts volunteers from a wide variety of backgrounds. Muers and Britt describe the participant's move from understanding the Christian faith as the prime motivation for altruistic voluntary work to a theological understanding of God acting within the world. This has resonance with Mary's journey, in which she now sees God at work as much amongst non-Christians as within the Church.

The participants' theologising regarding the nature of the Kingdom of God, as discussed in Chapter 5, is pertinent to the rejection of a strict division between the Godly and the secular. Bonhoeffer (1955, p.196) criticises a theological position which interprets the role of the Church as a fight against the world in order to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. Bonhoeffer goes as far as to deny any spiritual existence that is set apart from the secular sphere. The heart of Bonhoeffer's (1955, p.195) ethics can be encapsulated by his dictum: 'I never experience the reality of God without the reality of the world or the reality of the world without the reality of God.' This encountering of God in the world is to some extent echoed by the churchgoers in their God-talk on the nature of the Kingdom of God. All of the fourteen churchgoers who articulate a connection between support for Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God are conscious of the intimate link between God and world. Experience of, or knowledge about, the nature of the Kingdom of God is glimpsed through involvement with the world. Hence, churchgoers are not only motivated by their faith to carry out work for social justice, their carrying out of such work informs their faith and their understanding of what the Kingdom is. This emphasis on the intimate connection between the spiritual life of the believer and the activities of the

secular world, stands in contrast to a binary view of stark distinction between the Church and the secular. Seven of the churchgoing participants state that work towards, or in foretaste of, the Kingdom of God can be carried out by any person who acts in accordance with the values of the Kingdom. This is regardless of their religious background or lack thereof. Brandon expresses this in the following manner:

*The Kingdom of God here on earth, that is about love really, and it is John who talks all about 'God is love' and my view is that, where any loving action is, that is God at work on this earth. Whether someone is not a Christian, is a Muslim, or whatever.*

Duncan also articulates this belief in the Kingdom of God as not exclusive to Christians.

*Any person who is doing something really positive for somebody else is actually incarnating the values of the Kingdom. So, I would say that Fair Trade is actually incarnational.*

Antonia, in observing God at work in the lives of non-Christians and secular society, regards the Kingdom of God as open to all who contribute to the struggle for justice.

*In my Christian faith, I've been just as inspired by non-Christians as by fellow Christians and I can see God in non-Christians or in any other faith [...] I believe God is in the struggle as well as the solution and so everybody striving for that is carrying out God's Kingdom, whether they're Christian or not.*

For the remaining seven participants who do not make explicit their views on the involvement of non-Christians in the Kingdom of God, they all refer to God being at work in the Fair Trade movement. There are no statements which view the work of building, or demonstrating, the Kingdom of God as an activity exclusive to the Church.

In understanding the work of the Kingdom of God as open to anyone who is motivated by righteous values, the views of the churchgoers contrast with the position of many theologians who stress the ecclesial nature of the



Kingdom of God. Matthewes (2007, p.104), for example, indicates that it is possible to participate in the character of the Kingdom of God (albeit partially) in the present life, but this must be done through the project of the Church. The thinking of Hauerwas provides example of a theology in which the role of the Christian in public life is clearly focussed on their contribution to the witness of the Church. Hauerwas' (1983) vision of Church is one which stands in counter-cultural contrast to the world. According to Hauerwas and Willimon (1989, p.30) Christians are to consider themselves an 'alien people', alien that is, to the world. For Hauerwas (1983, pp.97-9), the role of the Church is 'to be the Church' and the Church 'being Church' serves as example to the world and the means by which it can learn of the Kingdom of God. Contrary to the views of the churchgoing participants, Hauerwas (1983, p.99) is critical of attempts to emphasise shared moral values as the basis for action towards a more just society. His position places stress on the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology; the Church must provide a clear contrast to the world and has to protect itself from too close an engagement. Therefore, according to Hauerwas, the linking of Christian social ethics with values from outside of the Church is best avoided. The churchgoers occupy a more engaged position in identifying the shared values that motivate Fair Trade activists, be they Christian, adherents of another religion or those who possess no religious beliefs. In recognising Fair Trade as a foretaste, or building, of the Kingdom of God the churchgoers are acknowledging the participation of those outside of the Church in the work to make the Kingdom known.

Hauerwas (1983, p.101) is keen to reject a shared morality in a 'natural law' sense. Following Barth, he argues that the only way in which the world knows that it is the world, and not the Kingdom, is by observation of the Church (Hauerwas, 1983, p.100). However, Hauerwas (1983, p.101) does address the issue of the contribution of the non-Christian towards God's work for justice, referring to those non-Christians who 'manifest God's peace better than we ourselves.' He denies that this is attributable to natural law, rather:

It is a testimony to the fact that God's Kingdom is wide indeed. As the Church we have no right to determine the boundaries of God's Kingdom, for it is our happy task to acknowledge God's power to make his Kingdom present in the most surprising places and ways. (Hauerwas, 1983, p.101)

This acknowledgement of the participation of the non-Christian in God's work of peace and justice is wholly understandable, given Hauerwas' commitment to the peace movement which is formed of a mix of religious and secular influences. However, if the Kingdom is wider than the Church, then should the role of the Church in public life be limited to 'being the Church' as contrast to society? For the churchgoers in the study, rather than a strictly delineated involvement in the public realm, they are of the mind that the Church should become more involved in working within society, as Naomi states, the Church should be "less churchy and more Fair Tradey." This does not entail conforming to the values prevalent in society but encourages an embrace of like-minded allies and a search for finding the reality of God at work in the world.

Paeth (2008, pp.185-6) with his discussion of the covenantal theology of Moltmann, offers us a more satisfying theological understanding of the non-Christian's work for social justice than that offered by Hauerwas. In this covenantal theology, the institutions of society, rather than forming a secular realm from which the Church should delineate itself, are understood as a reflection of God's intention. God's covenant is therefore not limited to the Church. Paeth (2008, p.186) argues that 'the conversion that Christians seek is a reorientation of society as a whole to become more reflective of God's intention.' He points out that this work for societal change does not require the conversion of individuals to Christianity. God's covenant is viewed as extending to all society and the duty of Christians and the Church is to seek change to orientate that society towards the values of the Kingdom of God. This understanding of the role of the Church is more fitting with the outlook of the churchgoers in my study than that of Matthewes and Hauerwas. The project of the reorientation of society is not exclusive to the Church, nor does it require a

high level of guardedness on the part of the Church regarding the extent to which it works within the ‘secular world.’ It is the values of the Kingdom, and the imperative to reorder society in accordance with those values, that is paramount. Hence, anyone who shares the values of the Kingdom of God, be they of another religion, or no religion at all, can be identified as a partner for the Church in its work for the justice of the Kingdom.

The secular presentation of Fair Trade represents an open and engaged theology. The churchgoers’ references to the values of the Kingdom introduce the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. The churchgoers identify these values as central to Fair Trade and a unifying concept for the Fair Trade movement, regardless of the religious confession (or lack thereof) on the part of the individuals and organisations within it. Fair Trade can be presented in a secular manner, providing this form of engagement is balanced by the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology in the form of the values of justice and love of neighbour. Distinctive, in this sense, means distinct from the values of the world, challenging them with a strong message informed by the values of the Kingdom of God. However, as I will discuss in the next section, the churchgoing participants make statements expressing that, not only are they concerned for the distinctive nature of the values that inform Fair Trade, they are also concerned that Fair Trade action by churches should contribute to changing public perceptions regarding the nature of the Church. This requires communication of the connection between Fair Trade and the Church to a wide audience. It represents a reassertion of the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology that in some way stands in contradiction to support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade.

#### **6.4 Emphasising the Fair Trade – Church connection**

Within the interview data there are some consistent themes which highlight the importance to the churchgoers of maintaining a close connection between the Church and the public presentation of Fair Trade. These references indicate a concern on the part of the churchgoers for the

distinctive element of Public Theology. There is tension between these references and the churchgoers' support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade. This does not take the form of a division between the participants, rather there is a tension within the accounts given by each participant. The churchgoers support the secular presentation of Fair Trade but they also want church involvement in Fair Trade to publicly convey messages about the nature of Christianity. This can be viewed as an inconsistency within the testimonies of the churchgoers. However, the inconsistency can be resolved, or at least explained, with reference to the tension between the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology.

For the churchgoers, as I have outlined in chapters 4 and 5, there is an intimate connection between their faith and the promotion of Fair Trade. The most prevalent statements from the churchgoers emphasising the connection between the Church and Fair Trade relate to the need for the Church to demonstrate to a wide public that it is interested in justice. Chloe, for example states:

*It is important to connect with people's sense of justice. Christians don't have a monopoly on the sense of justice. It is worth us as Christians talking about that we do connect this with our own faith.*

In her interview, Ann identifies a key role for church action for Fair Trade in bridging the gap between religious and non-religious sections of society.

*It [Fair Trade action by churches] shows people who do not have, who are not part of a faith-based group, that the things that they think are important also do connect into the people who do God-talk. Because that is really important, that way round, that there are lots of people who believe passionately in a fairer world, but they don't see the Church that is something that has been engaged, or involved, in that. And so, if there are ways where you can build those bridges, and say 'well actually we believe in the same thing' because then you're communicating to people in the wider environment.*

Here Ann is effectively identifying the Fair Trade movement as a space for religious-secular rapprochement. Cloke and Beaumont (2012, pp.33-4) argue that spaces of rapprochement offer the opportunity for all partners to learn from those who do not share their particular world-view, helping to create 'possibilities for transformation in ethical discourse and practice' (Cloke and Beaumont 2012, p.34). Ann suggests a purpose for the Church's involvement in Fair Trade which moves beyond presenting the ethics of justice to a wide public. In Ann's interpretation, Fair Trade offers the opportunity to present the true nature of the Church and its concerns to a section of the public that shares similar ethical values to those held by many churchgoers.

Of the nineteen churchgoers in the study, sixteen make statements which indicate that it is important for the Church that Christians and Christian institutions publicly declare the connection between the Christian faith and work for social justice. Church action for Fair Trade is one such way in which the Church can make a public declaration of its commitment to justice. Five of the churchgoers make the point that the Church's public declaration of support for social justice will facilitate its work alongside non-Christian partners who share its values. If the Church stresses its theological motive for working for justice, then this will assist in quelling fears that the Church has an ulterior motive in its involvement in secular projects. The fears referred to relate to the perception of the Church using joint projects for justice as a pretext for recruitment with an aim to convert individual souls. However, in calling for public declarations of support for social justice, it is not such practical considerations that are paramount. All of the sixteen churchgoers who look for public declaration of the Church's support for social justice, state that this should be done in order to offer to the wider public a picture of what Christianity is and what it stands for.

There is tension between the churchgoers' support for a secular presentation and their desire to see Fair Trade as witness to biblical themes. Within the same interview, those participants who state that it is not necessary for Fair Trade to ever be described in the language of faith, then go on state that the Church should declare its support for Fair Trade and that

Fair Trade action by churches serve as a demonstration of the outworking of Christian principles. Both public declaration and public demonstration are important to these churchgoers and there is no sense that the Church should go quietly about its work for social justice; it should be trying to influence the public agenda. Brandon expresses his disagreement with the privatisation of faith:

*So, I think they [Church leaders] should be taking a proactive role in societal issues and they need to avoid retreating into a shell and just thinking, because there is a strand in society that just wants faith to be a very personal thing, and when the churches do talk about issues, whether it be morality or societal issues, that's nothing to do with you. I don't hold that view.*

Public Theology has thrived as a discourse, largely in reaction to the perception of an increasing privatisation of faith in the USA and Western Europe. It speaks for the right of theology to have its voice heard in the public realm.<sup>11</sup> One of the participants expresses concern that too close a Church participation in 'politics' may alienate some churchgoers. Other than this, there are no other comments which express reservation regarding the desirability of the Church speaking into the public realm. On the contrary, there is a strong call for the Church to 'speak out' on issues of public concern. In answer to the question 'how do you think that the Church should respond to issues in society?' all the participants refer to the need for the Church to have a strong public voice. There are some expressions of caution calling for public statements to be supported by appropriate social action on the part of the Church. However, there is a consensus of opinion that it is a good thing for church leaders to speak publicly on issues of justice. Even though Fair Trade is understood as a form of demonstration of Christian values, this does not preclude the churchgoers from support for other forms of involvement in the public realm. Alongside demonstration, the churchgoers also identify the need for

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, two key works from a US background which counter the notion of a privatised faith: Cady (1993); Thiemann (1991).

public pronouncement and an involvement in policy formation on the part of Church leaders. With regard to those theologians, such as Hauerwas (1983, p.99), who identify that the only role for the Church in the public realm is for the Church 'to be the Church', the churchgoers in my study do not share this belief in a limited role for public involvement. They are concerned that the life of the Church should reflect Christian values and that the Church offer demonstration of those values in the form of action, such as: Fair Trade, advocacy for international development or the provision of food banks. However, concentration on these acts of demonstration is not to preclude Church leaders speaking out. Indeed, in the promotion of Fair Trade, the churchgoers are keen that church action be supported by public endorsements of Church leaders and that the practice of ethical consumption be complemented by Church leaders' advocacy for trade justice.

In relation to this view of Fair Trade as a means by which to convey the true meaning of the Church, the participants put forward another argument which centres on the need for greater acceptance for the Church in wider society. If the Church is seen to be concerned about public issues, particularly issues of poverty, then the wider public will not only gain a greater understanding of Christian teaching, they may also begin to think more sympathetically towards the Church. Eight of the churchgoers make such remarks and they are set in the context of declining church attendance in the UK and a feeling that the Church has become isolated and marginal to the concerns of the mainstream. For example, Brandon states:

*We are living in a quite a secular country. I know sixty percent of the people of Britain said in the Census that they are Christian; it doesn't feel that way. The Church gets attacked quite a lot.*

The churchgoers express that there is a high level of misunderstanding about the Church on the part of the non-churchgoing majority of the public. Involvement with Fair Trade and other issues of public concern is a way in which a bridge can be formed between people of faith and the wider public.

There is resonance here with the concept of postsecular rapprochement.<sup>12</sup> Not only is the engaged emphasis of Public Theology important in bringing Christians together with non-religious partners to create a space of rapprochement, the distinctive emphasis must also be considered. For the Church's involvement in a joint project to serve as a demonstration of the coming together of religious and non-religious actors, religious actors have to be identified as such. The churchgoers view it as important that Fair Trade action by churches conveys a message that the Church is concerned about public issues and that it is prepared to work alongside non-religious actors as a form of religious-secular rapprochement. To carry out these functions, it is a basic requirement that Fair Trade action by churches must still be recognised as the expression of the Church.

There is another apparent contradiction associated with the churchgoers' understanding of church action for social justice as a means by which the wider public can better understand the Church. This purpose appears contradictory to the churchgoers' view that social justice issues only interest a minority of the population.<sup>13</sup> If the majority of the population are unsympathetic to social justice issues, then they are unlikely to appraise the Church in a more positive light upon learning of the Gospel imperative for social justice. It could be argued that it is the minority who do believe in social justice that the Church should be reaching out to or that, in presenting demonstration and argument in the public realm, the Church could help to persuade the general public of the desirability of social justice. Certainly, there is some evidence to suggest that in terms of gaining wider public sympathy, Fair Trade action by churches, and other work on international development issues, has proved to be a good means by which to demonstrate the relevancy of Christian values to the wider population (Anderson 2015, pp.141-2). Naomi is conscious of what support for Fair Trade says about the Church, in stating:

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<sup>12</sup> See Cloke and Beaumont (2012) who identify church support for Fair Trade as one such space of rapprochement.

<sup>13</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 6.3.2.



*Fair Trade is a form of witness. It makes non-Christians realise that the Church is still a force to be reckoned with and that the Church is relevant.*

The relevancy issue is an important one for the churchgoers who perceive that the Church in the UK has become marginalised and that it needs to demonstrate that it has a clear role in society. For these churchgoers that role is identified in terms of action and advocacy for social justice. As Felix states:

*It is essential that the Church address social issues. If it doesn't, I can't really see much purpose for it.*

There is tension between the participants' support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade and the role that they identify for Fair Trade action by churches in demonstrating the relevance of the Church to society. This can be represented as the tension between the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The secular presentation emphasises an open engaged theology in conversation with partners and one that is willing to be reshaped in the encounter. The demonstration of relevance possesses more of a distinctive emphasis. It requires a distinctive witness, a witness which is publicly acknowledged and explained as an expression of Christian belief. For Fair Trade action by churches to speak publicly about the nature of the Church, the public has to know that it is the Church that is working through the Fair Trade movement. Attention must be paid to the distinctive nature of theology, a theology that does not dissolve into a secular movement, but which retains its identity as an expression of the Church. The churchgoers' identification of these two purposes, secular presentation to encourage wide engagement, and distinctive witness to the true nature of the Church, should not be characterised as incoherence on the part of the churchgoers. There is no outright contradiction but a tension between different emphases. Treated as an academic argument, the tension between the views could be deemed as a philosophical instability, however the participants are not setting out a philosophy nor even expressing an argument. They are articulating two

purposes of Fair Trade action by churches, to be both engaged within society and to be distinctive enough to serve as demonstration of the true nature of Church.

### **Conclusion**

The secular presentation of Fair Trade is well established and supported by the research participants. This is motivated by a desire to gain mainstream support for Fair Trade and for the Fair Trade movement to be perceived as inclusive. The churchgoers identify adherents to religions other than Christianity as potential partners in the Fair Trade project. However, they also encourage the involvement of those who have no religious beliefs. The religious confession of the activist or organisation is not the main criterion by which partners in the Fair Trade movement are identified. Rather, the churchgoers understand the values that inform Fair Trade, justice and the love of neighbour, as a unifying force for the Fair Trade movement. It is a movement united by shared values. The concept of secular spiritual capital is helpful to understanding what is taking place in the Fair Trade movement, as the concept underlines the motivation of activists, both religious and non-religious, with reference to values. My examination of the theology of the churchgoers sheds light on their willingness to embrace non-religious activists as partners. The Churchgoers' theological outlook refuses to recognise a strict Church / world binary; with Bonhoeffer, they identify the work of God in the midst of the world. This, of course, influences their view of the nature of the Church. They do not share the concerns of Hauerwas regarding the sharing of values with those outside of the Church. Rather than strictly delineate the work of the Church from the remainder of society, they urge the Church out into the world. There is more affinity between the views of the churchgoing participants and a covenantal theology which understands the work of the Kingdom of God as stretching well beyond the confines of the Church. Foretaste of the Kingdom is not limited to the Church; anyone prepared to

act in accordance with righteous values can participate in the project of the Kingdom.

