

Word and Spirit: Reading Stance and Selected Emerging-Adult Reader Attributions of  
Experience of God in Church-Situated Readings of the Bible

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## Abstract

The focus of this qualitative research project is an examination of the role reading stance played in participant reader religious appropriations of the Bible as apprehensions of God. The Bible reading transactions of nine church-situated British emerging adults' solitary readings were investigated. Participants reported attendance at Sunday services and Bible study meetings sponsored by an Evangelical-Charismatic church located in a large city in the north of England. Participant biblical transactions are characterized by the actualization of meaning and its appropriation in terms of an apprehension of God in life experience or a state of affairs. Bible reading offered participants the prospect of reading God's presence in their lives. Reading stance emerged in data analysis as a significant factor in the connection of Bible reading to deemed religious experience. Reading stance, the reader's selective awareness of elements that transpire in the transaction of reader and text, shaped the way reader readings guided their readings of experiences of God. The role of the reader in Bible reading is situated within a theoretical framework composed of studies in the academic fields of Christian spirituality and the anthropology of Christianity, Archer's (2003, 2007) "internal conversation" sociological theory, and Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995, 2005) "transactional" theory of reading. This framework emphasizes the pragmatic and ideological dimensions of the reader's meaning-making activity during reading. The pragmatic dimension refers to the situated reader's purposeful uses of the Bible in the apprehension of God. The ideological dimension refers to the historically formed and socially embedded set of church teachings and practices that serve as interpretive structures to apprehend God. Research findings indicate pertinent intrapersonal and interpersonal factors had a shaping influence on reader orientations toward the Bible. A faith-life anxiety of uncertainty of Christianity, associated with the reader's major life transition from dependence to independence, was a significant intrapersonal concern that was indicative of a general disposition towards Bible reading. Also, an important interpersonal feature was the interpretive structures of church "Word and Spirit" teaching, the rationale of which authorizes the apprehension of God. Participants engaged with this church ideology as it offered the prospect of the resolution of their anxiety. These factors had a significant impact on reader appropriations of actualized meanings as deemed apprehensions of God. An extensive single case study of an emerging adult reader's readings indicates the particular combination of these influential factors contributed to the idiosyncratic character of his reading stance. The role reading stance played in the spiritual readings of the Bible in participants solitary readings suggests noteworthy theoretical and pedagogical implications for spiritually engaged Bible reading. The reading stance implied in the epistemology of Evangelical biblical interpretation is critiqued in support of the need for a new and holistic model of spiritually engaged reading. Pike's (2000a, 2003a) pedagogy of "responsive teaching" is discussed as an approach that contributes to the development of active and responsible readers who are spiritually engaged. These theoretical and pedagogical considerations which affirm the important role reading stance plays in the spiritual life of the Bible also contribute towards the development of a holistic model of the spirituality of Bible reading.

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## 1.0 Spiritual Readings of the Bible: Solitary Bible reading and reader apprehension of God

*Chapter Abstract: This chapter seeks to introduce and to provide a rationale for empirical research on the subject of the role of the church-situated solitary reader in the relation of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. Succinct case and ethnographic studies of the spiritual lives of the Bible among participant readers highlights three salient aspects of the topic in need of empirical research. The shaping influence on Bible reading of 1) the reader's life transition from dependence to independence, 2) the rationale of church interpretive structures, and 3) the reader's meaning-making activity in relating biblical texts to an apprehension of God in life experience. The thesis argument and organization of chapter findings reflect these characteristics of church-situated solitary acts of Bible reading.*

### 1.1 Case study of solitary Bible reading: Same verse, different readings

This thesis is on the nature of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality among selected emerging adult readers. It is an investigation into the relation of solitary reader readings of the Bible to their readings of God in their lives. Emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000) is a significant cultural phase of life from the ages of 18-29. This critical life transition and its influence on participant readings of the Bible will be discussed further in chapter 4.0. Nine emerging adult readers within this age range participated in a yearlong qualitative research project that was undertaken from 2008-2009. Their pseudonyms are Lee, Kevin, Andrew, Bradley, Clara, Simon, Helen, Deborah, and Melanie. All participants have attended Sunday services and Bible study activities sponsored by an Evangelical-Charismatic church located in a large city in the north of England. The influence of church teaching on participant readings is explained in chapter 5.0. Each participant responded to a series of three in-depth semi-structured interviews on the topic phenomenon. The process of selection of participants and Bible passages as well as the data collection methods used will be described in detail in chapter 3.0.

Participants reported a variety of readings of the biblical phrase “he [Jesus] had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (Mark 6: 34, New International Version). This verse, one of the selected biblical texts for the first interview, occasioned different spiritual understandings by multiple solitary readers. The following readings by four participants indicate how this text was read differently by each reader.

Lee focused on the word “sheep” and “blind followers” came to mind. “[I]f I just do it because everyone else is doing it then I’m missing something. So that was kind of what was hitting me I think.” This sense was related to the previous verse which says Jesus’ followers “ran on foot from all the towns” to get to meet with him (V. 33 NIV). In our first interview he recalled an image in his mind while reading the verse of paparazzi waiting for Britney Spears, an American pop star, to emerge and then rush to follow her every move. He got the sense of people who are “really crazy

about going to church which is fantastic ah but maybe like they focus too much on like they're going to church or focus too much on the pastor of the church and they kind of like maybe don't know why ah that they kind of forget the reason for it the purpose for it." Lee enjoys attending church but he does not want to get "carried away" and start "doing things without thinking about them." He wants to be honest about his reasons for doing certain things rather than simply "pretend" that he gets it. "If I don't understand something I question it. That's the right thing to be doing and I kind of like build my faith on really ah strong foundations and that kind of that factor...was the overall message that I got from the verse passage."

Andrew finds comfort in the text's description of Jesus having "compassion" on "sheep without a shepherd." He identifies with the shepherd-less sheep and finds himself "so lost and confused and wandering around." As a young person he is at the place where he is "just getting on my life" but needs "direction." He fills his life full with things like football, girls and clubbing and finds he doesn't "feel as close to God as I should." He says he struggles with his relationship with God and experiences "emptiness." This was not the case earlier in his Christian life when he sensed closeness with God, especially in prayer. "I've known I'm speaking to God, I've known that He's hearing me." This intimacy with God in prayer is missing now and he feels he's "just talking to myself." Questioning God's "commitment" to him he finds assurance in Jesus' compassion. Yet he wants to experience a former intimacy with God that is now missing in his busy life. "It's like I just want to text God and just get a text back from Him."

To Bradley British society is like a flock of "sheep without a shepherd." "[W]e're quite a liberal society and I thought you know this is where we don't always have direction we don't have that shepherd and that's why it's so liberal." He also identified himself as being a sheep in the fold of this "world" and in need of Jesus' compassion. After years of doing recreational drugs he "was in a really sort of sickly low place" in his life. He was struggling mentally with life after the loss of close friendships. He was feeling "isolated" and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. One night Jesus "spoke to my heart and offered me this lifeline." It was then he experienced the "transformation" of his life. He became a Christian. He is very thankful that "Jesus took compassion on me!"

It is in Jesus as shepherd that Simon sees the "real purpose" of his life on earth. Jesus was "trying to bridge the gap between man and God." He offered guidance to "wandering sheep" so they could have a "better relationship with God." He sees himself as a sheep without a shepherd, "wandering in this uncertain unknown wilderness." This verse is important to him as "there are times when I feel lost and need guidance to find the right paths." He related this verse to a time when he was uncertain about his future and was in need of a job. He also thinks Jesus' followers were looking for spiritual "fulfillment." "Maybe there's this kind of emptiness and the people want to kind of fill it with God

(indistinct speech) the word of God.” He says he is “unsure” and “lost” at times and is in search of fulfillment. “I kind of want some kind of fulfillment in some way to kind of guide me.” Simon is hopeful Jesus can fill the gap since he is “always there for man”.

Each of these solitary readers read the same biblical text and came to different understandings of it. Each reading is characterized by the reader’s sense of the passage and its relevance to his life. There is an integration of the text’s meaning and its spiritual significance to the reader. The spiritual status of the reader’s life is linked to his rendering of the text. The text’s meaning contributes to an understanding of God’s activity, or lack thereof, in the reader’s experience. Also the life circumstances of the reader contribute to the text’s spiritual significance.

For Lee, Mark 6: 34 means his faith is best built by an avoidance of pretension through a questioning of things he does not understand. He is a new Christian and recent university graduate. The verse reassures Andrew of Jesus’ compassion even though he feels estranged from God. He is a socialized Christian in the midst of a turbulent process that will eventually lead him to stop reading the Bible or going to church. Bradley’s reading explained why Britain is so liberal. It reminds him he was a lost sheep in the UK and in need of a shepherd, and of his experience of Jesus’ compassion that transformed his life at a critical moment. He is a new Christian who rebelled against his parents Christianity. Simon sees Jesus as the spiritual fulfillment for which the sheep are searching and hopes Jesus can fill the gap he feels in his life. He is a socialized Christian who is searching for help to address the uncertainties of his childhood faith.

The observed differences in the text’s spiritual significance highlight the role of the solitary reader in the appropriation of actualized meaning in Bible reading. According to reader response theory the reader occupies an important role in the fundamental relationship between language and response that makes possible the production of meaning from a text. Reader-response theory makes a distinction between the potentiality of textual statements for unrealized effects in reading and the reader’s synthesis of realized textual effects as an actualization of the text’s meaning (Tompkins 1980; Rosenblatt 1994). Reader actualizations of the text’s potential can also indicate the experience of a communicative event that addresses her or him. Reading becomes “an event of discourse” in which the text’s actualized meaning addresses the reader (Ricoeur 1976: 92). “Interpretation is completed as appropriation when reading yields” a discourse event, a happening that makes possible the “disclosure of new modes of being” (Ricoeur 1976: 92, 94). (For the purposes of this research there is a distinction between the reader’s actualization and appropriation of textual meaning. The actualization of meaning is the emergence of meaning from the potential stimuli of the text’s visual array of verbal symbols during reading. Appropriation is the reader’s relation of actualized textual meaning to an instance of an apprehension of God in life experience or state of affairs.) In each reading of Mark 6

the text's spiritual significance was the reader's appropriation of actualized meaning. These differences raise the role of the solitary reader in the relation of textual meaning to the reader's understanding of God's activity in his or her life. At issue is the spiritual life of the Bible in the solitary reader's readings.

## 1.2 The drama of spiritual readings of the Bible

This research is an exploration of the border lands between Bible reading and Christian spirituality to understand participant reader spiritual readings of an apprehension of God in the light of their transactions with biblical texts. It examines the role of the solitary reader in the relation of biblical text and Christian religious or spiritual experience. It seeks specifically to understand how participant reader readings of the biblical text guide their readings of God's activity in their lives.

The project tracks biblical and spiritual readings of nine socialized and converted Christian young people over the period of one year. The rationale for selection of these readers is addressed in chapter 3.0. They are in a critical life transition of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000), the features of which contribute to dissonance about their Christian faith. Readers report a vital juncture of personal concerns and a significant interpretive structure of a Christian church that has a shaping influence on their structuring of the relation of the Bible to their lives. They are on a spiritual quest to resolve certain personal faith and life tensions by means of doctrinal beliefs and practices of a local church in which they participate in varying degrees. They are searching for sufficient evidential basis to authenticate their Christian faith and way of life. The character of these meaning-making conditions contributes to our understandings of the connections between the reader's weaving of text and life.

This investigation highlights the interrelationship between the personal and structural in interpretive frames of Bible readings of solitary readers for spiritual purposes of understanding religious experience. An understanding of the role solitary Bible reading plays in their Christian religious experience takes place at the intersection of these pertinent intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that inform readers' biblical transactions. The following is a brief ethnography of the church-situated British emerging-adult readers of the Bible. It provides background to an examination of the uses of the Bible by solitary readers for the spiritual purpose of apprehending God's activity in their lives.

Participants are characterized by a preoccupation with an anxiety over their uncertainty of the Christian faith and of Christianity as an enduring way of life. They are between the ages of 19 and 26. (A description of each participant's age is given in Table 3.4. of chapter 3.0) There is a tension over the reality of their socialized or acquired Christian faith and its viability as a personal way of life. This uncertainty is related to their critical life transition into young adulthood which is characterized by

their assumption of responsibility for their beliefs and way of life. As will be shown from the data (see 4.0), they are stuck in the anxious tension between faith and doubt on their way to young adulthood. Their vulnerability to this anxiety motivates the search for a meaningful way to engage with Christianity. They are on a quest to resolve this tension by seeking to authenticate Christianity and thereby retain it as a vital part of their lives and personal identity. Institutional Christianity is perceived to provide a compass to guide them in this quest.

The teaching and congregational life of Mosaic Church appeals to participants. (See 3.0 for permitted use of the church as a research site and its actual name.) They see this Evangelical-Charismatic assembly affiliated with New Frontiers International in a large city in the north of England as offering promising ways of resolving their anxiety of uncertainty of Christian faith and life. Church teaching on the Bible and Holy Spirit mediates understandings of God's activity in the life of a Christian. This "Word and Spirit" theology advocates an equal engagement with the Bible and the Holy Spirit to apprehend personal, experiential knowledge of God's presence and action. A personal encounter with God is stressed in church materials and meetings. God communicates himself through the divine text of the Bible and by means of the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit. That is, God speaks through the oral reports of an encounter with the Spirit. As will be shown from the data in chapter 5.0, individual testimony of spiritual experience is the prominent form of reported instantiations of God's activity in Sunday worship. The Bible is interpreted to support *charismata* both highlighting its role in apprehending God's activity and raising expectations of the value of spiritual experience. Word and Spirit beliefs and practices present participants with a means to come to know God personally. Church leadership promotes the preaching, group study, and solitary reading of the Bible as a means of coming to know God personally. Leaders also place a strong emphasis on a direct and immediate encounter with the Holy Spirit as a way to relate to God. Congregants are told to request through the practice of prayer the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Word and Spirit emphasis informs an ideology of Bible reading, an understanding of how to apprehend personal knowledge of God in one's life. These dual approaches signify a spirituality of reception through the Bible and oral testimony of God's communicated presence and message.

The spiritual life of the Bible is related to the particular blend of a reader's anxious reading disposition and church Word and Spirit teaching. The solitary Bible readings of participants indicate the engagement of institutionally informed interpretive structures as a means to resolve their personal anxiety of uncertainty of Christianity. Readers are attracted to the emphasis of Word and Spirit teaching on the apprehension of divine knowledge. Reports indicate the appeal of personal, direct and immediate experience of the Holy Spirit as a way to deal with their doubts about Christian faith and way of life. They envision the prospect of spiritual experience as providing sufficient evidential basis for authentication of Christianity as an enduring way of life. Spiritual experience plays an

epistemological role in the ontological dilemma of participants. An encounter with God warrants belief in Christianity as a resource for empowerment of a way of life, especially a critical life passage of personal independence.

This succinct ethnographic study indicates the spiritual life of the Bible for participant readers is contingent upon the impact of salient intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. It suggests research should focus on the phenomenon of solitary Bible reading with consideration of the reader's dispositional concerns (see 4.0) and the interpretive structures of the reader's institutional context (see 5.0). Such an approach contributes towards the development of a holistic model of reader uses of the Bible for experiential knowledge of the divine. (The distinct qualitative and theoretical aspects of this thesis are addressed below in section 1.6.) This raises interest in the need for research of the relation of solitary Bible reading and Christian spirituality among church-situated British Emerging Adults. Emerging adulthood will be further defined and described in 4.0.

### 1.3 Why I decided to do this study

My interest in Rosenblatt's transactional theory first developed during my pastorate of an Evangelical church in USA. Ministry responsibilities raised for me certain questions about the nature of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. Can we read the Bible for spiritual formation? If so, how? A very basic concern was how to approach the intentional development of personal practices of Bible reading for the express purpose of Christian spiritual formation in an era of diminished Christianity in the West. Evangelical biblical interpretation emphasized the importance of a critical reading of the text to Christian spirituality. The focus of the ancient practice of *lectio divina*, sacred or holy reading, emphasizes the importance of the reader's subjective sense of the text to spiritual development. I first read Rosenblatt's (1995) *Literature as Exploration* in a bookstore in Indianapolis. Her theory offered a way to engage with the relation of the reader's production of meaning in the reading process to his or her apprehension of divine knowledge in life experience. It became part of my effort to locate a more effective approach to spiritual reading of the Bible. Further reading raised my sensitivity to theoretical and pedagogical issues important to an understanding of the relationship of Bible readings and accounts of Christian religious experience. Rosenblatt's pragmatic model led me to reconsider the viability of the epistemological basis of Evangelical hermeneutics.

The Evangelical commitment to having a correct reading of the biblical text tends to overlook the importance of a holistic pedagogy in producing competent readers of the Bible. Instruction in biblical hermeneutics and exegesis in Evangelical and mainstream Protestant seminaries tends to endorse a post-Reformation historical-grammatical approach to the study of biblical texts. The historical



paradigm of biblical interpretation is influential in seminaries: “the model still governs the practice of much biblical scholarship” (Patte 1998: 4). This approach privileges the autonomy of the text. “Historical perspective and consciousness is often determinative of our interpretation (Sullivan 2007: 34). Porter (1990: 283) cites biblical scholars’ “preoccupation with historical concerns” of the Bible as a main reason why reader-response theory flounders in academic biblical studies. This historical focus is of consequence to Christian spirituality. “Few biblical scholars engage in spiritual readings of scripture, and many who do seldom specialize in historical-critical and literary methodologies” (Dempsey 2007: 121). The historical-critical underwriting of biblical interpretation in Christian education fosters a false dichotomy between critical reading and spiritual reading that needs to be corrected. The transactional theory of reading addresses this false dualism and offers a much needed contribution to Evangelical Bible reading practices.

#### 1.4 Why research the role of the solitary reader in the relation of Bible reading and Christian spirituality?

The nature of the role of the reader in the relation of church-situated solitary Bible reading and Christian spirituality is virtually unexplored and is in need of empirical investigation. Extensive bibliographic searches have not revealed the existence of an empirical investigation of the role of the solitary reader’s church-situated readings of the Bible to make sense of God’s activity in the reader’s life experience (see 3.1.1). This lacuna is an indication of a glaring gap in qualitative research of church-situated solitary uses of the Bible in Christian spirituality.

The virtual lack of empirical inquiry into ordinary readers’ solitary uses of the Bible for spiritual purposes is noteworthy as the Bible is traditionally considered the authoritative source for individual Christian spirituality. Notions of Christian spirituality are associated with the Bible, and Bible reading is considered to be potentially spiritually transformative (Schneiders 2002). Inherent in this understanding is the readers’ “consent to the existence of a textual and spiritual tradition which makes its claim on us” (Stuhlmacher 1977: 85). Situated Christian practices of Bible reading assume some effective relationship exists between the act of reading and the reader’s spiritual development. Schneiders (2002: 136) presents a classic Christian understanding of the relationship when she writes, “[T]he subjectivity of the reader is transformed by the influence of the Word of God, which is mediated by the words of the text and, as Augustine said, made effective by the interior work of the Spirit.” The Spirit’s ‘interior work’ is judged to be important as his task is to bring about enduring change in the reader. For “the Spirit operates in our hearts and minds, in ourselves as subjects, to illumine and persuade us of the divine words and deeds” (Frame 1986: 231). Many theologians believe the spiritually (trans)formative potential of God’s Word occurs as the reader responds

positively to the Holy Spirit's internal application of the divinely communicated message of the biblical text.

On one level the connection of the Spirit's use of God's Word in the life of the reader is a mystery. "God and the Holy Spirit cannot be confined to a method" of interpretive inquiry (Stuhlmacher 1977: 90). The agency of the Holy Spirit in the connection of biblical message and spiritual development on this vertical plane is not subject to investigation. However, on another level, what might be called the horizontal plane, human agency in the relationship of Word and Spirit is open to investigation. Challenging the claim that the interior work of the Holy Spirit occurs outside of and beyond the parameters of human understanding, Thiselton (1980: 92, italics in original) asserts the Spirit "work[s] *through*" its ordinary course and not independent of it. Whilst the work of the Spirit is not contained by human understanding it is arguably conducive to it. The horizontal plane offers the opportunity of observation of participant expressions of human understanding of the work of the Spirit. Observable features of operative processes by which readers appropriate textual meaning in accounts of spiritual experience provide data for empirical study.

The employment of human understanding is acknowledged as an important feature of Bible reading. Bible reading occasions the performance of the reader's capacity for the making of textual meaning (Labberton 1990; Thiselton 1992). The exercise of this capacity is recognized as being involved in the reader's interpretive activities of obtaining knowledge of the divine from biblical texts. One popular treatment of Evangelical biblical hermeneutics co-authored by a Pentecostal (a volume prominently displayed at the book table of the church site of this research project) identifies "enlightened common sense" as the most vital factor the reader brings to the interpretive task (Fee and Stuart 1993: 14). The point here is that biblical interpretation is thought to occur within processes of ordinary human understanding thereby warranting empirical inquiry. The assumption of 'common sense' however fails to appreciate adequately the complexity of interpretive activity, an issue that will be addressed in the theory (see 2.0) and findings chapters (see 4.0, 5.0, and 6.0).

Also, the reader's meaning making capacity is recognized as being involved in reading activities associated with obtaining personal knowledge of the divine associated with Christian spirituality. The ancient Christian Bible reading practice of *lectio divina*, an approach embraced by many young evangelicals today (Webber 2002: 184), affirms the role of human affection as well as cognition in coming to know God. In the twelfth century *lectio divina*, holy or sacred reading, came to be structured systematically in four stages of *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio* (Sheldrake 2007: 37). The reader meditates on the reading experience and prays the text to God as he or she re-reads it. Slow and repeated reading of the text is conducive to an unfolding of an intimate knowledge of God. By means of contemplative reading the reader inhabits the text and through the cognitive-

aesthetic production of meaning makes it his or her own (Pike 2005:190). The human work of meaning making is at hand even in spiritual reading. The activities of human comprehension are at play in both the actualization and appropriation of Bible reading. They are most certainly common in the reader's appropriation of actualized textual meaning in accounts of Christian spiritual experience. The role of the solitary reader in the relation of biblical interpretation to Christian spirituality presents observable horizontal aspects for empirical study. The lack of adequate empirical research highlights the need to consider significant factors of the topic under investigation.

### 1.5 Exploring the reader's role in the relation of Bible reading and Christian spirituality

This investigation of the spiritual life of the Bible is an inquiry into how participant readers relate the Bible to their lives. A useful distinction is made between 'critical' readings of the Bible which are centered on the text and 'pragmatic' readings which are focused on life of the reader (Patte 1998: 15). Devotional Bible reading, for example, occasions an opportunity for believers to come to the text with the intention that it will have something to say to them about the actual situations of their lives. They "deliberately bring to Scripture their concrete lives with the expectation that the text will have a teaching for them in these situations" (Patte 1998: 15). There is an expectation of "*the biblical text to 'read' their life-experiences*" and offer them "a new way" of seeing them (Patte 1998: 15, italics in original).

Christians are story makers. Jacobs (2008: 12, italics in original) believes Christians are "*obliged*" to turn their lives into stories. A Christian should reflect about events over time in order to discern a coherent pattern of God's activity in one's life (Jacobs 2003). We account for experiences of reality by means of the composition of stories of life events which provide "coherence and continuity" to our lives (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998: 7). The scripting of a life story is an ordering of life experience into a narrative by means of some world and life view. "[T]he interpretive frames we employ to assign meaning to events shape fundamentally how we experience them" (Brookfield 1998: 105). Christian spirituality is concerned with an understanding of life experience from the view of faith. The reader's experience in the world is oriented to the "reality construction" of Christian belief (Schneiders 2002: 136). The "host text" sponsors the reader's "autobiographical text" (Rich 2009: 9). The conceptualization of experience as having Christian meaning is a feature of pragmatic Bible reading.

The Bible is influential in helping believers to interpret their personal story of faith. It is a primary source for the Christian in the organization of life events into a story. For pragmatic reader's the "'Word of God' for them is a new way of perceiving specific aspects of their lives and/or what they should do in this situation" (Patte 1998: 15). The Bible's account of God's overarching redemptive activity in human history as well as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels highlight

the existence of a meaningful purpose in the apparently random and chaotic mix of life events. In addition, scripture contains numerous autobiographical accounts of life renderings with a manifestly spiritual focus. Pragmatic readers can weave the texts of the Bible and life into a meaningful, coherent narrative. For example, the life stories which Pentecostals and Evangelicals tell are shaped by the Bible. “They walk companionably inside the Bible, considered as the tale of tales and the book of books, and so script their own autobiography out of Scripture” (Martin 2006: 36).

Bible reading also mediates the reader’s ongoing conceptualization and narration of life experience. Life’s stories are not fixed entities but are subject to reinterpretation, a phenomenon which indicates stories can be in a state of fluctuation (Brookfield 1998: 105). “The story *is* one’s identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life” (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998: 7, italics in original). The Christian recognition of the duty to develop and maintain accounts of the working of God in life’s events can be an influential factor in the reader’s ongoing appropriation of the biblical text’s meaning potential. The reader’s appropriation of meaning can take the form of the scripting of life experience. The “ascription” of religious meaning occurs as “an individual thing is set apart as special” (Taves 2009: 9). The rescription of life experience is a revision of a life story which can be made possible by new appropriations of meaning.

Christians are also storytellers. The verbalization of life stories is a mainstay of Pentecostal-Evangelical testimony culture. “Like Scripture itself, their autobiographies are testimonies, honed repetition, as well as assorted chronicles of selected events” (Martin 2006: 36). Life experience is not inherently meaningful. The meaning of life events is structured by us. “Experiences are constructed *by* us as much as they happen *to* us” (Brookfield 1998: 105, italics in original). Christian understanding of experience is defined by socially embedded discourse. Christians make use of speech genres to aid them in their formation of a significant and gratifying interpretation of life (Jacobs 2008: 39). “[T]here are meaningful connections between the shape of lives and the shape of some stories” (Jacobs 2008: 27). One notable feature of the pattern of the speech genre of testimony is the recounting of a “decisive or at least pivotal moment at which one’s life changed its direction” (Jacobs 2008: 22). As will be seen, life-altering and dramatic encounters with God are features emphasized at Mosaic Church (see 5.0) and in participant accounts (see 6.0).

This study is also an inquiry into the pertinent intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that affect the spiritual life of the Bible in the hands of ordinary readers. “What is the lived spiritual experience of this text?” (Liebert 2005: 90). It is important to make plain the pertinent factors that impact readers’ readings. The personal faith and life concerns of readers and the church context in which readers relate textual meaning to life experience are fundamental to this inquiry. The critical inquiry into Bible reading should pay attention to the theological categories and pragmatic religious interests

which impact reader's interpretive choices (Patte 1998: 22). The reader quest to apprehend divine knowledge is also affected by church ideology of Bible reading. "A focus on reading is invaluable because it allows us to analyze how, and to what extent, religious texts are made meaningful and authoritative within particular Christian traditions and communities of practice" (Engelke 2009: 152). These factors are important to an understanding of how God becomes real to solitary readers of the Bible.

Institutional aspects of the socially and culturally formed action of reading warrant investigation (Boyarin 1992; Bielo 2009b). As a cultural institution, a church is a religious site of the production and reception of biblical and spiritual meanings. As a community of practice, a Christian church is a social assembly of individuals who meet together regularly to address and engage in spiritual and missional activities. Scholars "must be attentive to the differing logics of the ways texts function within communities" (Robinson 1995: 16). The linkage between the biblical text and spiritual reality cannot be assumed. "What the written word signifies, then, and how it does so, cannot be taken for granted" (Engelke 2007: 19).

Church theology and semiotic assumptions accentuate different aspects of the Bible reader's interaction with the text for spiritual purposes. A distinction can be made between the communication of a divine message and the reader's communion with the divine in Bible reading (Vanhoozer 2000). The reader's communion with God is connected to the meaning he communicated in the text. The text's meaning potential is related to "Christian ideologies of reading" (Engelke 2009: 170). A theological economy and semiotic rationale (Keane 2003) inform the reader's actualization and appropriation of the text's divine message to apprehend divine activity.

There are three salient areas in need of research in the quest to understand the relation of solitary Bible reading and Christian religious experience. It is fitting to consider the spiritual lives of the Bible in solitary readings among British young people, especially as we approach the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of the 1611 King James Bible.

### 1.5.1 Solitary Bible reading and the religious lives of young people

The primary issue under consideration here is the impact of "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000) on the role of the solitary reader in Bible reading. Stated in question form, how does this significant life transition shape the spiritual readings of the Bible among church-situated British young people? Participant Bible readings are characterized by an anxiety over the uncertainty of their socialized or acquired Christian faith. This uncertainty is related to their major life transition from adolescence to independence in which they undertake an examination of the reasons for their religious beliefs. As the

data will show (see 4.0), they are caught in the anxious tension between doubts about their inherited or acquired faith and the retention of their faith as a way of life. Bible reading plays a role in their search for reasons to believe. Certain pressing concerns are a significant factor in their Bible readings. All readers express feelings of being distant from God, a common experience which raises significant questions. Is God really there? Is my Christian faith real and true? They have an intense desire to be close to God. Christian spiritual experience is valued as providing a sufficient basis for their anxiety resolution. Bible reading offers an occasion to address their concerns about faith and intimacy with God. The Bible is recognized by them as an authoritative source for making sense of spiritual experience. Reader appropriations of actualized biblical meanings indicate their search for understanding of God's activity in their lives. It is a means by which they can determine the validity and meaning of spiritual experience. The spiritual life of the Bible depicted in participant readings is related to their critical life transition, a cultural phase of life described in 4.0.

At a time when researchers are confronted with different accounts of religious faith as being either in a resurgent or waning state, it is especially important to be attentive to the "complexity and subtlety of thinking, feeling and acting in religious contexts" (Beckford 2006: xiii). Woodhead (2010: 241) maintains research of religion and young people should address the enquiries of "where, how and why young people find meaning, value and purpose, how they symbolize and communicate it, and how this relates to their differing social positions and empowerment."

The emerging adult participants of this study give evidence of an attraction to institutional religion in their quest for intimacy with God. Institutional Christianity is perceived to provide a compass to guide them in this search. Evangelical-Charismatic theology highlights the prospect of divine communication and communion in Bible reading. Church teaching on Word and Spirit underwrites the importance of Christian religious experience. As an authoritative source the Bible occupies a significant role in reader understandings of spiritual experience and offers a means of intimacy with God in their lives. God's presence and intervention in life is deemed to provide a resolution to the inner faith and life struggle and empower the transition into young adulthood. There is resilience of Evangelical-Charismatic religion among socialized Christian participants (see 4.3.2). However, the beliefs and practices of this faith tradition undergo a challenge by at least one participant for reasons we will consider in a findings chapter (6.0).

The character of young people's religiously based Christian spirituality can be researched in terms of two basic approaches. As Dandelion (2010: 236-238) explains, young people's religion can be evaluated in terms of deviation from the religious concerns of an older tradition or it can be assessed in terms of the features the life experience and identity of young people themselves. The deviation model seeks to portray any generational religious change a society undergoes and has the benefits of

explanatory and predictive powers. The reflexive approach seeks to understand young people on their own terms and has the value of describing the novel impact of youth on religion and spirituality with a view towards the creation of analytic categories for future research. The reflexive model gives voice to the “questions arising out of the experience of young people themselves” (Dandelion 2010: 234). Consideration of the reflexive voice of emerging adult participants offers a way to understand the role Bible reading plays in their religious lives.

To the best of my knowledge there is a gap in empirical research of the impact of emerging adulthood on the church-situated solitary Bible readings of the socialized and converted Christian. There is a need for such research to understand local manifestations of British youth religion.

### 1.5.2 Interpretive structure: Theological norms of reader actualization of a divine message in solitary Bible reading

It is important to take into consideration certain germane theological and practical issues of biblical interpretation. Social science engages with the belief structures and spiritual practices of the theological tradition under investigation (Cartledge 2003: 17-18). This is especially true given the “rescripting” tendency in social science toward over-generalizing when applying concepts of reductive ontologies to religious phenomena (Martin 2006: 18). The researcher’s grounding of subjects’ talk and actions within categories reflective of their terms “constitutes a rescript of their own accounts” (Martin 2006: 25).

One germane issue is the theologically normative basis on which the meaning of the reader’s textual effects is dependent. Two groundbreaking works that engage with theological issues of interpretation in Bible reading are Thiselton’s (1992) *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: the theory and practice of transforming biblical reading* and Vanhoozer’s (1998) *Is There Meaning in This Text? The Bible, the reader, and the morality of literary knowledge*. The critical concern addressed by both authors is the capacity of texts in general and biblical texts in particular to change readers from beyond the interpretive conventions and strategies of their reading communities. Christian theology affirms “an encounter with something in the text not of our own making” (Vanhoozer 1998: 407). The matter is one of “whether texts can challenge or transform readers, individually or communally, from outside their context” (Thiselton 1992: 537). Literary theories that posit biblical readings solely in the reader’s interpretive processes or interpretive context are theologically problematic (Thiselton 1992: 550). Both authors seek to defend that the theological meaning of what the biblical text does to the reader is contingent ultimately upon more than a reading community’s interpretive conventions and strategies. At issue is whether the reader’s registering of reading effects of biblical texts is attributable to his or her interpretive tradition or to the spiritual power of the text itself.

At the heart of the matter is the theological relation of Word and Spirit. Word and Spirit theologies are “mediatorial concepts” that are intended to form “the bridge between the world and the transcendent God” (Williams 2000: 123; 116). Theologically the disclosure of God’s Word is linked to the Spirit’s guidance of the reader’s interaction with the biblical text. The accepted ordering of the Word-Spirit relation impacts the interpretive activity of Bible readers’ actualization and appropriation of a divine message. There are two general theological positions of the relation. The Word of God is in the literal meaning of the biblical text as brought to life by the Holy Spirit or it is in the church’s Spirit-guided living tradition of biblical understandings (Vanhoozer 1998: 410-412). There is an ordering of Word and Spirit in each view in which priority is given to one or the other. In essence the Word of God is delivered by means of the biblical text as aided by the Spirit or it is conveyed by means of a Spirit-directed practice of understanding the Bible. In the former, the Bible is identified as the Word of God. In the latter, the Word of God is associated with the role of the Spirit in the church’s interpretive tradition. The Spirit guides the church into “new readings” of the biblical text that address contemporary readers (Vanhoozer 1998: 415). Word and Spirit views provide theological underwriting of interpretive norms in reading communities.

Theological norms contribute to a general framework by which the phenomenon under investigation can be understood. These norms play a significant role in the solitary reader’s production of meaning in Bible reading. The priority of Bible or Spirit impacts the reader’s actualization and appropriation of a potential transcendent message in Bible. Each offers a distinct way in which the reader understands the address of God’s Word. To the best of my knowledge there is a lacuna of empirical research on the phenomenon of emerging adult solitary performance of theological norms in Bible reading to make sense of God’s activity in the reader’s life experience.

### 1.5.3 Interpretive structure: Semiotic ideology of reader apprehension of God in solitary Bible reading

Christian theology assumes Bible reading has spiritual potential for the reader’s transformative apprehension of God. The reader’s spiritual communion with God is a feature of Bible reading (Vanhoozer 2000). Readers come to know God in their lives through Bible reading (Candler 2006: 3). Yet the question is the means by which readers relate text and life to apprehend divine knowledge. “The central problem practical theology must face is the hermeneutical question about the way in which the divine reality and the human reality can be connected at the experiential level” (Heitink 1999: 193).

Recent research in the anthropology of Christianity has provided insights into Bible reading practices (ex., Keane 2003; Engelke 2009; Bielo 2009a, 2009b). These studies include a focus on an ‘ethnography of reading’ which emphasizes the situated character of all reading (Boyarin 1992).



Reading practices are embedded in historical, social, and cultural settings. These accounts highlight the importance of situating readers within a particular context to elucidate the phenomenon of Bible reading. Of interest to this study is the impact on solitary Bible reading of the interpretive structures of the reader's community of practice. Engelke (2009: 154) draws attention to the importance of the "cultural logic" that underwrites reader understandings of the connection of material text and immaterial experience of the divine. For Keane (2003: 419) the immaterial meaning of the text's signs is related to the "semiotic ideology" of a reading community which is the operative and "basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world." Bielo (2009a: 52) sees the status afforded the biblical text in a Christian community as having a direct impact on personal and group Bible readings. The kinds of relationships Christian readers experience with the Bible are underwritten by certain presuppositions about the purpose and function of the biblical text that are at work in their communities of practice (Bielo 2009b: 5-7). These studies indicate the interpretive structures that are at work in a church community have a shaping influence on the solitary Christian reader's interactions with the Bible. These interpretive structures impact the church-situated solitary reader of the Bible.

The spiritual reality of the Bible's textual signs is related to the semiotic construct(s) that authorize the reader's apprehension of the divine (Engelke 2009). A semiotic system underwrites the relation of symbol and object, word and world. Church beliefs and practices of Bible reading supply certain "channels of communication" of religious knowledge of the divine (Engelke 2007: 19). The particular system of signification set in motion with the reader's interaction with textual symbols renders the text meaningful. This means that different ideological assumptions can circulate among different religious reading communities (Bielo 2009: 70). For example, Engelke's (2007) study of Zimbabwean Apostolics of Masowe Church shows a semiotic ideology at work that emphasizes the oral over written word in the apprehension of God. Also Bialecki's (2009) report of a Vineyard church in southern California shows a dialectical tension between the Bible and religious experience. This issue will be addressed in detail in chapter five (see 5.2). The primary focus here is to highlight the role institutional semiotic systems play in the solitary reader's connection between sign and Spirit. Semiotic structures are an observable factor in the reader's knowledge of God from the biblical text. To the best of my knowledge there is a research gap of empirical investigation of 'emerging adult' solitary reader's use of a church situated semiotic construct to make sense of God's activity in life experience.

#### 1.5.4 Solitary reader appropriation of actualized Bible readings in the apprehension of God

The theological rationale and semiotic conditions of Bible reading for spiritual purposes of apprehending God in life experience raise the issue of the solitary reader's meaning making activity.

Bible reading occupies an important position in the formation of the reader's understanding and expression of Christian religious experience. The character of Christian religious experience as reported by participants is linked to the reader's appropriation of actualized biblical meaning. Reader appropriations often take the form of an account of divine activity in life experience. The Christian reader makes connections between textual inscription and spiritual reality. The relation of Bible reading and Christian spirituality is linked to the "processes whereby traditions of practice and the worldviews embedded therein, which are deemed religious or spiritual by their practitioners, become the 'lived experience' of individuals or groups" (Taves 2003: 192-193). Christian spirituality "demand[s] some kind of meshing of 'our story' with the biblical story" (Young 1990: 149). Rosenblatt's (1994 [1978]) transactional theory of reading posits the production of meaning in the reader's collaboration with the text. Ricoeur (1976) highlights the communicative event of textual interpretation in which the reader personalizes actualized meaning through appropriation. The situated solitary reader plays a meaning making role in the actualization of divine message and the appropriation of it in life experience as an instance of divine communion.

It is also important to recognize the appropriation of biblical beliefs and values occurs in "different ways in different contexts" (Sheldrake 2005: 462). The idiographic nature of religious or spiritual experience requires researchers engage with it "*on its own terms*" (Liebert 2005: 91, italics in original). Attention must be paid to individual participant accounts of Christian spiritual experience of God. Christian spirituality is principally concerned with "the Christian spiritual life as experience" (Schneiders 2005b: 59). What is actually being observed is not the actual experience of individual interaction with God but rather some form of its manifestation. The meaning-making process is an important factor in how life experience comes to be understood by the reader as being spiritual or religious. The meaning of an experience is contingent upon the particular "meaning frame" with which it is engaged (Taves 2009: 118). It is by means of "interpretive structures of transcendence" that we come to understand spiritual experience (Howells 1997: 225). The reader's biblical readings play a role in the framing of accounts of Christian religious experience. More will be said about the character of Christian religious experience (see 2.2).

The role the solitary reader's appropriated biblical actualization plays in the framing of accounts of Christian religious experience is the focus of this thesis. Reader processes of meaning making are a factor in how a life event or state of affairs comes to be understood as religious or spiritual to the reader during reading. Bible reading provides concepts basic to an understanding and expression of Christian religious experience. To the best of my knowledge a rupture exists in empirical research regarding the solitary 'emerging adult' readers appropriation of Bible readings to account for God's activity in life experience. The character of Christian religious experience as shaped by the solitary reader's appropriation in Bible readings is under researched. There is a need to investigate the role of

the solitary reader as meaning maker in the appropriation of Bible readings in an apprehension of God in life experience.

In conclusion, the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality is a complex phenomenon. The character of the solitary reader's mode of interaction with the Bible cannot be accounted for solely by any one factor in the reading configuration of text, reader, and context. A privileging of text alone overlooks the impact of interpretive context and personal concerns on the reader's meaning making. A sole emphasis on the reading context ignores the role of the reader's personal concerns that can give rise to incidental textual effects beyond sociocultural interpretive conventions. A preoccupation with the reader only fails to do justice to the socially embedded status of texts and interpretive practices that are employed during reading. A non-reductive perspective is required to investigate the phenomenon of solitary Bible reading and Christian spirituality. An investigation of the relationship starts with an awareness of salient intrapersonal and interpersonal factors shaping reader approaches to the text for spiritual purposes. The individual reader's particular blend of personal faith concerns and institutionally situated interpretive structures is influential in the appropriation of the Bible to determine the spiritual character of life experience. Three pertinent features that characterize participant reader engagements of biblical texts are in need of empirical research. One, their Bible readings encompass pressing personal concerns associated with the major life transition of emerging adulthood. Two, their readings reflect an engagement of the rationale of church-situated interpretive structures that underwrites reader actualization of the text's divine message and authorize reader apprehension of divine presence. Three, their appropriated actualizations indicate the impact of reading stance on the meaning-making function of the reader in perceived apprehensions of God's activity in life experience. Empirical exploration of these virtually unexplored aspects of the solitary reader's apprehension of divine knowledge is basic to an understanding of the relation of Bible reading and Christian spirituality among participant readers.

## 1.6 Overview of thesis argument

It is the aim of this research project to explore how participant readers' solitary readings of the Bible shape their readings of God in their lives. The focus is to examine the Bible readings of church-situated British emerging adult readers. As my research progressed I came to understand the importance of the reader's stance in the relation of Bible reading and religious experience (see 3.1.4). The shaping influence of reading stance became apparent in my engagement of participant Bible readings with my readings in the fields of Christian spirituality, the anthropology of Christianity, sociology, and reader response theory (see 2.0). Research findings indicate an influential blend of urgent personal faith concerns and church interpretive structures shape reader orientations toward the text. Reading stance, by definition, is the reader's selective attention to textual features. It shapes a

certain way of seeing or perceiving the text. Reader textual perception shapes meaning making activity. Data analysis revealed reading stance was a significant mitigating factor in the ways in which readers relate the Bible to their lives. As catalysts of meaning-making, reading stance had a shaping influence on readers' biblical transactions of actualization and appropriation. This thesis is an assessment of the critical importance of the reader's reading stance to our understanding of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality.

As such, the thesis reflects two focal points: one, as noted it identifies through qualitative research a pattern of pragmatic and ideological dimensions that comprise the reader's reading stance toward the Bible; two, it seeks to test the concept of reading stance in an effort to contribute towards the building of a theory on the nature of the connection between Bible reading and Christian spirituality. Whilst the building of an actual theory is not the purpose of the research project, I deemed it important to test the general notion of reading stance as this was in keeping with my overall theoretical aim to understand the role reading stance plays in reader apprehension of God via solitary acts of Bible reading. An extensive single case study is presented to evaluate the assumption of the importance of the reader's stance to the relation of Bible reading and religious experience (see 6.0). This second focus of the thesis is developed from Popper's (2002) deductive testing of propositions. The overarching line of reasoning is based upon falsification (Flyvbjerg 2001, 2006). (See 3.2.4 for details of how the deductive test of falsification was used in my methodological approach.) The line of reasoning proceeds as follows: If the finding of the importance of reading stance to religious experience is not valid in an extensive single case study, then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases. However, the validity of the finding from the presented extensive single case does not verify the importance of the reader's reading stance is valid in all cases. It is the argument of this thesis that the single case study presented does not falsify the assumption of this research of the importance of reading stance. As such, it is an original finding that contributes toward the building of a theory of the significance of reading stance to the connection of Bible reading and religious experience. This finding is qualified as further deductive testing is needed on the role of the reader's reading stance in the apprehension of God in solitary acts of Bible reading.

### 1.7 Implications of the nature of solitary Bible reading acts for research and thesis organization

It is important to note at the outset that the solitary reader of the Bible is not an isolated reader. There is a "deeply ingrained" notion of an isolated person reading a text to arrive at a sense of its meaning separate from a community of readers (Marshall 1995: 71). The reader-text relationship, however, is contingent upon historical, social and ideological streams within the reader's interpretive context. "Texts, readers, and contexts, each inseparable for the other, are also inseparable from the larger contexts in which they are enacted" (Galda and Beach 2001: 66) All reading practices are socially

embedded (Boyarin 1993: 4). The solitary reader's reading takes place within an interpretive community replete with conventions and strategies to construct the meaning of printed alphabetic symbols on the page (Fish 1980). Rosenblatt (1994: 20) rightly observes that "any reading act is the result of a complex social nexus." An interpretive community's "semiotic ideology" determines the status of the text and impacts the solitary reader's modes of signification of it (Keane 2003). The solitary reader's relation to texts is a phenomenon associated with an interpretive context.

A brief entry in Samuel Pepys diary illustrates the contextually situated aspect of solitary Bible reading. On Sunday 5 February 1660 Samuel Pepys attended church with his wife. "A stranger preached a poor sermon, and so I read over the whole book of the story of Tobit" (Pepys 1970: 42). His personal reading of this apocryphal book was located within the congregational setting of St Bride's Church on Fleet Street in London. Perhaps Pepys was reading this action story for "literary pleasure rather than spiritual edification" (Owen n.d.). Nevertheless, this event of a silent and solitary reading took place within the shared company of a public institution.

Long (1992: 193) rightly debunks the "ideology of the solitary reader," a misleading conception underwriting certain cultural notions of what it means to read. The concept of the lone reader can engender a range of expectations from an intellectually serious reader to an escapist or consumerist reader (p. 182). She locates the development of reading practices from within a "social infrastructure" (pp. 190-193). Based upon her research group reading practices in Houston Texas, she argues for a social collective understanding of reading. Reading is learned in primary social relationships such as family and classrooms. It is also impacted by social and institutional dynamics that privilege what is read and how it is read. The solitary reader's readings are socially authorized.

The solitary reader's embedded readings have implications for this research. Solitary Bible readings are instances of a reader-text interaction immersed within a church setting which is laden with signifying practices. Respondent reports indicate textual meanings generated during reading acts are comprised of salient influences primarily from the reader's personal concerns and interpretive context. The internal factor of the reader's existential concerns and the external factor of institutional interpretive structures are significant features associated with solitary reading of biblical texts. These pertinent aspects have a shaping influence on the reader's orientation towards the reading event. The phrase "solitary reader" as it is used in this study is simply a description of the type of reading being researched, as distinct from, say, 'group reading.' Its use is not intended to convey the idea of an ideology of the reader who exercises contextually isolated readings. The solitary reader's Bible reading is a situated personal event.

What all this means for this research is the findings of participants Bible readings can be negotiated on two levels, the ideological and the pragmatic. The term ideology is defined as a set(s) of ideas, historically formed and socially embedded, that structure and direct human interaction with the world (Boyarin 1992). The *ideological* level refers to the institutionally situated set of meanings that an Evangelical-Charismatic congregation of Mosaic Church incorporates as interpretive frames to apprehend God. Solitary Bible readings are guided by structures of signification whose logic underlies reader transactions. The *pragmatic* level is the situated reader's actual uses in Bible reading of these frames to apprehend God. Bible readings are related to church-situated interpretive structures.

Whilst this two dimensional framework offers an analytic distinction between institutional ideology and personal practice these factors are intertwined in actual Bible reading events. A focus on ideology alone does not address the interpretive flexibility of individual reader's Bible reading practices. Solitary readers may admit *ad hoc* readings that do not reflect a consensus of local interpretive standards. A focus on reader practices alone fails to do justice to the shaping influence of contextual ideologies on Bible reading. Taken together these factors provide a framework that seeks to recognize the interpersonal and intrapersonal character of Bible reading for spiritual purposes. The institutional and personal are salient features of the reader's solitary Bible reading, a factor vital to our understanding of the reader-text relationship.

These dimensions affect the organization of findings chapters. There are three findings chapters (4.0, 5.0, and 6.0) each of which addresses a specific aspect of the role of the solitary reader in the connection of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. Each chapter is organized according to the format of description, analysis and interpretation of the data (Wolcott 1994; Schneiders 2005b). The main objective of the first findings chapter (4.0) is to present data that highlights the impact of reader anxieties of faith and life on orientations to the biblical text. This chapter situates participant relations to the Bible in terms of a reading disposition. It establishes the specific reader concerns that are basic to this study of the phenomenon of Bible reading for spiritual purposes. The purpose of the second findings chapter (5.0) is to indicate the shaping influence on readers of Mosaic Church's Word and Spirit teaching on how to come to know God. It describes the rationale of the theological economy and signifying practices available to apprehend divine knowledge. Church beliefs emphasize personal encounters with God via the Bible and Holy Spirit. Participant readers are attracted to these interpretive structures as they offer the prospect of resolving their faith and life tensions. They adapt them as aids in their search for intimacy with God. The chapter's focus is to situate Bible reading within a reading ideology of spiritual experience which affects reader uses of the Bible. The third findings chapter (6.0) seeks to demonstrate the impact of a single individual reader's reading stance on his biblical transactions. This individual reading stance is characterized by the reader's particular blend of personal anxieties and rationale of church interpretive structures. This extensive case study

reveals reading stance has a dramatic impact on meaning making and structures how the participant relates the Bible to an apprehension of God in his life. The reader's particular reading stance is a mitigating factor in his readings. His reading stance is an essential factor in the relation of his transactions to his sense of Christian spirituality.

The three chapter investigations reveal the significant factors of reading stance and the shaping influence of it on one solitary reader's biblical transactions. These findings suggest the spiritual life of the Bible among participant readers is affected by reading stance. These findings contribute towards the development of a holistic model of reader uses of the Bible for experiential knowledge of the divine (8.0).

## 2.0 Reader and Text: Theoretical dimensions of the production of meaning in solitary Bible reading event

Chapter Abstract: *The focus of this chapter is the theoretical framework within which the constructive role of the individual reader in the act of reading the Bible can be situated. The reader's appropriation of meaning as an apprehension of God in life experience or state of affairs is the topic of this research project. Theory provides the researcher "a way of seeing" the subject matter or phenomena under investigation (Deal and Beal 2004: xi). Of particular interest are the pertinent factors that shape the reader's production of meaning in the Bible reading event. Cunningham's (2002) sacramental model of reading suggests certain critical factors which affect the reader's relation of the material text to an immaterial religious reality. These factors are deemed to have a shaping influence on reader transactions with the Bible and are dimensions to which a theoretical frame must be sensitive. They provide focal points for the presentation of accounts of background theories. Studies in the academic fields of Christian spirituality and the anthropology of Christianity along with Archer's (2000, 2003, 2007) sociological theory and Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory of reading contribute to the formation of a theoretical framework to be used in the findings chapters. These frames form an adequate theoretical account of salient features of meaning-making activities that structure the relation of the Bible and Christian religious experience.*

### 2.1 Framing the theoretical framework

This chapter is concerned with a theoretical description of the processes of the reader's production of meaning in the activity commonly referred to as reading. Cunningham's (2002) sacramental model of reading offers a starting point for this account. It suggests certain critical categories for the development of a theoretical frame. He claims reading is akin to the Eucharist, that the activity of reading a text is analogous to a communicant's participation in the ritual of Christian communion. The religious ritual is constituted by the performance of physical actions that are deemed to signify the apprehension of the divine. The reception of material elements through eating and drinking signify the manifestation of an immaterial dimension. This model is relevant to Bible reading in that the reader's reading of a material text can signify an instantiation of the divine in life experience or a state of affairs.

Cunningham's (2002) advocacy of a sacramental model of reading offers insight into the character of reading that informs this chapter. The personal act of eating the bread and drinking the cup signify both a memorial—"This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me"—and a declaration—"you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11, NIV). This ritual consists of a physical display of the meaning of the texts that comprise it. "Here's a body of text and the text as body, the body of the other, the text as other, to be consumed, ingested...in an act of personal reception" and manifestation (p. 148). The reception of material elements embodies the immaterial, a manifestation of the invisible via the visible. The ingestion of Eucharist elements is an event marked by the recipient's embodiment of them as salvific effects of the Lord's death. "The Word of God, the body of Christ, become you: to your emotional, ethical, spiritual benefit" (p. 148).



Through receptive engagement with words on a page there is potential for the reader's understandings of divine activity in life to undergo transformation through the effects of the act of reading. Such an act of textual consumption can promote the effects of personal, moral and religious knowledge. Thus the ritual of an outward manifestation of an inward reception offers an initial paradigm of reading.

This characterization of reading as a sacramental act has some implications for the theoretical frame of the relation of Bible reading and the apprehension of God among participant British emerging adult readers. First, the Eucharist ritual mediates the prospect of personal apprehension of the divine. The sacramental model affirms the instantiation of divine presence in the communicant's practice of the Eucharist. Just as the recipient acknowledges the ingestion of the Eucharist represents more than the simple consumption of bread and wine, so too the reception of the biblical text by the Christian reader can represent more than a mere comprehension of its words. "[M]any Christians treat the materiality of the Word as epiphenomenal, or as in service to its spiritual ('immaterial') significance" (Engelke 2007: 7). The sacramental model suggests the need to understand the role of Bible reading in mediating the reader's apprehension of God. It raises the issue of how the factors of the Bible and Christian religious experience are related. Material drawn from various studies, including writings in the academic field of Christian spirituality, provides perspective on this issue and will be presented below (2.2).

Second, through its emphasis on reception and manifestation the sacramental model highlights the personal and social dimensions of meaning making in Bible reading. The instantiation of the divine which the ritual represents to the individual recipient is related to the historically situated and socially embedded status of the practice. "For humans, participation in the triune life of God is not atemporal but historical and contingent" (Candler 2006: 3). The intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of meaning making can be seen in the significance of ideological and pragmatic levels to this research project. As was noted earlier (see 1.7), the ideological level refers to the institutionally situated set of meanings that a Christian church incorporates as interpretive structures to apprehend God. The pragmatic level is the participant reader's uses of these interpretive frames in Bible reading to apprehend God in the light of his or her faith-life concerns. The reader's relation of a Bible reading and the apprehension of God in life experience highlight the importance of ideological and pragmatic dimensions of the production of religious meaning. These ideological and pragmatic levels correlate with the interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of this study. Archer's (2003, 2007) sociological theory of "internal conversation" frames the pragmatic dimension of this research (2.3). Recent studies in the field of the anthropology of Christianity address the role of ideology in the reader's mediation of religious experience of the divine (2.4). The institutionally-situated structures of interaction with God offer participant readers a means of addressing their existential concerns of faith (see 5.0).

Third, the ritual's focus on the sacramental acts of remembrance and declaration highlight the literary conditions for the reader's meaning-making activities in Bible reading. The reader's connection of synthesized textual evocations and affirmations of divine activity in life experience is the particular signifying act under investigation. The interaction of the reader and the author's text offer a "communicative framework" in which the responsible reader's production of meaning occurs (Harker 1988: 13). Bible reading occasions the reader's actualization and appropriation of meaning, the ingestion of material, textual signs and their embodiment in Christian understandings of immaterial divine reality in life experience. Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory of reading, which provides an account of critical factors of the reader's meaning-making activities, will be presented (2.5).

## 2.2 Bible reading and the apprehension of God

The primary issue under consideration is the role Bible reading plays in the solitary reader's apprehension of experiential knowledge of God. Human experience of the divine is a topic often associated with spirituality. "Spirituality has become a word that defines our era" (Sheldrake 2007: xi). However, 'spirituality' is notoriously difficult to define. Sheldrake (1991: 128) maintains "it may not be possible to arrive at abstract definitions of religious life with universal or permanent application." McGinn (2005: 34) believes it is important to make clear one's approach to its study as a way forward even as he wonders if 'spirituality' like 'religion' is "one of those terms where exploration will never eyelid a clear and universally acceptable definition." Holmes (2007) finds that the integration into a single domain of the emerging field of the study of spirituality is likely to remain elusive and that its subject matter will continue to be defined in terms of individual academic disciplines. For the present purposes philosophical investigation of religious experience by Davis (1989) and Taves (2009) as well as studies drawn from the academic field of Christian spirituality offer helpful perspectives in the subject under consideration.

The academic field of Christian spirituality offers the most relevant perspective on this research inquiry. According to Burton-Christie (2001: xxii-xxiii) the emergence in the 1990s of the contours of Christian spirituality as an academic discipline coincided with the formation of the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality in 1992 and its official publication, *The Christian Spirituality Bulletin* in 1993. This international scholarly community pioneered and carries on critical conversations about what constitutes spiritual experience and appropriate methodological approaches to its interpretation. Sandra M. Schneiders is viewed as "perhaps the most articulate and prolific English-speaking scholar writing on the definitions and methodologies appropriate to this relatively new discipline" (Holder 2005: 6).

Issues related to the solitary Bible reader's apprehension of God in this section are the experiential character of the apprehension of God (2.2.1), the character of religious experience (2.2.2), and the role of the Bible in Christian religious experience (2.2.3).

### 2.2.1 The experiential character of the apprehension of God

Religious experience provides the primary source for belief in the divine. Whilst the beliefs and practices of religious tradition offer a context for the occurrence of religious experience, it is religious experience which "constitutes the only ground we can have for giving credence to such traditions, or indeed for developing them and transforming them" (Archer *et al.*, 2004: 26). Deemed religious experiences can function as "building blocks" in the formation of a religion or spirituality (Taves 2009: 9). Paradoxically, a nearly two-thirds rise in frequency of reports of spiritual experience in Britain between 1987 and 2000 is attributed to the decline of institutional religion in the UK: "the rapid decline in the power of the institution has given more social permission for people to admit to experience that has always been there but in the past has been kept secret because of embarrassment" (Hay 2005: 430). Despite the growing chasm between spirituality and religion in the West, their interplay remains significant (see 2.2.3). Nevertheless, whatever the character of the contribution of spirituality to religion and of religion to spirituality the experiential character of divine knowledge is of importance to this study.

Schneiders maintains "the experience of the spiritual life *as* experience" is the proper focus of the academic study of Christian spirituality (2005c: 18, italics in original). The interaction of human beings and the Spirit of God is the spiritual experience under consideration (Schneiders 2005b: 51). Christian spirituality is concerned with "the ultimate human value of union with God" (Schneiders 2005a: 22). The study of Christian spirituality attends to "what one is actually doing while insights, judgments, decisions, and actions emerge in one's lived experience" (Frohlich 2005: 70). There is a diversity of ways which humans manifest interaction with the Holy Spirit (Wolfteich 2009: 135-136). Personal devotions are one such activity which offers an object of investigation (Frohlich 2005: 72).

One important implication of the conceptualization of experience as the object of critical inquiry is the domain of study it represents. A focus on experience distinguishes the study of spirituality from the study of Christian theology and the history of Christian spirituality. Biblical and systematic theologies inform and critique descriptions of spirituality. Histories of Christian spiritualities situate the beliefs and practices of historical movements and classic writings. The experiential focus designates an object of inquiry and helps clarify the disciplinary boundaries in which it is investigated. The spiritual dimension of life experience raises a few pertinent questions. The spiritual "ground of experience"

requires articulation and interpretation (Burton-Christie 2005: xxiv). What is spiritual experience? What is Christian spiritual experience? Each of these questions will be addressed briefly below.

What is spiritual or religious experience? Davis (1989) presents a worldview based definition of religious experience for the purposes of her philosophical investigation of apprehensions of the divine in human experience. Subject descriptions of an apprehension of the divine “often involve religiously significant claims about the world” (1989: 3). She first defines experience: “An ‘experience’...is a roughly datable mental event which is undergone by a subject and of which the subject is to some extent aware” (Davis 1989: 19). A religious experience is an experience in which “the subjects themselves describe in religious terms or which are intrinsically religious” (1989: 31). She describes two broad categories of religious experience as interventionist and non-interventionist in which the divine or transcendent is deemed by the subject as being immanent (1989: 31). Interventionism is characterized by extraordinary experiences of the divine. Non-interventionism attributes divine activity to natural or human causes (1989: 31). Both classes can be considered religious experiences in that the subject reports in religious terms an experience in which God is believed to be at work. Davis’ definition of religious experience is adopted for the purposes of this research. More will be said about the character of religious experience below (2.2.2).

What is Christian spiritual or religious experience? The word ‘spirit’ (*ruach*, Hebrew) in the Old Testament conveys a range of meanings including ‘breath’ and ‘wind’ which, when applied to the study of spirituality, emphasize that which “gives life and animation to someone” (McGrath 1999: 2). The use of the word ‘spiritual’ (*pneumatikos*, Greek) in the New Testament to describe a person simply meant that the individual was “someone within whom the Spirit of God dwelt or who lived under the influence of the Spirit of God” (Sheldrake 2007: 3). The idea of the individual’s union with God’s Holy Spirit or being animated by him goes to the heart of Christian spirituality. The focus of Christian spirituality is “the vital, ongoing interaction between the human spirit and the Spirit of God” with the ‘human spirit’ being understood as “the radical capacity of the human subject for self-transcendence” (Schneiders 2005b: 51). By definition Christian spirituality is “the project of self-integration through self-transcendence within and toward the horizon of ultimacy which, in the case of the Christian, is God revealed in Jesus Christ who is present as Spirit in and through the community of faith called Church” (Schneiders 2005b: 51). It is important to note there is not one form of Christian spirituality. The diverse versions of Christianity—Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Anglicanism, and Protestantism—offer different spiritualities (McGrath 1999: 13). There is also a diversity of spiritualities within Christian churches that are “contradictory and incompatible” (Lonsdale 2005: 239).

This definition of Christian spirituality highlights the role of religious beliefs and activities in the apprehension of God. It is recognized that the word ‘spiritual’ can also denote the conception of the deemed experience of a non-material or transcendent dimension that is not necessarily defined in religious or supernatural terms. The contemporary character of spirituality indicates that the field of Christian spirituality should not be reduced to study of phenomena that are exclusively religious or even Christian (Schneiders 2005b: 53). However, the use of ‘spiritual’ in this research signifies the notion of the divine or transcendent expressed in the worldview of Christian theistic religion. This is the typical meaning of the term as used by participants. Also, participant expressions of ‘spiritual experience’ typically refer to a Christian religious understanding of experience (see 5.0). Whilst it is recognized that ‘spiritual experience’ is not technically synonymous with ‘religious experience,’ the phrases are used interchangeably in this thesis to refer to subjective Christian understandings of the divine or transcendent, unless a different meaning is specified.

### 2.2.2 The character of religious experience

The central question is whether the existence of religious experience is a unique and independent reality with “special inherent properties” or whether such experience is interpreted or represented by a subject as being endowed with religious properties (Taves 2009: 20). The following discussion is largely taken from two significant works on the character of religious experience: Davis’ (1989) *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience* and Taves’ (2009) *Religious Experience Reconsidered*. These works highlight the meaning making processes by which experience is recognized as being religious or spiritual.