The churchgoers' support for a secular presentation of Fair Trade does not represent the whole picture. My analysis of the churchgoers' interviews reveals a paradoxical tension within their statements, whereby support for a secular public face is set alongside a desire to see Fair Trade as a public demonstration of the true nature of the Church. The involvement of the Church in working for justice can spread a powerful message about what it is the Church really stands for. According to the participants, this demonstration should be supported by the Church leadership 'speaking out' and, what is more, Fair Trade should serve as example of the relevancy of the Church to contemporary society. How can the two apparently contradictory desires, for secular presentation and yet for Fair Trade to convey key messages about the Church, be reconciled? Firstly, they must be acknowledged as paradoxical; there is a different emphasis for each of the two desires and there is a tension between them that is not readily reconciled. However, they are not entirely contradictory and it is possible to envisage them both being held together within the same action. This will require vigilance to protect the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology in the close engagement that springs from the secular presentation of Fair Trade.

To better understand the connection between theology and the secular presentation of Fair Trade, I need to return to the concept of the translation of theology into a publicly accessible language.<sup>14</sup> The churchgoers' reference to justice exemplifies this translation. In carrying out action in the promotion of Fair Trade, the churchgoers understand that they are contributing to the demonstration of the practical outworking of justice in the public realm. It is possible, therefore, to describe Fair Trade as a publicly accessible language with which a theology of justice can be understood by a public outside of the Church. Framing Fair Trade as translation does not solve the inherent tensions as described above, however

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<sup>14</sup> As discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.3.

it does assist us in understanding them and working towards a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The use of a publicly accessible language does not preclude acts of Public Theology from being perceived as demonstrations of the true nature of Church. However, acts of Public Theology do have to be recognisable as expressions of the Church. In the next chapter I will indicate how a reassertion of the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology can achieve this.

## **Chapter 7: Fair Trade as translation**

### **Introduction**

Given the secular presentation of Fair Trade, and the implicit nature of the distinctive theology that underpins it, it is not surprising that some commentators identify Fair Trade action by churches as a conundrum.

Anderson (2015, pp.61-2) articulates this problem in the following manner:

One of the dilemmas raised by recent research into grassroots Fair Trade activism has been the apparent disconnect between the high level of Christian support and the predominantly secular message.

To some extent the dilemma can be explained by the understanding of Fair Trade as a form of translation. Theology motivated and informed the development of Fair Trade; it has not gone away but remains embedded within the movement. The secular presentation of Fair Trade still represents the voice of theology, but rather than speaking in the language of faith, theological insight is presented in a language that is widely understood. The issue of the language with which Public Theology speaks is a key source of contestation within the discourse. Many theologians believe that if theology is to be understood in the public realm then it must undergo a process of translation.<sup>1</sup> However, some theologians express concern that, in speaking in a shared language, theological insight can be diluted or lost to dominant discourses in society.<sup>2</sup> At its best, translation represents a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The method of communication, the presentation of theology in a publicly accessible language, respects the emphasis of engagement. The content of the translated concept should therefore respect the distinctive emphasis with a firm rooting in theology. In this chapter, I examine the nature of translation, identifying it as an ongoing dialogical process. Fears regarding the loss of the distinctive voice of theology highlight the need for theology to maintain

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Section 2.1.

<sup>2</sup> As discussed in Section 2.3.

close contact with the translated concept and I indicate that this can only be achieved by the embedding of Public Theology in the life of the Church.

## **7.1 The translated concept**

I will begin this section with a brief outline of the ways in which faith communities can contribute to public discussion. I then discuss the language with which they speak, referring to the views of Habermas on the need for the contribution of religious actors to be translated into a language that is shared by all contributors in the public sphere. In the third subsection, I look at the nature of the process of translation, identifying it as a dialogical process which represents a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology.

### **7.1.1 Faith communities and public discussion**

At a fundamental level, for theology to offer its voice as contribution to society, there needs to be a means whereby faith communities can speak, and be heard, in the public realm. Williams (2012, pp.23-36) discusses the contribution of the insights of faith communities to discussion within the public square. He is critical of a ‘programmatically secularism’ which attempts to cleanse the public square of religious influence; however, he recognises the need for a ‘procedural secularism’ which allows the faith communities to contribute to public discussion as one voice amongst many in a plural society. Programmatically secularism represents a view of the public square as a neutral space, in contrast to Williams’s (2012, p.27) description of the public square of procedural secularism as ‘a crowded and argumentative public square which acknowledges the authority of a legal mediator or broker whose job it is to balance and manage real difference.’ When the churchgoing participants talk of Christian principles influencing society or reaching a wider public they envisage the ‘crowded and argumentative public square.’ Their statements regarding the secular nature of Fair Trade indicate that they recognise that Church influence within society is not such

that the Church is in a position to dictate; it must be in the business of persuasion, adding its voice amongst many. Their identification of a need for Christian principles to be demonstrated in the public realm, and for the Church to remain relevant to society, represent a rejection of the neutral public sphere of programmatic secularism. The churchgoers' support for a secular Fair Trade does not indicate that they envisage a secularised public realm, cleansed of religious influence and characterised by value-free judgement. Rather, they envisage a voice for the Church, to state its case and demonstrate relevance. As Graham et al (2005, p.139) point out in their description of theological method, part of the role of theology is 'to commend the faith in the general market-place of ideas.'

In his discussion of procedural secularism, Williams points to the valuable contribution which faith groups can make by adding their voice in the public square. Williams (2012, p.35) argues that people of faith can facilitate a 'broadening of the moral sources from which the motivation for social action and political self-determination can be drawn.' This has resonance with the concept of spiritual capital which recognises, not only the practical contribution of faith groups in the public square (for example in the provision of social care or in the generation of bridging capital to bring together diverse parts of society), but also in the values and ethical insights of faith communities. The turn towards 'virtue' in philosophy has opened space for recognition of the insight of faith traditions as a source of enrichment for public life. For example, the political philosopher, Michael Sandel challenges the notion of 'neutral' public discourse. Sandel (2009, pp.268-9) views the banishing of reference to moral and religious standpoints from public debate as a source of division rather than cohesion and calls for a politics of 'moral engagement.' For Sandel (2009, pp.244-69), moral insights regarding the nature of the good, or virtuous, life can contribute to public discourse as social problems are not always fixed by neutral, managerial solutions but may require moral transformation; not only of the structures of society but of the citizens within it. An area of public concern that he identifies as ripe for moral insight is that of the encroaching power of the market. Sandel (2009, p.265) argues that:

Markets are useful instruments for organising productive activity. But unless we want to let the market rewrite the norms that govern social institutions, we need a public debate about the moral limits of markets.

Sandel takes issue with the view that the market is a ‘neutral’ element within public life, a facet of liberal society that should go unchallenged by moral insight or debate about the nature of the good life. The insights of faith traditions have much to contribute to a debate about the place of the market in society.<sup>3</sup> Religious and ethical voices can offer challenge to the purely managerial outlook of the status quo. Indeed, the role of Fair Trade as demonstration of a counter-cultural alternative to the mainstream offers its own comment on the need for limitations to be placed on the logic of the market. Motivations for trade that are limited to profit and economic growth are challenged by the emphasis of Fair Trade on alternative values, such as justice for the producer and concern for their dignity as human beings made in the image of God. The absence of moral and ethical content in public debate has led to a vacuum in terms of critique of the encroaching power of the market. This has influenced a shift in position for some political thinkers who previously advocated the limitation of religious voices in the public realm. Notable amongst their number is Habermas, who has come to acknowledge the benefit that religious insight can bring to challenging the dominant forces of state and market in the public sphere.

### 7.1.2 The language used by religious actors

Habermas (2011a, p.24) observes the rise of the contribution of religious groups to civil society, and because of this increasing profile, he now views it as essential for religious groups to be included in public deliberation. Habermas (2011a, pp.25-6) has joined the debate about the language with which religious actors speak in the public sphere. He declares that religious citizens should not only be free to add their voice in

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<sup>3</sup> As indicated by the work of a number of public theologians. See, for example, Atherton (2003).



the public sphere but that this can be in the language of faith. He does, however, add two provisos to this statement. Firstly, the language of faith must be translated into a publicly accessible language if it is to contribute to policy deliberation involving the formal decision-making bodies of the state. Religious voices are free to contribute to these processes, but to adjudicate between a multiplicity of voices, the contributions made will need to be in a language universally spoken and understood. Secondly, Habermas (2011a, p.26) makes the point that, although free to speak in the language of faith in the public sphere, this does not guarantee that religious voices will be heard; he states:

The ‘monolingual’ contributions of religious citizens then depend on the translational efforts of cooperative fellow citizens if they are not to fall on deaf ears.

As Habermas (2011a, p.27) indicates, for the ‘secular portion of the population’ it cannot be presumed that they would view religious communities as the ‘bearers of truth contents.’ For Fair Trade action by churches, and other projects of social justice, Habermas’ first proviso is relevant as, in addition to serving as demonstration, church action for social justice also hopes to speak into an agenda for political change. As I have described in Chapter 4, the majority of the churchgoing participants are conscious of the need for the Fair Trade movement to carry out political advocacy for justice. Taylor (2011a, p.50) criticises Habermas’ stance arguing that there is a place for religious language including in state legislatures. However, even if it is the case that there is a place for the language of faith in formal deliberation, in a situation of adjudication between multiple voices and outlooks (as will be the case with most formal public deliberation in a plural democracy) there are clear benefits for the acceptance of a political programme, if it is presented in a language readily understood by all parties. This is most likely to be in the mode of communication that has been established as conventional for the deliberative process.

Habermas' (2011a, p.26) second proviso is particularly pertinent to this discussion and his warning of the message conveyed in religious language as falling 'on deaf ears' has a great deal of resonance with the remarks of the churchgoers regarding the need for a secular presentation of Fair Trade. The cooperation of a wide public in interpreting religious language is not something that can be presumed in a society such as the UK; where religious observance is a minority occupation and religious texts may appear alien to much of the population. The prospect of simply not being listened to, because of the language in which the message is presented, is foremost in the minds of the churchgoers who advocate for a secular presentation of Fair Trade. However, the use of secular language in the promotion of Fair Trade does not indicate that the message itself has been secularised. This distinction, between the content of the message and the language with which it is conveyed, can help us address the dilemma described in the quote from Anderson in the introduction to the chapter. It is important to focus on the way in which the message can be understood as secular. There is an absence of the language of faith in the public presentation of Fair Trade and the role of the Church in the Fair Trade movement is in some ways downplayed. At a national level, Anderson's (2015, p.64) reference to the Fairtrade Foundation's joint faiths approach, whereby a predominantly Christian contribution is presented in terms of 'faiths', rather than specific reference to churches and Christian organisations, serves as an example.<sup>4</sup> At a grassroots level, the attempts of the Skipton Fair Trade Initiative to downplay the contribution of the churches and churchgoers, in order to achieve a more inclusive campaign, represents a similar approach.<sup>5</sup> Yet it must be stressed that there is no element of the 'programmatically secularism' that Williams (2012, pp.2-3) refers to. This is not an attempt to remove the role of religious groups from the movement and neither does it represent a privatisation of church support, whereby churchgoers contribute only as individuals, their faith purely motivational. As I have described in Section 3.1, the evidence of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Sub-Section 6.3.1.

<sup>5</sup> See Section 6.2.

case study indicates that church networks are involved in the promotion of Fair Trade, together with institutional support in the form of Christian NGOs and FTOs. Crucially the message of Fair Trade was initiated and, to some extent, continues to be sustained by theology, both in institutions such as Traidcraft, which are guided by theologically-based foundation principles, and through the theologising of churchgoers. Theology is there in the 'secular' presentation, but in the form of translation; the language of faith translated in a tongue that is widely accepted and understood.

As an example of a 'successful' translation of theology into a concept that has proved engaging to a wider public, Fair Trade action by churches can be studied to shed light on the nature of Public Theology. There is a danger for Public Theology, in that it may become the victim of its own success. Its translation into a language understood by a secular public may render theology effectively redundant in the specific action. The churchgoers indicate that some members of the congregations of which they are a part question whether the Church is still needed in the Fair Trade movement. This is particularly pertinent given that mainstream economic actors, such as supermarket chains and transnational corporations, have embraced the Fair Trade concept. As I shall discuss in Chapter 8, an overview of the changing nature of the Fair Trade movement over time can offer an answer to this question. It can also assist the discourse of Public Theology more generally; in defining the role of the Church in ongoing actions which demonstrate Christian values in the public realm. The conflation of a successful translation of theology with one in which the role of theology has been completed, is reliant on an understanding of translation as a one-off process. As I shall indicate in the next section, the process of translation is not singular, rather it is both dialogical and ongoing.

### 7.1.3 The dialogical and ongoing nature of translation

The political philosopher, Charles Taylor (2011b, p.112) discusses the translation of religious insight into a language accessible to wider society. He views the process as dialogical, involving both the translation

of religious insight into non-religious language and the translation of non-religious insight into religious language. Within the literature of the discourse of Public Theology, there is much to indicate that the conversation at the heart of Public Theology is understood to be a dialogical process. As Morton (2004, p.27) points out, Public Theology is about the voice of theology speaking in the public realm, but as well as speaking it is also in the business of attentive listening. Public Theology is a dialogue and must have interlocutors. Despite this dialogical emphasis there is still a tendency amongst theologians to view theology as pronouncement. Day (2008, p.357) is critical of theologians who understand the project of Public Theology ‘to be expressive; that is, a one-way communication of the Church speaking to the public.’ Although such theologians may recognise the need for speaking a language that can be widely understood, they do not view this in terms of the shared language which, as Day argues, is needed for genuine dialogue to take place. In practice, attempts to engage a wider public will often be in the form of ‘talking at’ rather than ‘talking with.’ The requirement of theology to be in dialogue with its conversation partners extends to dialogue with other academic disciplines. Atherton et al (2011, p.20) indicate that faith communities need to be open to disciplines outside of theology and this includes a willingness to listen to non-religious language and to learn from it.

It may be tempting to view translation as a singular process; the concept is translated from theology to a language widely understood and that is the final outcome. However, Taylor (2011b, p.112) ponders:

Does this process end at a certain point? Do you sort of exhaust the ideas of the other side and then you have kind of translated it into your own world and you forget the source? Or is there something, in principle, endless, inexhaustible, about this kind of exchange?

The view of the process of translation as either discrete or ongoing is pertinent to the role of theology in Fair Trade. In the discrete sense, the translation of theology into the secular presentation of Fair Trade has facilitated the move of Fair Trade out of a church niche and into the

mainstream economy. In this outlook, the job is then perceived to be done; the Church must then move on to other opportunities by which to add its voice within the public realm. This is not to say that the role of theology is exhausted, as the social theorist, Judith Butler (2011, pp.112-13) points out: ‘the residues of the theological continue to resonate within what we understand as the secular.’ On the other hand, does Taylor have a point and translation is more of an ongoing dialogical process? In which case theology as the source of Fair Trade still has a more proactive role to play in the Fair Trade narrative.

A conception of the translation of theology that is dialogical and ongoing can shape our understanding of what the process of Public Theology looks like. Taylor (2011b, p.112) offers pertinent insight in his identification of translation being necessary, not only to render theological insight intelligible to a wider audience, but also to make the insights of secular society relevant to people of faith. Public Theology will need to speak of public issues in the language of faith if it is to engage congregations. What is more, a dynamic, responsive Public Theology will require ongoing theological reflection on what is being said in the public realm. Insights created as a result of theological reflection may then require translation back into a shared language in order to further contribute to public debate. Day (2008, p.378) talks of Public Theology requiring synapses, whereby the new theology that has been generated as a result of public dialogue can reach the attention of a wider public, in order to contribute to bringing about social change. An understanding of translation as a dialogical ongoing process would indicate that there needs to be dynamic contact between theological reflection and the translated theological concept. The translated concept can take on its own narrative within the public realm. Changes to the contemporary situation help shape the narrative and, although, as Butler (2011, pp.112-13) points out, the residues of the theological remain within the secular, for Public Theology to be truly public *theology*, the voice of theology must be responsive to the dynamic nature of the contemporary situation.

The understanding of translation as dialogical and ongoing represents a holding in tension of the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology. In conducting itself in a dialogical manner, Public Theology is remaining faithful to its aim of real engagement between theology and a wider public outside of the Church. This real engagement involves theology not only speaking but listening and responding to conversation partners. In its encounters, it is open to change. The emphasis of engagement is balanced by the distinctive emphasis. The translated concept, in order to continue in ongoing dialogue with a wider public, must maintain contact with the original theological insight. It can only do so through the work of the Church. A key theme that emerges from the literature of Public Theology, and that is pertinent to the understanding of the ongoing process of translation, is the need for Public Theology to be ecclesial theology. De Gruchy (2007, p.28) stresses that Public Theology arises out of theological reflection and the life of the Church and its worship. To balance open engagement with distinctive witness, the process of translation is reliant on the maintenance of a strong connection between the practice of Fair Trade and the life and worship of the Church and the theologising of its members. It is this intimate connection between Fair Trade and the Church that I will go on to address in the following sections. A key task in embedding the generation of Public Theology within the Church is to persuade members of congregations of the validity of the enterprise. As the churchgoers' responses indicate, there is much work ahead if Public Theology is to convince many Christians of the public relevance of their beliefs.

## **7.2 Persuading congregations**

In all Public Theology, there is a clear role for the Church to play in maintaining the contact between theology and the translated concept. Kim (2011, p.232) identifies a need for Public Theology to break out of the confines of academia and Church leadership to embrace whole congregations. For Kim, and many other public theologians, the answer to

the question ‘who is it who does Public Theology?’ is members of church congregations. Here then there is close correlation between Ordinary Theology and Public Theology. Just as Astley (2002) argues that churchgoers do theology, so too it is churchgoers who do Public Theology. However, not all churchgoers are convinced of the public relevance of their faith. The research interviews indicate that there is considerable work to be done to persuade members of congregations to be involved in the support of Fair Trade, or indeed any other work which aims to present the voice of theology in the public realm.