A brief history of the discussion of religious experience provides a helpful context of the concepts of a unique religious experience and the notion of the religious interpretation of experience. Taves (2009) offers a ‘state of the art’ account. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, challenges to traditional sources of religious authority such as the Bible and church doctrine contributed to the lack of a recognized authority for religion. The concept of ‘religious experience’ was thought to provide an acknowledged source that could underwrite religion and religious activities. Religious experience is the notion that “a certain kind of experience, whether characterized as religious, mystical, or spiritual, constituted the essence of ‘religion’ and the common core of the world’s ‘religions’” (p. 3). The idea of the existence of a unique religious experience supplied a framework that could account for religion. To privilege this view, academic inquiries into religion must take seriously the subjective experience of religious adherents and avoid attributing or reducing reported religious experience to explanations of the academic disciplines. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century this influential construct of religious experience is increasingly challenged, and attention has focused on the religious interpretation of experience. The idea of a special class of religious experience as distinct and separate from other facets of human

existence is questioned. The rise in philosophy of the so-called ‘linguistic turn,’ which privileges the shaping power of language in social interaction on understandings of phenomenon in life, has been influential. It has shifted attention from a decontextualized conception of religion to an understanding of the way people make sense of their experiences in general. The act of meaning making in daily life is contextualized within certain social realities. The conception of contextualized understandings of experience reorients the study of religion away from a concept of a transcultural or transhistorical religious experience towards local understandings of it. Also, the neurological and cognitive sciences indicate something of the role of interpretive activity in religious experience. Recent research on the brain identifies correlations of neural activity and religious experience which highlights operative mental processes below the threshold of awareness. These mental processes feature in attributions of meaning to experience. Given these mounting critiques it is increasingly difficult to assert the notion of a unique and global kind of religious experience to underwrite religion. Instead, there is a new focus on religious experience which situates what it is that people believe to be special about experience—the religious, mystical, and/or spiritual—in the larger context of meaning-making activity. The negotiation of meaning of experience takes place on a variety of levels from the personal to the social and from the individual to the group. These dimensions impact the process of the interpretation of experience as having religious significance. From this review Taves concludes “we can neither simply invoke the idea of ‘religious experience’ as if it were a self-evidently unique sort of experience nor leave experience out of any sensible account of religion” (p. 8).

The concept of religious experience can be addressed in non-religious explanatory terms (Taves 2009: 17-20). This is not to say that religious experience is simply and only an interpretation or that the subject’s religious account of perceptual experience is not subject to further interpretation (Davis 1989: 156; Taves 2009: 89). Records of profound experiences of the divine or sacred indicate their occurrence prior to the development of a religious conceptual set (Davis 1989: 162-164; Taves 2009: 98). It is to say that there are meaning-making processes by which an individual explains or assigns some experiences as religious and others as not being religious (Taves 2009: 19-20). The researcher can situate a subject’s religious or spiritual experiences within “larger processes of meaning making and valuation” in which people deem some things special and set them apart from others” (Taves 2009: 12).

There are two aspects to the processing of religious experience. There is the individual’s unconscious ‘bottom up’ processing of experience that is relatively insensitive to cultural input and to conscious ‘top down’ processing that is culturally sensitive (Taves 2009: 98-99). Bottom up processing entails a search for an appropriate framework of meaning and top down processing involves organizing of experience from existing schemata. This difference can be seen in subject reports of experience that

have yet to be defined as religious or not and those which have already been defined by subjects as religious.

The religious understanding of life experience is attributable to an interaction of the individual's meaning-belief system (schemata) and environmental influences (Davis 1989: 146-147; Taves 2009: 94). Cultural training, religious and non-religious, contribute to the development of schemata (Davis 1989: 158, 163). Training enables the "encoding" of conceptual frameworks and linguistic expressions that aid in the perception, retention, and communication of religious experience (Davis 1989: 162-163). There are a variety of factors at work in conceptual frames that aid perceptual experience including upbringing, linguistic and cultural background, beliefs, training, needs, desires, and learned rules of inference (Davis 1989: 150).

Interpretation is integral to the transformation of the torrent of stimuli into meaningful perceptual experience (Davis 1989: 149, 153). Stimuli of experience are interpreted according to a subject's conceptual sets which when engaged with stimuli make it meaningful (Davis 1989: 150). An unambiguous designation of religious experience usually involves the subject's interpretation according to some conceptual set (Davis 1989: 154). An individual may consider an experience to be out of the ordinary and set it apart from others as something special in terms of it being sacred, spiritual or religious (Taves 2009: 12, 26ff). It is difficult to divide experience and interpretation, as interpretation is incorporated in all meaningful perceptions of experience (Davis 1989: 143, 154). In this way there is "no absolute dichotomy between concepts derived from experience and concepts brought to experience, or between 'experience' and 'interpretation'" (Davis 1989: 165).

This understanding of the character of religious experience is important to this study for a couple of reasons. First, it offers a way to approach the phenomena of "the Christian spiritual life as experience" of the Spirit of God (Schneiders 2005b: 56). What is actually being observed is not the experience of individual interaction with God but rather some form of its manifestation. It is only in the "articulated 'something'" of religious experience that the phenomenon can be accessed (Schneiders (2005c: 18). The individual's process of meaning making is an important factor in how life experience comes to be defined as spiritual. The meaning of an experience is contingent upon the particular "meaning frame" through which it is processed (Taves 2009: 118). It is by means of the "interpretive structures of transcendence" that we come to understand spiritual experience (Howells 1997: 225). The reader's appropriations of actualized readings of the Bible play a central role in the framing of accounts of Christian religious experience.

Second, Christian spirituality represents a socially constructed form of religious experience. The ordering of religious experience is contextually situated. Religious experience is less an intrinsic,

essential aspect of reality and more an interpretation. It is subject to the context of “the larger processes of meaning making” including religious traditions and communities (Taves 2009: 14). Christian spirituality began historically with the Jews as the covenanted people of God (Lonsdale 2005: 244). To move beyond the essentializing of experience is to embrace the understanding that individuals ascribe religious qualities to singular experiences that are deemed to have a special status by them (Taves 2009: 10). As such, religious experiences are historically formed, culturally situated, and socially embedded. “Religious experiences are thus discursively constructed by and in communities of faith, which share the symbolic and linguistic resources to evoke and define them for believers” (Smith 2010: 14). This highlights the importance of reader uses of the Bible to frame and re-frame their understandings of experiences they deem to be spiritual. As will be detailed below interpretive conditions of the situated Bible reader’s setting have an impact on his or her interaction with God (2.5). This understanding of religious experience also accentuates the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of religious experience which will be considered (2.3 and 2.4).

### 2.2.3 The role of the Bible in Christian religious experience

What role does Bible reading occupy in the reader’s apprehension of God? Traditionally, the Bible occupies a central place in the formation of the divine-human relationship. Sheldrake (2007: 2) observes “all Christian spiritual traditions are rooted in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and particularly in the gospels.” The relation of biblical texts to Christian spirituality is rooted in a commitment to the Bible as a “primary place where God’s self-disclosure with believers and believers’ self-integration with God are experienced” (Green 2005: 52). Schneiders (2002: 134) claims “authentic Christian spirituality is biblical in some sense, and all salvific engagement with the Bible...shapes and nourishes spirituality.” In addition, she argues the relation is qualified in terms of reading the Bible as it is comprised of “*a transformative process of personal and communal engagement with the biblical text*” (Schneiders 2002: 136, italics in original). The uses of the Bible in Christian spirituality typically include reading it, studying it, meditating on it, memorizing it, and praying it. Christian spirituality is strongly related to the reader’s active engagement of the Bible.

There are a few implications of the relation of the Bible to spiritual experience that are worth noting. First, the Bible is used to mediate reader understandings of the apprehension of God in life experience. For Christians the Bible is the authoritative source understandings of an experiential knowledge of God. The Bible “originally composed to witness to an experience of God, can legitimately be engaged as a mediation between that experience and our own” (Schneiders 2002: 142). Biblical texts bear “witness to patterns of relationship with God that instruct and encourage our own religious experience” (Schneiders 2002: 134). Bible reading is critical to the reader’s obtaining of knowledge of an experience of God. Not only does the Bible affirm that human experience can come



to be understood as having potential for instantiations of religious meaning but that its use is basic to a realization of incarnations of divine presence. The role of reading the Bible is critical to the reader's apprehension of God.

Second, reading of the Bible is important to the reader's religious conceptualization of life experience. Christian theology describes an effective relationship between the faithful act of reading the Bible and changes in the reader's outlook on life. Sheldrake (2007: 39) maintains "Christian spirituality is 'discipleship' which implies conversion and following a way of life in the pattern of Jesus Christ." Schneiders (2002: 136) describes a traditional understanding of the process of spiritual and intellectual transformation from an engagement of the Word of God which "culminates in change (*metanoia* or conversion), the becoming 'more' (spiritual growth or progressive sanctification) that results from entering into, dwelling in, experiencing oneself within the 'world' (i.e., within the reality construction) of Christian discipleship." Bible reading is considered to be potentially transformative, spiritually and intellectually. It has the deemed power to effect the structuring of a world and life view by which the reader can make sense of life experience and states of affairs.

Third, conceptions of the relation of Bible reading to Christian spirituality are rooted in theistic religion. Spiritual traditions arise out of particular historical and cultural contexts (Wolfteich 2009: 132). The Hebrew and Christian scriptures are engaged within religious communities and the meaning of spiritual life is often defined in terms of religious tradition. Christianity is characterized by a set of beliefs and values that are reflected in a certain way of life (McGrath: 1999: 3). As obvious as it may seem it is important to affirm that "the church *is* a context for Christian spirituality" (Lonsdale 2005: 239, italics in original). Local theological views of the relation of Word and Spirit have a shaping influence on human interaction with God (see 1.4.2). Spirituality is "an experience rooted in a particular community's history (McGinn 2005: 33). The beliefs and activities of institutional religion can function as substantial factors in the ordering of religious experience. Flanagan and Jupp (2007: 256) assert "that culture is both permitting and producing new forms of spirituality and these can also be found within organized religion to a greater degree than some sociologists might imagine." This is certainly the case with Christian spirituality. Coleman (2005: 291) argues that the much touted distinction between religion as being institutionally authoritative and formal and spirituality as being personally expressive and authentic distorts the actual reality. His survey of recent sociological literature on spirituality and religion in the United States finds a mix of spirituality and religion among practitioners. For example, Wade Clark Roof's (1999) study of 'baby-boomers' found that "the majority of Americans are both religious and spiritual" albeit they are more likely to engage with religious traditions rather than to embrace creedal expressions of belief (Coleman 2005: 293). Also, Robert Wuthnow's (2003) research on American religion argues that "most people who develop serious interest in spirituality wind up pursuing that interest through organized religion" (Coleman

2005: 297). While it is the case that there are spiritualities that are not religious it is also true that Christian spirituality “is at the core of what it means to be religious” (Coleman 2005: 304). This view is consistent with the findings of Flory and Miller’s (2007: 217) study of American ‘post-boomers’ in which expressions of Christian spirituality “only have personal meaning within the context of the religious community.” The traditions of organized theistic religion can function as a substantial factor in the ordering of experience.

One final comment is in order on the distinction between the terms ‘religious’ and ‘religion.’ Academic empirical study of religion often has as its focus the analysis of formal systems of the so-called great religions or the charting of such in new religious movements. Sociological study of religion, for example, often consists of inquiries of congregational or institutional features of particular denominations. A focus on religious life, however, is concerned with the everyday reality of religious commitment by ordinary people. As an empirical consideration this research project is concerned with the actual Bible reading as a feature of ordinary Christian religious life. This is to be contrasted with a preoccupation with formal structures of denominational religion which do not accurately reflect individual behaviors in the actual living of religious commitment. The doctrinal and institutional aspects of religion have a bearing on participant’s religious lives.

### 2.3 Bible reading and the pragmatic dimension of meaning making

Archer’s (2004a) sociology steers between the Scylla of ‘pure individualism’ and the Charybdis of the individual as societal ‘puppet on a string.’ In so doing she avoids the reductive explanation of anthropocentric and sociocentric models of social theory that seek to explain religious experience. She makes a distinction between “supplementary” and “substitute” social science explanations of religious experience (Archer 2004b: 139). ‘Supplementary’ explanations involve the consideration of factors relevant to the phenomenon under investigation of which the active agent may not be aware. ‘Substitute’ explanations tend to discount the active agent’s claims of religious experience and rely upon presuppositions of an all-encompassing perspective for analysis. Archer’s theory offers a supplementary explanation of religious experience.

#### 2.3.1 Archer’s model of internal conversation

Archer’s (2003, 2007) sociological theory seeks to define a mechanism that relates the social and personal. She posits “human reflexive deliberations” mediate the interplay of social and personal agencies (2003: 14). “‘[R]eflexivity’ is the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to their (social) context and vice versa” (2007: 4, italics in original). It is by means of the mental processes of reflexive deliberations that occur through “internal

conversation” that subjects exercise their ability to respond to the social situations in which they find themselves (2007: 2-3). An active agent’s exercise of self-talk can be “*causally efficacious*” by initiating actions within social constraints and affordances which facilitate or impede the accomplishment of projects in relation to a preferred way of life (2003: 14, italics in original). It is through the deliberative process of reflexive dialogue that subjects can tie their significant personal concerns to the limits and opportunities of the context within which they are situated (2003: 142). Context refers to three orders of reality: “nature, practice, and society” which confront active agents (2003: 138). There are social and cultural factors which structure the situations they face (2003: 135-136). Social structures include organizations and institutions and cultural qualities are described as being “propositional, theoretical and doctrinal” features (2003: 135). Personal concerns are influential subjective interests that affect the subject’s inner dialogue. The subject’s “ultimate concerns” are interests about which the individual cares most about in life (2003: 138-139). The individual’s exercise of reflexive dialogue supplies the “mediatory mechanism” by which individual’s make their way in a world with which they are confronted (2003: 16). Archer’s model of ‘internal conversation’ provides a plausible explanation of the way individuals regulate their inner and outer worlds.

Archer’s (2003: 342) empirical research revealed three different modes of reflexive deliberation among participants which she labeled as “communicative reflexivity, autonomous reflexivity, and meta-reflexivity.” The ‘communicative reflexive’ defines a life project from within the constraints and affordances of the social context (p. 345). This mode of deliberation is characterized by the individual giving consent to an existing and stable context. Self interest is relinquished in exchange for the benefits of the social collective (p. 354). The communicative reflexive acts in ways that are compatible with the desired social context. The ‘autonomous reflexive’ searches for a complementary combination of concerns and context that is suitable to the desired way of life (pp. 346-347). This solitary undertaking produces a focus on personal investment in the performance of tasks rather than in people. Social context provides a means to the end of the realization of personal concerns (p. 353). The individual assumes the responsibility for the development of skills to make one’s way in the world. This skill set requires accommodation and intention. The autonomous reflexive acts in independent and intentional ways to realize their concerns in a social environment. The “meta-reflexive” holds to an ultimate ideal or vision that is incommensurate with the social context (p. 347). These individuals are self-made “sojourners” in search of a social context that is compatible with their vision (p. 347). The deemed incompatibility of their social context and life ideal results in “volatile biographies” replete with customary changes of jobs and locations, as the sought after way of life cannot be experienced in an institutional setting (p. 350). The refusal to compromise their ideals of social integration and institutional development has the effect of promoting social values, like justice, which spurs the conscience of society (pp. 361-362). The meta-reflexive interrogates the current relation of the personal and the social and seeks to transform it.

These different modes of reflexivity represent fundamental orientations to society. Archer (2003: 343) refers to these orientations as “stances” which she defines as “the tendential capacity to regulate relations between the person and her society.” The subject’s particular stance towards society orders the relation between his or her prized concerns and the external contexts encountered. In order to maintain continuity of relations within the sanctioned social context the communicative reflexive seeks to sustain and protect this context by adopting a stance of “systematic *evasion*” of social mobility (p. 349, italics in original). The autonomous reflexive’s successful achievement of a life project requires a “strategic” stance to social context, a posture of individualism that takes advantage of the constraints and opportunities of the social system (p. 358). The loyalty of the meta-reflexive to a utopian point of view results in a “subversive” stance toward social structures that is reflected in the willingness to oppose constraints and sacrifice opportunities (pp. 350-351).

A chief criticism of Archer’s sociology is the tendency of her theory to under appreciate the impact of social conditioning on the self. In the effort to address forms of sociological reductionism Archer presents “an undersocialized view of selfhood” that downplays the significant role of habits of intersubjectivity in its construction (Gronow 2008: 245). The critique highlights the role of theorizing either social structures or personal agency as the primary shaping influence on the development of the self. The critic, who recognizes the need for a mechanism beyond the simple assertion of a discursively structured self, attributes the catalyst for social action more to the impact of attitudinal orientations toward socially shared meanings than to a residual capacity and practiced modes of reflexivity (Gronow 2008: 255). However, what distinguishes Archer’s theory is its “substantial empirical test” of her mechanism of internal conversation (Wiley 2005: 1529). Her analysis of data from interviews with twenty diverse subjects revealed the existence of different modes by which individuals mediated self and society in the establishment of a way of life (Archer 2003: 159, 163). Archer’s empirical research supports her argument for the active agent’s exercise of a pre-social capacity of the self to generate reflexive practices as a catalyst of action within existing social structures. Her concern is not simply to affirm that active agents can think and act in social situations in ways that might achieve what they want but rather to understand the mechanism by which they are able to do this at all (Archer 2003: 9). This focus shifts the debate from prioritizing either the chicken or the egg to the actual way in which social conditioning and personal agency come together. It is by means of the exercise of the capacity for reflexive dialogue that the active agent evaluates the interplay of personal concerns and social context (Archer 2003: 344). The relationship between the self and society comes to be defined through the reflexive modality of internal conversation: the mingling of the limits and allowances of a situation and valued personal interests can give rise to a course of action via the process of reflexive inner dialogue (Archer 2003: 9). Whilst the active agent draws upon language and knowledge originating in interpersonal discourse his or her actions do not merely mirror the constructed self of social conversation but rather involve an internal conversation, a

subjective power which enables private reflection upon the relation of self and society in the pursuit of a way of life (Archer 2003: 13).

### 2.3.2 Bible reading and Archer's internal conversation

Archer's concept of internal conversation has a discrete social focus. However, she maintains the exercise of reflexive power cannot be limited to the social sphere alone but also encompasses private acts in the lives of individuals such as meditation (Archer 2007: 3, footnote). This acknowledgement extends her theory in principle to the solitary act of Bible reading. The reader's capacity for internal conversation encompasses this personal act. The solitary reading event offers an occasion for readers to exercise reflexive deliberations on the interplay of personal concerns and life situations with which they are confronted. Archer also acknowledges the Christian way of life involves "a reflexive self-adjustment, the capacity to make one's own judgments about the appropriateness of actions in new unscripted contexts" (2004b: 151). This feature of reflexivity is relevant to the understanding of participants concerns to retain their Christianity in the face of their anxiety of uncertainty of emerging adulthood (see 4.3.3). Bible reading occasions the readers reflexive consideration of a Christian way of life in new life contexts.

The solitary act of Bible reading can be situated within the reflexivity of Archer's internal conversation. Bible reading can be theoretically framed in terms of the reflexive activity by which the reader mediates self and society. Bible reading occasions the activity of reflexive deliberation via internal conversation. In the light of the textual encounter the reader can consider the relation of his or her personal concerns and Christian way of life in the world and vice versa. Also, the reflexive act by which ultimate concerns and the Christian way of life are aligned occasions the reader's production of meaning. The way in which readers relate the biblical text to life can be affected by the reflexivity with which they mediate personal concerns and a desired way of life. The present research project indicates emerging adult participant readers are stuck in an anxiety of uncertainty about Christianity (see 4.3). Participant uses of the Bible to address their personal concerns indicate the solitary act of Bible reading was situated within the reader's life transition into independence in society. They desire to retain a Christian way of life in the face of internal faith-life anxiety. Bible reading afforded readers an opportunity to seek the resolution of these tensions. The anxiety of a faith-life inner dialogue predisposed their encounter with biblical texts (see 4.3.3). Archer's mechanism of reflexive inner dialogue indicates readers encounter the biblical text from within the context of their relation of pressing concerns and Christian way of life.

Archer's internal conversation also highlights pertinent factors which influence the reader's text-life relation. The mechanism by which persons relate their ultimate concerns to the world in which they

find themselves sheds light on the character of influential factors by which readers relate the biblical text to their lives. As noted there are intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of the reader's appropriation of actualized meaning as an apprehension of God in life experience (see 1.2). The reflexive deliberations of internal conversation highlight these influential aspects of the reader's production of meaning. Archer observed a close relationship of the active agent's reflexive activity, ultimate concerns and way of life within social structures. The efforts of her subjects to organize ultimate concerns in tandem with a desired way of life were intimately related with a given mode of reflexivity (Archer 2003: 163). For example, it is in the ultimate concerns of the 'communicative reflexive' to sustain a stable social context. This mode reflects an intrapersonal dimension of reflexivity. Also, the basic orientation of the subject's mode of reflexivity represented a particular stance towards the situations they encountered in their social context (Archer 2003: 349). For example, the 'communicative reflexive' protects a desired context by adopting a strategic stance of evasion of social mobility. This social stance reflects an interpersonal dimension of reflexivity. These dual aspects of reflexivity frame our understanding of the influential factors of meaning making in Bible reading. The production of meaning is not solely attributable to either the reader's concerns or sociocultural context. The model of internal conversation affirms the interplay of reader concerns and social context and emphasizes the character of reflexive deliberations by which they are mediated. The activity of this mediatory mechanism is a reflection of the distinctive ways in which readers order ultimate concerns and a Christian way of life. There are a couple of implications of these two aspects of reflexivity for the pragmatic role Bible reading plays in the Christian way of life.

First, the intrapersonal dimension of reflexivity has a shaping influence on the Bible's relation to religious experience. Archer's (2003: 349) subjects "reflexively prioritized their concerns and crystallized these into determinate projects." Intrapersonal factors shape the reflexive activity by which a way of life is negotiated in the world. As noted above, the process of reflexive deliberation is impacted by the active agent's ultimate concerns, the matters about which he or she cares about deeply. The reader's personal concerns have a bearing on the mediation of a Christian way of life within social contexts. Research participants have affirmed a commitment to Christianity yet also experience an anxiety of uncertainty about their Christian faith. Findings of this research project indicate participant readers pressing concerns have a shaping influence on their production of meaning during Bible reading (see 4.2 and 6.3.2). They feel the onus of confirming the reality of their faith. Personal concerns affect the way in which participant readers related the biblical text to a Christian way of life.

Second, the interpersonal dimension of reflexivity impacts the Bible's relation to religious experience. Social and cultural features of the external world encroach upon the reader's personal concerns. The propositions, theories and doctrines associated with social institutions contribute to the conditioning

of the reader's reflexive activities. Participants of this research project have taken part in the congregational life of Mosaic Church. By virtue of church attendance participants find themselves in an institutional structure with social and cultural dimensions that is not of their own making. It was established prior to their personal involvement and it exists beyond their own life conditions. As such participants are faced with the local structural properties of Christianity in which they encounter the Bible. The way in which participant readers are postured towards institutions and doctrines affects their deliberations on their relations with these features. The reflexive stances represented by the three modes indicate the impact of social context on the subject's basic orientation toward the world. Findings of this research project show doctrinal features of the reader's institutional context have a strong influence on the reader's production of meaning during reading (see 5.2.4 and 6.3.3). Participants are attracted to the promise of church teaching to help them resolve the anxiety of their faith-life dilemma. Social context affects the way in which participant readers related the biblical text to a Christian way of life.

Archer's internal conversation contributes to an understanding of the relation of Bible reading to religious experience. It highlights specific aspects that influence the reflexive act. Ultimate concerns impact readers inner deliberations and are reflected in their subjective disposition or stance towards the reading event. The social structures in which readers find themselves also have a shaping influence on their reflexive activity. The reader's concerns and context are pertinent factors in the relation of Bible reading to religious experience. These features are important to an understanding of reader appropriations of Bible reading in deemed apprehensions of God in life experience. Archer's model is relevant to an understanding of factors pertinent to the reader's meaning-making activity in solitary Bible reading events.

#### 2.4 Bible reading and the ideological dimension of meaning-making activity

Recent research from the field of anthropology of Christianity contributes towards the development of systematic approach of addressing the ways in which Christians interact with the Bible (Keane 2003, 2007; Engelke 2007, 2009; Bielo 2009a, 2009b). Bielo (2009b: 5-7) cites four themes that animate contemporary anthropological and ethnographic analysis of corporate and individual relations with the Bible: local *textual ideologies* that structure interpretive uses of the Bible, *hermeneutic strategies* employed to interpret biblical texts, *rhetorical practices* rooted in biblical discourse for purposes of identity formation, and *material representations* of the Bible as a signifying artifact of Christian faith. Each theme provides perspective on a significant aspect of Christian uses of the Bible. The ideological theme is the focus of this section. Ideology offers a culturally embedded "structuring mechanism" for reader uses of the Bible (Bielo 2009b: 5). For present purposes 'ideology' refers to the culturally formed and institutionally situated set of meanings that a Christian church incorporates

as interpretive structures to apprehend God. (The ideological dimension will be addressed in detail in 5.0 in regards to Mosaic Church.) Cultural formation refers to an individual's participation in the social processes of institutional life which contributes to the development of his or her thoughts and actions (Bielo 2009a: 10-11).

#### 2.4.1 Anthropology of Christianity and ideological structure of meaning-making activity

Engelke (2007) discusses the significance of church teaching and practices to an understanding how divine knowledge is mediated through the Bible. He highlights the impact of such institutional channels in addressing the problem of God's presence. "Simply put, the problem of presence is how a religious subject defines and claims to construct a relationship with the divine through the investment of authority and meaning in certain words, actions and objects" (p. 9). The ontological distance between God and humanity can be observed in the paradoxical character of "God's simultaneous presence and absence" with his creation (p. 12). This paradox is amplified by the historical and theological shift from the material presence of God in Christ to his immaterial presence via the Holy Spirit (pp. 14-15). Human uncertainty of divine communication and communion gives rise to the need for definition of the theological concepts and semiotic modes by which God is deemed to be apprehended. The Bible's status and function is basic to church valuations of proper material representations of the immaterial. Church teaching privileges linguistic, phenomenological, and material mediums through which the faithful apprehend the divine.

The problem of God's presence highlights the importance of church understandings of the Bible's "mediatory significance" (Engelke 2007: 16). The reader's relational experience of God "gets defined" through the practice of Bible reading (Engelke 2009: 155). For Christians the biblical text is an "artifact and sign," a material inscription that represents an immaterial Spirit (Engelke 2009: 154-155). The linkage between the biblical text's verbal signs and spiritual reality cannot be assumed. The Bible's spiritual significance is impacted by dynamics of the theological tradition and the community of practice in which it is read (Engelke 2009: 152). These religious and cultural features are important aspects of the "Bible's signficatory potentials" (Engelke 2009: 156). These factors contribute to a "semiotics of faith" that renders meaningful connections between the material and the immaterial (Engelke 2009: 170). The spiritual significance of the text's signs is related to the community's judgment of how its material qualities should be received as (Engelke 2009: 155, 170) as divine communication and communion by the faithful.

Engelke (2009: 170) also raises the importance of a "semiotics of faith" to the situated reader's apprehension of God through Bible reading. Semiotics, the study of the relation of symbol and object, word and world, is germane to religious concerns of the relation of signs and spirituality. Building on



the work of Keane he argues the connection between the visible and invisible, the material and immaterial is underwritten by a “semiotic ideology” which is a claim of “what signs are and how they function in the world” (Engelke 2007: 10; Keane 2003: 419). Semiotic ideologies authorize the roles material and phenomenological representations play in addressing the problem of God’s presence. It is by means of these semiotic channels that religious institutions address the matter of “how God can be approached or made present through certain material representations” (Engelke 2007: 19). The logic of a semiotics of faith indicates how material and phenomenological symbolizations can transform the reader’s understanding of God’s activity in life experience.

Keane’s (2003, 2007) work on Dutch Calvinism on the Indonesian island of Sumba is influential in understandings of the connection of material sign and spiritual reality. His analytic framework of “representational economy” and “semiotic ideology” offers an understanding of how relations are determined between signs and objects in social and religious life (Keane 2003: 410, 421). He is concerned with “basic assumptions about what signs are and how they function in the world” (Keane 2003: 419). His model makes distinctions between the abstract structure of the relation between signs and things and the rationale that justifies their particular relation. Representational economies locate words, things and beings within shared social residences; they map the boundaries of ontological claims and their concrete manifestations. These are organized in various forms of signifying practices that enact connections between animate objects and inanimate beings. A semiotic ideology encapsulates the underlying logic of these relations. It spells out the assumptions that underwrite understandings of the relations that are embodied in an economy’s signifying practices (Keane 2007: 18). There can be numerous representational economies and semiotic ideologies at work within societies.

#### 2.4.2 Bible reading and the ideological structure of meaning-making activity

Authors in the field of the anthropology of Christianity draw attention to the cultural logics by which situated readers access the Bible’s potential to signify the apprehension of God in life experience. The material aspect of the Bible should not be understood as “simply a medium of transmission, nor a repository of meanings” (Engelke 2009: 170). Institutionally situated rationales reveal how instantiations of God’s presence can be rendered from the verbal signs of a material text. A semiotics of faith is linked with “Christian ideologies of reading” (Engelke 2009: 170). The use of the Bible to come to know God can be observed in Bible studies, sermons, and Sunday school curriculums of Christian communities of practice. The function of semiotic ideology in the lives of ordinary readers can be observed in the extralinguistic religious qualities assigned to the written symbols of biblical texts. The phenomenon of religious experience is related to the underlying logic of Bible reading.

The cultural rationale of the status and use of the Bible in mediating the presence of God impacts the reader's readings of its texts in a solitary event. The view of the individual reader making sense of the text privately undervalues the socially embedded character of reading (see 1.7). It also undervalues the impact of the cultural aspect of reading in a community of practice. The formation of thoughts and actions occur as individuals participate in the institutional life of the church. The solitary act of Bible reading is not immune from the impact of a church's semiotic ideology. The logic of a church's semiotic ideology frames reader understandings of connections of the text to knowledge of divine activity. The underlying rationale influences the production of meaning. Institutionally situated rationales for the signification of God's presence are a salient factor that mediates the reader-text relation in solitary Bible reading events. They offer a way of understanding the processes of the production of meaning by which readers read God in their lives.

The role semiotic ideology plays in participant mediation of religious experience of the divine will be addressed in detail (see 5.2). Church teaching on Word and Spirit provides readers with a theological economy and an ideological rationale for the apprehension of God. Participants are attracted to church teaching (see 5.1). Church doctrine and cultural logic have a shaping influence on participants (see 5.2.4) and on one reader's solitary Bible readings (see 6.3.3). The institutional practices of interaction with God offered participant readers a means of relating material text and personal experience of the immaterial. The cultural logic of semiotic ideology highlights the interpersonal dimension of meaning making in Bible reading.

## 2.5 Bible reading and the literary conditions of meaning-making activity

An examination of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian religious experience requires an explanation of the processes of the reader's production of meaning during reading. Cunningham (2002: 30, 35) highlights the "Big Three" linguistic building blocks of literary communication as the author's writing, the written text, and the reader's reading of the text in print. With the advent of modern literary and semiotic theories the focus of critical inquiry is "the processes that operate in the interaction and encounters between texts and readers" (Thiselton 1992: 16). Modern literary theories seek to provide explanations of agencies and activities pertinent to the interpretation of texts. What readers do with texts is the subject of valuable inquiry. "What sort of procedures do readers follow in responding to works as they do? What sort of assumptions must be in place to account for their reactions and interpretations?" (Culler 2000: 62-63). Reader-response criticism makes an important contribution to an understanding of the fundamental relationship between the text's verbal symbols and the reader's responses to them in the production of meaning. The reader's religious experience is affected by his or her literary experience. Reader-response criticism offers a "promising" and "vital" approach to the study of the effects of Bible reading in spirituality (Donahue 2006: 87).

Louise M. Rosenblatt offers a valuable theoretical account of how readers read texts. She is the pioneer of reader-response criticism (Tompkins 1980a). Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory of reading offers a plausible explanation of pertinent factors in reader's production of meaning in a solitary reading event. First, it affirms the importance of the roles of reader and text to the production of meaning in the reading encounter. "In many respects Rosenblatt's transactional theory offers a compelling explanation of the reading process that is responsible to both text and reader" (Pike 2003a: 42). Second, transactional theory is consistent with cognitive activity of interactive models of reading. In his evaluation of the reader-response models of Rosenblatt, Iser and Fish, Harker (1992: 35) found Rosenblatt's theory with its emphasis on the inclusion of textual information by the readers in their meaning making was "best supported by the interactive models of the reading process proposed by cognitive psychologist[s]" who research information processing. Three, transactional theory is compatible with the Word and Spirit reading ideology adopted by participant readers in their Bible readings (see 5.0). This ideology presupposes the importance of textual features in the reader's meaning-making efforts, a feature consistent with the importance of the Bible in Evangelical-Charismatic theologies. The following section is an attempt to situate historically and theoretically the transactional theory of reading.

### 2.5.1 Reader-response theory and Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading

A brief review of modern literary theory helps to orient reader-response theory within a history of literary theory. Eagleton's (1996: 64) three-stage history consists of Romanticism's nineteenth century fixation with the author followed by American New Criticism's (1930's-1950's) restricted concern with the text, and eventuates in an emphasis on the role of the reader in relation to literary meaning (last half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century). He rehearses significant issues related to each emphasis (pp. 64-77). New Criticism challenged the Romantic-era notion of reading literary texts to embrace the author's intended creative vision. Not only is literature to be regarded as more than an author's autobiography, the reading of it raises the demanding issue of how it is possible to know what he or she actually had in mind when writing it. The late 20<sup>th</sup> century focus on the reader disputed the contention of New Critics that the text is a sufficient object of analytical interpretation and that the reader's responses are not to be confused with the text's meaning. The text serves as an invitation to the situated reader to generate meaning and readers bring contextually-shaped interpretive conventions to bear on the reading of the text. Reading involves an active reader who makes a series of revisable speculations and inferences based upon the genre and sentences of the text. Without readers there is no literature.

Models of reader-response theory can be characterized according to their particular orientation. Vander Weele (1991: 132-141) recognizes that even though reader-response theories share "no single

philosophical starting point” they can be organized into three basic categories: “Psychological” models of understanding (represented by Norman Holland and David Bleich); the “social” model of socially-historically informed reading conventions (Stanley Fish, Walter Benn Michaels); and “intersubjective” model of negotiation of literary meaning between the reader and literary convention (Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser).

There are a number of similarities between these reader-response theories. One, there is a shared epistemological assumption of the collapse of the distinction between the subject and object, between the knower and the known, between the reader and the text. The issue is significant to a model of spiritually engaged Bible reading, a feature which will be addressed in 8.0. Two, there is a shared emphasis on the role of the reader’s experience in interpretation as being basic to the production of meaning. Reader-response criticism “claims that the meaning of the text is the experience of the reader” (Culler 2000: 63). The text is merely a material artifact of printed inscriptions until it is taken up and read by a reader. What a text means to a reader cannot be separated from it does to the reader. Research findings indicate the reader’s reading stance plays a significant role in biblical interpretation (see 6.0 and 7.0). There are also some differences between these models. One, they differ in their conceptions of the nature and role of the text in the reading event. The intersubjective model affirms the importance of the text as a guiding factor in the reader’s interpretation. The psychological and social models see the reader’s role as one of a composer of the text due to the impact of the reader’s identity or the situated reader’s conventions as the primary interpretive factor in meaning making. Two, the role of the reader in meaning making varies according to the theoretical configuration of controlling agencies. Configurations are primarily a reader-text (Holland, Bleich, Rosenblatt, Iser) or reader-context (Fish, Michaels) paradigm. What the text does to the reader is a primary focus of the reader-text model. The reader-context view deems the situated reader’s readings reflect the influence of contextually-derived interpretive conventions and strategies. These differences will become apparent in the accounts below.

Jane P. Tompkins (1980) presents a valuable overview of the theoretical development of reader-response theories. Her edited collection of essays on reader-response criticism charts critical moves in the evolution of the theories of the function of reader, text and context in the act of reading. She tracks the movement of dominant configurations of reading from the autonomy of the text to the autonomy of the reader and then to the autonomy of the reading context. Of particular interest are articles that highlight the shifting character of the situated reader’s role in the production of textual meaning. Michael Riffaterre (1980) affirms the developing nature of the reader’s role in his discussion of the poetic effects of linguistic structures. He contends that a poem communicates more than the syntax of its grammatical constructions allow. This is possible because the critical reader’s response indicates that the poem’s message is greater than its text. The reader’s contact with a text’s aesthetic features

elicits responses that are germane to the literary meaning of the work. Hence, the text requires reader response to register poetic effects. However, the specific emphases placed on the reader's response locate meaning primarily in the text. The reader's involvement is largely limited to finding certain textual properties and responding appropriately to them.

George Poulet (1980) breaks rank with the prevailing concept of meaning as residing in the text. He argues that during reading the reader becomes conscious of a self or subject that is a distinct subject from him/herself. Such a phenomenon indicates the presence of the consciousness of another that is the subject of the literary work. The reader is to assume the passive position of hospitable host to this artistic consciousness and to experience and observe its effects. The desired goal of criticism is to apprehend the text's transcendent presence and not simply to analyze its pertinent features. Criticism must limit or destroy those objective elements that prevent the subjective experience of the ineffable. Literary meaning now moves from the objective properties of the text to the realm of the reader's consciousness. The reader's role is more than one of an active agent whose function it is to identify literary clues in order to discover the text's meaning.

Wolfgang Iser (1980) further develops an understanding of the role of reader in his phenomenology of reading. In his analysis, linguistic and artistic indeterminacy posits an integration of text and imaginative reader. The reader's involvement is necessary to an achievement of the text's potential. The actual text requires the reader to supply its connections and fill its gaps in order to attain its meaning potential. Thus, the subject-object relation of reader and text is relocated within the reader's mind or consciousness. This feature is very similar to Poulet's point. Furthermore, like Riffaterre, literary meaning is more than the sum total of the parts of the text. However, unlike Riffaterre, the reader's decisive and imaginative participation renders meaning. Iser, Poulet and Riffaterre highlight the importance of the reader in interpretation, a feature that is of significance to the development of a holistic model of Bible reading.

The shift to an actualizing of the potential meaning of the text by the reader is accentuated by the early work of Stanley E. Fish (1980a). He asserts what happens in the reader during the reading event reorients the aim of criticism. Meaning is not to be found in what happens in the structure of the text but in the structure of what the text does to the reader: "what it does is what it means" (p. 77). The temporal flow of the reader's experience of reading sentences sequentially, as well as his oscillating back and forth among them, mark specific events in which literary meaning resides. Meaning exists not in the sentence but what is happening in the linkage events between it and the reader's mind and emotions. The reader's experience of the movements between text and mind constitute the advent of meaning: "the place where sense is made or not made is the reader's mind rather than the printed page or the space between the covers of a book" (p. 81). In addition, like Riffaterre, there is a relation

between textual language and reader response in meaning making. Unlike Riffaterre, the reader is always active in processing the text, even those segments of text that are not poetic or stylistic. The significance of Fish's early work for a holistic model of Bible reading is its emphasis on meaning being structured in the reader-text relationship. This view is contrary to a text-centered approach in Evangelical hermeneutics (see 8.3).

The next set of selected essays in Tompkins ordering clearly take a so-called 'subjective turn' in which the autonomy of the text is clearly replaced by the autonomy of the reader or the autonomy of the situated reading act itself. The writings of a number of critics highlight this critical shift in the development of reader-response theory. For Norman Holland (1980), the reader's identity creates literary meaning through a mixture of the self and the text. Literary interpretation, the achievement of a unity of subject and object, is a recreation of the work in the reader's likeness that, in turn, offers the possibility of the recreation of the self. For David Bleich (1980), unfettered response makes possible literary interpretation. That is, the reader must be free from the constraints inherent in a subject-object dualism in order to participate in the construction of knowledge. The "subjective paradigm" of the self in a particular context makes genuine response a precondition to learning and literary meaning (p. 135). It is under these conditions that the reader's responses to literature can break out of the limitations of a pre-defined and objective text and generate action on the text in the form of new understandings of aesthetic experience. The reader's response authorizes his "resymbolization" or interpretation of the text (p. 147) as it offers an epistemological basis for converting aesthetic experience into knowledge. According to the later work of Stanley Fish (1980b), the existence and pursuit of any objective textual meaning melts away completely. What remains after the evaporation of textual structures as repositories of meaning are the reader's experiential structures. Literary meaning exists in the interpretive act of the reader based upon certain interpretive strategies that have been authorized by the interpretive community of which the reader is a member. Literary meaning is reframed in terms of the reader writing the text according to a given interpretive strategy. For Walter Benn Michaels (1980), literary meaning resides in the act of interpretation in which both the reader and text are constituted. That is, the self and text exist as "reciprocally constitutive effects" by virtue of the acts of signification as dictated by of the reader's inherited "canons of interpretation" (p. 200). The freedom of the self to read is constrained by the interpretive strategies that comprise both it and the text. "The most we can say is that we can choose our interpretations but we can't choose our range of choices" (p. 199). The possibilities and limitations of the reader's interpretive strategies determine the kind if not the degree of composition of self and text in the reading act.

A few succinct observations of the themes of these selected essays are in order. First, early reader-response criticism affirms the reader's encounter with the text is essential to the production of meaning. It stresses the distinction between the texts meaning potential and the reader's actualization

of that potential in an actual reading. In addition, the reader's actualization of textual effects is more than what the grammatical structure of a sentence conveys. Textual effects experienced by a reader tend to exceed the actual statements of the text. The recognition of the importance of the reader's role in meaning making is fundamental to the development of a holistic model of Bible reading (see 8.4).

Second, later reader-response criticism emphasizes how context shapes the connections between text and reader in the production of meaning, and even constitutes the text itself. The conventions and strategies of the reader's interpretive community mediate the relation of language and response and the emergence of meaning. These later developments in reader-response criticism reflect the "epistemological revolution" in which language is understood to be embedded in historical and social realities rather than an indication of reality 'at large' (Tompkins 1980a: xxv). One implication of the emphasis on contextuality in interpretation is the importance of the reader's interpretive community on the structures used in biblical interpretation (see 5.0). The significance of this is the undermining of the assumption of meaning as the private interpretation of the solitary reader.

Reader-response theories have been subject to criticism. Eagleton (2003) raises an epistemological issue with reader-response criticism that postulates that texts require a reader to determine meaning. "If one considers the 'text in itself' as a kind of skeleton, a set of 'schemata' waiting to be concretized in various ways by various readers, how can one discuss these schemata at all without having already concretized them?" (p. 73). If the reader's interpretation of the text actualizes the text's 'properties' then it is problematic for textual features to be more than an interpretation of the reader. How can one speak of these textual features prior to their interpretation? In response to his own question Eagleton (2003: 75-76) asserts it is by virtue of social practices of an interpretive community that texts exercise some constraint over the reader's interpretation; "its meaning is to some extent 'immanent' in it."

In addition, the collapse of the distinction between subject and object in reader-response theory did not transform the quest for the meaning of the text as the overall goal of criticism. The goal of critical inquiry into the relation of reader and text in reading remains the same as it was with New Criticism. Only now it is the reading context that generates a textual object of which the subject is the reader or the reader's interpretive community. "The text remains an object...an occasion for the elaboration of meaning" (Tompkins 1980b: 225). This betrays the preoccupation of critics with privileging the locus of meaning in particular descriptions of the relation of subject and object in reading.

Finally, the theoretical shift to the reader-context paradigm has also focused attention on the diminishing spiritual value of reading. If the text simply mirrors the reader's identity or interpretive conventions then the possibility of personal moral change has been lessened significantly. "What you get out of the work will depend in large measure in what you put into it in the first place, and there is

little room here for any deep-seated ‘challenge’ to the reader” (Eagleton 2003: 69-70). A social model is especially problematic when it comes to Bible reading. “[I]t is difficult to see how the text can transform or correct the horizons” of the reader “‘*from outside*’” the interpretive conventions of his or her community of practice which constitute its meaning (Thiselton 1992: 537, italics in original). Texts, by virtue of their inescapability from a culture of interpretation, are no longer “a force exerted upon the world” but rather represent sites of dispute over political power (Tompkins 1980b: 225-226). The alleged values of reading have been moved beyond the reader’s moral responsibility of forming a better definition of self to his or her engagement of the political activity of winning the competition of discourses. Vander Weele (1991: 145) affirms those reader-response theories such as intersubjective models of reading which move beyond the assignment of autonomy to a single feature such as the reader’s identity or interpretive community to embrace a more organic conception of the relation of reading agencies.

## 2.5.2 Transactional theory of reading

What happens when readers read texts? Rosenblatt (1994: 13-14) employs a musical analogy to illustrate transactional theory. She likens the activity of reading to a musician’s performance of a musical score. The composer’s text activates and guides the performance by virtue of the artist’s playing of the notes. A work of art comes into being as the musician draws upon experiences of life and music in the performance that is suitable to the score’s notations. In addition, Rosenblatt (1994: 137-138) notes the artist who performs the musical score that is the text, a unique rendition played only by the instrument that is the reader, is also a critic who critiques the validity of his or her interpretation. The individual reader is both performer and critic of the meaning found in the reading transaction. The following is a brief description of basic activities associated with the reader’s production of meaning during the reading of a text according to Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory.

### 2.5.2.1 Literary meaning exists in the transaction between reader and text

At the heart of Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory of reading is the view that meaning is predicated on the reader’s perception and response to textual stimuli. Dewey’s (1896) explanation of the observer having a role in what it is that is being observed is basic to transactional theory. He concluded from his experiment that a stimulus is an act of perception. Rosenblatt was influenced by his view of the organic relation of “the experiencing subject and experienced object” (Connell 2008: 103-104). Rosenblatt (1994: 17) made use of Dewey’s account of the relation between individuals and their surroundings to support her view of reading as a *transaction*. The term reflects the function of an organic system of elements in which each is conditioned by its connection to the



other (2005: 40). “The reader looks to the text, and the text is activated by the reader” (1994: 18). The reader’s engagement with the text conditions it as a stimulus and the text’s verbal symbols prompt his or her evocations and responses. “What the organism selects out and seeks to organize according to already acquired habits, assumptions, and expectations becomes the environment to which it also responds” (1994: 17). The pattern of physical black marks on white pages becomes in the hands of the reader a pattern of linguistic symbols, a text that occasions the emergence of meaning (2005: 8). The use of the term *transaction* also reflects the influence of the larger context in which the reading event occurs. The word “ensures that we recognize that any interpretation is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular social or cultural context” (1995: 295). Change in the time and place of reading impact the “live circuit” between an individual reader and the particular text being read: it occasions a “different circuit, a different event—a different poem” (1994: 14).

### 2.52.2 The roles of the reader and the text in the literary transaction impact meaning-making activity

Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995) transactional view of reading highlights the importance of the contributions of the situated reader and the text to the production of meaning in the reading event. The meaning of a reading transaction resides within the reader’s shaping of the relevant “reverberations between what is brought to the text and what it activates” into a completed reading (1994: 174). The input of the text in *the act of reading* offers perspective on the reader’s meaning-making activity. The text functions in two major ways in the reader’s experience: it is the *stimulus* of verbal symbols that evokes or activates the reader’s selective attention to memories of past experience or present concerns that he or she may associate with its pattern of signs; it *regulates* the reader’s awareness of relevant features by which she or he develops a framework and orders a coherent organization of his or her reading experience into a literary work (1994: 11).

The reader’s production of meaning involves his or her recognition of responses activated by the text’s stimulus and the synthesis of these responses into a completed reading. The final synthesis is the reader’s “poem” or “literary work of art” (1994: 12). Responses coexist with textual evocations as a “concurrent stream of feelings, attitudes, and ideas [that] is aroused by the very work being summoned up under the guidance of the text” (1994: 48). Reader attention frequently shifts between the text’s verbal symbols and his or her responses to them (1994: 129). There is an ongoing process in which the reader responds to textual stimuli *and* draws upon relevant aspects of his or her linguistic repertoire and life experience to order the responses (1994: 43). Drawing upon these resources the reader recognizes both publicly acknowledged referents of the verbal symbols and attends to “a special personal feeling-tone and significance” associated with the text’s words (1994: 53). It is not uncommon for readers to “pay attention first of all to the feelings and ideas accompanying the emerging work” (1994: 145). The reader experiences the ongoing activity of selecting and

constructing these relevant responses into a completed meaning. It is by means of this ongoing “synthesizing process” that the reader fashions the meaning of the reading experience with the text (1995: 265). Whilst the criteria of a valid interpretation vary according to social context, the reader’s reading should not ignore or contradict textual elements or impose on the text renderings which have no basis in it (1994: 115, 137).

The transactional character of the reading event distinguishes Rosenblatt’s theory from other accounts of reading. Transactional theory affirms the importance of the situated reader *and* text in an understanding of the production of meaning in the act of reading. “The finding of meanings involves both the author’s text and what the reader brings to it” (1994: 14). Unlike New Critics who affirm the text as the locus of meaning, Rosenblatt emphasizes the importance of the reader’s activity to the generation of meaning. The text remains a physical artifact until the reader transacts meaning from inscriptions on its pages. And unlike the psychological and social literary theorists who posit the locus of meaning in the either reader’s identity or reading community, Rosenblatt stresses the importance of the essential roles of the text and the reader in the reading event. Yet she also affirms the relation between reader and text is a socially embedded event. The reader’s transactions have “social origins and social effects” (1994: 157). Rosenblatt’s transactional theory offers a non-reductive account of the pertinent factors affecting the production of meaning in the reading event.

### 2.52.3 The reader’s reading stance and meaning-making activity

Rosenblatt (1994, 2005) also highlights the role of the reader’s reading stance as being basic to activities associated with the reader’s production of meaning. The reader’s adoption of a reading stance orients the reader to the text and indicates a “readiness to respond” in a particular manner to it (1994: 43). The text’s verbal symbols are “potential stimuli for the reader’s engaging in various kinds of selective activities (1994: 75). The reader’s attention to select objects of thought as experienced during reading is guided by reading stance (2005: 10). Reading stance shapes the emergence of elements that constitute the reading transaction and the readers focus on their content to the exclusion of other features (2005: 12). In addition, reading stance determines the range and blend of “public and private” features, primarily the analytic and experiential aspects of meaning making respectively, to which the reader selectively attends and synthesizes in the composition of meaning (2005: 10). It sets in motion the proportion of socio-cultural and individual factors which are present in the act of reading. Reading stance manages or limits the potential range of referential and affective responses that could be activated by the stimulus of the text (1994: 75).

The adopted reading stance differentiates the character of the reader’s selective activities. The reader’s focus of attention shifts as he or she moves along a continuum of reading stances. The

prospect that various meanings can emerge from the same text as the reader engages it with different reading stances highlights the operation of different kinds of selective activities. The “efferent” and “aesthetic” stances mark the two distinct poles of the continuum (1994: 37). The reader’s choice of either a dominant efferent or aesthetic stance, primarily the cognitive and affective aspects of meaning respectively, determines the distinct character of the transaction. The reader who readily selects useful information that she or he will carry away from the reading adopts an “efferent” stance toward the text (1994: 24). In contrast, the reader who adopts an aesthetic stance is concerned with the literary experience of the “web of feelings, sensations, images, ideas, that he weaves between himself and the text” (1994: 137). Aesthetic reading offers the greater possibility of access to a new state or quality of the reader’s makeup since this stance affects the extent of his or her involvement in thought and emotion in reading. Reading stance activates the meaning-making process of selection and synthesis of reader responses.

### 2.5.3 Bible reading, religious experience and Rosenblatt’s transactional theory

Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory offers critical insight to our understanding of how ordinary readers relate texts to actual life experience. It conceptualizes the meaningfulness of the text to the reader, a feature of significance to the spiritual meaning in Bible reading. Pike (2003a: 38-39, italics in original) argues reader-response theory in general and Rosenblatt’s transactional theory in particular have “contributed to the restoration of a healthy balance in biblical studies by focusing attention in what the Bible means to individual readers today as well as what it *meant* to its original readers.” Her theory addresses fundamental aspects of the processes of the production of meaning that make possible the reader’s readings of biblical texts and readings of God’s activity in life. The production of religious meaning from the Bible involves the reader’s actualization of the text’s potential (see 2.5.1) and an appropriation of it in an apprehension of God in life experience or a state of affairs. At issue is the reader’s judgment of the association of extralinguistic referents and the sense of the text’s verbal symbols. These judgments are basic to the effort to make intelligible an apprehension of God. The following is an account of the meaning-making process by which reader’s link words and worlds.

Religious texts such as the Bible may be valued by readers for more than the information they contain and can be “experienced as works of art” by them, especially when they approach it with certain “urgencies” (1994: 36). The reader’s conscious or unconscious assumption of a reading stance towards the text affects the elements in the transaction to which he or she will pay attention (2005: 10). The reader must select from the “wide range of referential and affective responses” that can be potentially activated by his or her engagement with the stimulus of the text (1994: 75). The reader’s attentiveness of these responses is in actuality his or her consciousness of the acquired associations

with the text's words (1994: 72). "The reader's attention to the text activates certain elements in his past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols" (1994: 11). These connections come from the reader's fund of language and experience. This fund is the capital on which the reader draws to make associations between the text's words and external referents and internal responses. There are "public and private aspects" of the reader's fund that furnish the connections (2005: 10). Interpersonal experience contributes to the reader's linguistic fund. The reader's intrapersonal "present interests or preoccupations" also affects what connections the reader attends to in the transaction (1994: 20). The reader organizes the selected cognitive-affective responses into a completed structure which he or she interprets as the text's meaning (2005: 14). The synthesis of referents and responses takes place according to some interpretive frame of reference (1994: 135). The reader's judgment of the construed meaning occurs within a community of interpretive practice and according to its criteria of what constitutes an acceptable reading (1994: 129, 135). The reading experience offers the prospect of the reader transcending the boundaries of his or her thoughts and coming into a new understanding of life experience or a state of affairs.

The transaction is basically between the reader and what he senses the words as pointing to. The paradox is that he must call forth from memory of his world what the visual or auditory stimuli symbolize for him, yet he feels the ensuing work as part of the world outside himself. The physical signs of the text enable him to reach through himself and the verbal symbols to something sensed as outside and beyond his own personal world. The boundary between inner and outer world breaks down, and the literary work of art, as so often remarked, leads us to a new world. It becomes part of the experience which we bring to our future encounters in literature and in life. (1994: 21).

The religious dimension of the reader's reading experience qualifies as the phenomenon Rosenblatt describes as the sensing of something outside of his or her personal world which occasions a new understanding of the world. Of importance in the reading of religious works is the reader's consciousness of "the qualities of thought and feeling generated by the words during the reading of the text" (1994: 36). An appropriation of meaning is the framing of life experience or state of affairs as having religious qualities by virtue of the reader's actualization of the text. "[R]eading as production of meaning can also mean an appropriation of meaning" (Croatto 1987: 30). In the process of reading, the reader associates with the text's words certain extralinguistic referents acquired from public and private realms with their cognitive-affective dimensions. The reader's deemed apprehension of God in life experience as an extralinguistic textual referent is an instance of an appropriation of actualized meaning. This aspect of the production of meaning is inherent in the reader's reading transaction with the biblical text and is not separate from or subsequent to a completed reading of it. An appropriation of meaning is part of the reader's understanding as it occurs during the act of reading the text. The reader's cognitive-affective processes "may go on either at the same time or in many different phases" as he or she reads (1995: 270). An act of appropriation can be

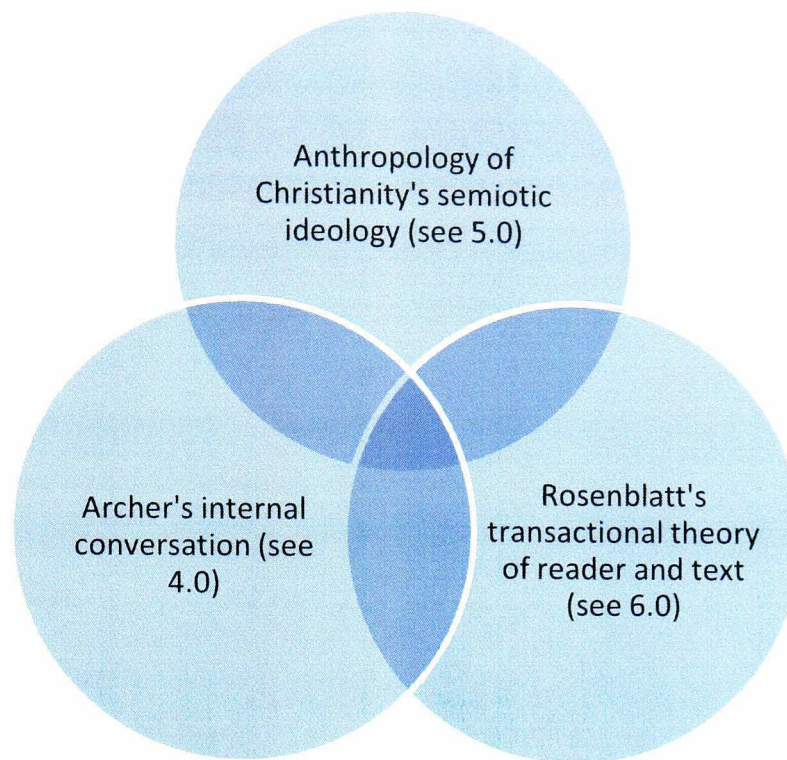
discerned in the reader's verbalization of meaning. The reader "must 'find words' for explaining the evocation and the interpretation" in his or her transaction with the text (2005: 19). Transactional theory indicates the meaning-making process by which the reader's readings of God in his or her life experiences are shaped by Bible reading.

## 2.6 Theoretical framework, thesis argument, and research findings

The relation of Bible reading and Christian religious experience is the focus of this thesis. This chapter is an effort at the construction of a theoretical framework by which the reader's role in the production of meaning can be properly situated. The pertinent factors which contribute to the ways in which readers combine text and life are complex and cannot be accounted for in terms of one cognitive domain alone. There are significant intrapersonal, interpersonal and literary dimensions of meaning-making activity that structure the relation of Bible reading and Christian religious experience. The assembled model offers an adequate perspective on how the situated reader's apprehension of God is shaped by his or her production of meaning in solitary Bible reading events. The theoretical framework accounts for pertinent factors in the reader's activity of the formation of religious meaning of life events via Bible reading.

Archer's sociological theory of 'internal conversation' highlights the importance of the character of the reader's self talk to the mediation of personal concerns and structural life situations. It is from within the context of their relation of pressing concerns and Christian way of life that readers encounter the Bible. The intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions of reflexivity impact the Bible's relation to religious experience. Research in the field of anthropology of Christianity emphasizes the importance of the cultural logic by which situated readers of biblical texts access their potential to signify the experience of the divine in life. Semiotic ideologies inform the processes of meaning making by which readers read God in their lives. Church-situated rationales for the signification of God's presence offer a way of understanding how reader's mediate the text-life relation. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading indicates that meaning is not an entity to be found in the text or the reader but rather it is constructed by the situated reader's responsible engagement with the text. The reader's production of religious meaning involves the connection of the sense of the text's words with extralinguistic referents. The reader's transactions are activated by the adopted reading stance toward the text. It directs the selection and synthesis of evoked referents and responses into a completed reading. Reading stance is a catalyst to the reader's actualization and appropriation of meaning. Each of these theories serves as the background of the findings chapters (see Figure 2.1).





**Figure 2.1:** Theoretical frame of Bible reading and religious experience for findings chapters

Pragmatic and ideological aspects of the relation of Bible reading and Christian religious experience are basic to the argument of this research thesis. These are pertinent factors of participant reader transactions. The pragmatic is composed of the reader's personal quest to resolve a pressing faith-life anxiety via Bible reading and the ideological is the logic of church teaching on the apprehension of God, a rationale that offers a promising way to address the reader's anxious disposition. Research findings indicate the individual blend of these pragmatic and ideological factors impacts the reader's meaning-making activity in Bible reading.

Reader intrapersonal concerns of faith and life occasion an internal conversation to retain Christianity as a way of life (see 4.0). Readers evidence anxiety of an uncertainty of their Christian faith, a tension related to a critical life transition to becoming an independent adult called "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000). Mosaic Church's semiotic ideology of restorationism offers readers a way to resolve these faith-life tensions (see 5.0). Church teaching and practices of textuality and oral testimony provide ways to come to know God personally. Readers adopt aspects of this ideology of experiencing God according to the character of their spiritual quest. Their adoption of semiotic ideology is linked to their inner faith-life dialogue.

The particular mix of pragmatic and ideological factors has a shaping influence on reader orientation to Bible reading transactions. A single case study indicated there are pertinent internal and external features that contribute to one reader's reading stance towards biblical texts (see 6.0). According to transactional theory the structure of the reader's literary experience corresponds to certain primary

shaping influences on meaning making. The particular blend of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors informs this reader's stance. It is by means of a reading stance that this reader engages with the stimulus of the text, attends selectively to evoked referents and responses to it, and synthesizes relevant elements into a completed meaning. The individual reader's reading stance structures the reading experience and governs the transactions of actualization and appropriation. His reading stance mediated the relation of a reading of the Bible and the apprehension of God in his life experience.

In conclusion, the theoretical framework contributes to our understanding of pertinent factors that shape the solitary reader's meaning-making activity. It offers explanations of the role of the reader's reading stance in biblical transactions and the processes by which readers assign spiritual qualities to the text's written symbols.

### 3.0 Methodology Chapter: Researching Bible reading and Christian Spirituality

Chapter Abstract: *The focus of this chapter is the presentation of methodological issues related to the purpose, design, data collection and analysis, quality, and ethics of the research project. A framework for assessing qualitative research on behalf of the Cabinet Office provided by National Centre for Social Research (Spencer et al., 2003) informed the development of the topics and issues covered in this chapter.*

#### 3.1 Research Purpose

##### 3.1.1 Researching research on Bible reading and Christian spirituality

A series of extensive bibliographic searches for empirical investigations of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality were undertaken from autumn of 2007 to the spring of 2010.

Bibliographic searches revealed no empirical studies on the relationship of solitary acts of Bible reading and their connection to the apprehension of God in life experience. This was an indication of a gap that is in need of research. A description of the searches is presented in Appendix A.

##### 3.1.2 Research aim

The purpose of this research is to contribute to our understanding of the relationship of solitary acts of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. The aim of the research project is to examine the role of the church-situated emerging adult reader as the contact point in the relation of biblical text and Christian religious or spiritual experience. Its main concern is the investigation of the role reading stance plays in how reader readings of biblical texts guide their readings of experiences of God in their lives. It focuses on the shaping influence of reading stance on reader appropriations of actualizations of meaning as his or her deemed apprehensions of God in life experience.

##### 3.1.3 Research questions

Main research question:

*What is the role of the church-situated British emerging adult reader's reading stance in the relationship of solitary acts of Bible reading to his or her deemed apprehensions of God in life experience?*

Supplementary research questions:

1. *What is the impact of the major life transition of emerging adulthood on the church-situated reader's orientation to solitary acts of Bible reading?*



2. *What is the influence of church interpretive structures on the emerging adult reader's orientation to the appropriation of actualized meaning in solitary acts of Bible reading?*
3. *How do emerging adulthood and church interpretive structures affect the individual reader's orientations to the appropriation of actualized meaning as deemed apprehensions of God in solitary acts of Bible reading?*

#### 3.1.4 Change in research questions during study

The focus of the research aim remained the same throughout the research process. My interest was constant in the church-situated emerging adult reader's role in the relation of Bible reading and understandings of deemed apprehensions of God in solitary acts of Bible reading. However, later development of the research questions reflected a shift of focus. There was an expansion of initial interest in the content of reader interpretations to later concern with reader orientations toward the Bible that impacted interpretive activity. This change of focus occurred over the course of the data collection and data analysis stages as my attention was drawn to pertinent personal and contextual factors that had a shaping influence on readers readings of the Bible and deemed experiences of God. For example, I observed the significant role reader reading dispositions played in biblical transactions. I also observed the impact of church interpretive structures on participant readings. This resulted in inclusion of the language of individual reader orientations and reading stance in the research questions.

#### 3.1.5 Relevance of research to end user

I anticipate research findings will be of relevance to leaders of Christian churches and religious educators in universities and seminaries who have an interest in biblical interpretation and Christian spiritual formation of British emerging adults. The research offers contributions in theoretical and applied knowledge on the subject matter of the topic. The theoretical abstraction of the phenomenon of emerging adult spiritual uses of the Bible provides a productive understanding that offers end users the utilisation of concepts in their contexts. The rich description of participant reader reading dispositions and the interpretive structures of their church context contain details which offer end users a basis by which to judge the relevance of research findings to their situations. The theoretical and applied aspects of the research also offer the prospect of new insights into the relationship of literary experience and spiritual experience among emerging adults. In addition, end users may utilize the pedagogical suggestions of the research.