### 7.2.1 Reliance on a few key individuals

In examining why churches choose to take up action for Fair Trade, a clear pattern emerges. In all the churches described in my research, the Fair Trade action is lay-led and lay-initiated. The initial impetus to promote Fair Trade, or to work towards Fairtrade church status, was made by a small group of enthusiastic churchgoers, or even one key individual, who then enlisted the support of others. Cloke et al (2011, p.100) discover a similar pattern in their research of churchgoers’ action for Fair Trade in Bristol, identifying the crucial role played by what they term Fair Trade ‘evangelists’; these are described as ‘energetic and persuasive individuals who present potentially governing repertoires of Fair Trade practices.’ My research indicates that these ‘evangelists’ gather the support of a small group of like-minded individuals in their churches. In none of the churches involved does this exceed more than half a dozen individuals. A common complaint on the part of the churchgoing activists is the lack of personnel willing to drive support for Fair Trade forward, both in church and in the community. The problems associated with this issue of personnel are compounded when one takes into account that rarely is it the case that Fair Trade activists are working solely on Fair Trade. Duncan, a retired minister, points out that:

*The people who are mostly at the forefront of Fair Trade issues are the same people as those who are involved in Christian Aid and in*

*the ecumenical movement, Churches Together. In other words, those people who have not just a social conscience, but a desire to be involved in the community and in the big issues in the world. I have found that in all the churches where I have been a minister.*

Duncan confirms the pattern of church based Fair Trade supporters as possessing multiple allegiances. He also identifies a limitation on the support of the Church's work for justice, in that churchgoers need not only be convinced of the connection between the Christian faith and social justice, but also possess the desire to 'go public.' To some extent the programmatic secularism, as described by Williams (2012, pp.2-3), has taken hold and many churchgoers identify faith as relevant to the individual, or to the collective as church, but not to a wider public. An emphasis on presenting this work for justice as part of the mission of the whole church, rather than the enthusiasm of the dedicated few, could help to address such a danger. However, the testimonies of the churchgoers indicate that this will involve considerable persuasion, not only to convince members of congregations of the validity of supporting Fair Trade as a form of witness, but in arguing for any work with a public dimension. Duncan highlights that work for social justice within churches can easily be reinforced as a minority preoccupation.

*I would say that in my own church, and here in Skipton, we have got some key people who really are very motivated. Lucy is a ball of fire and she is a great motivator. You only need a few people like her and things start taking off. The danger of that is, because you have got a few highly-motivated people pushing the church in a particular direction, it is very easy for other people to feel left behind.*

Duncan's concern emphasises the need for congregations to be persuaded to take ownership of the church's work for social justice, rather than leave the work to be carried out by a few key players. Anderson (2015, pp.140-1) confirms this picture of the need for considerable effort to enlist the support of churchgoers, stating: 'although it may be tempting to argue that churches were "natural allies" of the Fair Trade movement, this would underestimate



the amount of work involved in encouraging some churches to support Fair Trade.’ The participants’ compelling accounts of the connection between Christian theology and the need for a public expression of support for Fair Trade are not shared by all churchgoers. Human and Crowther (2011, pp.100-101) acknowledge the significant role that churchgoers play in the Fair Trade movement; however, they point out that support from the churches is by no means comprehensive. They go so far as to state that ‘what amazes many [Fair Trade] campaigners is the slowness and indifference of some church communities, and even the hostility of others, to engage with Fair Trade’ (Human and Crowther 2011, p.101).

### 7.2.2 The work of persuasion

All the churchgoers interviewed consider the persuasion of the members of their own congregations to be one of the most onerous parts of their work on Fair Trade. Although they view support for Fair Trade as a natural fit with the Christian faith, they are aware that a case needs to be made to persuade their fellow churchgoers. Such persuasion is only going to be successful if the connections can be made between the activity and deeply held faith. Action which is perceived as being on the margins of faith, tangential to its tenets, will not persuade congregations. Those activists advancing the promotion of Fair Trade in churches therefore need to be versed in theological understandings of Fair Trade, even if limited to generalised principles, in order to effectively persuade their fellow churchgoers. Ann identifies a dual attitude to support for Fair Trade, perceiving a division between those who have a depth of understanding regarding the practice of Fair Trade and those who do not.

*There is a definite divide between people who will willingly spend the extra money on Fair Trade, because they know what difference it makes, and they believe in the difference that it makes, and then the people who are not quite sure. They do it because it is the right thing to do, but they don't really own it.*

Ann goes on to relate this depth of understanding to the Christian faith, describing the division as between those who make the connection between support for Fair Trade and their faith and those who do not. It is problematic for the Church taking forward its public support for Fair Trade, if many of the members of the congregations themselves are not supportive. An element missing from the participants' accounts of Fair Trade church activity is any reference to exploring theology as a congregation.

Theologising about Fair Trade is certainly taking place, and the participants talk of relating their life experiences to their theology, to help shape their involvement in Fair Trade and other social justice issues. However, this theologising is described either as an individual activity or as taking place with one or two like-minded individuals. Nowhere is it described as a church activity, either in a small group or as a whole congregation. Nor is there reference to any activity that may resemble a form of practical theology carried out at a congregational level. Certainly, a more dynamic theology of Fair Trade, reflecting on and learning from the practice of promoting Fair Trade, in conversation with the texts and teachings of the church, would have the capacity to place the action more centrally to the life of the church.

### 7.2.3 Fair Trade and the language of faith

In answer to the question 'how necessary, or desirable, is it for Fair Trade to be described in terms of the Christian faith?' half of the churchgoers answer that it is not desirable and cite the necessity of spreading the Fair Trade message amongst non-churchgoers. This response can be seen as successful Public Theology in action, churchgoers having understood the need for theology to be translated to offer its voice in the public realm. However, whilst agreeing that such a secular discourse is necessary to advance Fair Trade, or indeed any form of Public Theology, the words of caution that have come from within the discourse of Public

Theology are pertinent.<sup>6</sup> In the battle to construct a secular language, the churchgoers should be vigilant not to lose their fluency in the original theological voice. The level of caution expressed by the participants against using the language of faith in support of Fair Trade is high, and I have been surprised at their reluctance to discriminate between settings where the use of the language of faith may be appropriate and where it is not. There is, therefore, a paradox at the heart of Public Theology. Public Theology urges translation of the theological in order to be understood by a secular public. In the case of Fair Trade that translation has been so successful that it has become the dominant discourse. Whilst Public Theology begins to capture the imagination of a wide public, it is in danger of faltering in its home constituency of the Church. The link between the message of the Public Theology and its original theological rooting is in danger of being lost.

De Gruchy (2007, p.39) stresses the importance of Public Theology speaking a language that is understandable to an audience outside of the Church, and at the same time, speaking in the language of faith to members of congregations. For Public Theology to function, congregations need to be versed in relating the insight of Christian tradition to public debate and this holds true for church action for Fair Trade. A more sophisticated understanding of the use of language in the public realm will help move those who carry out the action away from a reluctance to ever speak in the language of faith. In this, Fair Trade action by churches can learn from the discourse of Public Theology and, in particular, the thinking of David Tracy on the language with which Public Theology speaks. Tracy (1981) identifies the need for theology to address three publics: the academy, the church and wider society. To complement his focus on multiple audience, he outlines three forms of theology associated with the three publics. Firstly, fundamental theology is related to an academic public and possesses a form of argumentation open to all reasonable persons, it is therefore not

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<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Brown et al (2012, pp.186-9) who criticise what they term as ‘liberal activist theologians’ who do not make explicit the connections between theology and social action. Hence the language of social analysis dominates and the language of faith is absent.

expressed in terms of the particularities of the Christian faith. Secondly, systematic theology is associated with a Church public and makes explicit the traditions and language of faith, and thirdly, practical theology, rooted in praxis, is associated with wider society. The three forms of theology are not limited to addressing the specific public that they are associated with. In recent years, the discourse of Public Theology has developed Tracy's thinking. Morton (2004, pp.31-2) wishes to take Tracy's views further by stating that, not only can the three theologies (fundamental, systematic and practical) feasibly be applied to all three of the publics; all three of these approaches are necessary to address all three publics. Morton cites Williams' adaptation of Tracy's model, whereby he outlines critical, celebratory and communicative theologies (associated with the academic, ecclesial and general public respectively). Williams emphasises the need for all three to complement each other in engagement with any public. Tracy's work, and the subsequent development of it within the discourse of Public Theology, can inform church action on Fair Trade. The action needs to be accountable to wider society and therefore speak in a language that that public can understand. However, it also needs to be accountable to the Church and speak in the language of the traditions and texts of the faith.

Pearson (2011, p.88) identifies a role for Public Theology in conversing with people within the Church who may be sceptical about the public relevance of faith. He argues that attempts to present theology in the public realm could be undermined by conflicting outlooks on the part of churchgoers. Pearson is conscious of a Church divided over the pressing need to combat climate change. The good work that is being carried out by churchgoers to demonstrate the concern of the Church regarding climate change, could be cancelled out by voices within the Church which choose to question the relevance of climate change to personal faith. A similar argument could be applied to Fair Trade. The public witness of the Church in its support of Fair Trade is to some extent undermined by churchgoers vocalising their belief that there is no connection between the Christian faith and working for justice in the trade system. This consciousness of division within the Church, as a result of the failure of many of its members to grasp

the theological vision of Public Theology, leads Pearson (2011, p.88) to argue that: ‘one of the audiences for a Public Theology is to talk back into the churches and handle the internal debate as well.’ The arguments for public theologies will be much more persuasive in internal debate if they are phrased in the language of faith, rather than solely in the language of social analysis.

Pearson (2011, p.88) points out a form of potential opposition to Public Theology from within the Church, in stating that: ‘the otherworldly and eschatological natures of a Christian profession can look for a new heaven and a new earth where there is no connection with this present age.’ This ‘otherworldly’ view is characterised by an absence of public relevance for religious belief. Belief exists only for the individual or perhaps for the collective of a religious community. Its only connection to ‘the world’ is in the call for individual conversion. This outlook eschews the theology of the Kingdom of God; eschatology is limited to the apocalyptic. This does not represent a distinctive emphasis, as there is no intention ever to demonstrate the Gospel as socially relevant. Engagement does not take place and the distinctive nature of theology is confined to the believer and denied to the public realm. Such a strict Church / world binary is an extreme, but one which in the mid twentieth century came to be associated with the fundamentalist wing of evangelical Christianity. Cloke and Beaumont (2012, pp.41-4) identify a shift away from such a fundamentalist position, which can in part be attributed to a rise in the contribution of praxis to the public role of Christianity. Cloke and Beaumont (2012, p.43) stress the ability of faith as praxis to ‘inculcate *hope*, by presenting critical narratives of the injustices and calamitous orthodoxies of the current order.’ This has resonance with the views of the participants in stressing the importance of praxis and in Fair Trade demonstrating the values of the Kingdom of God, both as sign of hope and denunciation of the values of the current order. This connection between the theological and the social has, according to Cloke and Beaumont (2012, p.43), led to a decline in the suspicion of work for social justice in the public realm as ‘anti-evangelical’, representing a rapprochement, not only between the religious and the non-religious, but

also between the varieties of belief within the Christian confession. To engage those churchgoers who may be suspicious of the public engagement of theology, once again it is necessary to speak in the language of faith, to effectively make the connections between theology and involvement in the social order of ‘the world.’ Theologising, of the sort demonstrated by the participants in relation to Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God, need not be confined to private contemplation. Its articulation could serve as part of the work of persuasion of congregations to adopt public theologies, of which Fair Trade is but one example.

Thus far, I have discussed the need to articulate support for Fair Trade, and other Public Theology, in the language of faith within the context of the Church. However, there is also space for speaking in the language of faith in a wider public arena. Such a movement away from the understanding of Public Theology in terms of a strictly secular presentation will assist in allaying the fears of those churchgoers (and theologians) who are suspicious of Public Theology because of the perception that it is beholden to a secular agenda.<sup>7</sup> As I have outlined in Section 2.3, some theologians fear a loss of the distinctive voice of theology in the readiness to translate its insights into a language from outside of the discipline (see, for example: Bradstock 2012; Neville 2013). To hold in tension the emphases of the engaged and the distinctive, Public Theology needs to respect the distinctive nature of theology by recognising the validity of speaking in the language of faith within the public realm. Whilst I acknowledge the need for theology to be translated into a language widely understood, there is space for the judicious use of the language of the texts and traditions of the Church for a public audience. Morton’s (2004, pp.31-2) reference to the use of all three of Tracy’s modes of communication with each of the three publics (academy, Church and wider public) entertains the validity of speaking in the language of faith in a public setting. This is echoed by Elliot (2007), who argues that Public Theology cannot expect to address different audiences whilst speaking in the one ‘universal’ language. The

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<sup>7</sup> As articulated by Matthewes (2007) p.1.

postmodern era is characterised by a more diverse public sphere and this requires the development of multiple languages in order to reach a multiplicity of audiences. For example, Elliot (2007, pp.300-304) refers to a 'personal public' familiar with the confessional style of the modern media; in addressing this public there may well be opportunity to speak using the language of faith. Rather than pronouncing or reciting doctrine, the appropriate means of referring to belief in addressing this 'personal public' is to tell one's own story. Faith can be referred to in the context of a personal narrative; the concept of the testimony, which is familiar to many evangelical Christians and to the Quakers. The citing of theology to encourage support for Fair Trade and other forms of Public Theology may well be alienating to a secular public if it takes the form of 'lecturing' or pronouncement. However, reference to theology in the context of the individual's life journey, or journey of faith, has the potential to resonate with a wider audience.

Not only can direct reference to Scripture bring benefit in conveying theological content or narrative, the language itself may have an inherent value. Although Habermas (2011a, pp.25-6) issues caveats to the use of religious language in the public sphere, he does identify benefit, not only to religious groups, but to all society, through its employment. Habermas (2011a, p.28) talks of the 'semantic potentials from religious traditions for the wider political culture.' Public life can not only be enhanced by the content of religious insight but also by the expression of that insight in the language of the tradition. The expression itself is a gift to wider society, serving to enrich public debate. This has resonance with Neville's (2013) call for Public Theology to refer to Scripture in public pronouncement. Habermas' emphasis on language lies not only in the power of the way in which a message is conveyed but also in his understanding that the use of particular language may communicate an implicit content. Hence the use of the language of religious tradition in the public sphere may gift to the public insights which are, in a sense, hidden within communities of faith. Habermas (2011b, p.65) states:

I do want to save also the authentic character of religious speech in the public sphere, because I'm convinced that there might well be buried moral intuitions on the part of a secular public that can be uncovered by a moving religious speech.

The judicious use of the language of faith in a public setting will assist in achieving a stated aim of the churchgoing participants, that Fair Trade should serve as an example of the true nature of the Church and reinforce its relevance in contemporary society. For Fair Trade to do so, it must be recognisable as a concept which is associated with the work of the Church. There is surely room for public explanation of why so many churchgoers and Church organisations support Fair Trade and it would not be inappropriate to refer to the language of faith in articulating this explanation. The confessional style of Elliot's (2007, pp.300-304) 'personal public' may be particularly suitable for this task. However, in the context of contemporary public debate there is a wider application of reference to values articulated in the language of the tradition. In the conclusion to the thesis, I shall return again to this issue and I argue that recent changes in the nature of public debate render it appropriate, now more than ever, for the language of faith to be employed by the Church in public discussion.

The message that Fair Trade should be presented in a secular manner is one that has been embraced by the research participants and by Christian organisations involved in the Fair Trade movement. However, I suggest that Fair Trade action by churches, and all forms of Public Theology, need to cultivate speaking in the language of faith. There is a considerable job of persuasion to be done if Public Theology is to involve church congregations. As the participants attest, many members of congregations do not understand that their faith has a public relevance. To convince that there is a pressing need for churchgoers to 'go public' and demonstrate the relevance of the Christian faith within society, arguments will need to be made using the language of faith. Public Theology will not convince if it is viewed as peripheral to tenets of faith. For the link between theology and the translated concept to be maintained, theologising must take place. Public Theology involving congregations cannot only envisage a role for



churchgoers as foot soldiers carrying out action in its support; congregations must also be involved in the development of theology. This will require theological reflection upon the contemporary situation, with the language of social analysis translated into the theological, and the outcomes of theological reflection translated into a language widely understood. To interpret the contemporary situation in the language of faith is vital to the process. The participants describe a situation where theologising is a private matter. They interpret the contemporary situation in the language of faith but not as church. To take seriously a Public Theology of congregations, the culture of speaking about public issues solely in the language of social analysis will need to be rethought and space created within churches to cultivate understanding about public issues with reference to the language of the tradition. This can only be achieved if acts of Public Theology, such as church support for Fair Trade, are embedded within church life. The integrity of Public Theology is maintained by its rooting in the life of churches; it is congregations who maintain the connection between theology and the translated concept. Theology is kept alive in the reflection of churchgoers and it is made public in the demonstration of theological values in the public realm. Public Theology exists only by virtue of its enactment by the Church.

### **7.3 Fair Trade and the life of the Church**

Forrester (2004, p.432) asserts that Public Theology is ‘necessarily ecclesial theology.’ It must retain a firm rooting in the life of congregations and receive acknowledgement and support from the leadership of the Church. Public Theology cannot play a sufficient role in the Church if it viewed as tangential to its concerns and to its core activity. An ‘add-on’ extra will soon be deprioritised when set against the pressing needs of church finances, pastoral support or the logistics of church services. The outline of the participants’ theology, discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, is one in which Fair Trade, far from being viewed as tangential to belief, is an important expression of Christian teaching. For these churchgoers, Fair

Trade is not so much something that the Church does, it is part of what the Church is; an enactment of the values upon which the Church stands. Sacks (2003, p.171), in discussion of the nature of religions, argues that ‘religions are not philosophical systems. They are embodied truths, made real in the lives of communities.’ The truth proclaiming justice for the poor can be embodied by the Church in action, such as support for Fair Trade, or in other acts of social justice. It is made real as an embedded part of life in the worshipping community and the wider community of which it is a part.

### 7.3.1 Fair Trade and the core activities of the church

For half of the churches represented in my Skipton case study (four of eight churches), Fair Trade promotion is complemented by reference to Fair Trade in sermons and in prayers, representing an attempt to embed the activity in the life of the church and its worship. It is in these churches that the highest levels of satisfaction with the efficacy of the Fair Trade action are expressed and also the greatest levels of engagement with the congregation. From the evidence of these interviews, effectiveness in engaging a congregation depends on the ability of the activists to forge clear links between that activity and practices commonly perceived to be central to the existence of the church. For some of the participants, the notion of referring to Fair Trade within services appeared alien and others pointed out that just by my asking the question ‘Is Fair Trade ever referred to in sermons and in prayers?’ this had introduced them to new possibilities. For one of the churches in the study, the vicar provided me with the notes for a sermon and the plan for an ‘all age worship’, which were delivered on the theme of Fair Trade. Both of these attempted to integrate support for Fair Trade with theology. The sermon identified Fair Trade consumption as a form of ‘Kingdom living’ and this fitted with the theme of a series of sermons on the values of the Kingdom of God. The Fair Trade theme was also well integrated into the format of the service. The ‘all age worship’ incorporated a baptismal service and, in addition to explanation and encouragement for Fair Trade, there was also the singing of a specially

commissioned Fair Trade song on the ‘twelve months of Fair Trade’ and the difference Fair Trade made to the lives of producers over the period of a year. The embedding of Fair Trade within church life provides a dual benefit in that, firstly, it makes the connection between support for Fair Trade and the Christian faith explicit, providing churchgoers with the theological tools to understand the connection. Secondly, there is a cultural element, in that support for Fair Trade in the context of the worship of the church is viewed as natural rather than bolted-on. Support for Fair Trade as part of the life of a church will influence the behaviour of churchgoers outside of the church context, as Stefan states:

*It is a cultural thing, once they [churchgoers] get a grip of it, it becomes part of their life.*

Of the remaining four churches, where Fair Trade is not integrated into the worship, prayers and teaching of the church, the churchgoers who attend these churches express some degree of disquiet as to the level of support from the congregation. For two of the four, the Fair Trade action that is carried out, such as the holding of a stall or the serving of Fair Trade refreshments, was felt to have impact on a minority of the congregation, with the majority thought to be unreached. For both these churches, the interviewees argue that, if it were not for their own intervention, there would be no work carried out in support of Fair Trade.

From the evidence of the research interviews, it is clear there is a strong connection between the extent to which Fair Trade is embedded in the core activities of the church and the ability of church action on Fair Trade to influence whole congregations. There is little reference in the interviews to members of the congregation being openly antagonistic to Fair Trade but some of the churchgoers state that many in the congregation think of Fair Trade as marginal to the concerns of the church. These participants are of the view that, for most of their congregation, Fair Trade is understood as a worthy cause for churches to support, but only once other core activities have been fulfilled. The core activities referred to vary amongst the churches but largely centre on organising services and worship, evangelism

and fundraising. Fair Trade's positioning as a 'good cause', with little reference to any theological significance, does mean that it can be easily marginalised, excluded from the church's mission and core practice. Conversely, Fair Trade action by churches which is embedded in the core activity of the church, can assist in maintaining the connection between theology and the public action by keeping alive the language, practices and biblical understanding necessary to cultivate an act of distinctive witness.

### 7.3.2 Recognition

The reliance of Fair Trade action on small groups, or perhaps even a single motivating individual within a church, has led to difficulties in gaining recognition for what is taking place; particularly for those churches in which Fair Trade is not mentioned in services and other acts of worship. This has clear implications for Public Theology, as the reluctance of a church to acknowledge the work that it is doing to promote a social justice issue, will limit its ability to reach a wider public. Indeed, this perception that action for Fair Trade is not part of the official work of the church, and is largely only acknowledged by the activists themselves, is shared by both the churchgoers and the non-churchgoing community stakeholders in my case study. The community stakeholders all express admiration for the work carried out by the churchgoers involved in the Fair Trade Initiative Group. However, four of these participants indicate that they are unsure of the support of the Church for Fair Trade. They indicate that what has been achieved is largely the result of the actions of individual churchgoers, rather than the support of whole congregations. Nor do they acknowledge a clear link between the action of the individual churchgoers with Church policy. All of the stakeholders state that they are unsure as to any official position of the denominations with regard to Fair Trade. They express that more could be done by senior Church leaders to express support for Fair Trade, for example, Elaine states:

*I think generally all the church representatives on a country level could be speaking out louder about issues of unfairness and Fair Trade being one way to address some of those.*

This perception of the absence of official recognition is echoed on a national level. Anderson (2015, pp.140-1) describes the reluctance of some parts of the Church to participate in support of Fair Trade. He identifies the work on Fair Trade as an opportunity for Christians to demonstrate the relevance of their faith to society. However, Anderson (2015, p.141) states that this is carried out by 'Christian groups (not necessarily the Church).' His view being that, although organisations and individuals from within the Church form the mainstay of the Fair Trade movement, lack of support from some sectors, and the absence of official recognition, renders it inappropriate to refer to 'Church' support. The churchgoing participants think it important that denominational leaders speak out in support of Fair Trade, both to encourage the general public, and also to indicate to congregations the need for their support of the concept. The greatest concern springing from the lack of corporate endorsement of church action on Fair Trade, is that it is perceived as being in some way separate from the core work of the Church. Once again, this has resonance with the debates within the discourse of Public Theology, and concerns that Public Theology is neither sufficiently integrated into the Church, nor mindful of theology. Greater recognition of Fair Trade as part of the work of the Church will assist the Fair Trade activists to convince congregations that it is not just the concern of the few, but of all churchgoers. As an act of Public Theology, official support and recognition from the denominations will assist in maintaining the connection between the public action and the Church. The Fair Trade activists, motivated and sustained by their faith to carry out action for justice, offer a powerful witness. However, if their work is recognised and supported by congregations, clergy, and the Church leadership, then this distinctive witness can achieve a much wider public reach.

## **Conclusion**

Anderson (2015, pp.61-2) identifies a dilemma for the researcher of Fair Trade in that the Church is involved in the Fair Trade movement on many levels, and yet the movement is presented in the public realm as 'secular.' The notion of Fair Trade as translation goes part of the way to explaining this dilemma. Theology motivated and informed the concept of Fair Trade at the outset. It is still there; the original values of justice and fairness sustain Fair Trade and ensure it remains distinct from the mainstream. It is there; but in translation. To reach out to a wider public, theology has been translated into a language that is universally accessible. The participants acknowledge the need for the secular presentation of Fair Trade and are careful to limit the use of the language of faith in its description to the private realm. Translation respects both the emphases of Public Theology, of the engaged and the distinctive. The method of communication, the way in which the concept of Fair Trade is talked about, respects the emphasis of engagement, in that it is publicly accessible. The content of the communication, the heart of the message of Fair Trade, is distinctive, in that it retains a connection with the theological rooting of Fair Trade. The participants' reference to the considerable work to be done to persuade their fellow members of their congregations of the validity of supporting Fair Trade, highlights a disconnect between Fair Trade and the Church. The danger of translation is that the ability to speak of the translated concept can be lost. Public Theology, as a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases, requires that successful engagement in the form of translation be balanced by attention to the distinctive theological message. The connection between theology and the translated concept must be maintained and this can only be done by the Church, as the embodiment of theological values.

As Forrester (2004, p.432) states: 'Public Theology is necessarily ecclesial theology.' Public Theology is only theological in so far as it maintains its connection with the practice of the Church. The process of translation is not a monological one, of theology speaking into the public realm, rather, it is both dialogical and ongoing. This requires a process of

consideration of what is taking place in the public realm by means of theological reflection. Such reflection involves the bringing together of the understanding of the contemporary situation with the texts and traditions of the Church. Who does this theologising? For a genuine Public Theology to take place, theological reflection is carried out by churchgoers, and not just acting as individuals, but in congregations, as part of the life of the church. The understanding of translation as dialogical and ongoing represents a holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases. In endeavouring to maintain a living link between theology and the translated concept, the distinctively theological is being supported. However, in being genuinely dialogical in nature, the process represents true engagement. Rather than theology being diluted or lost from the process over time, ongoing theological reflection represents the ability of theology to engage; to listen, respond and remain open to change.

For all Public Theology, there will be a significant work of persuasion necessary for congregations to recognise the public relevance of faith. This persuasion will have to be articulated in the language of faith. A Public Theology that is tangential to the concerns of congregations will not succeed; it must be embedded in the life of the church, a part of its core activities. Congregations and denominations must embrace the work of Public Theology to such an extent that they feel a sense of ownership of it, recognising its validity as core practice of the Church. Public Theology as an ecclesial theology serves to maintain the connection between theology and the translated concept. In the next chapter, I will offer an example from the experience of Fair Trade action by churches which will underline why it is important for theology to maintain this connection. The narrative of a translated concept, reshaped by the contemporary situation, may begin to look different from its original rooting in theology; presenting challenge to the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. Such has been the experience of the progressive mainstreaming of Fair Trade.

## **Chapter 8: The mainstreaming of Fair Trade**

### **Introduction**

As a theologically inspired concept, reaching out to many sections of the public including large market actors, mainstreamed Fair Trade can be seen as successful Public Theology. However, this example of the open engagement of theology must be balanced by the requirement for distinctive witness. In this chapter, I outline the churchgoers' views on the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, pointing out both their support and their significant concerns. I then relate these views to my conceptual framework of Public Theology as engaged and distinctive emphases held in tension. The churchgoers' concerns regarding mainstreaming represent a real fear that the translated theological concept of Fair Trade could lose contact with the original theological insight, rooted in justice and the love of neighbour. The churchgoers' willingness to fight for the theological values of Fair Trade are an attempt to reassert the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. Drawing on Anderson's work on the history of the Fair Trade movement in the UK, I challenge the linear narrative that mainstreaming must inevitably result in a progressive dilution of the justice that lies at the heart of Fair Trade. Finally, I take forward this analysis to outline three roles for Fair Trade action by churches in the context of mainstreaming. The roles serve to balance the open engagement of mainstreamed Fair Trade with the distinctive emphasis of the theological values which inform the movement; suggesting a means by which theology can maintain contact with the translated concept.

### **8.1 The churchgoers' views on mainstreaming**

I will begin this section with a brief outline of the rise of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, before moving on to discuss the views of the churchgoing participants. I indicate their support for mainstreaming but this is a qualified support. In their interviews, the churchgoers express



significant wide-ranging concerns with the process of mainstreaming which they understand as offering challenge to the centrality of justice in Fair Trade.

### 8.1.1 The rise of mainstreaming

Fair Trade has always focussed on the need to bring about change in the wider economy.<sup>1</sup> To increase the influence of Fair Trade over the mainstream economy, the Fair Trade movement has encouraged large market actors to become involved in the practice of Fair Trade. This has been achieved by persuading supermarkets to stock Fair Trade products, the creation of supermarket Fair Trade own brands and the encouragement of major corporations, including large transnationals, to switch to buying from producers on Fair Trade terms. Much of this expansion has been achieved by an increase in concentration on Fair Trade labelling and certification. Knowles (2011, p.24) highlights the importance of large corporate brands to the growth of Fair Trade. He describes the certification of the Cadbury Dairy Milk brand in 2009, which resulted in a doubling of the amount of cocoa Cadbury purchased from smallholder farmers in the global south and an increase in overall Fair Trade sales in the UK by over 20%. Knowles (2011, p.36) sees major benefit for Fair Trade in encouraging well-known brands to apply for certification. A large player within a market will publicise its commitment to secure brand advantage; the standards that it adheres to are then likely to be treated as benchmark, thus raising standards of payment and working conditions across an industry. The success of Fair Trade in scaling up from an ethical niche market, to a movement which has significant impact on the mainstream economy, leads the churchgoing participants to declare their support for the concept of mainstreaming.

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<sup>1</sup> This is discussed in Section 2.2.

### 8.1.2 The churchgoers' support for mainstreaming

The majority of the churchgoing participants acknowledge the benefits that accrue from the involvement of large corporations in the Fair Trade project. Of the nineteen churchgoing participants, fourteen state that they think that mainstreaming is a good thing. They cite the ability of mainstreamed Fair Trade to assist millions of producers from poor communities across the globe and the greater public recognition of the concept. Brandon is typical of many of the churchgoers in the study, when he states that:

*There's no point in having Fair Trade as a niche market because the aim has got to be to have it as the norm that people trade fairly.*

As discussed with reference to the secular presentation of Fair Trade, the churchgoing participants acknowledge that Fair Trade, to have real impact on the economy, must speak to an audience wider than the Church.<sup>2</sup> Cheryl is conscious of the limitations of the retail of Fair Trade products by means of the church stall. This leads her to comment on the mainstreaming of Fair Trade:

*Great, absolutely brilliant, and so it should be. I think we should be able to buy Fair Trade goods for as many products as possible in the supermarkets. I think that is the way it should go [...] a lot of people will look at the prices of goods that I have on the Fair Trade stall and some of the comments I have are 'actually I can get Fair Trade goods cheaper in the supermarkets' and so, in this economic climate, people will prefer to buy Fair Trade goods in the supermarket than in a Fair Trade stall that is open once a week on a Sunday morning.*

The churchgoers point out that the stocking of Fair Trade goods in supermarkets brings advantage in terms of wider availability and a cheaper price, which can render Fair Trade goods affordable to consumers in low income brackets. The visibility of the products in mainstream retail

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<sup>2</sup> As discussed in Section 6.2.

environments also raises the profile of Fair Trade and the participants are keen to stress how much easier it is to promote Fair Trade now that it is more widely known. The churchgoers identify a role for Fair Trade activists in persuading large market actors to increase their involvement in Fair Trade. Several of the participants talk of lobbying their local shops and supermarkets to stock more Fair Trade products. In answer to the question: ‘now that Fair Trade is so easily available in the supermarkets, and well known amongst the public, is there still a clear role for churches in the promotion of Fair Trade?’ Brandon identifies a role in persuading more sectors of business to support Fair Trade. He argues:

*We have got Fair Trade coffee, tea, bananas, sugar but equally there are still, a considerable amount of the market is not Fair Trade. If we are serious about tackling poverty, you've got to tackle those issues, because otherwise you are condemning part of the world, producers who can't sell their products under a Fair Trade initiative, to struggle with poverty.*

Brandon goes on to talk of the need to extend Fair Trade into the clothing market as he points out that this industry has some of the worst examples of worker exploitation. For these churchgoers, there is an imperative for Fair Trade to grow to assist more producers and they identify a role for the Church, at congregational and leadership levels, in lobbying corporations to persuade them to extend levels of production carried out on Fair Trade terms. In the participants' support for mainstreaming, my findings tally with the work of Goodman et al (2012, p.208) who describe significant levels of support for the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, from both activists and FTOs. Increased availability and visibility has led to a dramatic increase in sales and, crucially from the perspective of the activists and FTOs, this has meant that millions more producers from some of the world's poorest communities have been assisted. However, Goodman et al (2012, pp.200-1) view the support of the activists and FTOs for the mainstreaming of Fair Trade as a ‘Faustian bargain.’ The benefits brought by increased sales have been achieved at the expense of a decreased emphasis on the original ideals of the movement; in its close association with commercial

brands, Fair Trade has become more like the form of trade that the original movement was set up to challenge.

### 8.1.3 The churchgoers' concerns regarding mainstreaming

The churchgoers in my study are aware of the trade-off that mainstreaming entails. Although there is support for the concept of mainstreaming per se, the majority of participants articulate some concern at aspects of the process of mainstreaming. Of the nineteen churchgoing participants, sixteen express criticism associated with the involvement of large corporations in the Fair Trade movement. Their view of Fair Trade as characterised by justice, and serving as a demonstration of Christian principles,<sup>3</sup> generates concern regarding the process of mainstreaming. From analysis of my research interviews, I have identified five key concerns of the participants with the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. Firstly, there is concern regarding the practices of large corporations; although some of their products may have Fair Trade certification, other elements of their activity may be far removed from just practice. Secondly, the participants question the motivation of corporations for their involvement in Fair Trade. The loss of focus on the producer as being at the heart of the Fair Trade concept is another perceived threat posed by the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, as is the diminished ability for the movement to critique market influences. Finally, the churchgoers are worried by the precarious position of FTOs in the context of progressive mainstreaming. As I shall indicate, all of these expressed concerns have resonance with scholarly commentary on the mainstreaming process.

### 8.1.4 Practices of supermarkets and large corporations

The largest number of criticisms of the mainstreaming process were related to the business practices of supermarkets (referred to by thirteen of the nineteen churchgoing participants). Although the churchgoers were in

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Chapter 4.

one sense pleased that supermarkets were stocking a range of Fair Trade products, unease was expressed about their business practices outside of their Fair Trade activity. In particular, the supermarket chains were criticised for their practice of squeezing the price paid to producers in order to maximise volume and profits. In this way, the supermarkets are perceived as being part of the problem in the unjust trade system, rather than contributing towards the solution. This leads some of the interviewees to the conclusion that it is important for the Church to encourage purchasing from smaller retailers, both for Fair Trade and non-Fair Trade products. For example, Keith argues that churchgoers should buy their Fair Trade products from Traidcraft rather than from supermarkets, as he feels that even with Fair Trade products:

*Supermarkets try to wield their muscle and push prices down.*

Several churchgoers criticise large corporations that have arranged to have some of their branded products certified with the Fairtrade mark. Once again, unease is felt with the business practices outside of the Fair Trade activity. Ann expresses cynicism towards Nestle's involvement with the Fair Trade movement because of its promotion of baby milk formulas in developing countries. She asserts:

*Kit Kat is Nestle isn't it? So, I have issues with Nestle anyway. So, I kind of think they can put as many Fairtrade logos on their products as they like [...] I'm still not going to be buying Kit Kat.*

There is considerable resonance between the concerns of the participants and those of academic analysts of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. Jaffee (2011, p.95) for example, discusses the decision by Nestle to introduce a Fair Trade coffee 'Partners Blend' in 2005. Although this was applauded by the leadership of the Fairtrade Foundation, Jaffee indicates that there was considerable disquiet in the Fair Trade movement; many activists perceived that Nestle was buying a tiny fraction of its coffee on Fair Trade terms, whilst much of its business practice was characterised by forms of 'unfair' mainstream trade. The worry for these churchgoers is that, by association with large corporations who are involved in practices which the churchgoers

regard as socially undesirable, the Fair Trade movement becomes tainted by association. Because of the emphasis of the participants on Fair Trade acting as a demonstration of just principles in practice, this is a serious concern which threatens to undermine the efficacy of Fair Trade in its role as alternative to the market.