## 3.2 Research paradigm and methodology

### 3.2.1 Qualitative research paradigm

This research project is a qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry in social science research is undertaken in order to understand some experience, activity, or phenomena from the perspective of the participants involved (Elliott *et al.*, 1999). Qualitative researchers seek “to *understand the meaning* people have constructed about their world and their experiences; that is, how do people make sense of their experience?” (Merriam 2002: 4-5, italics in original). Characteristics common to qualitative research are descriptions of participant experience and meaning and the researcher’s conceptual framing of that experience and meaning (Preissle 2006: 686-687). Researcher interpretation of participant accounts of subjective meanings to make sense of the world of experience is a feature of qualitative research (Merriam 2002; Willig 2001; Crotty 2003).

Qualitative inquiry is an appropriate research paradigm to address the aim and questions of this project. Ruffing (2005: 321) argues that qualitative inquiry offers an appropriate approach to the study of Christian spirituality in that it permits researcher access to respondent accounts that “produce new insights about a broad range of human experiences which may be infused with the sacred.” A qualitative approach is consistent with my research aim of an examination of reader readings of biblical texts and their readings of God’s presence in their lives. In addition, participant reports of their Bible reading experiences are of importance to research questions about influences of emerging adulthood and church interpretive structures on reader orientations to appropriations of actualized meaning. This study is contingent upon what sense participants make of Bible reading and their deemed apprehensions of God in life experience in solitary reading acts.

### 3.2.2 Hermeneutic methodology

A hermeneutic methodology was deemed adequate and appropriate for use in this qualitative research project. Researchers have a hermeneutic relationship with participant constructions of meaning. In essence, the “researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world” (Smith and Osborn 2008: 53). Since there is “no possibility of theory-free knowledge or theory-free observation” (Smith and Hodkinson 2002: 291-292) a hermeneutic approach recognizes the meaning of the topic phenomenon is constructed in the interactions between researcher and participants. The piecing together of an understanding of participant constructions of reality is an outcome of the contextually situated and theoretically informed researcher. This means researcher understanding involves considerable “dialogical engagement with practitioners wherein not just means but also ends are reflected on” (Hammersley 2003a: 3). A hermeneutic methodology steers a

course between the Scylla of objective truth and the Charybdis of radical constructivist activism. Interpretation is instrumental to researcher understandings of Christian spirituality (Schneiders 2005b: 56).

A hermeneutic methodology involves a basic interpretive approach to the research. The sequence of researcher description, analysis, and interpretation of the topic phenomenon reflects the hermeneutic character of an interpretivist approach (Schneiders 2005b: 56-57). Wolcott (1994: 12) maintains qualitative inquiry is characterized by researcher description of observations, analysis of interrelationships of essential factors, and interpretation of participant meanings. The researcher's combination of these three elements reflects his or her qualitative procedure in the research (Wolcott 1996: 49). My research reflects an engagement of all three aspects. This can be observed in the organization of each of the findings chapters (4.0, 5.0, and 6.0). Each chapter format highlights thick and rich descriptions of my observations of relevant phenomena, the use of appropriate theoretical frames in my analysis of data, and constructive interpretation of the data that reflects my understanding of topic phenomenon.

A hermeneutic methodology highlights the importance of the interdisciplinary character of the adopted theoretical framework to the qualitative researcher's interpretation of how situated participants make sense of lived experience. My research project is not confined to a particular theory or discipline with its bespoke aims and methodology. This inquiry made use of multiple theoretical perspectives to help conceptualize the phenomenon under consideration. One benefit of such an approach is that it offers the prospect of understanding multiple facets of data as well as the avoidance of conceptual reduction. Theoretical constructs from the fields of Christian spirituality, sociology, anthropology of Christianity and reader response theory were used in the conceptualization of this research phenomenon (see 2.0).

Hermeneutic methodology offered a strategic approach to the design of my research project. Hammersley (2003: 3-4) argues the hermeneutic tradition that underlies qualitative methodology offers a realistic assessment of research design in which the researcher's aim and method are iteratively shaped. He also makes the point that the initial research proposal is not a fixed entity but rather it is something that is redesigned from the researcher's choices given the interaction of the problems and methods of the research (Hammersley 2003: 2). Viewing research as a "recursive, open process" makes it possible to "identify a comparative, operational, methodological relationship among the research purposes, questions, and processes" (Cho and Trent 2006: 333). It was anticipated that my understandings of the phenomenon under investigation would evolve over the course of the research. This was especially the case given the lacunae of empirical research on the spiritual life of the Bible in solitary reading acts among emerging adult readers. For example, my initial approach to

the research was exploratory in nature yet my aim became more focused over the course of the project due to refinement of my understandings of the topic phenomenon. The adopted methodology was compatible with this developmental aspect.

A hermeneutic methodology was also conducive to my concern for progressive focusing on pertinent data during its collection. Researcher use of data to inform and guide further data collection is distinctive of progressive focusing. Longitudinal research is also characteristic of progressive focusing. The year-long longitudinal research design was intended to allow sufficient investigative access to participant reports and church context. Three stages of data collection were designed to accommodate progressive focusing whereby the emergent data of one stage informs the development of inquiries in the next phase (see Table 3.1). For example, data from first round interviews was used in the development of the second round inquiries, and third round inquiries were based on data of the second round. This approach permitted the sequential evolution of my inquiries into how participants made sense of their apprehensions of God through their Bible readings.

**Table 3.1** Progressive focusing and data collection stages: the following is a summary of primary data sources organized according to planned collection stages to reflect its progressive focusing character.

<i>Stages/Tools</i>	<i>Documents</i>	<i>Interview</i>	<i>Observations</i>
First identification of lines of inquiry	First round selected Bible texts	First round semi-structured	Interviews and church services
Secondary lines of inquiry	Second round selected Bible texts	Second round semi-structured	Interviews, services and small groups
Tertiary lines of inquiry	Third round selected Bible texts	Third round semi-structured	Interviews, services and meetings

In addition, a hermeneutic methodology was conducive to the use of case study in my research. Case study, according to Stake (2000: 435), “is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied.” The researcher gives attention to “one among others” which is a “functioning specific” such as a person or organization in an “integrated system” (Stake 2000: 436). The strengths of case study approach made it a reasonable choice for use in this research project. Yin (1994) lists some benefits of case study: it is conducive to ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions (p. 6); it offers a way to deal with a various data sources such as documents, interviews, and observations (p. 8); it is useful to the investigation of the contextual conditions of a phenomenon (p. 13); and it consists of an “all-encompassing method” in which evidence from multiple data sources can be channelled by theoretical propositions in data collection and analysis (p. 13). Case study provided an appropriate and effective means of addressing my research aim and questions. Chapters on research findings utilized multiple individual case studies (see 4.0, 5.0, and 6.0).

### 3.2.3 Generalizability and transferability

What can case studies contribute to our understanding of Bible reading? It is unrealistic and “unworkable” for qualitative researchers to sample representative population sites in order to generalize broadly (Schofield 2000: 74). “The purpose of a case report is not to represent the world, but to represent the case” (Stake 2000: 448). However, the fact that small scale research does not yield a tidy generalization or a wide-ranging extension does not mean that it cannot have applications to other settings (Pike 2002b: 37). The criteria of generalization must be adapted to suit case study particularization (Stake 2000: 448-449). There is among qualitative researchers a reconceptualising of generalizability in terms of a matching of findings of a particular site to other contexts: “generalizability is best thought of as a matter of the ‘fit’ between the situation studied and others to which one might be interested in applying the concepts and conclusions of that study” (Schofield 2000: 93). Research findings can “ring true” to end users and can provide them with “a provisional truth” (Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2001: 12). There is, then, the possibility for transferability of “a sufficiently discriminating generalizability” of small scale qualitative research findings to other contexts (Pike 2002b: 38). There is a claim of limited generalizability of findings of this research project and shared responsibility with an end user for transferability of findings to situations other than the research site. There is no attempt to try to establish a broad generalizability of findings. The interpretive conditions by which case studies can contribute to end user knowledge will be addressed below.

What impact does this qualitative notion of generalizability have on the transferability of case study and research findings? The significance of the “interpretive turn” (Schwandt 2000: 201) for applicability of small scale qualitative research is the shared responsibility among researcher and end users of the research for the extension of its findings. The impact of the interpretive turn can be seen in its conceptualization of human understanding as historically formed, culturally situated, and socially embedded. One implication is meaning is not an object that is discovered by an interpreter but rather an *awareness* that is disclosed in interpretation (Schwandt 2000: 198). Meaning “is temporal and processive and always coming into being” (Schwandt 2000: 195). There is a “normative dimension” to understanding in that it is a form of practical reasoning and moral knowledge born out of one’s experience in the world (Schwandt 2000: 202). The act of “coming to terms” (Schwandt 2000: 195) with the meaning of a phenomenon applies to both researcher and end user as interpreters.

The qualitative researcher has an obligation to enhance the applicability of research for end users. The actual applicability of research findings is ultimately linked to end user knowledge and understanding. Since there is no absolute certainty or infallible criteria of validity, the character of end user judgments of knowledge claims or research findings is of importance (Hammersley 2008).

Generalization and transferability are relative to the end user's comparative judgment. What this means for the researcher is that he or she must provide generous and significantly thick and rich descriptions of phenomena under investigation in order for an end user to analyze the level of applicability of the research to other settings (Schofield 2000: 75). Ample descriptions make possible the end user's comparison of any similarities and differences that exist between situations (Schofield 2000: 76). I have sought to provide substantial descriptions of the research site, participants, and their uses of the Bible to make sense of apprehension of God in life experience.

In addition, I have sought to be attentive to ways in which research design can increase the potential for generalizability and end user judgments of transferability. The specific phenomena of case study are particularly conducive to manifold interactions of the researcher's empirical data and theoretical ideas (Ragin 1992). In case study theoretical ideas structure data and data explains theory (Ragin 1992: 218, 224). The interaction of the researcher's use of thick and rich descriptions and various theoretical conceptualizations of the data offers the potential for multiple perspectives to emerge from a case study. Different outlooks can be refracted through the prisms of theory and data. This means there are diverse aspects within even a single case study that are potentially conducive to applicability. The transferability of a case study is made possible by an end user's recognition of the ways in which its diverse aspects offer a prospective understanding of his or her situation not previously known. The case study by virtue of its in-depth composition of complex and dissimilar features is conducive to generalizability and can enhance its applicability. I have sought to make clear the interaction of data and theory in order to offer end users the utilization of both to judge the extension of research findings to their contexts.

Finally, to enhance its applicability of research for end users I selected an extensive single case study for the presentation of research findings (see 6.0). This single case study is presented in addition to numerous case studies in the thesis (see 4.0, 5.0 and Appendix N). Stake (2000: 437) maintains the basis for selection of one particular case from a number of cases studied jointly is that the researcher believes it "will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing" about the larger pool of cases. Research findings reveal a pattern of pragmatic and ideological aspects of reader orientations to the Bible. Reading stance, the reader's idiosyncratic mix of these intrapersonal and interpersonal features, was found to be a significant factor in solitary reading that had a shaping influence on his or her appropriations of biblical texts as apprehensions of God. Evidence for this is presented in the form of selected case studies in chapters 4.0, 5.0, and the extensive single case study in 6.0. Also, the selected single case study is useful to the generalizability of research findings. Even though case studies cannot be statistically generalizable they are analytically generalizable in terms of theories and propositions (Yin 1994: 10). Case study can be useful to the explanation of a theory or testing of a proposition (Yin 1994: 3). In-depth case study can falsify preconceptions, assumptions and

hypotheses and compel revisions in theories and suppositions (Flyvbjerg 2006: 235). The usefulness of the single case study can also be seen in the generating and testing of hypotheses that can contribute to theory building (Dooley 2002). Whilst theory building is outside the purpose of my research this thesis is an effort to contribute towards the building of a theory on the nature of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. My overall research aim is to understand the role reading stance plays in reader apprehension of God via solitary acts of Bible reading. I deemed it important to test critically the general notion of reading stance; the single case is useful to the testing of the concept of reading stance. My approach to the testing of reading stance is this: if the notion of reading stance is not valid in this single instance then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230). This falsification approach is explained below (see 3.2.4). My reasoning for the selection of the single case from among the other individual cases is related to these focal points of the presentation and critical testing of research findings. Detailed selection criteria of this case study are presented in chapter six (see 6.2). This single case manifested characteristics that were common to other individual cases yet its idiosyncratic character was also significant to the research. The research design made possible the eventual selection of the single case study. I did not select the case in advance.

#### 3.2.4 Case study method, researcher subjectivity, and theoretical generalizability

Flyvbjerg (2001: 81) addresses the criticism that case study method occasions a “tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived notions.” The point being that the method encourages researcher bias towards data that tends to support and confirm his or her subjective views. In response, he argues case study fosters an close-up involvement in the real-life conditions of the phenomenon being investigated that exposes the researcher to points of view and behaviours which can compel the revision of prior assumptions and theories (Flyvbjerg 2001: 82). The testing of researcher outlooks in relation to subject practice in real-life contexts is an advantage of case study rather than a detriment (Flyvbjerg 2006: 235). As such, case study method is characteristically biased toward falsification rather than toward verification (Flyvbjerg 2001: 83, 84).

Flyvbjerg (2001: 76) also argues the usefulness of case study method for theoretical generalizability of research findings, a position that is related to Karl R. Popper’s concept of falsification. Popper (2002: 9) promoted four deductive tests of propositions as a means to distinguish between scientific statements and speculative ones. This was in an effort to counteract the “problem of induction,” the inductive logic that justifies the inference of a universal statement or theory from single propositions (Popper 2002: 3-4). One deductive test he asserted was the critical testing of theory “by way of the empirical applications of the conclusions derived from it” (Popper 2002: 9). Both positive and negative outcomes of deductive testing are of use to the researcher as the test serves either to verify or

falsify the proposition (Popper 2002: 10). As long as the proposition under consideration withstands deductive testing there is no reason to reject it, though its truthfulness should not be assumed to have been irrevocably established. If testing proves to refute the proposition and necessarily those aspects of the theory of which it is a conclusion then they have been “*falsified*” and the proposition is unacceptable and in need of revision (Popper 2002: 10, italics in original). Popper’s example that ‘all ravens are black’ is subject to a procedure of falsification in which a search can be undertaken and if white ravens are found the statement would be proven false (Corvi 1997: 28). Flyvbjerg (2001: 76-77) maintains the in-depth approach of the case study can give rise to one observation that falsifies a proposition: “if just one observation does not fit with the proposition it is considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected.” For example, Stake (2000: 448) says a single instance of harm undermines confidence in the notion that the welfare of a child of divorced parents is best realized when placed with his or her mother. Kvale (1996: 243) maintains “the more attempts at falsification an interpretation has survived, the stronger it stands.” A generalization can be formulated along the line of reasoning that if the finding is not valid for the case study then it is unlikely to be valid for other cases (Flyvbjerg 2001: 78).

My thesis suggests that reading stance exerts a significant shaping influence on reader orientations to Bible reading transactions. This view is open to refutation. Popper’s deductive theory of testing offers a line of reasoning that can be used to falsify the concept of reading stance: if the concept of reading stance is not valid in the extensive single case study then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230). The selected extensive single case study, which reflects the pattern of the individual mix of pragmatic and ideological dimensions of the reader’s reading stance, offers a testable case (see 6.0). The advantage of case study method is that it can test researcher outlooks in relation to subject practice in real-life situations (Flyvbjerg 2006: 235). As noted earlier, the single case study can be useful to the generating and testing of hypotheses that can contribute to theory building (Dooley 2002). It offers but one test in a potential series of progressive tests by which the shaping role of reading stance could be proven acceptable or unacceptable.

Smith and Deemer (2000: 883) claim there is a problem with falsification. They maintain if observation is theory laden then it is impossible for there to be ‘facts’ that can be observed independent of theory. It is a contradiction for a researcher to test a theory or hypothesis against an observation of reality that is independent of theory. This critique assumes one holds either to an epistemology of constructivism or realism, that one is a relativist or “quasi-foundationalist” (Smith and Deemer 2000: 880). This is a false dilemma. Philosophical hermeneutics offers an epistemological view which holds that there is truth to the matter of interpretation (against many constructivists) without holding to the correspondence between an object and language (against naive realists) (Schwandt 2000: 198).



### 3.3 Data collection

#### 3.3.1 Data requirements

The designation of appropriate data collection methods is related to what constitutes the required data. Data consists of information that addresses and answers the research questions. A consideration of the kinds of data needed to answer research questions is a prerequisite to the selection of suitable methods of collecting it. The research project highlights the interconnection of the personal and contextual in reader uses of Bible reading to understand apprehensions of God in life experience. First, it is imperative to get the particulars of reader transactions with biblical texts and of their contextually informed understandings of spiritual experience. Interpretive activity involves the situated readers' transacted sense of what the text says and what this meaning says about God's activity in their life experiences. Attention must focus on readers actual meshing of biblical interpretation and life experience. Reader disclosure of transactions with the text can take many forms, including evocations, evaluations, interpretive framework guesses and revisions, and emerging meanings. Reader development of literary meaning can address understandings and concerns of self, life, and God. Second, it is also necessary to understand the church context in which participants are situated. Church beliefs and practices feature in the interpretive activity of readers. Exploration of the church as a community of interpretive practice contributes to an understanding of its shaping influence on participant accounts. An identification of the church's particular beliefs and practices is basic to the recognition of how they might affect participant biblical interpretation and understandings of spiritual experience. The examination of various features of the church, including her history, objectives, Christian theology, worship services, and Bible studies is important an understanding of pertinent factors of her beliefs and practices.

The kinds of data in need of collection are verbal and written accounts of emerging adult reader Bible readings and observations of church meetings as well as documents of church history, beliefs, practices and meeting events.

#### 3.3.2 Research site selection

Mosaic Church in a large city in the north of England was deemed to provide a sufficiently rich research site suitable to research aims and questions (see 3.53.1 for permission for research site access and use of church name). This single site was selected for the following reasons. First, a significant percentage of the congregation are emerging adults. Approximately seventy-five percent of church attendees are university students. This made feasible and accessible the selection of cases among site population. Second, the church's Word and Spirit teachings are particularly conducive to research

questions. The Evangelical and Charismatic congregation emphasizes the importance of the Bible and spiritual experience in the apprehension of God. Church beliefs and practices offer interpretive structures that are attractive to emerging adults. Finally, church leadership was very accommodating to me as a participant observer of church events. I was keen to observe naturally occurring data and was granted full access to a wide range of weekly church services, Bible studies, and social events. My extensive involvement in church sponsored Alpha and 'Beta' Courses was instrumental to case selection and recruitment. An extensive description of the church location, denominational association, beliefs and practices, and worship services is provided in chapter five.

### 3.3.3 Sample design rationale and participant selection

A purposive sample design provides a suitable strategy for this research, as its objective is the selection of particular cases from the research site population that are theoretically relevant to research aims and questions. Theoretically defined samples are appropriate since the definition of characteristics studied "is itself the *topic* of your research" (Silverman 2001: 252, italics in original). A purposive sample consists of cases which are intentionally chosen by the researcher because they are thought to possess certain sought after characteristics or attributes as defined by the research focus. Random design, however, was not deemed a viable strategy for sample selection, as it did not fit the purpose of this research inquiry. Randomly selected cases may not be in a position to provide pertinent data to address research questions. Furthermore, the study aim does not require the achievement of statistical probability of selection from the larger population.

Purposive sampling design permits the gradual composition of sample selection, a strategy that offers the prospect of focusing on rich data according to its theoretical purposes (Flick 2006: 125-126). The decision making process of the achieved sample composition coincided with the gradual development of theoretical criteria for case and group selection. Case selection decisions in this study were gradual and iterative, and were informed by developing theoretical criteria over the course of data collection. Original theoretical criteria were based upon the pilot study and literature review for the upgrading document. The initial research design called for the recruitment of up to twelve cases. Evidence from the pilot study indicated emerging adult subjects were undergoing significant life transitions in education, jobs, dating, and family conditions. These conditions were a factor in their readings of the Bible and their readings of God in life experience. These conditions also affected their interests in Bible reading. As non-Christians some wished to explore Christianity whilst others were concerned to retain their socialized Christian faith.

Case selection for the research focused on British emerging adults associated with the research site church who were concerned with the topic phenomenon. It was expected that new and 'retaining'

Christians would offer a rich data field conducive to the research aim and questions. It was also expected that uses of Bible reading to understand apprehensions of God in life experience were likely to occur among emerging adult new Christians or emerging adult Christians who wished to retain their socialized Christianity. In addition, it was expected that emerging adults in an Evangelical-Charismatic church context would offer evidence of the influence of church interpretive structures on their encounters with the Bible and its use in making sense of experiencing God. It was assumed that subjects would possess basic reading, writing, communicating, and interpretive skills. That is, they should be able to read the Bible and to interpret it with a view to their interpretations having relevance to personal spiritual experience. Also, it was assumed that they should be able to write and verbally communicate their biblical interpretations and the relevance of them to their personal spiritual life experience.

The following is an account of how I negotiated access to selected cases and the conditions of their recruitment. I selected eleven cases of which nine remained as participants throughout the data collections process, and they are anonymously listed here in the order of their recruitment: Lee, Andrew, Kevin, Helen, Clara, Bradley, Simon, Deborah and Melanie. (Presented below in Table 3.4 are influential background factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, education, and occupation.) The initial research focus was on the selection of emerging adult Christians who were new to the faith or who wished to retain their socialized Christian faith. One's Christian socialization is characterized by some form of standardized or normalized socially embedded access to and participation in Christian belief and practice such as it being a feature of one's birth family. The church research site offered two venues which were conducive to the search of new or 'retaining' Christians. A series of weekly topic-driven Bible studies called 'The Beta Course' was made available in spring 2007. The stated focus was to help new or existing Christians to learn more about "the fundamentals to the Christian faith" (Hatch 2007: 3). The church also offered the Alpha Course to new and non-Christians who are interested in exploring the Christian faith. My involvement as a participant observer in both courses, Alpha Course in winter 2007 and Beta Course in spring 2008, exposed me to a number of individuals who were prospective recruits. One young woman from the Alpha Course and three young men—Lee, Andrew, and Kevin—from the spring 2008 Beta Course were selected. They were recruited in September and October of 2008. The female recruit was not responsive to requests for an interview date. She was contacted and chose to drop out of the study. Three interviews with the young men were conducted in October 2008.

Examination of interview data from the three initial sample cases indicated the need for refined selection criteria. Lee had been a Christian for less than six months and Andrew and Kevin claimed to be Christians for approximately five years. Interview data also revealed some interesting differences among the participants. Lee's readings reflected his concerns with being caught up in the enthusiasm

of the church atmosphere and becoming a “blind follower.” He did not want to go along with acceptable beliefs, behaviours, and practices of faith without due consideration of the reason for doing so. Andrew’s reading reflected his desire to recover the lost vitality of his Christian faith. He said “drinking and clubbing” behaviours interfered with His relationship with God. He felt distant from God and wanted a return of the quality of his early experiences with him. Kevin’s readings indicated that he had questions about the truthfulness of the Bible yet as a socialized Christian he wanted to be confident about his beliefs for the proper reasons. The respective readings of these three individuals were predisposed to their diverse spiritual interests in reading. In addition to the sample design of new and ‘retaining’ Christians, case criteria were redefined to include a focus on new Christians of six months or less, Christians who were seeking to recover a sense of lost faith as well as those Christians who wished to retain their socialized faith.

One challenge I encountered with case selection was the plausibility of my identification of a prospective case as being representative of a particular category, such as a ‘new,’ ‘retaining,’ or a ‘recovering’ Christian. Participant observation of subjects at Alpha and Beta Courses offered understandings of their Christian interests and concerns. However, my interpretation of subject descriptions of belief and experience as indicators of possible membership in a category was not always accurate. Subject descriptions were useful but limited. Exposure to prospective cases within time constraints did not always allow for sufficient discernment of subject viewpoints. Also social contexts have a way of affecting what subjects say and how it is said. Initial impressions can shift over time and with repeated contacts with prospective cases.

In the coming months additional cases were selected and recruited based upon the refined criteria. I attended the autumn 2008 Alpha Course with a view to locating prospective cases who met the revised selection criteria. My weekly participation over a course of seven weeks allowed me to meet numerous non-Christian, ‘recovering’ Christian, and ‘retaining’ Christian attendees and to track their interest and or concerns with the Christian faith. I identified four cases that I thought met redefined criteria for selection. Helen said she was a Christian who wished to recover her faith after a significant event in her life which led to her loss of faith. Clara said she “believed in her head but wanted it in her heart.” I considered her a ‘retaining’ Christian. Bradley came to only one Alpha meeting but said he had become a Christian convert within “the last two weeks” and was looking for a church to attend. He sat at my table and I was able to speak to him and get his contact information. I subsequently met him at church services and spoke to him again. Simon claimed to be a Catholic and said he considered himself a Christian but was unsure of the historicity of the Bible. He was not an active or practicing Catholic Christian. I considered him a ‘retaining’ Christian. I recruited these four young people whom I met at conclusion of the Alpha Course in November 2008.

At this stage in the data collection process I had recruited two new Christians of six months or less (Lee and Bradley), two who qualified as ‘recovering’ Christians (Andrew and Helen), and three whom I considered to be ‘retaining’ Christians (Kevin, Clara, and Simon). Of these recruits two were females and the rest males. Purposive sampling populations are defined in terms of topic requirements rather than characteristics of the population at large such as gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic standing (Silverman 2001: 252). However, first round interview data indicated differences between male and female readings and deemed experiences of God. For example, females described spiritual experiences with God in terms that manifested a concern with emotional security and personal intimacy with him, whereas males typically reported concerns with intellectual reservations about Christian belief though some spoke of the importance of sensing “God speaking” to them when reading the Bible. This raised the concern to select additional female cases for the study. Also, I was concerned I was not getting an adequate number of recent, new Christians in the study. I combined the concerns about additional females and new Christians. I contacted a church leader who was responsible for evangelism outreach in the church about any new female Christians in the church from the recent autumn Alpha Course. It was after a church service in which Deborah was interviewed publicly by a person about her experience at the Alpha Course. I enquired about her. He thought she was either a new Christian or interested in becoming Christian. He also supplied the name of Robin who was in attendance at the Alpha Course. I contacted Deborah and Robin, informed them I had spoken to a church leader about the need for new Christians to participate in the research. I also selected Melanie whom I met at the Alpha Course and with whom I also talked at one of the mission group Bible studies I was observing. She was a recent attendee at Mosaic church who indicated an interest in spiritual experience. I considered her a ‘retaining’ Christian. These three cases were selected and recruited the winter of 2008 and spring of 2009. Robin elected to drop out of the study after the second round of interviews.

The final size of the sample consisted of nine participants. Eleven cases were recruited in total. Of these nine participated throughout the research project and completed the interview schedule. Two females elected to drop out of the study. Additional cases were not selected. Constraints of data collection timescale were a factor in the size of the sample. The selected cases of the purposive sample provided data appropriate to the research aim and questions. They provided sufficiently rich data in order to address research questions. Data gathered from the nine cases over the course of the collection schedule revealed dissimilarities of reader orientations to Bible readings between subgroups. Yet the data overall reflected similarities of the general role reading dispositions and interpretive structures played in reader orientations. A summary of the selected cases is presented in Table 3.2. A summary of case selection criteria is presented in Table 3.3. The criteria presented were outcomes of decision making about case selection during the data collection process. The composition of the achieved sample of selected cases is presented in Table 3.4. Throughout the selection process

some individuals asked to be included in the study. They were aware of the study and expressed an interest in the topic and either hinted to me about wanting to be involved or stated outright that they were willing to participate. Those individuals who volunteered for the study were not selected.

Selected subjects were recruited by means of the following method. Subjects were approached in person and asked to participate in the research project. An information sheet was provided which explained the project and what participants would be expected to do (see Appendix B). Recruited participants were asked to be involved in three rounds of data collection activities over a twelve-month period. Each round of activity is comprised of 1) reading selected Bible texts, 2) writing comments about each of the texts on a prepared 'Bible Reading Comment' form, 3) and participating in a one-on-one semi-structured interview based upon, in part, written comments on the selected Bible texts. In addition recruited participants were also informed that they might be asked to be observed in a church sponsored Alpha or Beta Course Bible study, or small group Bible study. A consent form was also given to the prospective recruit. All the selected subjects who were approached agreed to participate and were recruited for the study.

**Table 3.2** Summary of stages of selected cases: the following table organizes participant names according to stages which reflect the refinement of sample criteria (three categories) of case selection.

<i>Case Selection Stages</i>	<i>New Christian</i>	<i>'Retaining' Christian</i>	<i>'Recovering' Christian</i>
Stage 1	Lee	Kevin	Andrew
Stage 2	Bradley	Clara, Simon	Helen
Stage 3	Deborah	Melanie	

**Table 3.3** Summary of sample selection criteria: the following table is a summary of criteria which reflects outcomes of the decision making process of case selection.

1.	British emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 30
2.	New and non-Christians who are concerned about Christianity and Bible reading
3.	Socialized Christians who are concerned to retain their faith and Bible reading
4.	Christians who are seeking to recover vitality of faith and view Bible as helpful
5.	Voluntarily attend research site church services, mission groups, or at least associate with church events like the Alpha Course and The Beta Course and social events

**Table 3.4** Composition of achieved sample: the following table is a summary of significant features about the selected cases.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Status</i>
Lee	26	Male	White British	Office Manager	Single
Kevin	19	Male	White British	Student	Single
Andrew	21	Male	White British	Student	Single
Bradley	22	Male	White British	Student	Single
Clara	21	Female	White British	Student	Single
Simon	21	Male	White British	Teacher	Single
Helen	21	Female	White British	Office Worker	Single
Deborah	21	Female	White British	Student	Single
Melanie	21	Female	White British	Student	Single

### 3.3.4 Data Methods

The focus of this section is to describe the particular data collection methods used, the schedule of their use, and the rationale for their use. Participant reports of Bible reading and researcher observation of church events meet data requirements. Participant reports involve written and verbal accounts of reader transactions with biblical texts. Researcher observation involves watching participant behaviours in church sponsored small group settings. The primary sources of data collection are the documents of participant Bible Reading Comment forms, digital recordings and transcripts of semi-structured interviews, and written field notes of participant observations of small group settings. An additional data source includes pre-existing published and distributed church documents regarding Mosaic Church's history, doctrines, and Bible study materials. A summary of data sources and details is presented in Table 3.5. A timeline of the data collection process is presented in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.5** Types of data sources and summary of data details: the following table is a summary of the primary data sources and an itemization of data details which were collected during research.

<i>Data Sources</i>	<i>Data Details</i>
Documents	45 Bible Reading Comment forms completed
Interviews	27 participant and 3 leader interviews conducted
Questionnaire	9 questionnaires completed
Observations	27 interview, 6 small group and numerous church service and meeting observations conducted

**Table 3.6** Timeline of data collection process: the following table is a summary of the time involved in data collection for each of the primary data sources.

<i>Data Sources</i>	<i>Data Collection Timeline</i>
Case Selection	September 2008-March 2009
Bible Reading Comment documents	October 2008-September 2009
Interviews	October 2008-September 2009
Small Group Observations	February 2009-May 2009
Church Service Observations	September 2008-February 2010

### 3.34.1 Bible Reading Comment document

Documents written for the purpose of research can be instrumental in making it feasible for certain aspects of an investigated phenomenon to be seen (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 201). The participants' completion of Bible Reading Comment forms made this possible. Participant completion of this form is part of the longitudinal design of the study. The data provided was used to track changes over time that was deemed useful in the interviews. These documents were also used to provide "personal details and feelings" and interpretations of events that may not be expressed in other forms of communication (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 201). The actual words, phrases and idioms used by participants were used incorporated in the interviews as questions. The forms were first read during the interview with the participant.