#### 8.1.5 The motivation of large corporations

A key concern for the participants is the motivation of large corporations in their involvement with the Fair Trade movement. For many of the churchgoers in the study it is important that individuals, groups and organisations all support Fair Trade for moral reasons. There is a level of scepticism about the involvement of large corporations, for example Margaret states:

*I'm a bit cynical about, you know, companies like Nestle and Cadburys in particular. I just think that they've jumped on the bandwagon really because they realise [...] that people are wanting to buy Fair Trade goods, and they're missing an opportunity.*

Margaret is of the view that large corporations carry the Fairtrade mark on some of their products, in order to convince consumers that their overall practices are more ethical than they actually are. These concerns can be characterised by what some commentators, such as Jaffee (2011, p.95), term as 'fair-wash.' This involves large corporations, without a real concern for the promotion of Fair Trade, endorsing the practice in some quarters of their business in order to improve their overall brand image. For the churchgoers who express concern in my study, they fear that the endorsement of Fair Trade in some parts of the portfolio of large corporations may provide tacit endorsement for less socially desirable business practices which take place elsewhere. For example, Doreen has fears as to whether:

*The supermarket understands Fair Trade and actually promotes it properly and doesn't just use it as a handle on which to hang [...]*

*their own agenda on [...] their motivations are different from the people who are wanting to buy Fair Trade.*

Concerns were expressed that, because the corporations do not have a 'genuine' concern for Fair Trade, they will attempt to dilute the criteria. To secure higher profits, they may resort to placing leverage on certification bodies into relaxing their standards. Goodman et al (2012, p.208) acknowledge a pressure from large corporations to dilute Fair Trade standards and they call for the Fair Trade labelling organisation, FLO, to resist such pressures. In his interview, Stefan felt especially strongly in relation to plantation produce, which he thought should not be included in Fair Trade certification because of the lack of control most plantation workers have over their working conditions. This lack of control, and the inability for workers to collectively organise, was felt to breach the spirit of Fair Trade which, for this churchgoer, possesses a strong emphasis on producer empowerment. Jaffee (2011, pp.91-2) discusses the rise of plantation produce as a percentage of the overall sales of Fair Trade products and the implications for the movement of the more limited opportunity to bring about worker empowerment in a plantation production environment. He cites the concerns of the FTO, Equal Exchange, which views plantation production as incompatible with Fair Trade. Another fear expressed by the churchgoers is that large corporations may well lack a long-term commitment both to the producers and to the concept of Fair Trade. If Fair Trade fell victim to the vagaries of fashion, then it was felt that the corporations would drop their commitment. This fear may well have been confirmed by the 2016 decision of Cadburys to downplay its commitment to Fair Trade certification. As Doherty (2016) explains, Cadburys justified their decision with reference to the establishment of their own in-house regulation with auditing to be conducted by the Fairtrade Foundation. Doherty argues that this could begin a trend for large corporations to abandon Fair Trade in favour of self-regulation. The replacement of Fair Trade certification with a plethora of in-house schemes would make it virtually impossible for the consumer to compare standards across different corporations. This move confirms the fears of the

participants regarding the commitment of large corporations to Fair Trade. For the churchgoers in my study, motivation is important; Fair Trade is all about justice and the thirst for justice needs to be apparent in the motivation of all who are driving the movement.

#### 8.1.6 Loss of the producer focus

Another key concern for the churchgoers in the study is the potential loss of the central focus on the producer in both the practice and the publicity of Fair Trade. For example, Doreen thought that supermarket chains and large corporations were unlikely to want to tell the producer's story. In answer to the question: 'now that Fair Trade is so easily available in the supermarkets, and well known amongst the public, is there still a clear role for churches in the promotion of Fair Trade?' Doreen responded that there is still a clear role for the churches, in telling of the lives of the producers and the difference that Fair Trade makes to their living and working conditions; she explains:

*The churches through what they do can provide that back story, that detail, that the supermarkets are never going to put that amount of detail on display.*

This observation highlights the issue of decreasing emphasis on the producers' narratives in the promotion of Fair Trade, even for dedicated Fair Trade brands. Dolan (2011) discusses recent changes in Fair Trade marketing to emphasise quality and deemphasise the role of the producer. In this way, the focus on Fair Trade as a relationship between consumer and producer is being undermined by commercial pressures. The majority of the interviewees felt that the supermarkets and large corporations could not be trusted on their own to look after the interests of the producers. The following remark by Naomi, is typical of the anxiety that the churchgoers feel about the role of corporations in the movement:

*We are at a bit of a turning point here and we are in danger of falling into the trap of believing that the job is done and that we can*



*leave it to the big players (large corporations) to get on with it. And that is really frightening because everything that has been achieved could be thrown away so easily, if we let corporations get their greedy mitts on it, because they will not give the producers the respect they deserve.*

The interviewees identify a clear role for the churches in the context of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. This is as guardian for the movement, to ensure that large businesses do not exert too much influence over Fair Trade and to ensure that the original ideals, of a trade guided by justice and love of neighbour, will not be lost.

#### 8.1.7 The ability to critique market influences

The guiding role for church-based activists within the movement would not be possible without the ability to critique market actors. As the above quote from Naomi suggests, there is a real fear on the part of some activists that Fair Trade will cease to become a movement and be subsumed by corporate interests. Effectively, it could be overwhelmed by the Corporate Social Responsibility industry. To counter the power of the corporations, Ann stresses the importance of the role of NGOs within the Fair Trade movement. She states that:

*It is really important that they [NGOs] continue to support Fair Trade because it is the values underneath it that need to be flagged up.*

As powerful market actors enter the Fair Trade movement, and become increasingly influential, there is greater need for reference to the values that underpin Fair Trade. Jaffee (2011, pp.97-8) detects a significant shift in purpose for the Fair Trade movement, arguing that the challenging of the nature of markets is being lost and that Fair Trade is focussing on amelioration of the worst effects of the capitalist economy. For Jaffee, there is a danger that the movement is losing its ability to tackle issues of trade justice and to challenge the exploitative practices of large corporations. As I

indicated in Sub-Section 4.5.3, the churchgoers understanding of Fair Trade as justice leads them to see Fair Trade as part of the wider work for trade justice, which may include calls for political change. In their view, the movement has to call for state, or international, regulation of markets in order to combat injustice and it may be necessary to criticise current commercial practice in order to bring justice for workers who have to suffer very poor working conditions. Five of the participants mention the textiles industry, where, thus far, Fair Trade has had little impact. In order to bring about more just treatment for workers in this industry, it will be necessary to denounce current practice and lobby and campaign against retailers in order to bring about change. Goodman et al (2012, p.236) identify a problem with mainstreamed Fair Trade in that it has withdrawn from ‘discursive spaces’, whereby the movement can critique market practice. Goodman et al (2012, p.244) argue that the highlighting of ethics in a business arena should result in more than the expansion of ethical consumption and have the power to be truly socially transformative. Transformation on a significant scale will require Fair Trade activists to join with wider movements to challenge current corporate practice and the political structures of trade. The paradox of Fair Trade as ‘in’ and ‘against’ the market is in danger of falling out of balance; the emphasis on the ‘against’ has been challenged by the increased role of large market actors.

#### 8.1.8 Threats to FTOs

The FTOs themselves are under threat from mainstreaming; Moore (2004, p.83) identifies their vulnerability within the market when faced with the much greater resources of large corporations. The ability of the corporations to increase their market share of Fair Trade sales could threaten the viability of some FTOs. Fourteen of the nineteen churchgoing participants mention the positive benefits of the work of FTOs. They are aware that their sales are under threat from mainstreaming and call for the churches to give more support. Clearly, the churchgoers see the FTOs as a key element in the Fair Trade movement and one which can act as

counterbalance to the rise in influence of market logic over the practice of Fair Trade. FTOs can assist in addressing the concerns that are highlighted by the churchgoers. They serve as an example of a more ethical form of trade, and this example is not only directed to the consuming public but also to the large corporations themselves. The ways in which the FTOs conduct their business point to how large corporations might do things differently, to bring about transformation to a less exploitative form of trade. The role of FTOs is not only seen as one of counterbalance, the participants acknowledge that the sustainability of the Fair Trade movement depends on the thriving of these organisations. The FTOs take the initiative in trialling new products, accessing new markets and in identifying communities that are in need of the assistance of Fair Trade schemes. They are less risk averse and willing to reach out to poorer communities and work in difficult circumstances, such as in war zones or areas of post-conflict reconstruction. Cheryl stresses the need for both mainstreaming and the continued support for FTOs:

*We are not just buying Fair Trade we are actually supporting Traidcraft as an organisation to be able to continue its development work. That we need both, yes, we need Fair Trade mainstreaming but we also need the Fair Trade Organisations, such as Traidcraft, to be able to continue to do its Fair Trade work.*

A key role that Cheryl identifies for Traidcraft is in its deepening of standards, improving conditions for producers by going beyond Fair Trade standards. The work of innovation that the FTOs carry out stands in contrast with the large corporations who drive Fair Trade forward in terms of increased sales but not in terms of innovating for the future development of the concept. The message from the participants is that even though the mainstreaming of Fair Trade is to be welcomed, churchgoers must continue to support and to promote the FTOs.

## **8.2 Mainstreaming and the engaged and distinctive emphases**

The churchgoers' views on mainstreaming represent a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The drive for engagement leads the churchgoers to support the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, so as to be able to reach out to a wider audience. The availability of Fair Trade goods in supermarkets transforms the concept from one associated with an ethical niche to a mainstream movement capable of bringing assistance to millions of producers. However, concern for the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology is never far from the surface of the churchgoers' statements regarding mainstreaming. The churchgoers express concern that, as a result of the successful engagement of large economic actors, the distinctive nature of Fair Trade may be undermined. The churchgoers' perception of Fair Trade as a work of justice and as demonstration of Christian principles engenders their concerns regarding mainstreaming. I shall now refer to each of the churchgoers' five concerns as outlined in Section 8.1, highlighting the churchgoers' identification of the need to bolster the distinctive emphasis of this act of Public Theology. For each, I will refer to the ways in which the churchgoers' concern is influenced by their theological outlook on Fair Trade as justice and as demonstration.

The unjust practices carried out by supermarkets and large corporations pose a threat to Fair Trade. If these organisations are seen to be closely allied to the Fair Trade project, then their unjust, exploitative practices could undermine its distinctive witness. For Fair Trade to demonstrate biblical justice, it must itself be just. If the practical outworking of the Fair Trade project is not sufficiently distinct from the mainstream then it cannot serve as an example of a different way of trading. In the context of mainstreaming, the logic of the market embodied in large corporations could serve to dilute or destroy the theological values that underpin Fair Trade. In this way church action for Fair Trade would cease to be Public Theology, as the link between the action and theological insight would be lost.

The churchgoers' apprehension, regarding the motivation of corporations for entering the Fair Trade project, springs from the participants' framing of Fair Trade as justice. If Fair Trade is a form of justice, then its purpose is to counter the injustice of the mainstream economy and stand alongside the poor, fighting to correct those injustices by challenging the rich and powerful. The churchgoers' views on working with like-minded allies suggests that they regard anyone motivated by similar ethical values as partners.<sup>4</sup> What unites them is not religious affiliation but the informing of their action by the values of justice and fairness. Corporations, by necessity, must be informed by market values such as efficiency and the profit motive and there appears only limited scope for the sharing of values with churchgoing activists. Even though large corporations are now an integral part of the Fair Trade project, the participants regard them with suspicion as their motives are viewed as alien to the values which underpin Fair Trade. Notably, the understanding of Fair Trade as justice informs the movement's focus on the wellbeing of the producer. The focus on the producer is central to the distinctive nature of Fair Trade as it challenges the mainstream economic focus on the consumer. To put first those people regarded by the 'worldly' system as lowly is a counter-cultural demonstration of biblical values. Recent actions which attempt to undermine the producer focus are therefore a cause of worry for the participants, as they threaten both the distinctive nature of Fair Trade and the distinctive demonstration of biblical values.

A diminished ability on the part of the Fair Trade movement to critique the mainstream also poses a threat to the distinctive nature of this act of witness. As an integral part of the work for justice, the churchgoers do not draw a dividing line around ethical consumption, rather they view it as complementary to the wider work for trade justice.<sup>5</sup> This involves critique of mainstream corporate practice as well as political calls for regulation of trade. There is a clear tension between this purpose for Fair Trade and the involvement of large market actors in the movement. For

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<sup>4</sup> See Sub-Section 6.3.2.

<sup>5</sup> See Sub-Section 4.5.2.

Fair Trade to serve as distinctive witness, it must not only represent a positive benefit to the poor but also a challenge and denunciation of the rich. It is clear that the FTOs occupy an important role for the participants in embodying the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. The FTOs' call for justice is both implicit, in the way that they do business, and explicit, in their public statements. Examples of these include Traidcraft's biblically based foundation principles (Johnson and Sugden 2001, pp.152-5) and the publicity of its campaigns. FTOs serve as the visible outworking of biblical values applied to the trade system and as distinctive demonstration to the mainstream economy of how business can be conducted differently. In the context of mainstreaming, the view of the participants is that, far from being irrelevant to the Fair Trade project, the contribution of the FTOs is essential to ward against over accommodation to the values of the market.

### **8.3 Challenging the linear narrative**

It is tempting to view the mainstreaming of Fair Trade in a 'tragic' light. A well-meaning, ethically pure system was established by the churches only to be corrupted by the values of the world. Its openness in conversation with the market led to it being subsumed by dominant commercial forces; the naivety of the Fair Trade activists rendering them complicit in this corporate take-over. In the race for engagement the Fair Trade movement did not pay attention to the distinctive element of Fair Trade and this element was lost. However, the history of Fair Trade is much more complex. The churchgoers' concerns with the mainstreaming of Fair Trade cannot be ignored as they indicate a threat to the underlying values which inform the concept. However, the churchgoers do not indicate that it is inevitable that the Fair Trade project will be subsumed by commercial interests; on the contrary, they identify a role for the Church in acting as counterbalance to the influence of large market actors. The linear view is characterised by the inevitability that Fair Trade will be given over to corporate interests, becoming increasingly dominated by supermarkets and transnational corporations, whilst witnessing a withering of other

sectors of the movement (including church action). Fair Trade will no longer be in a position to challenge the nature of markets and call for their transformation, its function will be limited to ameliorating the harshest effects of the market. Haden-Pawlowski (2011) believes that this position has already been reached, leading him to call for Fair Trade activists in the global north to direct their attentions away from the ethical consumption scheme and towards action for political transformation. In the linear narrative, the original operation of Fair Trade was governed purely by ethical considerations, but, as Fair Trade grew, it moved further away from the original ideals; ethical considerations were replaced by commercial decision making and the logic of the market. If the linear narrative is accepted at face value, then it is difficult to construct a Public Theology of Fair Trade, as the role of theology would ultimately disappear from the movement. In order to suggest a public role for the Church in its action on Fair Trade, the future of the movement must be envisaged differently.

Anderson (2013) challenges the linear view of the history of the Fair Trade movement. He points out that the narrative of a shift in power from producer to consumer is inaccurate as the pioneering FTOs were led by personnel in the developed world and, although they considered their activities as in the interests of the producers, there was little element of producer input into decision making (Anderson 2013, p.81). This stands in contrast to more recent developments within the movement where FTOs, such as Divine Chocolate and Café Direct, have introduced producer ownership and representation in governance. Anderson (2013, p.84) stresses that, rather than a linear competition between binary elements, the narrative of Fair Trade is a complex story characterised by the need to balance 'idealism and pragmatism.' This analysis does not detract from the serious concerns regarding the mainstreaming process, but although the rising influence of corporations offer a challenge to the original ideals of Fair Trade, it is far from inevitable that this will lead to a corporate takeover, as some commentators suggest. The linear narrative can also be challenged by identification of the resilience of the multi-faceted model of the Fair Trade movement. In the linear view, as commercial elements

exercise a growing influence over the movement, other forces will fade away. However, the activist wing of the movement, including Fair Trade action by churches, has proved remarkably resilient. The Fair Trade Towns movement, which encourages activist support for Fair Trade at a community level, has grown rapidly over the past ten years. Indeed, Goodman et al (2012, p.241) credit the Fair Trade Towns initiative with helping boost Fair Trade sales, to the extent that Fair Trade has been able to survive the impact of the global recession relatively intact. The churchgoing participants are aware of the strength of the activist movement and its potential to contribute to the shaping of the future of Fair Trade. The churchgoers do not view a corporate take-over of Fair Trade as inevitable; in their opinion, such a possibility is real, but the strength of the activist wing of the movement is such that the ideals of Fair Trade can still be fought for.

Thus far, mainstreaming has not adversely affected the level of church action on Fair Trade, as evidenced by the increasing numbers of Fair Trade churches and the significant profile of Christian FTOs and NGOs within the movement. In some senses, mainstreaming has fed this growth in interest by the churches; the success of churchgoers in promoting the concept to a wider public, has been aided by the vast growth in public recognition of Fair Trade that has accompanied the mainstreaming project. However, given the concerns of the participants and the academic commentary which highlights a movement away from the original purpose of Fair Trade, there is clearly a need for action to prevent a dilution of the movement's commitment to the wellbeing of producers. The Church is well placed to lead a response to mainstreaming, given the strength of its presence, both in terms of the number of church based activists involved in the movement, and the role of theology in inspiring the ethics of Fair Trade. In answer to the question: 'now that Fair Trade is so easily available in the supermarkets, and well known amongst the public, is there still a clear role for churches in the promotion of Fair Trade?' all of the participants answered in the affirmative. For most of the churchgoers, the role of churches is identified as: countering the commercialisation of Fair Trade, placing emphasis on fundamental principles or providing focus on the



narratives of producers. If these feelings are mirrored elsewhere, then this may indicate the possibility of a galvanisation of Fair Trade action by churches, in response to the requirement for vigilance under mainstreaming.

The linear narrative represents a dialectic of opposing forces, with the stronger winning out over the weaker. Hence, in this narrative the distinctive element is subsumed by engagement with the dominant market. In place of the linear narrative, I return to my characterisation of Fair Trade and Public Theology as a holding in tension of the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive. The way forward for church action for Fair Trade is not to retreat from engagement. Fair Trade cannot bring change or serve as a demonstration of biblical justice if it does not engage with a wide public, including the mainstream market. However, the threats to the original values of the Fair Trade movement posed by the increased involvement of large corporations serve as a call for vigilance. There is a role for the Church in the Fair Trade movement in reemphasising the distinctive emphasis of Fair Trade and of Public Theology. There is a lesson here for Public Theology. Just as it is not inevitable that the theological insight that guides Fair Trade will be lost in the context of mainstreaming, so too it is not inevitable that theology will lose contact with the translated theological concept over time. In the same way that there is a role for the Church in emphasising the distinctive nature of Fair Trade, for all Public Theology there is a role for the Church in maintaining contact between theology and the translated concept. In the final section, I will suggest three roles for Fair Trade action by churches which provide an example of the ways in which the Church can ensure that theology is not diluted, or lost in acts of Public Theology.

#### **8.4 Three key roles for Fair Trade action by churches**

Drawing from the conversation between the research data, analysis of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade and theological insight, I have identified three key roles for Fair Trade action by churches in the context of mainstreaming. Firstly, to constitute a strong grassroots activist wing of the

Fair Trade movement; secondly, to act as support to FTOs and dedicated Fair Trade businesses; and thirdly, to uphold the core values which inspired the original Fair Trade pioneers and can sustain the moral vision of Fair Trade into the future. In this section I envisage a strong role for the Church in this act of Public Theology. This provides illustration of my discussion in Chapter 7 of the need for theology to maintain contact with the translated theological concept through the work of the Church. The Church's work to reassert the distinctive emphasis of Fair Trade in the context of mainstreaming offers example to the discourse of Public Theology of how the maintenance of contact can be achieved.

#### 8.4.1 Fair Trade action by churches as grassroots activism

Fair Trade action by churches, as a form of grassroots activism, can assist the Fair Trade movement to retain an emphasis on the concept of justice in the face of increasing commercialisation. The Church is well placed to do so, thanks to its developed networks which are well integrated into the life of grassroots communities.<sup>6</sup> These networks can reach outside of the Church and embrace allies in the promotion of Fair Trade, effectively linking it with other action for economic and social justice. Church based activists can act as guardians of the understanding of justice for poor producers which lies at the heart of Fair Trade. Activists have always played a key role within the Fair Trade movement. Rather than the expansion of the Fair Trade concept being driven by individual consumer choice, to a great extent growth has been achieved by the efforts of activists and networks of organisations including NGOs and FTOs (Anderson 2015, pp.1-4). Far from activism being peripheral to the functioning of Fair Trade, it is vital in driving Fair Trade forward and in shaping its values.

Moore (2004, p.84) indicates a key role for campaigning in the Fair Trade movement in order to 'minimise the potential subversion, dilution or redefinition' of Fair Trade by commercial forces. To do this, activists will

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<sup>6</sup> See Section 3.1.

need to hold large corporations and Fair Trade labelling organisations to account, to ensure that standards are maintained and the producer focus of Fair Trade remains central to the concept. Moore's analysis has resonance with the statement expressed by the participant Naomi (quoted in Sub-Section 8.1.6) as she warns against churchgoers abandoning Fair Trade activism to leave promotion of the concept to large corporations. For Moore, and the churchgoing participants, activists are needed to act as a counterbalance to commercial forces, to give voice to the producers, whose voice would otherwise be overwhelmed by the logic of the market. For church based Fair Trade activism to hold the market to account, the activists must be versed in wider issues of trade justice and anti-poverty action. Fair Trade acts as a demonstration of justice in action, but, rather than envisage the transformation of global trade taking place entirely as a result of the expansion of the ethical trading scheme, the movement brings about transformation by linking the concept with calls for political change. This view is echoed by the participants, who view Fair Trade as a starting point, rather than an end in itself, in the quest for justice in trade.<sup>7</sup>

As I have discussed in Chapter 4, a message that came through strongly in the interviews was the need for church based work on Fair Trade not to be seen in isolation, but as part of wider work for justice.<sup>8</sup> At a grassroots level, Fair Trade activists can work effectively to bring about change in international trade by linking with international networks of NGO's and justice organisations. Through these networks, they can be informed and mobilised to challenge the operation of markets, and in particular, the actions of transnational corporations that are involved with Fair Trade certification. The response of the Fair Trade movement to 'fair-wash' should be to challenge the actions of transnational corporations, to bring about transformation of their exploitative practices. Jaffee (2011, p.101) admits that the Fair Trade movement cannot act alone to bring about change in the global economy but needs to work alongside the wider networks of organisations working for economic justice. Maintaining

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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 3.3.3.

<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 4.5.2.

a strong church based activist body offers the Fair Trade movement the opportunity to demonstrate distinctive witness by bringing about justice in the structures of trade. The scaling up of Fair Trade, by means of increased sales volumes through the mainstreaming process, needs to be balanced by a complementary growth in activism, helping build a movement for trade and wider economic justice.

#### 8.4.2 Fair Trade action by churches in support of FTOs.

Fair Trade action by churches should encourage a strong voice in conversation with FTOs and dedicated Fair Trade businesses. There is synergy between church networks and many FTOs and dedicated businesses,<sup>9</sup> and the evidence of the research interviews indicates that churchgoing activists view the work of FTOs as vital to the Fair Trade movement.<sup>10</sup> In the context of mainstreaming this connection needs to be developed to act as counterbalance to the growing influence of large corporations. The interviewees understand that, not only are the FTOs worthy of support because they play a key role within the movement, they also need the support of activists to remain in business. Some of the pioneering organisations, such as Traidcraft, are largely dependent on the activist base. Although they have attempted diversification, they are still reliant on church based sales and the majority of their 'Fair Trader' agents are churchgoers, who sell mainly to other churchgoers.<sup>11</sup> Left purely to the forces of the market, these organisations will disappear, however, with the support of Fair Trade activism, including Fair Trade action by churches, they can be emboldened.

Hutchens (2010, pp.80-82) points out that in the 1990's some FTOs switched from operating on a 'not for profit' basis to becoming 'for profit' organisations. The introduction of the profit motive allowed them to

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<sup>9</sup> As discussed in Sub-Section 3.3.1.

<sup>10</sup> See Sub-Section 8.1.8.

<sup>11</sup> For a description of the role of the Traidcraft Fair Traders, see Grant (2001).

compete with mainstream businesses and also paved the way for some of the organisations to move towards producer ownership. Although this alternative represents only a tiny volume of trade compared to that carried out by transnational corporations, it does serve as a demonstration to the wider economy. These organisations can be viewed as a bridge of communication between the original ideals of the Fair Trade movement and mainstream corporations; they demonstrate to the mainstream that the implementation of higher ethical standards is possible in a commercial environment. The FTOs and dedicated Fair Trade businesses contribute a unique perspective, gained through experience of the practical implementation of an ethical vision in the realities of the market place. FTOs offer distinctive witness in being much more producer-focussed than mainstream corporations. The participants in my study identify some of the activities carried out by FTOs that are invaluable to the movement's striving for justice. For example, they point to Traidcraft working with producers in some of the poorest communities, including areas affected by conflict, which large corporations would either be unable, or unwilling, to work with. Small scale artisan work, such as the production of craft items, would also be excluded from the ambit of major corporations and yet this activity remains a valuable source of income for those living in the poorest communities. A vital role for church action on Fair Trade is to support FTOs in their distinctive witness and work for justice: to drive up standards, to innovate, to support poorer communities, encourage worker empowerment and to shame the mainstream into improving their standards.

#### 8.4.3 Fair Trade action by churches to uphold core values.

Finally, Fair Trade action by churches has an important role under mainstreaming in upholding core values, by maintaining an emphasis on justice, and acting to reverse the drift towards the positioning of Fair Trade purely as practical help and as a device for ameliorating the worst effects of the market. Theology, working through FTOs and Fair Trade action by churches, gifts to the movement a rooting in principles of justice and the

love of neighbour. These principles are foundational for Fair Trade but they also need to be applied to the ongoing work of the Fair Trade movement. This application maintains the purity of the concept and ensures that Fair Trade offers a true alternative to mainstream business practices. However, the principles of justice and love of neighbour also can be brought to bear on the mainstreaming strategy, informing discernment to guide the engagement of the movement with wider society and the capitalist economy. In fulfilment of the requirement for distinctive witness, theology will also serve as constant reminder that the true focus of the Fair Trade movement is on the poor and marginalised.

The experience of mainstreaming has thrown into stark relief the need for theology to play an ongoing role in Fair Trade. Much of the social scientific literature on the mainstreaming of Fair Trade talks of the straying of the Fair Trade concept from the original ideals of the movement (see, for example: Goodman et al 2012; Jaffee 2011). According to these commentators, this straying has resulted in increased commercialisation, a focus away from the producer, a dilution of standards and a decreased ability to offer challenge to the practices of the mainstream market. The original ideals of Fair Trade are rooted in theological values; they have not disappeared but their influence over the movement has been challenged by mainstreaming. To ensure that Fair Trade represents a balance of engaged and distinctive emphases, it is necessary to reinforce the distinctive message of Fair Trade as encapsulated in the original ideals. Biblical themes, such as the love of neighbour, the justice of God towards the poor and the right stewardship of creation, all inform the underlying message of Fair Trade. These values stand in contrast to the values of the mainstream economy and, for Fair Trade to function as a demonstration of an alternative way to trade, they must be the values that characterise the concept.

The work of the Church, in emphasising the distinctive nature of Fair Trade in the context of mainstreaming, provides example of what it would take for theology to maintain contact with the translated theological concept. As I have argued in Chapter 7, this maintenance of contact can only be achieved by the Church playing a strong role in Public Theology.

Members of congregations can maintain the contact between theology and the translated concept by the means that I have outlined in Chapter 7. The translation of public discussion into the language of faith is needed in order for theological reflection to take place. In discernment regarding the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, grassroots churchgoers must interpret the changing nature of the contemporary situation in the light of the theology which represents the core values of Fair Trade. Theological reflection and the generation of theological insight is the task of congregations; for Public Theology, it is vital that this activity is not limited to academic theologians and the Church leadership. However, this will require a work of persuasion of congregations, which must be conducted in the language of faith. Fair Trade activists should not view the secular presentation of Fair Trade as having application in all settings and certainly not in the setting of the church congregation. What is more, the connections between core theological values and the contemporary practice of Fair Trade need to be affirmed by embedding Fair Trade in the life of churches; in their worship, sermons and prayers. In this way, the connections will become familiar and natural for congregations, rather than Fair Trade appear as a 'bolt-on' extra to the church's activity. This is a lesson for all Public Theology, if it is to involve congregations, then there is considerable work to be done to persuade them of the connections between public life and the insights of faith.

The three roles for Fair Trade action by churches that I have outlined are closely interrelated. The theologising of churchgoers can influence the practice of Fair Trade through the work of activists and FTOs, who can then exert influence on all sections of the Fair Trade movement. In the context of mainstreaming, this is the means by which the values of justice and the love of neighbour can serve to balance the powerful logic of the market. Ongoing theological reflection and the hands-on involvement of the Church is necessary in all acts of Public Theology to respond to the changing nature of the contemporary situation. As evidenced in my discussion on the linear view of the history of Fair Trade, the changing nature of the contemporary situation is unpredictable. In looking to the future of Fair Trade, even the

process of continued mainstreaming itself is under question. The downgrading of Fair Trade certification by Cadburys might pave the way for other corporations to withdraw from Fair Trade (Doherty 2016), initiating a process of ‘de-mainstreaming.’ This does not serve as an argument that the involvement of the Church would no longer be required. Rather, it acts as an example of the unpredictability of the contemporary situation and the need for ongoing involvement of the Church in acts of Public Theology. Potential de-mainstreaming would bring its own problems, not least a threat to the engaged emphasis of Public Theology, in that Fair Trade would find it difficult to reach out to a wide audience, if much of its current mainstream activity no longer takes place. Ongoing theological reflection and a strong activist and FTO presence makes the Church well placed to respond. The moral arguments put forward by church Fair Trade activists, for corporations to adopt more just practice, could be mobilised in order to respond to any potential de-mainstreaming. The aim would be to persuade, and to shame, corporations not to abandon the Fair Trade system; a system which guarantees decent payment and working conditions for producers in some of the world’s poorest communities. Whether mainstreaming or de-mainstreaming, the three roles for Fair Trade action by churches provide an example of the ways in which acts of Public Theology can maintain contact with the original theological insight. Crucially, this contact is upheld by the Church, in the form of congregations which keep alive theological insight by embedding it within their practice, and who then go on to demonstrate this theology to a wider public.

### **Conclusion**

The churchgoers recognise the benefits that mainstreaming can bring to Fair Trade in terms of increased engagement with a wide audience and influence over the mainstream economy. However, they express significant concerns with the process of mainstreaming and these represent a call for vigilance to protect the theological insight at the heart of Fair Trade from the encroaching influence of the market. In challenging the linear narrative



of Fair Trade, I indicate that it is not inevitable that continued mainstreaming will result in a dilution of the ideals of justice and love of neighbour that inform Fair Trade. The churchgoers are willing to fight for the movement. For the discourse of Public Theology there is a lesson here, that it is not inevitable that acts of translation will lose contact with the original theological insight. I have suggested three roles for Fair Trade action by churches in the context of mainstreaming: that of activist body, support for FTOs and as guardian of the ideals of the Fair Trade movement. In Chapter 7, I argued that theology must maintain contact with the translated theological concept and this can only be achieved through the work of the Church. My three roles for Fair Trade action by churches in the context of mainstreaming offer example of the ways in which the Church can achieve this. The narrative of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade serves as a lesson for Public Theology. It confirms the fears of those theologians who talk of the vulnerability of theology in translation into a language that is widely understood. However, the understanding of Public Theology as a holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases articulates the possibility of balancing open engagement with a reemphasis on distinctive witness. Just as the Church must play a pivotal role in reasserting the values of justice and love of neighbour at the heart of Fair Trade, so too it must protect the distinctive emphasis of all acts of Public Theology, ensuring that the translated concept maintains contact with the theological insight that underpins it.

## **Conclusion**

This research has set out to better understand church action for Fair Trade by examining the action as a form of Public Theology. In doing so, it represents a contribution to the study of the nature of support for Fair Trade, by investigating the role that faith plays for churchgoing Fair Trade activists. It also illuminates the discourse of Public Theology by providing a detailed study of an example of one particular form of Public Theology. The research provides an answer to the question ‘what does Public Theology look like?’ The methodology of the research, in utilising the techniques and interpretations of Ordinary Theology, represents an innovative approach to the study of Public Theology. The research has deliberately shifted the focus of the study of Public Theology away from Church leadership and policy making and towards grassroots churchgoers. It also represents a shift in focus towards praxis, in investigating the meeting point between faith and action. I have found the theology of the participants and the action that they carry out to be so intimately linked, that to investigate their theology is to investigate their action and vice versa. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on my use of the methodology of Ordinary Theology, before setting out the results of my research. I have divided the summary of my findings into two parts: Part One, which describes how the beliefs of the churchgoers shape their support for Fair Trade, and Part Two, which discusses the lessons for the discourse of Public Theology from the detailed study of Fair Trade action by churches. Drawing on these lessons for Public Theology, I suggest some ways forward for Public Theology in the contemporary context of the ‘post-truth’ nature of public debate. In the final section, I identify potential future research to contribute to the discourse of Public Theology.

### **Reflection on the methodology**

This research has furthered the study of Public Theology by its testing utilising the methodology of Ordinary Theology and, in this section, I wish to briefly reflect on my use of this methodology. What was clear

from the outset was that at a fundamental level, grassroots churchgoers ‘do theology.’ The churchgoing participants were able to give an account of the connection between their faith and the action that they carry out with reference to biblical texts and Christian principles. My research affirms Astley’s (2002, p.3) view of real theology as a dialogue between the lives and experiences of believers and the Christian tradition. The testimonies of the participants bear witness to the intimate link between their actions and their beliefs. To some degree, the churchgoers only ‘take what they need’ from theology, to gain sustenance and guidance to carry out their commitments (Astley and Christie 2007, p.26). This was reflected in a straightforward attitude to biblical interpretation with a concentration on broad biblical themes and principles. Support for Fair Trade and acts of social justice is understood by these churchgoers as a biblical imperative. The most frequent response to denials of this imperative was incredulity that any Christian could justify such a position. Astley (2002, pp.74-6) describes a key characteristic of the God-talk of ordinary theologians as ‘kneeling theology.’ Astley (2002, p.76) states that this kneeling theology ‘incorporates the deepest value convictions on which they [the ordinary theologians] rest their lives and their deaths.’ This emphasis on values came through strongly in the interviews that I conducted. The churchgoers gave accounts of both their actions and beliefs with reference to deeply held values. This gave a clarity and power to their views on Fair Trade and the action that they carry out. The ability to articulate a course of action with reference to values points to a future opportunity for Public Theology, which I shall indicate in the section on Public Theology in the context of ‘post-truth.’

The understanding of real theology as a dialogue between the lives of the believers and the tradition of the faith (Astley 2002, p.3) has given my research an insight into the practical implications of the theological positions that the churchgoers advocate. By means of theological reflection, it would have been possible for me to outline a theology of Fair Trade with the potential to serve as Public Theology. However, the testimonies of the churchgoers have flagged up pertinent practical issues regarding the

outworking of Fair Trade action by churches as form of Public Theology. The issues include: the work of persuasion that is needed to convince congregations of the need to support for Fair Trade, or indeed to convince them of any public relevance for their faith; the frustration of the participants at the lack of official Church approval for church action for Fair Trade; and the disappointment that the participants express at the nature of society, which is perceived as antagonistic to social justice. I have been able to incorporate all these concerns into my research and they illuminate the practice of doing Public Theology. The issues are not purely practical ones but are interwoven with theology. The theological outlook of the participants leads them to confront these three difficulties; this generates theological reflection and a reshaping of the participants' theology. For example, the participants' views of society and the experience of their calls for social justice receiving either an indifferent, or hostile, reception, leads them to position Fair Trade as an act of resistance or challenge to society. Ultimately, the churchgoers place an emphasis on the counter-cultural nature of the Gospel message, as a result of their experiences of presenting what they view as a Gospel imperative to a wider audience.