The Bible Reading Comment forms were sent to participants via an email attachment in advance of the scheduled interview (see Appendix C). The attachment contained a cover letter introducing the form as well as the selected biblical texts to be read for each round of the interview schedule. Two biblical texts were used for each round. Participants were asked to read the texts as they would ordinarily read the Bible. Also they were asked in each round to comment on certain things. They were asked to write about any ideas, feelings, images, memories, or concerns that may come to mind as they read. And they were asked to highlight the words or phrases in the verses that triggered their responses. In addition they were prompted with questions in each round (See Table 3.7). The general and open nature of the questions was intended to give latitude to participant responses and to provide relevant data for further examination in the interview. Some participants chose to write their responses on paper rather than on the forms provided. Four participants did not complete some of the forms for the interviews.



**Table 3.7** Bible Reading Comment form questions for each round: The following is a summary by round of questions participants were asked to address on their BRC sheets while reading biblical texts.

<i>Round</i>	<i>Bible Comment Questions</i>
1	What strikes you about these verses? Do the verses shape how you see your life experience? Does your involvement at Mosaic Church affect your understanding of Christianity?
2	What is your interpretation of these verses? How do you see your life now in light of your interpretation? What sources affect your interpretation of these texts?
3	What is it about this passage that is important to you? What about your life do you see differently from this passage?

The selection of appropriate biblical texts that resonate with the possibility of the reader's spiritual engagement is essential to an understanding of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. The following is a rationale for criteria for the selection of biblical texts. The longitudinal design of the research calls for interviews about participant readings of two selected biblical texts in each of the three rounds. I was responsible for the selection of first and second round texts.

Participants selected the texts for the third round (see Table 3.8). They were asked to select Bible passages which they found to be particularly meaningful and spiritually beneficial. The personal nature of their text selections offered a way to understand how they connected literary experiences to apprehensions of God in life experience.

**Table 3.8** Summary of participant selected texts for third round Bible reading: the following is a summary of texts selected by each participant for the final round of Bible reading.

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Selected Text for Round 3 Bible Reading</i>
Andrew	Exodus 12:21-30 and Psalm 43
Bradley	Psalm 41 and 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
Clara	Psalm 139, Matthew 5:3-12, and Isaiah 41:10
Deborah	Matthew 7:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-19
Helen	Matthew 20:1-16 and Luke 15:11-32
Kevin	Romans 12:1-9 and Ephesians 6:10-18
Lee	Mathew 21: 33-46, James 1: 2-21, and James 2: 1-13
Simon	John 6:22-59 and John 10:1-21
Melanie	Proverbs 3:1-10 and Colossians 2: 6-7

Criteria for the selection of biblical texts for participant reading include a definable pericope, a variety of genres, and potential for a spiritually engaging literary experience. A pericope consists of a complete literary unit of thought. In addition, the selection of biblical of texts should not be limited to a particular genre to the exclusion of the others. Eco's (1984) concept of 'open' and 'closed' texts is

pertinent to the issue of genre. Readers can actualize an author's textual strategy by responding appropriately to these kinds of texts. Closed texts elicit specific responses that are direct at "pulling the reader along a predetermined path" (Eco 1984: 8). Open texts are structured to elicit the reader's productive responses. Eco (1984: 8) cites James Bond novels and literary novels as examples of closed and open texts respectively. Biblical narratives like the Gospels correspond to the character of open texts and New Testament books like letters to Romans and Ephesians correspond to the nature of closed texts. Thiselton (Lundin *et al.*, 1999) asserts there are differences in reader re-readings of open and closed texts of the Bible. To reread a closed text is "to seek greater *clarity* concerning a *single, fully determinate meaning*" and to reread an open text is "to seek not clarity but *resonances, intertextual allusions, new perspectives, transformed horizons*" (1999: 171, italics in original). The difference in responses to open and closed texts offers a way to observe readers prospective spiritual engagements. Finally, texts that offer the potential for spiritually engaged reading may provide access to participant accounts of spiritual experience and offer an exploration of their uses of the Bible in making sense of them. Textual content that depicts the spiritual experiences of biblical characters or addresses spirituality may be pertinent to life and germane to faith. A further discussion of theoretical and practical aspects of the selection of texts is presented in Appendix D.

For the first round texts I selected Mark 6:32-44 and Mark 8:1-10. Thiselton (1992) refers to reader response criticism of Mark's Gospel that highlights aspects of the text that are conducive to the prospect of the reader's spiritual response. He notes that the text "seems to provoke the reader to struggle with apparently insoluble puzzles. To keep the reader in some measure of suspense and in the dark allows the reader initially to share the disciples' sense of puzzlement about Jesus" (Thiselton 1992: 520). The 'open' nature of the two Markan passages can have the effect described and offer the prospect of a disquieting reading experience. For the second round texts I chose Romans 8:12-17 and Ephesians 5:15-20. Both passages are discussed in the church's Alpha and Beta Courses. All participants were involved in one or both of the courses. They qualify as efferent or 'closed' texts that affirm church understandings of a Christian spiritual way of life that could be considered as encouragement to young people in a major life transition. Both sets of Bible readings qualify as spiritually engaging texts. The use of these texts also offered the possibility of the divergence of individual interpretations and church teachings. The New International Version of the Bible (1984) was the English translation used for the texts presented in the Bible Reading Comment forms. The reading of the same biblical texts makes possible the comparison and contrast of readers reports. The reading of an identical passage supplies the conditions for an investigation of potential differences in biblical interpretations and any accounts of spiritual experiences among new, 'retaining', and 'recovering' Christians.

### 3.34.2 Semi-structured interview

The format of semi-structured interviews with participants followed the approach of “hierarchical focusing” (Tomlinson 2003, 1989). The objective of hierarchical focusing of interview questions is the initial use of an open-ended approach to get the required data while influencing as modestly as possible the interviewee’s responses. After an initial general question the researcher avoids the introduction of new prepared questions until the respondent’s expressions have been explored fully by using their terminology. Hierarchical focusing approach is consistent with the semi-structured interview. I sought to match respondent language with the appropriate inquiries of the prepared interview outline and to integrate these two features as further prompts and probes. The development of the hierarchically arranged guide of interview questions for each round was related to the questions presented in the Bible Reading Comment materials which were based on general research questions.

The following is a brief narrative of how interviews were prepared and conducted. As noted above a progressive focusing approach used in the three round interview schedule (see Table 3.9 for interview schedule). Preparation for first round interviews consisted mainly of the review of the interview guide. The guide was based upon the questions asked in the Bible Reading Comment forms that were sent in advance to participants. The interviews began with review of project and asked them if they had any questions. I then turned on the digital recorder and began asking them for their readings of Mark 6 and Mark 8 passages. I then probed with follow up questions.

**Table 3.9** Interview schedule with participants: the following is a summary of dates and length of participant interviews by round.

<i>Participant</i>	<i>1<sup>st</sup> Round</i>	<i>2<sup>nd</sup> Round</i>	<i>3<sup>rd</sup> Round</i>
Andrew	05 October 2008 53min	02 April 2009 2hr 14min	19 June 2009 1hr 42min
Lee	14 October 2008 1hr 05min	06 March 2009 1hr 45min	20 May 2009 2hr 04min
Kevin	24 October 2008 58min	27 February 2009 2hr 15min	14 September 2009 1hr 38min
Clara	19 November 2008 1hr 02min	03 March 2009 1hr 23min	14 May 2009 1hr 33min
Bradley	23 November 2008 52min	19 April 2009 1hr 25min	18 July 2009 2hr 08min
Helen	13 December 2008 1hr 11min	17 March 2009 2hr 17min	16 June 2009 2hr 32min
Simon	31 Jan 2009 1hr 50min	28 March 2009 2hr 28min	31 July 2009 2hr 34min
Deborah	01 March 2009 1hr 08min	22 March 2009 1hr 15min	03 June 2009 2hr 02min
Melanie	26 April 2009 1hr 03min	07 June 2009 1hr 22min	09 September 2009 1hr 31min

In preparation of each second round interview with participants I listened to digital recordings of their first round interviews while reading along with the transcripts. A transcript was made of each first round interview. I made notes of pertinent features from the transcripts and selected excerpts for member checking. I also re-read my field notes entries on the participant and reviewed their first round Bible Reading Comment notes. I then prepared my interview question guide. I started the second round interviews with a discussion of the excerpts and then asked about their Bible readings according to the interview guide. I then focused on comparisons of Mosaic documents on Romans 8:16 and Ephesians 5:18 with reader readings. I finished with questions about the person's involvement and views of Mosaic.

In preparation for each third round interview with participants I listened to their second round interviews as I read along with the transcripts. A transcript was made of each second round interview. I selected transcript excerpts for member checking. I also re-read field notes on each and reviewed their second round Bible Reading Comment notes. In addition, I reviewed first round interviews. By this time I had developed a written overview of each participant's stated life history with an emphasis on their expressed faith and life concerns. I reviewed this summary and made any needed revisions in the light of my reviews of materials. I then prepared the interview guide. The preparation process for each interview took about eight hours. I began the interview with participant interpretations of their Bible texts. I incorporated respondent checking of my understandings of second round transcript excerpts in follow up probes to their readings. I also juxtaposed some excerpts to their third round readings for their comments. The focus was on how readers used their Bible readings to make sense of God's presence in their lives. I then asked for participants to complete a questionnaire. I also rehearsed the summary of spiritual life history for respondent validation. I concluded by asking each for contact information in case of need for further clarification.

Interviews were also held with three church leaders to discuss the church's history, objectives, theology, worship services, and Bible studies. These interviews were conducted in September 2008 and April 2009. The interviews followed a prepared interview guide (see Appendix E).

A questionnaire was developed specifically for use in the third round interview (see Appendix F). The twofold objective was to use participant responses as a catalyst for the asking of interview questions and to access basic topic information. A series of questionnaire drafts was prepared and submitted to my supervisors and five peers for critique before the final draft was given to participants. Participants were asked to complete its twenty questions during the actual interview. I reviewed the responses and asked questions from them during the interview. As noted in the third round interview guide, I scheduled the comparison of an individual participant's responses to the questions. For example, I looked for any discrepancies in responses between sections. I also scheduled probing of their

responses on their views and uses of the Bible and their life experiences. My knowledge of previous interview data served as a background to assess and probe their responses. The questionnaire was divided into four sections which consisted of the frequency of participation in religious practices, beliefs about the Bible and views on Mosaic Church teachings, effects of Bible reading on making sense about experiencing God, and the importance of Bible reading to managing life emerging adult life experiences. A Likert Scale format was used in the questionnaire with three to six response points used in section one questions and five response points used in sections two through four. In preparation of the questionnaire I used data from the previous two rounds of interviews, adapted appropriate information from articles on emerging adulthood, and borrowed some questions from a questionnaire on Evangelical group Bible study (Bielo 2007). It is important to note that the questionnaire was supplemental to the interview. The questionnaire provided a creative way to make inquires about relevant topics.

### 3.34.3 Participant observation

Participant observation was the observational method used in data collection. The activity of participant observation involved the overt watching and noticing of the naturally occurring behaviours of participants in various settings in which I took part. Of interest were participant actions and talk in regard to the phenomenon under investigation in interview and small group settings. In addition I observed church services and meetings. Participant observations were recorded by means of written field notes. Field notes of my observations were primarily descriptive, analytical and reflexive. I followed a format including date and time, names of participants involved, and appropriate descriptions of physical setting, participant talk and actions in the interview and small group activities as well as church program activity. Conduct of observations in each setting is briefly described below.

Observational factors which were considered in interviews included attention to details of face to face communication such as participant gestures, facial expressions, eye movements, body position and movements. In my observations I sought to capture what happened. One aim was to try to get a feel for authenticity of participant responses. I was also trying to access some insight into their concerns and interests in their Bible readings. Field notes were made of each of my interview observations. Typical examples of field note excerpts of my interview observations are presented in Appendix G.

Small group settings provided an opportunity to observe talk and actions of four participants (see Table 3.8). Three of the four were new Christians (Lee, Deborah, and Bradley). These occasions offered the prospect of observation of participant interactions with group members in which interest and concern about their new faith might be expressed and addressed. One participant was a 'retaining' Christian who was especially drawn to the teaching of Mosaic Church. Observations of these

participants were consistent with the progressive focusing design of the research project. These observations took place in the Beta Course and 'mission group' settings. Mission groups are designated small groups at Mosaic Church whose members meet together regularly for Bible study and prayer.

**Table 3.10** Small group participant observations: the following is a summary of the dates and occasions of my scheduled observations of selected participants in small group Bible study settings.

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Group setting and date</i>	<i>Recording time</i>
Lee	Mission Group 05 February 2009	N/A
	Mission Group 12 February 2009	1hr 19min
Simon	Beta Course 05 March 2009	2hr 42min
Deborah	Beta Course 10 March 2009	1hr 10min
	Beta Course 17 March 2009	1hr 04min
Bradley	Mission Group 05 May 2009	1hr 51min

Participant interactions with group members made possible my focus on certain factors. Experience with participant observation from my pilot study of the church sponsored Beta Course helped me to focus on talk and actions of group discussions. Observational factors which were considered in these small group settings were participant interactions in which they shared their biblical interpretations, spiritual experiences, and comments on Mosaic church. The small group settings also made possible observations of participant interactions with Word and Spirit church teachings which could arise in group discussions of church materials. I was able to record digitally most of the small group events. Field notes were made of each of my small group observations. An example of a field note excerpt of my small group observations is presented in Appendix G.

I also made observations of church services. The observation checklist from the Kendal Project (Tusting and Woodhead 2000) was used to make observations. Forty-five inquiries from the checklist were used (see Appendix H). General areas covered were the church's physical environment, people in attendance, church service structure, people who participated in the service and those who were in authority, the sermon, weekly church activities, church community engagements, church denominational association, descriptions of the congregation, description of religious beliefs and practices of the church, and researcher impressions of the church. Observations were made of church services during a fourteen month period from September 2008 to November 2009. There is a composite description of a worship service in chapter five composed from these observations (see 5.1). Field notes were made of the observations. Typical examples of field note excerpts of my church service observations are presented in Appendix H.

In addition to church service observations, I also attended and observed other church meetings. For example, on 15 November 2008 I observed a 'New Frontiers Regional Celebration' at Mosaic Church, on 15 February 2009 at 12:45-4:30 I observed 'Launch Pad,' a series of sessions on what is involved in becoming a member of Mosaic Church, and on 03 May 2009 I observed the church's annual business meeting.

### 3.4 Data analysis

There are three basic dimensions of my approach to data analysis: my analytical model (3.4.1), my mode of analysis (3.4.2), and my method of analysis (3.4.3). Examples of data analysis are presented in Appendix I.

#### 3.4.1 Idiographic analytic model

I selected an idiographic approach to data analysis as it is reflective of my hermeneutic methodology. The two major types of textual analysis are systematic coding and researcher reflection or immersion in the data (Tesch 1990; Robson 2002; Hodkinson 2008). Systematic coding is an inductive approach to analysis and a data-immersion method is indicative of an idiographic approach. Idiographic analysis is characterized by the special pragmatic, situational and subjective nature of the approach. The researcher does not apply a predetermined set of procedures to the data but rather is concerned with the use of one or more *ad hoc* methods or with the use of a particular theoretical framework (Kvale and Brinkman 2009: 233). It is contingent upon the guidelines developed by the researcher for the analytic task at hand (Tesch 1990: 78). The researcher's conceptions of meanings emerge from a focused and disciplined engagement with the data, a process that involves the "[i]terative blending of partly subjective ideas with careful (re)examination of the data" (Hodkinson 2008: 2). Researcher uses of data-immersion have drawn criticism for being "particularly resistant to any systemization of their analytical process"; a procedural feature of a "scientific approach" is missing in the *ad hoc* approach (Robson 2002: 457). Such criticism is more reflective of a structural analysis approach which resonates with methodological concerns typical of quantitative analysis. Qualitative research recognizes "each scholar's individuality as a research instrument", a quality that resists the codification of procedures (Tesch 1990: 304). Idiographic approaches should be viewed in principle as a prospective asset rather than a liability (Hodkinson 2008).

#### 3.4.2 Modes of analysis

Idiographic approaches to data analysis can be described as "theory building" and "interpretive/descriptive" forms of analysis (Tesch 1990: 98). The theory building approach is most

useful in the discovery of conceptual relationships between research elements in order to develop generalizations that may apply to other situations (Tesch 1990: 98). The aim of an interpretive/descriptive approach is an understanding of the essence or nature of the meaning of human action or literary texts (Tesch 1990: 68). I refer to this form of analysis as meaning-oriented analysis. Elements of both of these modes of data analysis were incorporated in my research findings chapters. For example, I was concerned to show common themes of participant dispositions of Bible reading such as their faith-life anxieties and search for intimacy with God (see 4.0). My identification of common themes in experiences is typical of meaning-oriented analysis. I also sought to establish connections between identified thematic elements. The development of abstract categories from themes and patterns is typical of theory-building analysis. I established a connection between pragmatic and ideological dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation (see 6.0). These aspects were basic to an understanding of the way in which participants used Bible reading to make sense of God's presence in their life experiences. The modes of qualitative data analysis featured in my research are meaning-oriented analysis and the pattern aspect of theory building analysis. It is not the aim of my research to build a theory but rather to work towards theory building.

### 3.4.3 Hermeneutic method of analysis

The focus here is on a brief description of my actual conduct of the hermeneutic method of data analysis. This is intended as a summary and not a history of the analytic process. In general I took a hermeneutic approach to the analysis of interrelationships of reader, context, and Bible readings. These areas were germane to my research aim and questions. I concentrated on the development of themes or patterns of pertinent data and the grouping of them into conceptually relevant categories. Over the course of data analysis the researcher "becomes conscious of certain 'themes' through either frequency of occurrence, or strength in terms of cataclysmic effect on people, or strangeness in terms of paradoxes, inconsistencies, and deviations from routine" (Woods 1977: 17). The manner in which themes and categories evolved was related to the way in which I immersed myself in the research site, textual data, and literature of the theoretical framework.

The purposes of the two modes of analysis—meaning oriented and theory building—served as guidelines for management of the analytic process. Description is a focus of meaning oriented mode of analysis and explanation is a feature of theory building. The modes are ways in which I organized data into meaningful categories. There are at least two basic ways by which data units can be arranged into categories: 1) groupings are made from prior categories generated by a theory or the research questions; 2) groupings emerge from the researcher's interaction with the data (Tesch 1990: 119). My interaction with the data was the principal means by which I developed categories in meaning-



oriented analysis. I used my theoretical framework to develop and refine categories in theory-building analysis.

In meaning-oriented analysis I focused on the subject matter of a textual data unit in the light of the research aim and questions. Sources of textual data units are Bible Reading Comment sheets, interview transcripts and questionnaires, and field notes of participant observations. I located germane topic statements in data sources and from these data units I identified recurrent themes. I arranged the themes into conceptually relevant categories, applied these categories to data sources and redefined or expanded the categories as needed. Examples of meaning-oriented analysis are presented in Appendix I. In the theory-building approach I focused on making connections between themes generated by meaning-oriented analysis. This represented my movement from description towards explanation. Data analysis is the de-contextualizing and re-contextualizing of data by the researcher (Tesch 1990). I organized themes into two basic abstract categories of participant 'intrapersonal/pragmatic concerns' and 'interpersonal/ideological influences.' The development of these categories was influenced respectively by Archer's (2003, 2007) internal conversation concept and the anthropology of Christianity's concept of semiotic ideology (Keane 2003, 2007). I saw these elements as part of a larger pattern and classified their relationship under the abstract category of 'reading stance.' The construction of this category was influenced by Rosenblatt's (1994, 1995, 2005) transactional theory. A single case study in the thesis serves as an example of theory-building analysis (see 6.0).

Whilst the aim of my research project was not to build a theory but to contribute towards such, I was concerned to offer the general concept of reading stance as a significant feature in the relationship of solitary acts of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. As noted earlier (see 3.2.3), I deemed it important to test critically the qualitative finding of reading stance. Popper's (2002) deductive test of falsification offered a logical procedure (see 3.2.4). His procedure of deductive testing also addresses the criticisms mentioned earlier of researcher subjectivity in case study method (see 3.2.4) and an *ad hoc* approach of idiographic analysis (see 3.4.1). Since case study method is normally biased toward falsification (Flyvbjerg 2001: 83, 84), I selected an extensive single case study as a testable case in an effort to falsify the notion of reading stance (see 6.0). My reasoning approach to the deductive testing of reading stance is this: if the concept of reading stance is not valid in the extensive single case study then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230).

The hermeneutic method had the advantage of allowing for the use of both modes of data analysis. This made possible appropriate uses of data in both describing and explaining pertinent features of the interrelationships of reader, text, and context. The hermeneutic method was conducive to making the conceptual moves from the particulars of the data to the development of abstract categories by which I

was able to establish the situated emerging-adult reader's subjective reading stance as a dominant factor that structures the text and life relationship.

### 3.5 Researcher and the research

#### 3.5.1 Research validity

The issue of validity in qualitative research is contingent upon the researcher's execution of decisions that contribute towards an end user's assessment of the truth or trustworthiness of the research. What enhances validity is less an issue of what rules or agenda is followed by the researcher and more what appropriate decisions he or she makes given the particular challenges faced in the research. Validity is an assessment of the truthfulness or trustworthiness of the researcher's claims of the reality of the phenomenon under investigation. "Traditionally, validity in qualitative research involves determining the degree to which researchers' claims about knowledge correspond to the reality (or research participants' constructions of reality) being studied" (Cho and Trent 2007: 320). The deemed threats to the validity of my research are the status of interviews to access personal accounts, the adequacy of respondent reports, and adequacy of researcher interpretation of respondent reports. What follows is a discussion of these risks and the strategies I used to address them in the research process.

##### 3.5.1.1 Risk of the status of interview data and strategic responses

One threat to validity is the extent to which interview data reflects interviewee meaning of lived experience and to what extent it is deemed to be an artefact of the reality of a social interaction. The assumption that interviews grant researchers access to participant meaning is challenged. Silverman (2001: 93) criticizes as naive "a common-sense assumption about the immediacy and validity of accounts of human experience." This view sees respondent reports as products of local social interactions that make use of cultural conventions and therefore are not an accurate representation of experiential meaning of some phenomenon. Therefore, it is argued that "interviews can never be treated as a source of data for analysis of anything other than the interview itself" (Wilkinson 2004: 121). This "radical critique" sees interviews as being "even more complex than naturally occurring social interactions insofar as respondents may feel additionally obliged to display competence as interview respondents" (Murphy *et al.*, 1998: 120). While it may be unreasonable to think that respondent reports offer direct and unmediated access to experiential meaning, it is not reasonable to assume that the value of interview data is undermined by the radical critique. Hammersley (2003b: 124) argues because respondent reports are constant constructions it should not be taken to mean that they cannot represent personal or social knowledge "any more than the fact that research reports are constructions rules out their claim to represent the world."

In-depth interviews and respondent validation are strategic responses to address the risks inherent in symbolic interactions of an interview. The longitudinal design of my interview schedule was conducive to in-depth interviewing and member checking of reports. Miller and Glassner (2004: 126) argue “information about social worlds is achievable through in-depth interviewing.” They maintain linguistic shaping of socially located identities supplies the researcher with 'cultural tales' and narrative constructs rather than lived experience itself. Yet, within such constructs are partial glimpses of lived experience which the researcher formulates and then subjects them to the participants for validation, correction, or rejection. In addition, the character of researcher questions can promote productive respondent engagement with life experiences that address research aims. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) recommend strategic ways of achieving this. One way is to “suggest orientations to and linkages between, diverse aspects of respondents’ experience, hinting at—even inviting—interpretations that make use of specific resources, connections, and outlooks” (Holstein and Gubrium 2004: 151). I sought to link in interviews a respondent’s different reports of experience and even different respondent’s experiences in order to occasion new understandings of lived experiences.

### 3.51.2 Risk of the adequacy of respondent reports and strategic responses

The adequacy of respondent reports to express their understandings of experience is a threat to validity. At issue are two concerns. First, a respondent’s meaning can be composed at the time it is reported. There can be distortions when responses are reported in the present about readings in the past. Interviews were held with participants after they read the Bible. There is a distinction between the moment of Bible reading in which the reader responded to the text and the moment of the reader’s interview in which these responses were reported. However, Harker (1992: 36) argues conversations “may extend and alter the response of the reader achieved at the moment of reading, but they do not constitute this response—they proceed from it.” A strategic response to this issue was requesting participants to use Bible Reading Comment sheets. These forms offered readers the opportunity to state their responses at the time of reading. The completed forms served as a catalyst for the interviews. Participants were asked to recite their responses from the sheets. In addition, I read their comments during the interviews. Attention was given to beliefs, attitudes and any spiritual experiences that were mentioned. Comparisons between a participant reader’s written and spoken comments were made. Comparisons can give rise to the identification of similar and different responses (Hodder 2000: 711). I asked questions about these features and any responses not previously reported. This contributed to an understanding of the reader responses at the time of reading. The forms were useful to identify reader responses to textual features.

Second, a respondent’s meaning can be different than what is reported. There are two aspects to this matter. One, a respondent’s meaning can be greater than what is reported. Apprehension about interviewer opinions about expressed ideas and feelings of an experience or features of a situation can

cause respondents to resist being forthcoming in their accounts or to withhold certain parts from being reported. Polkinghorne (2007) counsels researchers take appropriate steps to develop participant confidence in her or him as a condition that makes more openness and responsiveness possible. To facilitate this he advises making the most of time and trust, time between interviews for participant reflection as well as the use of a series of interviews to enable the development of respondent trust in an interviewer. The use of three rounds of interviews in my data collection schedule was conducive to such a strategic response. I found participants who were resistant to sharing personal concerns to me initially were more forthcoming in reporting their views over the course of the schedule. Two, respondents can generate reports that do not capture his or her sense of meaning. They often refrain from sharing the meaning of their experiences to an interviewer in order to project competent versions of themselves to a researcher. The power positioning of an interviewer as researcher and the interviewee as respondent gives credence to the interviewer as being in control of the conversation. The interviewee responses to interviewer questions can be biased by what the interviewee thinks the interviewer expects to hear. Polkinghorne (2007: 482) advises interviewers counter an interviewee tendency to provide expected responses to inquiries by “assuming an open listening stance and carefully attending to the unexpected and unusual participant responses.” I found Tomlinson’s (2003, 1989) “hierarchical focusing” approach to interviewing to be useful here. Also, the use of an interview questionnaire was useful. The careful probing of reports tended to show participants of my active listening and concern to take seriously what was being said.

### 3.51.3 Risk of the adequacy of researcher interpretation and strategic responses

At issue is the researcher’s judgment of the uses of interview data in an argument. Respondent reports are an outcome of the interview as a site of social production. These reports are accounts of thoughts and experiences that are constructed “in collaboration with the interviewer” (Holstein and Gubrium 2004: 155-156). What matters here is how the researcher takes the reports and “put[s] them to honest and intelligent use in theorizing about social life” (Miller and Glassner 2004: 138). This is not simply a matter of data analysis but the plausibility of the researcher’s use of data in an argument. The end user should be given an opportunity to evaluate the data that gave rise to the researcher’s interpretation. A strategic response that contributes to interpretive validity is to let end users see thick, rich descriptions and to give “access to the data themselves” (Wolcott 1994: 350). Also, Hammersley (2003) affirms researcher observations are an important factor in the assessment of respondent reports; researcher judgment of any respondent errors or bias helps determines what conclusions can and cannot be made of the interview data. A descriptive approach in qualitative inquiry is typically characterized by researcher participant involvement in a prolonged longitudinal study of a research site. The longitudinal design of my research made possible the observation of social contexts and the use these observations in in-depth interviews which contributed to thick descriptions.

Furthermore, readers can be informed of how researcher interpretations were generated by accessing interview data. The use of sufficient transcript excerpts helps to link data and interpretation. “Readers should be able to retrace the steps in the argument to the text [interview transcripts] and to judge the plausibility of the offered interpretation” (Polknghorne 2007: 484). Also, Perakyla (2004: 290) speaks of the “transparency of analytic claims” of interview data that give the appearance of genuineness: “once you have read them, you are convinced they are transparently true.” By such means an end user should be able to judge the plausibility of the researcher’s interpretations. Excerpts of individual interview transcripts and case studies are presented in the appendices (see Appendices K, N, and O) and numerous transcript excerpts are presented in the single case study of this thesis (see 6.0).

### 3.5.2 Researcher reflexivity

At issue is the impact of my personal biases on the research. It is important for researchers to make their biases known and the ways in which they may have shaped the data. The following is an attempt to address specifically the influence of my Christian status on my interactions with the research process, research site, and participants. Each of these areas will be briefly addressed in order below.

#### 3.5.2.1 My Christian status and the research process

First, the potential influence my Christian status on the research design became apparent to me during my transfer examination. One examiner suggested there was a potential conflict between my Christian faith and the character of social science inquiry, as I was using a “secular” means to address a “sacred” issue. Since there is no neutral position from which a researcher does research, I replied that I did not believe there was a dichotomy between ‘sacred’ and ‘secular,’ between faith and science. This encounter was valuable and helped me to consider the viability of a hermeneutic engagement of faith within a qualitative paradigm of social inquiry. The deemed tension between Christian belief and social science misses a more fundamental issue which is that all social science researchers embrace beliefs about reality that inform their understandings of the research. Since no one has a God’s eye view the social science researcher holds views from ‘somewhere.’ Howell (2007: 372) argues conservative Christian commitment is a “‘standpoint epistemology’” that is analogous to other commitment positions in social inquiry such as those of gender or sexual orientation and race. In what follows I engage with Howell (2007) to explicate the affect of my Christian bias on the research process. Howell (2007: 372) asserts the more problematic research issue is how a Christian researcher goes about researching other Christians. Contrary to the assumption that adherence to universal Christian belief constitutes the vital character of Christian subjects (p. 379) it is the “embodied, lived and relational aspects of the religion” that are critical to local Christian identities (p. 381). This effectively reframes the ‘insider/outsider’ issue in terms of a researcher who shares a

Christian confession of faith but not the cultural context of the subjects being investigated (p. 374). The researcher who is also a Christian might be considered as a religious insider who is granted a special level of access to the believing subject yet such access does not grant a privileged understanding as Christianity encompasses an assortment of beliefs and practices (p. 374-375). This was exactly the position in which I found myself in my study of Mosaic Church, a matter which I address further below. My religious identity as a confessing Christian was relevant to my obtaining access to the research site and participants and it was important to my interactions with them. However, my Christian status did not grant me a common stake in the cultural context or the sharing of local Christian identities. Howell (p. 375) argues what the religious insider can bring to bear on the research is a productive inquiry of what it is that constitutes the character of local Christian commitment such as questioning the identity, beliefs, and practices of confessing Christian subjects. This approach involves the researcher's focus on understanding the "irreducible theological categories" which constitute subjects' local social world as well as secular theory which can be useful to the explanation of their Christian commitment (p. 382). For me this issue was a matter of using my perspective to engage with the context and participants in order to understand them better. My Christian bias provided me an opportunity to engage with subject positions as well as to assess my own assumptions. Certain features of subject understandings of what constitutes Christianity may challenge the assumptions of the researcher and lead him or her to question aspects of their own positions (p. 377). I found this to be the case as church and participant views challenged my own perspective and had the effect of questioning my own position as a Christian. This tension was conducive to the clarification of local beliefs and practices. I believe participant openness to me as a Christian researcher contributed towards my understanding of the complexities of the particular Christianity that was being manifested or embodied on the local level. This draws attention to the tradition in which my Christian commitment is defined.

### 3.52.2 My Christian status and the research site

Second, there were some theological similarities and differences between Mosaic Church and my Evangelical-Reformed church tradition. Whilst we shared an Evangelical commitment to Christianity we held to different degrees of commitment to Charismatic beliefs and practices. I accept the non-cessationist view of the availability of certain charismatic gifts for today yet disagree with the hermeneutic of restorationism. For example, I found a focus on direct, immediate personal experience of God among congregants as preferable to an engagement with theology or worldview as a definable feature of Christianity. I value the role Christian tradition plays in spiritual matters and see its worldview as beneficial to the interpretation of the Bible. This contrast made me more conscious of the distance between our theological positions and practices. However, church focus on Christian spiritual experience made me more aware of the interpretive structures at work within my tradition

that contribute to the formation of concepts and practices of spirituality. This acknowledgement helped me to see that the Bible and tradition are not the only sources that underwrite the rationale of spiritual experience in my tradition. It also helped me to appreciate more fully the concerns that motivated congregant interest in spiritual experience. This understanding helped me to focus on identifying local interpretive structures and representing correctly the particular way of thinking about Christian spiritual experience at work in the church and among participants.