Another characteristic of the interviews, which has had a significant impact on my findings, is the apparent contradiction of view contained within the same interview. A notable example is the interviewees' support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade and their desire to see Fair Trade serve as a demonstration of the true values of the Church, asserting the relevance of the Church to wider society.<sup>1</sup> Whereas an academic theologian may rationalise apparent contradictions within their own statements, the ordinary theologians do not set out to present a systematic theology, nor do they see the need for doing so. The ordinary theologians' holding together of apparent contradictions within the same testimony has proved valuable to my research. Such apparent contradictions fit with an understanding of Public Theology as a holding in tension of paradoxical emphases. It is not that the interviewees are offering both a correct and an incorrect statement,

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<sup>1</sup> As discussed in Chapter 6.

rather they are expressing both sides of the paradox. It is possible to hold the two sides in tension, but for my task of describing the nature of Public Theology, it has been necessary to highlight the friction between the two as well as the ways in which they can be held together.

My research has made a contribution to the methodology of Ordinary Theology in demonstrating that the analysis of the testimonies of ordinary churchgoers can contribute to the better understanding of a form of praxis and of Public Theology. The research demonstrates that grassroots churchgoers do think theologically about the action that they carry out for social justice. They can articulate links between theological reflection, broad Christian principles and the nature of the work that they carry out. The situation of Ordinary Theology at the intersection of the life and experiences of the churchgoers and the traditions of the faith, presents the opportunity for its study to illuminate many aspects of theology. As Astley (2002, p.162) argues, Ordinary Theology is ‘the Church’s front line’; it is first to respond to developments within society, as the lived experience of churchgoer interacts with the texts and traditions of the Church on a daily basis. My research has investigated a particular frontline, in the work that the Church carries out to promote justice in trade. Theology shaped directly by the experience of life deserves to be taken seriously. As I have found, the study of the theology of the grassroots churchgoer is a fruitful means of understanding an aspect of the life of the Church. Indeed, we cannot understand what it means to be Church without it.

**The findings Part One: How the beliefs of the churchgoing activists shape their support for Fair Trade.**

The findings of this research indicate the ways in which the Christian faith influences the actions and attitudes of churchgoers who carry out action in support of Fair Trade. This investigation of the connection between faith and Fair Trade support makes a contribution to the body of knowledge on Fair Trade; it addresses the imbalance of the existing academic commentary which has tended to downplay the role of faith in the

Fair Trade movement. These findings also make a contribution to theology, in that they describe the difference that faith can make in shaping churchgoers' involvement in an action for social justice. This research has looked beyond an interpretation of Christian faith as purely motivational, to examine the ways in which faith shapes churchgoing Fair Trade activists' understanding of Fair Trade and how they promote it. My bringing into conversation of Fair Trade and Public Theology has enabled me to develop a conceptual framework with which to better understand what is taking place in Fair Trade action by churches. This is formed by the characterisation of both Public Theology, and of Fair Trade, as a holding in tension of the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive. With reference to this conceptual framework, I will now set out the research findings on the difference that faith makes in the support of Fair Trade.

My research questions ask to what extent do the Fair Trade activists explain what they do with reference to theology? What are their sources of inspiration and how does their support for Fair Trade fit with their wider theological beliefs? In Chapter 4, I examined the theology of the churchgoing participants in relation to Fair Trade and found that the churchgoing participants do make connections between theological insight and their support for Fair Trade. The participants draw inspiration from biblical texts and refer to Christian principles and biblical themes in explanation of their support for Fair Trade. There is a practical bent to their theology which focuses on what they understand as a Gospel imperative to action. Right practice is their priority above an intellectual commitment to right doctrine. The churchgoers' linking of faith and action is expressed in two clear themes which emerge from the analysis of my data; these describe the ways in which the churchgoers' theological outlook on Fair Trade shapes their interpretation of Fair Trade and the nature of the work that they carry out. Firstly, that the churchgoers understand Fair Trade as an act of justice, and secondly, as an opportunity to demonstrate Christian principles.

Almost all of the churchgoers refer explicitly to Fair Trade as justice and their understanding of the concept is largely informed by biblical references to justice, particularly God's preferential concern for the poor.

At a fundamental level, Fair Trade as justice is not a form of ‘charity’; it is a moral obligation. An implication for the understanding of Fair Trade as a form of justice is that the work of the ethical consumption scheme is not strictly delineated. It is an integral part of the work for social justice and is therefore seen by the churchgoers as complemented by political activism for structural change. I argue that the interpretation of Fair Trade as an integral part of the work for justice represents a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of both Fair Trade and of all Public Theology. Work for social justice possesses an engaged emphasis, in that it is carried out in coalition with a multiplicity of partners and represents a coming together of diverse sections of the community. This diversity does not represent a dulling of the distinctive message of Fair Trade, as joint action working with partners involves a coming together to support distinctive values informed by the concept of justice. The participants’ view of Fair Trade as offering opportunity for the demonstration of Christian principles also shapes their views on the concept of Fair Trade and the action that they carry out. For effective demonstration to take place, both engaged and distinctive emphases are required. If Fair Trade is to demonstrate Christian principles to an audience outside of the Church, it has to engage with that audience, whilst to demonstrate justice, the practice of Fair Trade must itself be just. Fair Trade which acts in accordance with principles which are themselves counter-cultural to the values of ‘the world’, must offer a distinctive witness, demonstrating an alternative to mainstream trade.

A key question for my research is how the churchgoers’ support for Fair Trade fits with their wider theological beliefs. In Chapter 5, I discussed the ways in which the participants position their support for Fair Trade in relation to their understandings of the Kingdom of God. For the majority of the participants, there is a strong connection between the action that they carry out in promotion of Fair Trade and their interpretation of the nature of the Kingdom. The participants indicate that their work for Fair Trade offers either foretaste of the Coming Kingdom of God or a contribution towards building the Kingdom in this life. This linking between Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God fits with the participants’ focus on praxis. Offering

foretaste of, or contribution to the building of the Kingdom of God, requires action. Theology is made real in ‘doing’ rather than in subscribing to knowledge and doctrine which is not acted upon. The interpretation of Fair Trade as justice also forms a good fit with the churchgoers’ views of Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God. Fair Trade is able to reflect (or contribute to) the Kingdom of God because it is inspired and guided by justice, a core value of the Kingdom. Fair Trade as demonstration can also be readily understood through the lens of the Kingdom of God, in that the demonstration serves as representation of the values of the Kingdom, including justice, love of neighbour and the right stewardship of creation. In Sub-Section 5.4.2, I brought the testimonies of the churchgoers into conversation with reflections from Northcott (2011a) and Song (2004, pp.393-7), who argue that church support for Fair Trade can be positioned centrally to the Christian faith, to the extent that it offers foretaste of the Kingdom of God. An interpretation of Fair Trade as demonstration of the coming Kingdom of God fulfils the participants’ outward looking drive and inclination to view theology as praxis. Yet it also serves to ward against despondency in the face of the sheer scale of injustice in the world. Fair Trade is, in a sense, inadequate to the task of combatting the injustice of the global trade system, yet it is fit to demonstrate the Kingdom of God because it is informed by core values of the Kingdom.

In Section 5.4, I brought the reflections of the churchgoing participants on Fair Trade and the Kingdom of God into conversation with the thinking of Bretherton on Fair Trade. Bretherton positions Fair Trade as a form of provisional improvement for the welfare of the earthly city, rather than as foretaste of the Coming Kingdom. I indicate two major points of difference between the views of the participants and those of Bretherton. Firstly, Bretherton allows a role for theology in the motivation and guidance of Fair Trade but he recommends a guarded approach to the equation of Fair Trade and theology. The participants take the opposite view and call for Fair Trade and theology to be more closely identified. They are frustrated by the lack of recognition of Fair Trade by the Church and its positioning of the concept to the fringes of its concerns. Secondly, Bretherton discusses



Christian support for Fair Trade in terms of individual action and he does not refer to the collective action of congregations. Conversely, the participants view Fair Trade as an opportunity for congregations, and the Church as a whole, to demonstrate its core values. There is a point of meeting between the participants' views and those of Bretherton in that they share his concern that theology can be rendered vulnerable in the face of market interests. I argue that this should engender a call for vigilance but should not deter the Church from close identification with the practice of Fair Trade. In calling for greater identification between Church and Fair Trade, the participants are expressing support for an outward looking theology that is engaged with a wide audience. Their concern regarding the power of market influence represents an awareness that engagement brings risk and a need to protect the distinctive message of theology. The participants are effectively describing Fair Trade as a Public Theology and one in which the paradoxical emphases of the engaged and the distinctive need to be held in tension.

The churchgoing participants' concern regarding the power of the market comes to the fore in discussion of the mainstreaming of Fair Trade. In Chapter 8, I discussed the churchgoers' attitudes to mainstreaming. I described their support for mainstreaming because of its ability to assist millions of producers and its raising of the profile of the Fair Trade concept. However, the churchgoers express multiple concerns with the progressive mainstreaming of Fair Trade and there is resonance between these concerns and much of the scholarly commentary on mainstreaming (see, for example: Goodman et al 2012; Haden-Pawłowski 2011; Jaffee 2011). This attitude of both support for mainstreaming and a call for vigilance against the encroaching power of the market, represents a holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases of Fair Trade and of Public Theology. The drive for effective engagement leads the churchgoers to support mainstreaming and its ability to reach a wide audience. Through dialogue between the Fair Trade movement and market actors, change can be made to business practice to the benefit of producers from poor communities. This support for engagement comes with an attendant concern to protect the

distinctive message of Fair Trade, and the theological values which underpin it, from the encroaching power of the market. For the churchgoers, their understanding of Fair Trade as a work of justice and as demonstration of Christian principles, requires that the practice of Fair Trade exemplify justice and live up to principles such as the love of neighbour and right stewardship of creation. The exploitative practices of large corporations pose a threat to the distinctive witness of Fair Trade. If the practice of Fair Trade is not sufficiently distinct from the values of the mainstream economy, then it cannot serve as demonstration of a form of trade informed by the radically different values of the Kingdom of God.

The carrying out of action for justice and the demonstration of Christian principles requires concentration on both the emphases of Public Theology: the engaged and the distinctive. The ability of the churchgoing Fair Trade activists to hold the emphases in tension makes them well placed to fulfil a pivotal role in the Fair Trade movement in the context of mainstreaming. The holding in tension requires continued engagement between a theologically inspired and guided Fair Trade and a wide audience, including dialogue and cooperation with the mainstream market. In this engagement, the concerns of the churchgoers regarding the influence of the market should engender vigilance and a reassertion of the ideals of Fair Trade. In Section 8.4, drawing on the testimonies of the churchgoers regarding mainstreaming, scholarly commentary and theological insight, I suggested three roles for Fair Trade action by churches in the context of mainstreaming. These roles indicate the ways in which the Church can contribute to the Fair Trade movement to ensure the purity of the concept of Fair Trade. Through grassroots activism, support for FTOs and upholding the core values of the Fair Trade movement, churchgoers can balance the increasing power of market actors in the context of mainstreaming with a reassertion of the theological concepts of justice and love of neighbour at the heart of Fair Trade.

**The findings Part Two: Lessons for Public Theology from the study of Fair Trade action by churches.**

From this detailed study of one specific form of Public Theology, original insight has been generated as contribution to the discourse of Public Theology. My research indicates that the task of Public Theology is not clear cut; there are competing roles which are related to the ways in which the nature of ‘the public’ is understood. In Chapter 3, in examination of the public nature of Fair Trade action by churches, I outlined that the work carried out by churchgoers in promotion of the Fairtrade Town scheme in Skipton has effectively brought together diverse sectors of the community in support of one project. This activity fits with an understanding of churches as repositories of social capital, providing the necessary bridging capital to strengthen bonds within communities. Justice and love of neighbour at the heart of Fair Trade can be seen as spiritual capital, the values which motivate the churchgoers to generate social capital. A view of social capital and spiritual capital working to complement one another can be useful in describing Fair Trade action by churches but it cannot offer the full picture. The concept of social capital, as described by Putnam (2000), is based on the strengthening of bonds within communities and society. However, the work to promote values which constitute spiritual capital may engender challenge to society, and result in division, as much as in cohesion.

Reflections on the nature of ‘the public’ can result in different courses of action for Public Theology depending on how ‘public’ is understood. The understanding of public associated with the concept of social capital is a cooperative, or potentially cooperative one, whereas, interpretations of a public realm dominated by powerful and antagonistic forces may require the response of resistance. The research participants refer to both a cooperative and an antagonistic interpretation of the public realm. Their enthusiastic description of the Fair Trade Town project, with its success in bringing together diverse partners, fits with a role for Public Theology in bringing different sectors of society together. However, the churchgoers’ interpretation of the nature of contemporary ‘society’ is largely negative as it is viewed as antagonistic to the values that inform Fair

Trade. There is resonance between the churchgoers' description of society and Kierkegaard's view of the public as 'untruth.' The response of theology to this interpretation of public must be to challenge and to resist, which may engender division.

These findings indicate a dichotomy at the heart of the public nature of Fair Trade action by churches. This reflects the characterisation of Public Theology as the holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases. The emphasis of engagement is represented in reaching out to a wide audience outside of the Church, in bringing together diverse sectors of the community to facilitate a joint project. The distinctive emphasis emerges in the role for Fair Trade of denouncing injustice, challenging the status quo with calls for political change and resistance to the powerful forces of the market. The different outlooks on the nature of the public realm, and hence different roles for the voice of theology, highlight the difficulties in identifying the appropriate approach for Public Theology in contemporary society. An imbalance between the engaged and the distinctive emphases of Public Theology poses a threat to theology. An over-emphasis on engagement may lead to an unquestioning attitude to the prevalent values in society, for example the values of the market. This can make theology vulnerable to co-option by the dominant forces in society. An over-emphasis on the distinctive element, may render theology alien to an audience outside of the Church, leading to its rejection and the loss of theological voice in the public realm. Public Theology has to be relevant to a wide audience whilst retaining a distinctively Christian message.

Fair Trade action by churches as an engaged Public Theology works in partnership with a diversity of actors in the Fair Trade movement. This brings theology and the Church into close contact with adherents of religions other than Christianity and secular actors in the Fair Trade project. Although churchgoers and Christian organisations play a strong role in the Fair Trade movement, its messaging and outward presentation is essentially secular. Examination of the secular presentation of Fair Trade is fruitful for Public Theology, in that it serves as an example of a theologically inspired concept which has gone on to reach a wide audience by speaking in a

publicly accessible language. In Chapter 6, I discussed the views of the churchgoers in relation to the secular presentation of the Fair Trade movement. They are largely supportive of secular presentation, so as to reach out to the widest possible audience and to demonstrate the inclusive nature of the Fair Trade movement. The non-churchgoing community stakeholders state that they find the churchgoers who coordinate the Fair Trade Town scheme open and welcoming and they do not perceive a religious / secular divide. This is echoed in the statements of the churchgoers. Their lack of emphasis on a religious / secular divide is bound up with a theological outlook which does not recognise a strict Church / world binary. In this there is resonance between the outlook of the churchgoers and the thinking of Bonhoeffer (1955, p.195) and his view that the reality of God is to be found in the midst of the reality of the world.

The churchgoers' support for the secular presentation of Fair Trade is complicated by apparently contradictory statements which call for church action on Fair Trade to serve as a demonstration of the true nature of Church. The churchgoers wish to see this demonstration backed by the official support of the Church, including Church leaders speaking out in favour of Fair Trade. Crucially, the churchgoers identify Fair Trade as an opportunity to demonstrate the relevancy of the Church to wider society. This apparent contradiction can be best understood by applying the conceptual framework of engaged and distinctive emphases. The secular presentation of Fair Trade has a clear emphasis on engagement; theology is in open conversation with diverse parties within the Fair Trade movement, speaking a language which is accessible to all and not particular to the Church. Conversely, action for Fair Trade which serves as demonstration of the relevance of the Church to contemporary society, must be recognisable as the distinctive voice of the Church. These aims are not irreconcilable and can be held in tension within the same act of Public Theology. Both aims are joined together in the rooting of Fair Trade in a theology of justice. In identifying who the churchgoers regard as partners in the Fair Trade project, they do not refer to any religious qualification; adherents of all religions and none can be regarded as partners. However, the churchgoers indicate that

what qualifies any person or organisation to be regarded as a partner in the Fair Trade movement is their commitment to justice. The uniting around shared values reasserts the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology. Fair Trade can be presented in a secular manner, provided that it gives a distinctive account of justice. The account of justice is distinctive, not in the sense that it is the exclusive preserve of the Church, but in offering clear contrast to the paradigms of contemporary society, challenging its structures and the views of individuals who seek to bolster the status quo. For the churchgoing participants, the distinctive account is essential for Fair Trade to offer an alternative to the mainstream market and for Fair Trade action by churches to serve as a witness to the true nature of the Church.

For the discourse of Public Theology, these findings indicate that it is possible for Public Theology to exist in the form of a secular presentation of a theologically inspired concept. The secular presentation can be held together with a demonstration of the true nature of the Church, but this can only be achieved by a firm rooting in theology. The Church working in a movement of diverse partners, can advance Public Theology as long as the movement represents a 'coming together' around shared values. Partners do not necessarily have to understand the key values as theological, it is enough if they are motivated by values which are dear to the Christian faith. Action rooted in Public Theology can thrive in secular presentation but the action that is carried out must give a distinctive account of its values; distinctive in the sense that it provides clear contrast with the paradigms of mainstream economy and society.

The secular presentation of Fair Trade represents an accessible language, through which, a theology of justice can be understood by a wide audience outside of the Church. My study offers the opportunity for the discourse of Public Theology to learn from the experience of a work of translation of theology into a publicly accessible language. In Chapter 7, I discussed the process of translation and pointed to some difficulties which Fair Trade action by churches faces in maintaining contact between theology and the translated concept. Effective translation must respect both engaged and distinctive emphases of Public Theology. The method of

communication, the way in which the theologically derived concept is talked about, respects the engaged emphasis, in that it is accessible to a wide audience. The content of the communication is distinctive, in that it is derived from theology and articulates its core message. As an example of successful translation, Fair Trade action by churches may at first sight appear unproblematic. However, my research indicates that there is a reluctance on the part of the participants to speak of Fair Trade in the language of faith. The message, that Fair Trade should be presented in a secular manner to reach a wide audience, has been so successfully communicated that half of the churchgoing interviewees express that they do not see any role for the language of faith in the action. I argue that, for Public Theology, this outlook provides cause for concern. Public Theology, as a holding in tension of engaged and the distinctive emphases, requires that engagement in the form of translation is balanced by attention to the original distinctive insight. The connection between theology and the translated concept must be maintained and this can only be achieved through the ongoing involvement of the Church. To embed the act of Public theology within the life of the Church will require the ability to articulate that Public Theology in the language of faith.

The evidence of the research interviews is that the churchgoers do reflect theologically about Fair Trade. This is carried out on an individual basis or in conversation with a small number of other churchgoing activists. However, there was little evidence of the churchgoers reflecting theologically about Fair Trade as church. There is dissonance between this finding and the understanding of the process of translation as dialogical and ongoing. Theology should not simply pronounce, undergo translation and then withdraw whilst the translated concept takes on a life independent of the Church. Public Theology must speak but also listen, consider and reply. The process of consideration is one of theological reflection, which brings together an interpretation of the contemporary situation with the traditions of the Church and requires articulation in the language of faith. If Public Theology is to be meaningful to members of congregations, theological reflection should be carried out in meeting together as church. The

churchgoers refer to the considerable work of persuasion in enlisting the support of members of their congregations in the promotion of Fair Trade. To convince Christians of the public relevance of their faith is a task facing all Public Theology and this too will require articulation in the language of faith. The research interviews reveal that work on Fair Trade which is embedded within the life of the church, including in its core activities, such as sermons, prayers and worship is more successful in engaging members of congregations. Both the theologising necessary to maintain Public Theology, and the work of persuasion needed to convince members of congregations of the public relevance of faith, requires articulation in the language of faith, to embed Public Theology within church life. The experience of Fair Trade action by churches serves as a call to vigilance for Public Theology. It is vital that theology maintains contact with the translated concept, through the work of the Church. The narrative of the translated concept can change over time, shaped by the changing nature of the contemporary situation and, without the active involvement of the Church, the narrative may ultimately diverge from the theology from which it was created.

In Chapter 8, I discussed the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, which provides illustration of the changing nature of the translated concept over time. To some extent, the experience of mainstreaming proves the fears of those theologians who adopt a cautious approach to Public Theology to be correct.<sup>2</sup> These fears stress the vulnerability of theology in the public realm; in engagement with the world, theology will become more akin to the world and lose its distinctive voice. The mainstreaming of Fair Trade provides evidence that the translated concept can take on a narrative of its own, as Butler (2011, pp.112-13) points out, the original theological insight still resonates within the translated concept, but in some ways, it can also depart from it. The increased involvement of market actors in Fair Trade has brought about many developments which can be seen as a departure from the original theological rooting of the Fair Trade movement. Mainstreamed

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<sup>2</sup> See Section 2.3.



Fair Trade as a translated concept is, in a sense, attempting to cut loose from theology. This cutting loose of the translated concept is not an inevitable consequence of attempts to translate theology into a publicly accessible language. The translated concept will only cut loose if the Church lets it. The continued involvement of the Church in Fair Trade, the enthusiasm of the participants for fighting for the soul of the Fair Trade movement, and the challenge to a linear view of the progression of Fair Trade, all indicate that the original ideals of Fair Trade still exert a considerable hold over the concept. These signs highlight the possibility of an ongoing relationship between theology and the translated concept.

The lesson for Public Theology is that it should not be defeatist. Engagement within the public realm does not of necessity lead to a progressive secularisation. The characterisation of Public Theology as a holding in tension of the paradoxical engaged and distinctive emphases is helpful, as it guards against both defeatism and complacency. There is nothing organic about the dilution of theology in the public realm, but the translated concept will not maintain its connection with theology without the active involvement of the Church. The experience of mainstreaming highlights the need for the ongoing holding in tension of the engaged and the distinctive emphases. Fair Trade could not bring about change or inspire any section of society, but a small ethical niche, without engagement; but this engagement requires continual vigilance to ensure the integrity of the distinctive nature of the concept.

For Public Theology, Fair Trade as a translated concept serves as an illustration of the dynamic nature of the process. The holding in tension of the engaged and distinctive emphases must itself be dynamic in order to respond to the changing nature of the contemporary situation. The evidence of the interviews indicates that although the churchgoers encourage continued engagement, action is needed in order to reinforce the distinctive theological insight that underpins Fair Trade. For the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, it is the Church that can act to hold in tension the engaged and distinctive emphases. My identification of three roles for Fair Trade action by churches in the context of mainstreaming represents such an attempt.

The involvement of church based activists, their support for the FTOs, and the role of theology as guiding ideal for the movement, are all activities which attempt to reassert the distinctive emphasis of Public Theology in counterbalance to the open engagement of Fair Trade with the market. For all Public Theology, the holding in tension of the paradoxical emphases must be carried out by the Church, indeed it is difficult to envisage any effective form of Public Theology which can exist without its active involvement. The changing nature of the contemporary situation, as illustrated by the mainstreaming of Fair Trade, requires fresh theological reflection. This has to be carried out by churchgoers, whose lived experience occupies the space at the intersection between theology and the contemporary situation, between Church and world.

### **Public Theology in the context of ‘post-truth’**

Drawing on the lessons for Public Theology from my study of Fair Trade action by churches, I will now suggest how some of these findings can inform the future role for Public Theology in the contemporary ‘post-truth’ context. The past decade has witnessed the rise of the ‘post-truth’ nature of public debate. This shift is exemplified in the election campaign for the President of the United States and in the referendum campaign on the UK’s membership of the European Union (both held in 2016). Suiter (2016) describes the debate around these elections in terms of ‘post-truth politics,’ in which appeals to the emotions dominate over reason. Indeed, not only in election discussions, but on many issues of public interest, the nature of debate has taken a different form. For example, Evans (2017, pp.10-15) discusses the failure of climate campaigners to convince of the pressing need to combat climate change by means of an appeal to rational argument. Suiter (2016) comments on the weakened nature of public discussion, which is characterised by an absence of appeal to fact or evidence and, in its stead, an increasingly polarised population is making its choices based on emotion and allegiance to varied forms of identity. There is resonance here with Kierkegaard’s (1978, pp.90-95) characterisation of

the public; in which no individual feels responsible for the actions of the collective, they do not set aside time to consider a ‘public’ response, rather the actions of the ‘public’ are characterised by the absence of responsibility. Kierkegaard (1978, p.91) argues that, far from representing the communal, the public is characterised by the absence of communal life; it is what emerges when the communal has been destroyed. Evans (2017, p.112-13) refers to the discourse of social capital, viewing the decline in social capital identified by Putnam in terms of an absence of meeting place in which to think collectively about values.

With these threats to the quality and nature of public debate, where does this leave Public Theology? For the role of Public Theology in adding its voice in public debate, there are implications for doing Public Theology if the nature of that public debate is flawed. Suiter (2016) describes a rise of ‘populist’ politics, in which appeals are made to negative emotions, such as hatred and fear of the other. If these are the values of the mainstream, then this pushes Christian theology into a counter-cultural role. Although the participants in my research see a role for their act of Public Theology in bringing people together as a community, they are also conscious of a society that, on the whole, rejects core Christian principles, such as justice for the poor and marginalised.<sup>3</sup> Whilst stressing that Public Theology represents a holding in tension of engaged and distinctive emphases, a public climate increasingly more hostile to principles of social justice may well require a reassertion of a distinctive Christian message and a preparedness on the part of theology to embark on resistance and challenge.

The diminished impact of rational and scientific argument in public discussion, as characterised by Suiter’s (2016) post-truth politics, raises many concerns as to the welfare of public life. However, to some extent, it offers opportunity for Public Theology to make the voice of theology heard in the public realm. Evans (2017, p.104) refers to a ‘myth gap’, whereby individuals and groups campaigning for social change lack emotional narratives with which to challenge the powerful narratives of the post-truth

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Section 3.4.

world. Evans argues that this challenge can no longer come from rational argument and scientific data. He points out that narratives need to be found with which to combat the ‘anti-myths’ which have proved to be enchanting to a wide audience in the post-truth context. Public Theology is, and will continue to be, in the business of adding its voice in the public realm in a language spoken and understood by a wide audience. However, the post-truth context creates a space for Public Theology to challenge the dominant paradigms in society with direct reference to the narratives of faith. In Sub-Section 7.2.3, my discussion of the language with which Public Theology speaks refers to the judicious deployment of the language of faith in the public realm. Religious narratives can serve as an alternative vision with which to challenge the anti-myths of the post-truth context. They can also hold together an appeal to emotion without sacrificing rational meaning. Evans (2017, p.104) calls for the public articulation of myths with the capability to ‘animate real-world social and political movements to incubate new values and push policymakers to make a radical shift towards justice and sustainability.’

The churchgoing participants’ ability to link together theological values, such as a biblical conception of justice, with their support for Fair Trade points a way forward for Public Theology. Their reference to the values that inform Fair Trade has the ability to engage the emotional faculties needed to combat the considerable emotional pull of the anti-myths of post-truth. Northcott’s (2007, pp.183-4) outline of the Christian concept of love, which informs the work of Traidcraft, is a pertinent example of this grounding of the action of Public Theology in a religious narrative with the potential to engage the emotions as well as the intellect. The anti-myths based on fear can be challenged by political and social projects that are based on love. As I indicated in Sub-Section 4.6.2, the participants understand Fair Trade as serving not only as a positive demonstration of justice, but also as a prophetic denunciation of injustice. The role of Public Theology in the post-truth context is not only to present alternatives which challenge dominant paradigms (such as xenophobic policies springing from an irrational fear of the other), it is also to directly challenge unjust points of

view. As unpopular as it may be for a public enchanted by dominant paradigms to have their assumptions challenged, the prophetic role of Public Theology demands that this challenge takes place.

Whilst I am broadly supportive of the arguments of the churchgoing participants in their support of the secular presentation of Fair Trade, the post-truth context does require that the balance is shifted to allow for religious language to be used in support of Fair Trade. In Section 7.1, I outlined arguments for the role of religious voices in the public realm. Habermas (2011b, p.65) argues that the use of religious language in the public sphere should be permitted as it has the capability to convey an implicit moral content. This implicit content may gift to a wider public insight which can benefit the welfare of the public realm. Theologians, such as Neville (2013), argue for the benefits that biblical narratives can bring to the discussion of public issues. These outlooks fit with a Public Theology which can appeal to emotional sensibilities, which offer necessary supplement to reliance upon hard data and rational argumentation. Public Theology should not eschew the rational, but the gift of theology to the wider public is this ability to hold together an appeal to emotion with reasoned argument.

The views of Sandel on virtue are insightful. Sandel (2009, PP.244-69) calls for a return to the contribution of moral and religious standpoints in public discussion. Insights into the nature of the 'good life' provide an overarching framework for the solution of social problems. Sandel challenges the view that all social problems can be fixed by managerial solutions, rather they may require a moral transformation of society and of the attitudes of the citizens within it. My research has generated insight into a public action which is informed by overarching values. Fair Trade action by churches challenges the paradigm of trade based on the profit motive and the dominance of the consumer and, in its stead, advocates a trade based on values of justice for the producer and love of global neighbour. Sandel (2009, p.265) argues that the lack of moral content in public debate has led to an inability of society to exercise guidance or control over the market mechanism. Church action for Fair Trade introduces just such a form of

guidance for the market. This guidance is rooted in overarching values, which are themselves backed by the rich tradition of Scriptural narrative. The need for an appeal to overarching values in the post-truth context should lead to a shift in the messaging of Fair Trade to make more explicit the values which inform it. Utilitarian arguments of enlightened self-interest are unlikely to be able to challenge dominant paradigms with the same force that a recourse to values can achieve. The research participants' explanations of their support for Fair Trade, effectively linking a practical course of action with the value of justice, indicates a way forward for Public Theology. The linking that the participants articulate must reach a wider audience. Whether spoken of in the language of faith, or in translation, the values which inform acts of Public Theology should be made explicit rather than hidden. This task reemphasises the importance of theology maintaining its connection with the translated concept (as I argue in Chapters 7 and 8). A Public Theology which is vocal and explicit about the values which inform it, has to maintain contact with the articulation of those values in the life of the Church.

Public Theology has a renewed role to play in the context of post-truth public debate. Courses of action which can bring about social justice can no longer expect to garner the public favour through rational argumentation. Rather, public discourse is dominated by emotional responses, often without factual or moral foundation. Public Theology, in linking just action with explicit reference to the values which inform it, can offer challenge to dominant narratives which are informed by dark fears and hatred. The nature of contemporary public debate requires that values are emphasised and backed by the rich tradition of theology, with recourse to religious narrative and the language of faith. Public Theology has a unique role to play in articulating just action, it does not exist purely to bolster a political agenda but to contribute to the reshaping of public discourse. It gifts to a wide public a vision of the good life and the promise of a return to reference to the moral in public debate. My articulation of the participants' holding together of practical action for social change with Christian principles, in the form of a vision for justice, points the way forward for

Public Theology. If it is to transcend post-truth, Public Theology must be bold. It must be bold enough to articulate its support for social justice with explicit reference to the resources of the tradition; to persuade of the right course of action with reference to values and deeply held faith. Public Theology must also be bold enough to believe in itself; in the context of post-truth, Public Theology is urgently needed, now more than ever.

### **Future research for Public Theology**

The research participants stress the importance of praxis, of demonstrating faith by action, rather than vocalisation of doctrine. Cloke and Beaumont (2012, p.43) identify a rise of interest in praxis, particularly amongst evangelical churchgoers. The high prevalence of churchgoers in action such as: the provision of foodbanks, facilities for the homeless, or support for recent immigrants and asylum seekers, requires more acknowledgement from academia and particularly from theology. The blurring of boundaries between evangelical and socially-orientated Christians, between imperatives for the conversion of the individual and the conversion of society, is a pertinent field of study for theology. The public profile of these forms of Christian praxis paves the way for an increase in action-orientated Public Theology. There are parallels between church action for Fair Trade and praxis, such as the provision of foodbanks. As a form of praxis, there is a theologically inspired motivation behind the action. Foodbanks are not only forms of assistance for the poor, they are also a demonstration of both Christian care and denunciation of a society which allows families to go hungry. The praxis of foodbank provision is linked to calls for political change and this message is reinforced at local and national levels through national NGOs and Church leaders. Research with a similar structure to this project would provide valuable insight into the potential for other forms of praxis to serve as Public Theology. There may be different lessons for Public Theology to learn in these other contexts. Although the participants in my research refer to a societal rejection of the message of Fair Trade, and express negative reactions to the

nature of 'society', it would be valuable to explore the public engagement of a theology which runs almost totally contrary to the prevalent narratives of society. In a UK context, the political atmosphere driven by a partial media, and opportunistic politicians, vilifies asylum seekers. This dominant narrative has enchanted a receptive public. It would certainly add to the understanding of Public Theology to analyse the voices of those who carry out action to assist asylum seekers. It is pertinent to investigate how these churchgoers understand the relationship between theology and society. The literature of the discourse of Public Theology stresses the importance of theology's contribution to public debate, but what shape does Public Theology take when its insights are opposed by a public prejudiced against them from the outset? How far can Public Theology go to challenge and bring division? Regarding the holding in tension of paradoxical elements, if Public Theology is saying what society does not want to hear, then is the conclusion for it to withdraw engagement and take the form of a space of resistance or is Public Theology always in the business of compromise? These questions require academic consideration reliant upon analysis of the voices of participants in the action of Public Theology.

This thesis contributes to the discourse of Public Theology in offering an in-depth investigation of a form of Public Theology in practice. The significant body of literature which discusses, from a theoretical perspective, what Public Theology is, or should be, needs to be complemented by specific examples of practice which can serve to either support, or question, the theoretical basis of the discourse. The experience of this research has highlighted considerable resonance between my empirical findings and contributions to the discourse of Public Theology. For example, the understanding of Public Theology as ecclesial theology, or warnings regarding the loss of distinctive theological voice in close engagement with a wide public, are highlighted in this study of Fair Trade action by churches. Research of other forms of Public Theology will yield resonances which serve to complement the discourse. Public Theology will be in constant flux due to the dynamic nature of the contemporary situation; research into contemporary forms of Public Theology will assist the



discourse in keeping abreast of changes in society, and hence the ability to produce fresh theological insight in response.

### **Concluding remarks**

My research has contributed to redressing the imbalance on the part of academic commentary on Fair Trade which has tended to downplay the role of the Christian faith in the Fair Trade movement. The research has indicated that faith does make a difference; the theology of the churchgoers shapes their understanding of Fair Trade and the nature of the action that they carry out. For the discourse of Public Theology, this research represents a detailed study of one particular form of Public Theology, shedding light on what it means for theology to 'go public' and providing some lessons to inform the practice of Public Theology. Throughout the thesis, I have stressed the characterisation of Public Theology as a tension between two paradoxical emphases, the engaged and distinctive. Recognition of the need to hold in tension these two emphases is vital for the future of Public Theology. To abandon the notion of translation of theology into a language widely understood, would be to leave theology with a weakened voice in the public realm. That is not say that there is not room in public discussion for the Church to speak in the language of faith. Translation of theology will require vigilance to ensure that in engagement with a wide audience the distinctive nature of theology is upheld. Theology must retain contact with the translated concept and this can only be realised in the life of the Church. My research, to some extent, confirms the fears of many theologians that doing Public Theology is a risky business; but what can be gained without risk? The ability of Fair Trade to inspire the public imagination with a practice based on theological principles, and the dedication and enthusiasm of grassroots churchgoers to demonstrate that practice as an outworking of their faith, is reason enough to urge theology to 'go public.'

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