In addition, I made a conscious effort to consider my roles as a researcher and an attendee of the church. Mosaic Church emphasises that every believer is gifted to minister in the congregation. As a Christian I value the importance of worship and ministry. I was asked to read scripture in worship services on a few occasions in 2008 and 2009 and to officiate a communion service. I was more than willing to participate in the public reading of the Bible. However, I declined to lead a communion service. I was also asked to participate in an Alpha Course, which I agreed to do. The focus was on making connections with any older adults who may attend the Course. In addition, I was asked and agreed to teach on two occasions. The first was a talk on ‘Significant Factors of a Church Planting Strategy’ which was given to Mosaic Training School, an intense one year program of teaching and ministry to train future Christian leaders. The second talk was on ‘The Future of Faith’ based upon 2 Timothy 3: 1-9 which was given as a part of Mosaic Church’s Leadership Course, a short term series of lessons for congregants aspiring to leadership. No participant was in attendance at either of these events in which I participated.

### 3.52.3 My Christian status and participants

Finally, I sought to be aware of the impact my Christian beliefs and church involvement may have on participants. Howell (2007: 376) states his involvement at multiple church research sites in the Philippines affected his relationships in productive ways as that “offered access and openness.” I asked each participant before I started the digital recorder if there were any questions or concerns. Only one participant expressed concerns about the influence of my beliefs. It was at the start of the first interview she said was concerned that her views about Christianity may not meet my expectations, as she was unsure of her Christian beliefs. I told her that in my research I wished to know what happens to her when she reads and that meeting any expectations would not help me. She seemed relieved by my reply. I continued to observe her responses during this interview to gauge the persistence of her expressed concern. She was nervous at first but appeared to relax as the interview progressed. From her responses to interview questions I got the distinct impression that she was looking to reengage with her Christian faith, especially given the references to her involvement with the Alpha Course. At one point near the end of the interview she said it was like “therapy” to talk about the history of her faith. She told me on a later occasion of her expectation that her involvement

in the research might offer her a way to address her concerns of faith. This affirmed for me that my Christian status was not a negative feature in the researcher-participant relationship. I sought to respect participant viewpoints and to understand their perspectives from within their frame of reference, even when they diverged from my own. I did not venture to share my views or beliefs unless asked. No one asked me for my beliefs. Only one participant asked me for my interpretation of a passage.

### 3.5.3 Research ethics

#### 3.5.3.1 Research site access

I approached the lead pastor of Mosaic Church in November 2008 to request permission to use the church as a research site and to have access to his congregation for prospective participants. He expressed concern about the possible impact of the research purpose on church ministry. He asked if there would be a need for church leaders to follow-up with the participants in order to discuss 'fall-out' from their involvement with the research. He seemed to be concerned with the possibility of an adversarial approach to participant accounts of Bible reading. He also raised the concern that some participants may feel they would have to perform to meet some research aim. I sought to address both matters by asking the pastor to do a role-play interview with me in which I asked him to share with me a recent Bible reading experience. I then took features of his remarks and asked questions about them to which he responded. I then said that my research aim may involve interviews with a participant and that they would not be unlike the role play. I also said interviews were not intended to correct reader interpretations of Bible texts or to affirm or undermine claims of spiritual experience. My role as a researcher is not to assume an adversarial position in the relationship with participants or to create problems for them or the church leaders. The purpose of the research was to understand what happens inside Bible readers as they read and how this interpretive process is related to understandings of apprehension of God in life experience. The pastor said this helped him understand more clearly what I was doing. He seemed to feel at ease with this approach and expressed that such experiences may have a positive affect by helping participants to express their views on some significant matters in their lives. The pastor also requested that the research be used to help the church leadership team to improve their approach to Christian ministry. The pastor also wanted to know what methods would be used in the research. I told him I had not decided on methods but was considering interviews and some form of written responses to Bible reading. I also discussed with him ethical issues related to the protection of participants, including informed consent, participant anonymity, confidentiality, and avoidance of harm. The pastor agreed in principle to grant me research access. However, final permission was contingent upon his meeting with the church's leadership team at the end of November to discuss my request. I was informed in December 2008 that the leadership team



finalized the granting of official permission to use the church as a research site. The granting of permission by leadership also comprised their acknowledgement of the use of the church's official and public name in the thesis.

A productive relationship was developed with the church pastor and further meetings were held to discuss research progress. I did not experience any major obstacles to my research efforts at the research site. It was important to assure the gatekeepers that my research would be carried out with integrity.

### 3.53.2 Ethical treatment of participants

Due consideration was given to ethical issues surrounding participant involvement in the research. Subjects asked to participate were given an information sheet which explained the project and what they would be expected to do (see Appendix B). Each person was given an opportunity to inquire about the research and its purpose. I answered any questions directly. Subjects were also asked for their written permission to participate in the research project by means of a signed consent form which described the conditions of my sensitivity towards them and their involvement in the research (see Appendix J). I explained the issues on the consent form: that they would remain anonymous in my publications and presentations of the research materials; that pseudonyms would be used to refer to them; that they would be free to withdraw at any time for any reason; and that there would be no direct benefit to them from participating. I also explained that a transcriber would be used to type interviews. Data from Bible Reading Comment sheets, interviews, and observations was kept confidential and used only for research purposes. I took steps to protect digitally recorded and textual data collected from participants, and interview transcripts by storing all materials in a password protected computer and locking the recorder and any hard copies in my desk drawer. In addition, steps were taken to avoid any psychological or social harm to participants. I sought to attend to the quality of the research relationship. I understood the disclosure of personal thoughts and feelings about Bible reading and spiritual experience might be stressful. My building a relationship of trust with participants was a priority. I sought to demonstrate an ongoing sensitivity to their concerns. At every interview I asked each participant if they had any questions or concerns I could address before the digital recorder was turned on. I also worked to develop a relationship free of deception and harm. I was hospitable to them and told them often that I was learning from them and that I valued their involvement in the research. I believe my focus on trust garnered a level of credibility with them. Small group observations occasioned the potential of a loss of participant anonymity. I asked participants for permission to attend the small group sessions of which they were a part. During the meetings I sought to be part of the group and did not speak unless called upon. I interacted with

attendees before and after the meetings. I did not sit near participants so as not to draw undue attention to the research relationship.

#### 4.0 Faith and Life: Solitary Readers' Anxious Bible Reading Disposition

*Chapter Abstract: Participants are characterized by an anxiety about their Christian faith as an enduring way of life. They are caught in a faith-life tension. This tension is related to their status as young people who are seeking to live on their own and apart from their parents. They are concerned with the retention of their Christian faith and are seeking to resolve their anxiety. Christianity is deemed to offer a compass to guide them in uncharted waters of young adulthood. Confronted by their faith-life dilemma participants seek guidance from a local church in northern England to help guide them to resolve it. They intensely desire an apprehension of personal knowledge of God to authenticate Christianity as a way of life. The Christian socialization of the majority of participants combined with the dynamism of the British religious landscape provides a backdrop to the formation of their own religious beliefs. Institutional religion supplies a useful context for this effort. Bible reading affords them an opportunity to address their faith-life tensions. Reader preoccupation with faith-life anxiety contributes to an unrelenting interpretive disposition in Bible reading. The chapter format reflects a sequence of data description, data analysis, and interpretation of data for thesis argument.*

##### 4.1 Description: Clara's spiritual quest

Clara is “searching for why I believe.” She is on a spiritual quest to address her anxiety of uncertainty about Christian faith and her way of life. She attended church since she was 10 years old, became a Christian at 16 while attending an Easter Spring Harvest week, and was confirmed at 17 at her home church (Church of England). She held to Christianity even when her mother lost her faith. However she began to take Christianity for granted: “I just stopped trying to find out more because I thought I knew it all.” The inadequacy of her childhood beliefs was exposed during her critical life transition into adulthood. Yet her familiarity with the Christian faith is not sufficient to answer her doubts about it as a way of life. She is not sure why she accepted Christianity. “[I]f people ever ask me to why I'm a Christian I wouldn't be able to answer because I don't actually know. I believe it but I don't know why I believe it.” She is not sure of what difference Christianity has made in who she is because she has not had “big changes” in her life that she sees in other Christians lives. “I think it's quite hard to say well I act this way because of my faith rather than just I act this way anyway.” She has not had the dramatic conversion experience others reported at church in which “all of a sudden it was like yes this is true.” It is important to her now to understand the reasons for her belief in Christianity and she is “making an effort to question things and to actually think about them rather than just accept them.” She wants to retain Christianity as an enduring way of life in her critical transition to becoming an independent adult.

During her years at university Clara met people at Christian Union and Mosaic Church who were “more passionate” and “very focused” about their faith than she. They were open and expressive about their faith whereas she was content to attend church and keep to herself. She did not sense the need to talk about her faith or pray openly, activities which she observed in others. She felt “there was something that I wasn't getting that everybody else was getting.” Her realization of this set in motion

a search to find a vital spiritual connection with God she felt she was missing in her faith. She felt like she was “just praying to a brick wall” and that “there was nothing there.” She wanted a change in her relationship with God as she was not satisfied with her Christian religious experience. It seemed her faith was “quite superficial.” “I believed it in my head but not in my heart.” God’s absence in her life made her feel like she “wasn’t a Christian.” Now she wants to “feel it”, to have the sense of an affective connection with God.

This quest has resulted in her regular involvement with Mosaic Church. Church teaching, her attendance in the church-sponsored Alpha Course, and her conversations with church leaders were instrumental in affirming her effort to address her faith concerns. She also had talks with church friends which were constructive. Yet her church participation also contributed to her anxiety about faith in her life. Attendance at church services and small groups had a mixed effect on her. On the one hand, it was useful in that it helped her to define what it was she was missing in her life and to close the perceived gap between head and heart. On the other, church reports of dramatic spiritual experience contributed to her anxiety of what it was she might be missing.

Clara was at the point of graduating from university near the end of the interview schedule. She was uncertain of what the future held for her. She had yet to find the missing piece to the puzzle of her relationship with God. Her search for a definitive experience with him had eluded her and remained open ended. “It’s quite a step to actually accept that you’re not going to necessarily know.” She said God had a “plan” for her and that he was going to “be there” for her. She was “middling along” with a more settled sense of faith even as she continued to address this perceived spiritual gap in her life. She said she was determined to stick with her faith and was focused on being the person God wanted her to be.

#### 4.2 Description: Readers’ urgent spiritual quest to resolve faith-life anxieties

Clara’s urgent spiritual quest resonates with many of the concerns participants have about their Christian faith and personal life. Her case study illustrates their effort to retain Christianity in the midst of this anxious tension in which they find themselves caught. Her search reflects some of the basic issues that animate and drive their Bible readings. The anxiety of uncertainty of Christian faith and personal life is related to three urgent quests. Participants repeatedly communicated concerns about the reality of Christianity (4.2.1), the authenticity of personal faith (4.2.2), and the experience of intimacy with God (4.2.3). These three urgent quests predisposed the readers Bible readings. Interview transcript excerpts of selected participant quotations are presented in Appendix K. Selected quotations are marked by references to interview round, date, and lines. Before each of these features is presented a few pertinent notes need to be addressed.

First, participant reports reveal the persistence of a faith-life anxiety. The resilience of these tensions was evident in their Bible readings over time and across genres. There was an ongoing recurrence of these concerns in each reader's six Bible readings over the year-long interview schedule. This was the case in their readings of the four biblical texts selected by the researcher and the two chosen by participants. Reading interviews were dominated by readers wrestling with these tensions. There was also a remarkable staying power of these basic tensions in readings taken from different biblical genres. The texts selected by the researcher included the diverse genres of New Testament Gospel narratives and Pauline epistles. Poems, narratives and epistles were among the genres chosen by participants. There were different faith-life tensions reported when different readers read the same text. In a number of cases there was a consistency of similar faith-life concerns expressed when the same reader read different genres. There is evidence across the entire interview schedule of the endurance of reader anxieties in Bible reading transactions. The persistence of participant reader concerns is similar to Pike's (2000a, 2003c) findings of consistent identical patterns in reader's responses. He found "the same theme or pattern of response consistently appeared in the comments of each reader being tracked" over an eighteen month period (Pike 2003c: 65).

Second, the anxiety of uncertainty of Christianity is a concern shared by both socialized and converted participants. Evidence for this is presented in section 4.2.1. Religiously socialized participants are caught between inherited views of faith and the formation of their own belief systems. Six participants were raised in Christian homes. They are seeking to retain Christian faith as a vital part of their lives. Why do I believe? Do I accept Christianity because of religious socialization or do I believe it because it is true and real? Christianity is prized as a way of life by the three participants who converted to Christianity while at university or involved with Mosaic Church. As recent converts they express definite questions and doubts about their new found Christian belief. In both cases there is evidence of an anxiety of uncertainty of Christian faith and personal life. This anxious tension is also related to the critical life transition of becoming an independent adult (see 4.3.1). This vulnerability motivates the search for a meaningful way to engage with Christianity. Participants are on a spiritual quest to resolve their anxieties.

Third, participants were committed to seek to resolve their anxieties from within the context of institutional Christianity. All were involved with Mosaic Church. The length of church involvement varied among participants. Their spiritual quest for intimacy with God was a way to address their concerns with Christianity. As with Clara's search, participant desire for spiritual experience was significantly influenced by the teaching of Mosaic Church. Participants perceive the church as offering promising ways to address their anxiety of uncertainty. Church teachings of Word and Spirit promote intimacy with God (see 5.2.1). Church emphasis on personal, direct and immediate experience of the Holy Spirit appeals to participants as a way to resolve their faith-life anxieties.

Personal knowledge of God is judged to be important to a justified acceptance of Christianity. Spiritual experience is also deemed to empower their critical life passage to becoming an independent adult. These church beliefs and practices contribute to readers interpretive structures of Bible reading. This issue will be addressed in detail in chapter five.

#### 4.2.1 Reader search to justify Christian belief

Participants are on a search to resolve concerns about their Christian faith. They seek to address the uncertainty of the reality of faith even as they desire to retain their Christian belief. They demonstrate a need to have confidence in Christianity and to affirm it as an enduring way of life. They wish to form their beliefs about specific Christian doctrines.

Helen was raised in a Christian home and valued her faith. She talked with God regularly. But she had a crisis of faith when her relationship with her boyfriend was ended at university. She felt abandoned and questioned the reliability of her Christian beliefs. She began to think through the idea of Christianity and asked if it was real. Her engagement with this issue has waxed and waned since her crisis. Concerned she was losing her faith she attended The Alpha Course to help her address the matter once again. The course is a six week series of talks on the basics of Christianity, and it was hosted by Mosaic Church. Could she trust God to be there for her again?

Lee did not grow up in a Christian home. He describes himself as being “quite logical” and questions the Bible’s accuracy and Jesus’ divine nature and miracles. But since he began his journey of “discovery” with his new found Christian faith he says “it’s not about being sure anymore.” His uncertainty about Christianity is an opportunity to explore the faith. Yet his concerns persist. “I still do have the same questions.” He wants to be sure about what he believes and not just accept things and “follow blindly” (1<sup>st</sup> interview 14 October 2008, line 492).

Deborah believed in God as she grew up in a non-Christian home. She first attended church when she was eighteen. This was part of her effort to “hang on to God.” Shortly after Deborah became a Christian she experienced doubts about the existence of God. Following her talks with her non-Christian boyfriend about her faith she would find herself thinking “well maybe it’s all just a big joke and it’s not really real.” Her doubts make her feel very vulnerable. “I sometimes think if whether or not I’m just being dragged along by a load of wierdos who believe in something that’s not really there but they’ve had this feeling so they’ve decided that it’s God. I sometimes doubt whether he exists at all” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 March 2009, lines 46-49).

Simon has doubts about his birthplace religion being real and true. He wonders if his faith is due to his religious conditioning rather than to the merits of Christianity. “I was born into a Catholic family. I was christened and baptized and everything. Ah so even at a young age I couldn’t speak for myself.” He considers himself a Christian but he says, “I don’t necessarily believe totally in everything Jesus did or what Jesus said” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 121-122). He is looking for a way to address his concerns and to arrive at a more “total” faith.

Reader uncertainties about Christianity also extend to specific doctrinal beliefs. Lee expressed concern about conflicts between Bible and science, especially as it regards the biblical account of creation. Deborah is unsure of church teaching on sex. Clara has deep reservations about God’s sovereignty and human responsibility and questions how God could have a plan for everyone. Kevin has troubling concerns about the Bible’s teaching on the devil, hell and sexual abstinence before marriage. The subject matter of these issues is a deep concern to participants, especially as they seek to form their own views on the topics.

#### 4.2.2 Reader search for authentic faith

In their search for an authentic faith participants say they want to be honest in their reasons for accepting Christianity. They recognize the tension between an acceptance of a socialized faith and a ‘grown up’ assessment of faith. All but two of the participants were raised in Christian homes. They want to understand why they believe it as opposed to simply accepting it because they have been conditioned to believe. There is anxiety with an easy acceptance of a socialized faith and an effort at a truthful engagement of faith that sustains belief as a way of life. Simon said, “I don’t want to just accept everything outright just through reading [the Bible] think it must be true” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 496-497). They are seeking to make a socialized faith their own. Yet even in the cases of an acquired Christian faith there were expressed concerns about having an authentic faith. Lee said, “I think it’s about being honest and what I don’t want to do is like ah I don’t wanna pretend that I get things that I don’t” (1<sup>st</sup> interview 14 October 2008, lines 466-467). Participants want to avoid pretence and superficiality. They are seeking to be honest with themselves as to why they believe and practice Christianity. It is important for them to know the reasons why they believe.

Kevin wants to be confident in what he believes the Bible to teach. For example he finds himself between positions on his views of the Bible. There is a difference between the views of his family and Mosaic Church’s view that “everything in it is true.” He struggles with what he believes: “Just not as confident as what I believe. Like I’m stuck between the two” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 27 February 2009, line 360). He says he thinks that the Bible is from God and yet he questions if it is “really true.” He wants to have “a real think about it...because I wanna be fully behind everything Christian.”

Andrew is in the midst of a crisis over his birthplace Christian faith. He is seeking to transition from his inherited faith to making it a personal choice. He believes there is a “fundamental truth” to his belief and that it offers a “better life in the long run.” But he has doubts and he is searching for a personal connection with God that so far has eluded him. “I want a relationship with God but I don’t know what it means.” This tension is stressful and his talks with church pastors did not resolve it. He has come out of the “Christian bubble” of his childhood faith and now says he finds himself “questioning my faith in terms of is this really me or is this just what I’ve been brought up to believe” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 02 April 2009, lines 63-34).

Reader concerns about the authenticity of their personal faith also extend to lifestyle choices. Melanie feels she is drifting away from her faith when she drinks with her non-Christian friends. Andrew feels he is living “two lives” with his “clubbing and drinking.” Kevin struggles with his preoccupation with sex and has a history of looking at “lads magazines.” Lee says he is uncomfortable that the physical aspect of his relationship with his girlfriend is “getting harder” to manage. Deborah thinks Jesus “doesn’t mind” that she has a non-Christian boyfriend with whom she is sexually active (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, line 1958). But she is rethinking this matter in the light of church teaching on sex before marriage. These reports indicate awareness of an incongruity between Christian beliefs and personal behavior.

#### 4.2.3 Reader search for intimacy with God

Participants are also seeking an experience of intimacy with God. Many said they felt distant from God and want a sense of closeness to God. It is very important to them to experience a personal relationship with him in their daily lives. The lack of a sense of God’s presence is very troubling. It contributes to their perception that something is missing in their lives. In order to address this spiritual condition they want the sense of a personal connection with God in their lives. “I feel distant from God,” says Andrew. He struggles with “emptiness” in his life from a lack of personal connection. “It’s like I just want to text God and just get a text back from Him. It’s like when I’m praying sometimes I feel like I’m just talking to myself and things like that” (1<sup>st</sup> interview 05 October 2008, 568-570). Deborah believes God is present in her life “but I don’t *think* he’s a constant presence.” “I’ve said all these prayers and things and I’ve really tried God but I just don’t know where you are.” Lee says “sometimes I feel quite far from God” and wants to be close to him more often (3<sup>rd</sup> interview lines 20 May 2009, line 1338). He recounted one significant experience when God “felt really close and like he was right beside me.” He yearns for this kind of experience of God “be[ing] all around you in everything you’re doing and just fill you.” Participant awareness of God’s absence in their lives is significant. They desire the experience of God’s presence to be a feature in their daily lives. The personal experience of God is deeply yearned for but often missing in their relationship with him.



Spiritual experience plays an important role for a new Christian. Deborah finds being close to God gives her “a reassurance that what I’m doing in my life is right, maybe, from him [God].” These spiritual experiences help her to address her doubts about her faith, especially as a new Christian. “It’s because I think when you go from being a non-Christian to a Christian there is the sort of transitions stage between you know the – you know you think the non-Christian world is the real world. And you’re going into this new world where you know – I do see things differently now that I’m a Christian” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1441-1445). They play a significant role in coming to terms with her questions about the Christian way of life; “if you want to you really can feel him.”

Intimacy with God offers the prospect of confidence in life, especially in becoming independent and making decisions to build a good life. Kevin wants God to direct his life, especially in regards to his daily decisions; “when I wanna make a decision I need God’s guidance.” His decisions are important because he believes God “has a good plan for my life” and he “wants to do what’s right” and “become a better person.” “I pray now and say like God what is your will for me tonight? Is there something I need to learn from the Christian Union? Do I need to get my work done tonight?” Yet he is not certain that his choices are always God’s will: “maybe that’s God talking to me or whether that’s just me saying what I really deep down what I want” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 27 February 2009, lines 1450-1452). He wants to do stay on the right course in his life and feels the need for an “instant answer” from God of what he should do, a sense of the “next step” God is guiding him to take.

There is also an epistemological dimension to participants’ search of a personal experience of God. The prospect of an immediate, direct and personal experience of God offers a way forward in their efforts to resolve cognitive concerns about Christianity. They strongly desire an affective connection with God as a way to confirm the reality of the claims of Christianity. Cognitively based divine knowledge alone is not sufficient. For Melanie spiritual experience makes her relationship with God “real and not just something I’ve imagined.” Her sense of the Holy Spirit coming into her life when she prays for it “confirms that God is real and that God is present in your life and within you and around you” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 07 June 2009, lines 711-712). She also finds things work out better in her life when she is close to God. “I’ve learned from experience whenever I am close to God life does seem to be easier, less stressful.” Christian spiritual experience is important to participants as it is deemed to authenticate Christianity. Confirmation of validity of their Christian faith offers empowerment through a difficult life phase of being on one’s own.

#### 4.3 Analysis: Stuck in the anxious tension between faith and life in emerging adulthood

There are a few pertinent issues related to participants’ faith-life anxiety that are worthy of consideration. For one, a brief examination of participants’ transition to becoming an independent

young adult is helpful to an understanding of the character of their faith-life anxiety (4.3.1). This major transition offers a life context in which their search to retain Christian faith can be understood more fully. For another, there is the issue of participant religious socialization and religiosity during this life transition into young adulthood (4.3.2). The focus is to seek to account for participant efforts at retention of Christianity. Finally, participants' faith-life anxiety associated with emerging adulthood is characterized by an inner dialogue (4.3.3). This reflective inner dialogue contributes to a general reading disposition towards biblical texts.

#### 4.3.1 Participants' critical transition into young adulthood

Participants are in a life transition from adolescence to becoming independent young adults, a cultural process referred to by sociologists as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000). This critical life transition constitutes a significant exigent state of affairs. As such it may be considered an ordeal for participants, as it offers certain affordances and constraints to which they must respond in order to navigate it successfully. The nature of this phase of life contributes to the faith-life tensions reported by participants, an anxious reading disposition which vitally affects their Bible readings. A definition of emerging adulthood and characteristics that are relevant to this study will be presented.

Smith (2009: 6) argues that our understanding of the stages of human development in the life course should be recognized as "cultural constructions" rather than unchangeable features common to worldwide human existence. Configurations of the life course are best understood as outcomes of their "interact[action] with biology and material production, and are profoundly shaped by the social and institutional conditions that generate and sustain them" (p. 6). In this vein Arnett (2000: 478) has contributed to our understanding of the role that the late teens through the twenties play in patterning the discrete life course of young people in "highly industrialized or postindustrial" societies.

"Sweeping demographic shifts have taken place over the past half century that have made the late teens and early twenties not simply a brief period of transition into adult roles but a distinct period of the life course, characterized by change and exploration of possible life directions" (p. 469). He maintains this particular phase is distinct from previously identified periods in the life course such as adolescence, a life stage through which young people have already come and young adulthood, a phase which they have yet to attain (pp. 476-477). He labels this intervening life period "emerging adulthood" (p. 469).

Chronological age is deemed an indicator of this cultural phase of life. There is some discussion of the specific age brackets often marked as from the late teens to the mid to late twenties. Arnett (2000: 473) says it is from "18 to 25." However it is recognized the achievement of young adulthood may surpass this time frame (Collins-Mayo 2010: 2). Smith (2009: 4) identifies the ages of 18 through 29

as specific to emerging adulthood. Age was a criterion in the purposive sample for this research. The age range of the study was 18-29 years. At the time of the study participants were within this age group. Those individuals invited to participate in this study were in a critical life transition becoming independent young adults.

The time extension of this transitional period is attributable to the reality that “today young people are faced with many different choices concerning the path their life might take and who they want to become” (Collins-Mayo 2010: 2). Arnett (2000) credits the extra time of emerging adulthood to certain social changes. For example, the rise in the median age of marriage from early twenties to mid to late twenties in the last half of the twentieth century is a factor. Also, the relatively high percentage of the number of young people in late twentieth century who attend institutions of higher education is a contributing element. In addition, the amount of time invested in university and graduate education happens to lengthen. Furthermore, the residential living situations of this age group fluctuate greatly. “Emerging adults have the highest rates of residential change of any age group” (p. 471). They tend to enter into and leave a variety of living arrangements with parents, house mates, and significant others in which they assume partial responsibility. The delay of marriage, the time commitments in acquiring higher education for the workplace, and residential instability are significant factors of the demographic conditions in which young people live. These factors highlight the tendency of emerging adults to be less “constrained by role requirements” of society (p. 471). Whilst these factors may not be universal in industrialized countries they are nevertheless characteristic of young people and support the conception of emerging adulthood (p. 470). These identifiable social changes contribute to our understanding of emerging adulthood as a new phase in the life course.

Arnett (2000: 469) further characterizes emerging adulthood as “a period of frequent change and exploration.” It is “a time when little about the future has been decided for certain, when the scope of independent exploration of life’s possibilities is greater for most people than it will be at any other period of the life course” (p. 469). The postponement of marriage and parenthood offers a level of relative freedom from these responsibilities which allow young people the opportunity to explore “various possible life directions” (pp. 470-471). Emerging adulthood offers a life context in which participant efforts to address and resolve their anxiety of uncertainty can be understood more fully.

#### 4.3.2 Participant religious beliefs and socialization and their religiosity as emerging adults

There is an increasing awareness of the importance of young people to an understanding of religion and spirituality. ‘Religion and Youth’ was the designated conference theme of the 2008 Sociology of Religion Study Group conference of the British Sociological Association. The emerging field of sociology of youth religion has focused on the shaping influence of young people on religion and

spirituality (Collins-Mayo and Dandelion 2010). Collins-Mayo (2010:1) believes the durability of religion and its adjustment to socio-cultural changes can be observed in the impact of religiously and spiritually engaged young people. For example, Flory and Miller (2008: 6) note that “as Post-Boomers bring their own sensibilities about identity and authority into religious organizations these organizations may undergo significant changes in authority structure and in what counts for legitimate knowledge and belief in the years to come.” This is especially remarkable given the relation of authority and religious texts. “In short, control over the status and interpretation of texts is essential to the exercise of authority and power in religious organizations” (Beckford 2006: xv).

One prominent finding of recent sociological literature on the subject is that “young people growing up in late modern Western societies tend to be less religious than older people, at least in terms of institutional religion” (Collins-Mayo 2010:1). The decline of participation in institutional religion among young people has focused attention on the role of the life course in religious involvement (Collins-Mayo 2010: 1). Indeed, research indicates religions find the attraction and retention of adherents in the “twenties-to-forties age range particularly problematic” (Flory and Miller 2008: 4). The concern is to understand this loss of attraction to religion in the life transition from teenage years to young adulthood. Is the waning of religious involvement in these years a matter of course attributable to young people’s experimental interests at this stage in the life cycle or is it due more generally to their loss of religion? (2010: 1-2). This question highlights the need to consider “specific cases of young people’s relationship to religion in order to understand something of its local particularities” (Collins-Mayo 2010: 1).

It is notable participants are seeking to address and resolve their faith-life anxiety from within the context of institutionalized Christianity. Church attendance is important to them. All nine participants reported quarterly attendance at Sunday church services with seven reporting attendance either weekly or monthly. In addition, all but one reported quarterly involvement in church sponsored ‘mission groups’ or small group Bible studies, while seven reported monthly or weekly attendance. In their study of religious beliefs among American emerging adults Arnett and Jensen (2002: 462-463) found them to be skeptical of institutional religion. Not only did emerging adults doubt the benefit of religious institutions to their lives, they expressed institutional involvement was “a compromise to their individuality” (p. 463). He quotes a participant who believes being “religious and spiritual” is something that could be achieved on his own and apart from participation in religious institutions (p. 463). This raises issues about the significance of emerging adulthood to the formation of participant religious beliefs and the relevance of participant religious socialization to emerging adult religiosity.

The formation of one's own beliefs is characteristic of emerging adulthood (Arnett and Jensen 2002: 452). For the most part the development of one's worldview occurs in emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000: 473). Decisions regarding personal religious beliefs are recognized by emerging adults as essential to becoming fully independent (Arnett and Jensen 2002: 452). The making of decisions about religious beliefs tends to help young people feel more like an adult. The role of individualism in this transition can be seen in decision making about one's religious beliefs. "[E]verything is ultimately up to each individual to decide for himself or herself" (Smith: 2009 49). In their study of religious beliefs among American emerging adults Arnett and Jensen (2002: 459) found their religious views were "highly individualized." "[E]merging adults expressed a high value on thinking for themselves with regard to religious questions and on forming a unique set of religious beliefs rather than accepting a ready-made dogma" (p. 459). The "sovereign self" is a feature of emerging adulthood (Smith 2009: 49).

Institutional religion offers religiously socialized participants a context within which they can seek the formation of their religious beliefs (see 4.2). Contrary to Arnett and Jensen's (2002) findings they have chosen to participate in a local church, a resource they deem relevant to the project of resolving their faith-life tensions. They also state they want to accept Christianity for the reasons that seem right to them. This is consistent with individualization of religious beliefs noted by Arnett and Jensen (2002) and Smith (2009). Yet they wish to do so with the benefit of guidance from dogmatic religion. There is an interesting tension in this search to form one's own beliefs within institutional Christianity. On the one hand, participants demonstrate their need to have confidence in Christianity, a reason for their participation in institutional religion. On the other hand, the drive to accept Christianity for the reasons that seem right to them is characteristic of individualism. This tension goes to the character of the relationship of religious socialization and the formation of personal religious beliefs.

The occurrence of radical change in the British religious landscape contributes to an understanding of this tension among participants. Christian emerging young adults find themselves in a British society marked by the increasing decline of social-cultural capital of Christianity (Brown 2001). The collapse can be seen in rates of national church attendance, for example. At the commencing of the twentieth century 25-30 percent of the national population most likely attended church on any given Sunday, whereas by 1998 the figure had dropped to merely 7.5 percent (Brown 2006: 4). The collapse can also be observed in the discrepancy between claims of belonging to a religion and the actual practice of religion. In 2000, 90 percent claimed to belong to a religion yet only 31 percent claimed to actually practice their religion (Brown 2006: 8). There was a near "universal certainty" among British major institutions in 1900 that moral and civil order in society was underwritten by Christianity (Brown

2006: 2). By 2000 the British Christian culture had vanished (Brown 2006: 6). The dissolution of British Christian culture in the twentieth century “represents one of the greatest cultural changes of all time” (Brown 2006: 6). In addition, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) argue that Britain is undergoing a “spiritual revolution” as evidenced in the ‘subjective turn’ away from the rules and roles of traditional institutional religion and toward more relevant forms of autonomous spirituality. This is consistent with autonomous individualism among emerging adults noted by Arnett and Jensen (2002) and Smith (2009). Furthermore, Woodhead (2010: 240) sees the decline of Christian European dogmatic religion and the rise of new religious expressions among young people. In this religious climate there is an “opening up of a richer array of religious and secular sources” for young people to use for their own religious and spiritual purposes (p. 240). This cultural dynamic helps contextualize emerging adult participant concerns to make their decisions about faith for their personal reasons while seeking church guidance to help with their religious beliefs. In such a setting, institutional Christianity can be viewed to offer support to those seeking the retention of their faith.

Is participant autonomy in formation of religious beliefs consistent with an erosion of the traditional authority of theistic religion? Participant uncertainty about the truth of Christianity and the refusal to accept church teaching “outright just to make me think it must be true,” as Simon said, does not offer evidence of detraditionalisation. Efforts to retain socialized Christian faith within the bounds of institutional religion indicate something of the influence of Christianity. Personal concerns about belief are set against the backdrop of institutional understandings of truth, spirituality and morality of the Christian faith. But neither do participant faith retention efforts constitute evidence of commitment to the belief system of traditional Christian theism. Rather they give evidence of resistance to an easy acceptance of religious dogma. Lee avoids being a “blind follower” of the church. Reports featured the challenge of Christian doctrines and morality. Some disagreed with positions on hell and premarital sex and others challenged traditional views of God. The lack of an accommodation to church teaching demonstrates a critical independence at work. The emphasis on deciding matters of faith on one’s own gives credence to the notion of the role of autonomy in the formation of religious and spiritual beliefs. Participants are in control of their beliefs and not institutional authority. Participants want less to be told what to believe and more to be given concrete ways to think about the validity of their Christian upbringing and the authentication of Christianity. Mosaic Church provides a sacred space of freedom *from* religious ritual, regulations, and rules as well as a space of freedom *for* personal engagement of Christian faith and an experience of God personally and directly. Participant faith retention efforts are best construed as evidence of an assumption of personal responsibility for belief in the claims of Christianity rather than mere acquiescence to socialized religion or its outright rejection. The majority of participants find the institutional church relevant to their efforts to retain Christian faith even as they challenge its truth claims. This can be observed in the continuing church attendance of seven participants over the course of the interview

schedule. Only two of nine participants choose not to continue attending church, yet they retained friendships with church attendees.

What, then, is the connection of religion and spirituality among participants? Tacey's (2010) research of Australian young people found that their hunt for forms of spirituality took place outside of the controls of institutional religion. The expressions of spirituality he observed were attributable to a postmodern "search for meaning" in life apart from traditional religion (pp. 65-66). He noted students trusted inner spiritual experience more than traditional authorities (p. 69). As noted, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) highlight the emergence of autonomous spirituality in Britain, especially among young people. However, the interpretations offered by Heelas and Houtman (2009) of data from the Religious and Moral Pluralism survey of European countries facilitate some perspective on the status of the relation of religion and spirituality. According to survey findings the authors state "it is clear that traditional belief, *qua* transcendent theism, has faded as a source of significance and authority—in measure evaporated" (p. 91). Nevertheless they caution that the evidence of a "non-theistic, inner-life spirituality" is not necessarily indicative of the occurrence of a "spiritual revolution of 'belief'" in any European nation (p. 91). Theistic religion seems to play a role in the appearance of some forms of non-traditional spirituality. Woodhead (2010: 240) observes young people may use Christian practices devoid of doctrine for their own ends, and religious young people give the impression of being religious "in new ways." Smith (2009) found emerging adults attach significance to the experience of being 'close to God.' (He also noted cases of experiential spirituality were not typical of the study cohort (p. 162).) The search for spiritual experience is not synonymous with an acknowledgment of religious belief. "Having a personal relationship with God does not mean faithfully adhering to the belief and practice requirements of a religious tradition. Rather it means being present to God, mindful of God, praying a lot, listening to God's voice, attending to God's leading, being open and receptive to the lessons God would teach" (p. 162). Western Christian religion is not unlike a black hole whose presence is made known by the movement of heavenly bodies around it.

Christian theism informs participant understandings of spirituality. Their search for intimacy with the Christian God drives their interest in personal spiritual experience. Mosaic Church teaching emphasizes a personal, direct and immediate experience of the Holy Spirit. For most participants Christian socialization pre-exists their attraction to this teaching of a personal encounter with God. In fact, the reason why experiential knowledge of God is valued by participants is that it is deemed to offer an immediate authentication of Christianity in which they have been socialized. Participants believe Christian religion authorizes subjective spirituality. They appropriate Christian beliefs to underwrite their apprehension of divine knowledge to resolve their faith-life anxiety. It is important to them to authenticate the reality of their faith within the bounds of Christian religion. Institutional religion plays a role in participants' subjective spirituality. Perhaps the persistence of institutional

religion is attributable in part to its tendency to be “transformed” by incorporating subtle changes in meaning in response to changing cultural contexts (Hunter 1987:240). The relation of religion to spirituality is further evidence of individual-institutional tension among participants.

What is the role of Christian socialization in the religiosity of participant emerging adults? The relation of emerging adults to religion is a salient feature of Smith’s (2009) data analysis and interpretation of the National Study of Youth and Religion. Religion is recognized as a source for religious belief but the authority for decisions about what is “true or good or right” about religion rest entirely with the individual (pp. 156-157). It is the sovereign self that decides what beliefs to “pick and choose” from religion (p. 287). He notes the role of *sola scriptura* teaching of American Evangelicalism in the individualization of Christian belief (pp. 290-291). Emphasis on the plain sense of an infallible Bible as the sole basis for religious truth prepared the way for subjectivism of emerging adults, as the “final authority has decisively shifted from the Bible to the individual reader” (p. 291). Yet, there is a difficult burden to bear that comes with the autonomous individual’s assumption of responsibility for decision making about religious beliefs. The epistemic crisis of an objectively unknowable reality (p. 292) leaves emerging adults believing there is “really no way to know what is really true” (p. 163). Emerging adult uncertainty about what is true, good or right also “leaves them lacking in conviction or direction to even know what to do with their prized sovereignty” (pp. 294). What this complex structural and cultural condition means for many young people is that religion is viewed as a resource for stability in life, especially in cases of recovery from life challenges or consequences of harmful decision making (pp. 84-85). (This understanding also supplies a frame to help account for the religious involvement of participant converts.) Religious socialization offers default religious beliefs. “In the end, many simply fall back on their personal upbringings” (p. 164). This indicates the relevance of childhood religious socialization to emerging adult religiosity. Smith notes the continuity of religious adherence among emerging adults with religious socialization is not often acknowledged (p. 254). “[T]he religious lives of youth during this period reflect a lot more stability and consistency than many seem to have previously realized, compared to the amount of change and upheaval that has so often been assumed” (p, 254). However religious belief is not a given as “only some can believe it simply because they were raised that way. Others hold on only tenuously, and yet others simply stop believing” (p. 164). The tendency among participants to conserve their religious upbringings against a backdrop of structural and transitional uncertainty is understandable. This tendency also helps to explain why participants are seeking to retain their Christian faith while questioning it at the same time.

#### 4.3.3 Emerging adult participants’ anxiety of uncertainty as Bible reading disposition

Rosenblatt’s (1994, 1995) transactional theory addresses personal factors that impact reader’s readings (see 2.5.2). Her focus on the situational character of the reading event as occurring at “the



particular moment in the life history of the reader” is an emphasis that encompasses more than the actual instant of the reading act (1994: 20). It refers to the reader’s past and present life experience as well. Certain factors in the reader’s “past experience and present preoccupations may actively condition his primary spontaneous response” to the text (1995: 75). The cultural phase of emerging adulthood is the life context in which the reader’s Bible reading transactions occur. Participant readers find themselves away from home and they are seeking to make their way in the world. They are apprehensive about their critical life transition into full independence. The assumption of responsibility for their lives is fraught with uncertainty. The personal conditions of this life context contribute to the reader’s activation of the biblical text. Whilst interacting with the text the reader’s “attention will be diverted to those phases of any work that apply most clearly to his own emotional tensions and perplexities” (1995: 87). The reader’s pressing concerns shape textual or reading effects (1994: 20). A textual effect is the evoked sense of things the reader gets from the text’s signs. The reader’s referential awareness of the text’s symbols is affected by his or her preoccupations. Textual effects also involve a perception of a world “outside and beyond” the readers personal concerns (1994: 21). The particular time of emerging adulthood in which the reader encounters the Bible is of consequence.

There was a persistence of anxiety of uncertainty of Christian faith and personal life among emerging adult participants. Throughout the interview schedule participant discourse about their lives past and present revealed an intense interior exchange, a form of self-talk, between Christian belief and life experience. Their expressions of this tension exhibited a deep familiarity, an intimacy born of repeated efforts at its apprehension and resolution that reflects its integral status in their lives. It became apparent that this was an extant phenomenon that was present prior to their involvement in this study. Many reported that these concerns existed prior to their present church involvement. In fact, they said the reason why they attended Mosaic Church was to address these very tensions. Also, participants spoke of how the interviews provided a way for them to give voice to these ongoing tensions, to articulate what it was that they had been experiencing all along as young adults interested in a Christian way of life. One reader said, “it’s good to talk out what you’re thinking with someone else so you can get a new perspective on it.” Furthermore, participant talk about this pressing concern was reflexive, as they considered the biblical text in relation to this tension and their lives in relation to their readings. This phenomenon is evidence of an inner dialogue.

The sustained phenomenon of participant faith-life anxiety of uncertainty is consistent with Archer’s (2003, 2007) model. The existence of an inner dialogue is consistent with Archer’s (2003: 16) sociological mechanism of internal conversation (see 2.3). Her theory highlights the impact of the individual’s internal concerns on the way she or he relates to social structures. The subject’s conception of a preferred way of living embodies deeply held values and interests that shape the way

he or she relates to social situations. Individuals navigate their way through life by means of certain modes of “reflexive deliberation” on social opportunities and constraints (2007: 145ff). The exercise of this mechanism also encompasses solitary actions such as meditation in individuals’ lives (2007: 3, footnote). The recognition of structurally-bounded possibilities for furtherance or protection of an aspired way of life requires intentional decision making. Personal choices of action guided by an individual’s prized values and concerns are basic to a realization of his or her preferred way of life. The character of the individual’s internal conversation mediates his or her encounter with the world. Intrapersonal concerns impact the processes of meaning making.

The condition of an ongoing inner reflective dialogue in readers lives points towards the existence of a reading disposition. Readers come to the Bible with a generally anxious disposition. Participant faith-life anxieties related to emerging adulthood have a shaping influence on reader orientations to Bible reading. The faith-life anxiety of uncertainty is a prevailing feature in the reader’s disposition towards biblical interpretive activity. Reader questions, doubts, and uncertainty fuel their search to resolve this tension. Resolving tensions inherent in their desired way of life is crucially important to an enduring way of life. This phenomenon is a prominent feature of their Bible readings. An anxious disposition mediates the relation between reader and the text.

#### 4.4 Interpretation: Readers’ faith-life anxiety contributes to reading stance

This chapter gives evidence of an internal faith-life tension in participants’ lives. It is an anxiety of uncertainty of Christian belief and way of life. They talk of feeling distant from God at times and this experience raises urgent questions for them. Is God really there? Is Christianity true? Do I have real faith? They recognize the importance of thinking through the inherited faith of their childhood or the concerns that accompany their newly acquired faith. Their preoccupation with pressing faith-life concerns contribute to orientations to biblical text. This tension is related to their status as young people who are seeking to live on their own from their parents. Questioning of faith arises during this extended time span. The challenge of this life transitional period is further complicated by the dynamics of the British cultural landscape in which the decline of Christianity in society is accompanied by a rise in autonomous spirituality, especially among young people. They desire to retain Christianity as personal faith and way of life. They are far more consumed with addressing these anxieties than with the search of a life mission. In fact, it could be said that the resolution of their faith-life anxieties is their life mission at present. They exhibit a need of an authentication of Christianity as justification of a Christian way of life. They demonstrate honesty about their faith and the need to examine their reasons for believing it. They are seeking to clarify what they believe to be true about Christian faith. Mosaic Church is a resource for participant use in the formation of beliefs

as they navigate their way to independence. Participant religious socialization contributes to their emerging adult religiosity. They believe their Christian faith should be accompanied by spiritual experience. They have an intense desire to be close to God, to have a sense of a personal connection with him that they feel is missing in their daily lives. They believe an experience of intimacy with God will resolve their questions and doubts about the reality of Christianity and serve as an affirmation of it as an enduring way of life. Christianity plays a role in navigating the uncharted waters of emerging adulthood. It offers resources for being on one's own. Participants are characterized by a spiritual quest to resolve their faith-life anxieties of uncertainty in their effort to retain Christianity.

The data analysis finding of participant anxiety of uncertainty of Christian faith and personal life provides evidence in support of the pragmatic dimension of their orientation to solitary readings of the Bible. The pragmatic dimension refers to the situated reader's personal uses of the Bible to apprehend God. The findings of participant solitary readings of the Bible are addressed on pragmatic and ideological levels (see 1.7). Reader preoccupation with the resolution of their anxiety of uncertainty constitutes a disposition towards Bible reading. The significance of this finding for the overall line of reasoning of this thesis is that the reader's reading disposition is a pertinent feature of the reading stance towards the biblical text in solitary readings. Participants' spiritual quest to address their faith-life anxieties contributes to an unrelenting textual orientation that impacts the character of the text-life relation in Bible reading. The importance of reading stance to the relation of Bible reading and religious experience is an assumption of this thesis (see 1.4).

## 5.0 Word and Spirit: Church teaching and solitary Bible readers' apprehension of God

*Chapter Abstract: This chapter situates the participant Bible reader within the Evangelical-Charismatic habitus of Mosaic Church. It shows the shaping influence of the church's Word and Spirit teaching on the spiritual quests of participant readers to apprehend God in solitary Bible reading. The logic of restorationism underwrites the signifying practices of biblical literalism and charismatic testimony and is located within the theological economy of Word and Spirit teaching. The rationale of the direct correspondence of biblical accounts of the Spirit's activity and contemporary charismatic experience authorizes the reader's readings of God's presence and action. Case studies reveal the relevance of church teaching to the spiritual quest of participants to experience God in their effort to retain Christianity. Their engagement of church teaching reflects participant interest in resolving the anxiety of uncertainty of the status of their Christian faith. The chapter format reflects a sequence of data description, data analysis, and interpretation of data for thesis argument.*

### 5.1 Description: Relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to participant spiritual quests for God

The focus of this section is to situate participant readers within Mosaic Church's Word and Spirit beliefs and practices of the apprehension of God. First, a composite description of a Sunday worship service discloses the church's strong emphasis on experiencing God (5.1.1). This description of a worship service is based upon fourteen months of observations from September 2008 to November 2009. Second, also presented are three features that reveal the relevance of church services and teaching to participants' spiritual quests to experience God to retain Christianity (5.1.2). These characteristics indicate the phenomenon of solitary reading of the Bible is situated within a *habitus* of influential approaches to apprehending God.

#### 5.1.1 Experiencing God at church

Mosaic Church meets in a renovated warehouse located in a large city in the north of England. The warehouse is but one industrial space in a large and joined building that is occupied by two businesses. With the exception of a newly constructed eight-story office complex, the surrounding buildings are empty warehouses or closed businesses with 'To Let' signs prominently displayed. A potholed asphalt driveway abuts the front of the building. Two rows of about 50 parked cars fill up a large dirt and grass parking lot that exists between the driveway and the main street.

The 'Warehouse' is the fourth location of the church's Sunday services. The church was started in the main pastor's house in 2003. The congregation grew and moved October 2004 to Trinity Church where they met until 2006. The church moved again to a hotel where they met together for about eighteen months. Continued growth occasioned an additional move to the current warehouse facility in the winter of 2008.

Sunday attendees and guests are greeted at the front entrance by a couple of greeters, typically a male and a female. Attendees commonly arrive in small groups of three to five. Most who attend service are university students who walk some distance to church. Those who are known to the greeters are often hugged and conversations ensue to catch up with each other's lives. It's not unusual to hear long-term attendees say that they have to contact church friends outside of church because it is difficult to see them at church given their duties and the size of the crowds. The greeters hand out a weekly church newsletter, a folded sheet of A-4 that announces upcoming church events and mission group meetings. On the cover there is a four colour blurred picture of people walking. An inset box contains the sermon topic "Does Christianity make people better or worse?" Inside an introductory note from the lead pastor reads 'We want to worship Jesus with all our energy and passion and love each other as Jesus showed us how to.'

Inside stands another greeter in the main entry way that leads to the auditorium. A single table is situated next to the greeter's station and holds printed material about the church, pamphlets on various topics, and copies of *Newfrontiers Magazine*. The entry to the church is well lit. To one side a number of couches are lined up against the wall with an artificial green plant. The other side is lined with a series of rooms for child care and a bookstall. A couple of dozen books line the top of a table arranged among a host of CD's bearing different titles of contemporary Christian music. Book topics include Bible study methods, spirituality, dating, marriage, sex, theology, ministry, children's Bible stories, and Terry Virgo's story of founding New Frontiers International (NFI). Mosaic Church participates in NFI network, which is described as "a family of churches together on a mission to establish the Kingdom of God by restoring the church, making disciples, training leaders, and planting churches" (Newfrontiers Magazine 2008).

Two more greeters stand at the entrance to the auditorium to help with seating. The church auditorium is a large rectangular floor plan typical of a warehouse. It has the feel of a large and open activity room, not unlike that of a ground floor in a house that is used primarily for social activities. Its unfinished look gives a very informal sense of a place where young people like to 'hang out.' There is a snooker table and a football game table set in the back corner. Industrial grade grey carpet is stretched from wall to wall. All four cinder block walls host white paint. A steel rib framed roof is filled in with opaque corrugated plastic panels. The plastic panels buckle against the wind and amplify the splatter of the rain. Gas and water pipes criss-cross the ceiling and walls. Electrical outlets and conduits course along the tops of the concrete walls. Two large box-shaped gas heating units with noisy fans are suspended from the ceiling on each end of the auditorium. At the far end of the building stands one wide roll-up steel door extending from floor to ceiling. Approximately 300 chairs are arranged in a half-moon shape around a centre stage. The stage stands about ten inches above the main floor, effectively making it a large platform from which musicians play. A variety of musical

instruments are arrayed on the stage including a drum set, keyboard, three guitar stands, numerous microphones and stands, and public address speakers. The stage is bracketed by two large rear-projection screens. The pastor speaks from a metal lectern which is placed on the main floor in front of the stage. On the main floor to the right of the stage is a painter's easel with a rectangular canvas placed on it. During singing a young female paints various images. In the back of the auditorium is a three meter long sound table. It holds controls for sound equipment, computers for the projection units, and audio recording equipment.

The band begins to play music as people talk and find seating at the Sunday morning worship service. The hum of voices is barely audible above the volume of the music. People do not seem to have any trouble gathering in groups and talking together. The groups are scattered in the three main seating sections. The vast majority are casually dressed. Girls typically wear blue jeans or casual slacks with sweatshirts or sweaters and tops. Guys typically wear hooded sweatshirts over T-shirts or just T-shirts, a few sweaters with athletic shoes. One or two middle aged males usually wear suits and ties and some women wear pantsuits.

Attendances at Sunday services fluctuate according to university calendars. Fewer numbers show up during holidays and summer months. During the academic year Sunday attendances typically ranged from 200 to 250 in 2008 and from 250 to 300 in 2009. As many males are in attendance as females. In February 2009 the church launched two Sunday services at 10:30 AM and 5:00 PM with the morning service intended for families with children. Approximately seventy five percent of attendees are university students. The rest are comprised of young to middle aged adults and children.

Henry comes to the microphone and welcomes people to the service. He is one of three church elders each of which are in his early 30's and married with small children. He struggled with a "double life" when he was doing his A-levels. A prophecy was given about him at church which caused him to reconsider his lifestyle. Three weeks later another prophecy was given about him and he went to the front for prayer and experienced a transformative encounter with the Holy Spirit. "I remember being filled with the Holy Spirit and my Christian life got turned upside down and I really wanted to go for Jesus." He wears a dark blue Abercrombie and Fitch rugby shirt with designer blue jeans and brown leather dress shoes. He is very personal, winsome, humble, easily approachable and of an even temperament, characteristics which garner credibility with participants. He conveys a sense of authority and decisiveness about biblical and ministry matters. Henry manifests a psychological profile associated with NFI leaders whose extrovert tendencies are characterised as embodying thinking and planning, a clear sense of role and church service format, and firm approach to leadership (Francis *et al.*, 2009). An Evangelical, Henry also describes himself as "a Charismatic with a seat belt" given his concerns about the "triumphalistic" spirit of Charismatic theology. He gives a

brief order of service. A service usually consists of three main parts starting with about thirty minutes of congregational singing followed by thirty-five minutes of preaching and is concluded with about twenty minutes of music and prayer.

Henry presents an ice breaker. We are asked to greet each other and to talk about what we were doing this morning. I spoke to two university aged girls who sat near me. They started attending Mosaic a month ago and said they felt close to God when singing in the worship service, a quasi-sensate experience described as a warm and cheerful feeling. I also spoke to a young man who said that he feels God's presence when he is worshipping and described it as a feeling of acceptance.

Henry introduces the singing time and said "we like to use our bodies in worship" and he encouraged us to move about as we wished and to be "creative" in worship. With guitar in hand Darin, the worship leader, starts singing a song with the words displayed on the screens beside him. A tall young man, he is an imposing figure on stage. He grew up in the Church of England but was attracted to "Charismatic worship and spirituality." The band strikes up the music. People stand to sing. The congregation is led in singing three songs each punctuated with the repetition of verses and choruses. The songs are mostly praise songs with a hymn thrown in for good measure. The lyrics affirm God's love for people and assure them of hope and power to live life. The music swells and recedes in volume. The first song celebrates conversion as the great and happy day when one is changed forever. There is an eruption of applause after singing it. Darin then asks all to give a "clap of praise" to God. There is another vigorous round of applause. Congregational singing is very expressive. "Freedom" and "release" are words that come up often during worship. Many raise their hands, some move into the isles and sway lifting their hands high or stretching them sideways as if they are embracing the transcendent. A few move to the back or to the sides of the seating area and are more physically demonstrative in worship as they kneel, jump or dance. The band then plays softly as Darin prays aloud. With eyes closed he sings a spontaneous chorus of 'Hallelujahs!' to a series of chord progressions he plays on his guitar. The band follows suit and musically supports the exclamations for a few minutes. The congregation sways to the music with upheld hands and clinched faces. Many join in singing the chorus while others pray aloud. The music turns soft and Darin prays again thanking God for "new life" and asking him to "reveal your presence." He leads a new song that emphasizes welcoming Jesus in the meeting and asks him to have his way among the congregation. There is a recurring theme in the worship service of meeting with God personally and directly. Darin believes corporate worship is communion with God through the diverse gifts of the Holy Spirit as distributed to congregants. The diversity of expression is important as "we all present a little bit of this picture of Jesus." The lyrics of a concluding song talk of being in God's presence and finding strength to live in the face of fear.

During the singing a female painter paints on a large canvas near the stage. She paints leafy green plants on the bottom. Near the top she writes in large black letters 'WORD' against a dark blue and white back drop. She sketches sunrays emanating from the letter 'O' in the shape of a cross. The cross is painted yellow which blazes against the black letters. This picture gradually emerges over the course of the service, a disclosure of a simple message in plain view.

A young lady makes announcements about future church events. They are supplemented with PowerPoint slides. Attention is first given to 'Love the City' a special day in which the church makes food, games and live music available to the community. There is also an upcoming 'New Frontiers Regional Celebration' service in which district NFI churches will meet together and worship at Mosaic. This network of churches which began in Britain in the 1970's and by 2005 has grown to over 500 churches worldwide believes in restorationism as a means of spiritual renewal of the church (Kay 2007: 80-81). Restorationism is a movement characterized by the conviction that the modern church is in decline and must recover the quality of Christian spiritual living manifested in the New Testament to be "restored to its primitive glory" (Kay 2007: 21). In addition, the young lady extends an invitation to attendees to join a 'mission group,' a weekly small group meeting with a service focus such as helping the homeless or meeting with youth in the city. Over half of regular church attendees participate in mission groups. Furthermore, the church's five purposes for existence appear on screen—"Loving God, Loving Each Other, Loving our Communities, Loving the Underprivileged, and Loving the Nations." This mission-minded focus is presented regularly to the church. The church's ministry goals for 2009 are one new believer every week, two services filled to capacity, twenty thriving mission groups, and L3500.00 a month in giving. Finally, a monthly prayer meeting is also announced—"experience prayer like never before as we press into God in intercession." There is a weekly special programme for children of various ages and they are dismissed to attend. An offering is taken as ushers walk the aisles passing straw baskets down each row.

A passage of scripture is read by a young man who is a regular attendee. The Bible is read publicly every week by a member of the congregation, usually the passage that is being preached. It is presented as the Word of God to hearers. The Bible grants God's eye view of human life and presents a big picture of his activity in the world. People are reminded and encouraged often in services to read their Bible regularly.

Lay participation is encouraged in the worship service. There is a prevalent emphasis on the 'priesthood of the believer,' a doctrine that states each believer has direct access to God and to the gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to live a Christian life and minister to others. By virtue of the reception of the Spirit's various gifts members are equipped and authorized to bear witness to God's power and presence among the congregation. This belief is characterized by the generation of a sacred



space of freedom *from* religious ritual as well as freedom *for* bearing witness to one's personal, direct and immediate engagement of the Holy Spirit. This belief and its practice release a "lay religion" and empowers a way of life (Martin 2008). Worship is "relatively unscripted and egalitarian in offering the floor to all those who the Spirit calls" (Robbins 2004: 120). Male and female, young and old, new Christian and mature alike regularly participate in services in a variety of ways. They play in the band, give announcements, read scripture, and come forward to share and to pray at the end of worship.

Prayers are offered at the beginning and end of service, at the taking of the offering and the start of the sermon, and afterwards during congregational singing. Requests are often made of God to make his presence known and felt in the meeting. This is consistent with the church expectation that "God will break in during our meetings" (Hatch 2008: 9). There is a strong focus on receiving the Holy Spirit in worship. Also after the sermon and the service people are regularly encouraged to come to the front for prayer with someone.

Vincent makes his way to the stage to preach. He is one of the three pastors who speak often. Yet congregants, female and male alike, also preach on occasion. An energetic and engaging young man, he speaks quickly and confidently. Vincent's preaching is characterized by 'matter of fact' style that conveys a sense of authority and decisiveness. His sermons are also punctuated with moments of humor and vulnerability in the sharing of his life experiences. The sermon text is presented on the projector screens. Today he talks about the adequacy of Christ for our Christian lives. His main point is that Jesus is enough to live the Christian life. He says spiritual experience can be beneficial as it offers the possibility of a decisive life transformation. However, we do not need to depend upon it continuously in order to make Christianity work. Sermons typically highlight the importance of following Jesus in this life, an issue of Christian discipleship. An appeal is often given to attendees to enter into a personal relationship with God through Jesus by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. Telling others about this spiritual experience is also encouraged.

The sermon has the feel of pastoral correction of the flock. It can be challenging to keep the church's dual Word and Spirit emphases in balance. The history of NFI movement is characterized by a commitment to Word and Spirit working together in tandem, a dual emphasis on biblical preaching and charismatic expression in congregations (Kay 2007: 81). At Mosaic the Bible and congregational manifestations of the Spirit's gifting are primary sources which authorize the apprehension of knowledge of God. There is a tendency among participants to exercise the Spirit domain to assess apprehensions of divine activity. Church sermons occasionally address priorities of Christian living to help maintain equilibrium between these discrete aspects.

Church preaching is based upon the belief that the Bible is God's Word, an authoritative source for faith and practice. Approaches to the text are expositional and topical. Expository sermons explain the meaning of a single passage by clarifying systematically its pertinent sentences, phrases and words. Topical method presents a variety of passages and verses to make an overall thematic point. Sermons usually exhibit a literal rendering of the text and reflect a one-to-one correspondence of text and contemporary life setting that is indicative of restorationism. There is not a lot of consideration of conditional or occasional aspects of the text in making applications to life. Relevant illustrations are taken from popular culture, most often films and television programmes. On occasion video clips are shown to illustrate a point such as the prayer scene from the film, *Meet the Fockers*, in which Ben Stiller's character prays at the dinner table for the family meal. In recent sermons references were made to *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* movies and the *Heroes* television show.

Participants view church sermons as a "real" communication of the Bible's truths and not "boring" religious talk. Sermons are "relevant" to personal issues and concerns about Christianity. They focus on being in a relationship with God, a perceived shift from traditional churches. The certainty and vitality of preaching is attractive and appealing to young people in a life transition. It offers clarity in the midst of confusion. Disorientation can set the stage for a 'yes' and 'no' verdict of life matters. This is important to emerging adults who manifest a need for reassurance about their religious lives.

After the sermon Henry comes to the front again. Following a moment of silence he says "We believe that the Holy Spirit comes when we meet together so he can speak to us. If anyone has a verse or something to share come to the front." There is also an invitation extended to come to the front for prayer. He also encourages parishioners to overcome their "Britishness," a cultural sensitivity that is deemed to be an obstacle to the Holy Spirit's activity in the congregation. He then prays. "Holy Spirit you are so welcome in our hearts. We quietly wait for you. Release the prophetic and tell us what you want us to do." The band begins to play and music fills the building and people seem to be energized by it. Darin sings a song about God pouring over us like a waterfall. The congregation joins.

Gradually some people spill out of their rows into the aisles and walk to the front. A young female reads from Revelation 20 about the river flowing out from the throne of God in heaven. A young man wearing a cricket cap tells of a picture he got while singing of a vulnerable flower opening up before a cresting tidal wave. He says God is the wave and we are the flower in surrender to him. A theme of God's presence as a powerful water current becomes apparent. The band plays softly. The front fills with praying people.

A young man walks to the main microphone and reads a Bible verse. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom." He says he feels a "freedom to worship." Darin starts a new song that is sung enthusiastically. Its words describe God and the worshipper as being in a special moment of direct and

immediate intimacy. Leaving fear behind the worshipper is alone with God. He lets go of his life and pins his hopes and dreams on God here and now. Between verses Darin says, 'Be open to receive the Holy Spirit, to receive peace.' With arms outstretched a group of people in a row clasp each other's shoulders and sides while singing. A few jump up and down in the aisles while some fall to their knees in prayer. Others stand motionless with their heads bowed. A young lady then delivers a prophecy. She says we are standing in a zoo and a lion has escaped and is coming towards us and we think we are doomed. But he opens his mouth and licks you like a lamb. "That's God." Henry prays and asks the Holy Spirit to "give revelation of the Lord Jesus to everyone here." The band finishes playing.

The service is nearly at a close. Henry dismisses the service by asking for those who "need Jesus to break into your life" to come to the front and pray. He announces there is a group going to a pub following service. Also there are invitations to attend some open houses of members of the congregation. The band plays softly during his final prayer. Afterwards three or four groups of people huddle together in prayer. Some people stay in their seats and talk, others mill about and get coffee and teas to drink from the kitchen. Band members stop playing and turn off instruments and microphones. Noise levels increase from collective talking. After some time of conversation people begin to spill into the main hallway and slowly make their way to the exit.

#### 5.1.2 Characteristics of worship services that appeal to participants

Mosaic's worship services embody church teaching and signifying practices of a direct experiential apprehension of God. Congregants come to know God personally by means of "Word and Spirit", an influential teaching on the apprehension of God that mirrors the church's Evangelical-Charismatic commitments (Hatch 2008: 9). These teachings are embodied in certain signifying practices that resonate with Evangelical textuality and orality of Charismatic experience. Church services manifest three practical features of these theological beliefs and practices. Participants found these factors to be relevant to their spiritual quests.

One, the congregant's immediate accessibility to God is emphasized. God is personally, directly, and immediately reachable. God is alive and at work here among congregants. He is almost tangible and one can experience him now. Participants characterize church as "joyous" and "open" to the divine. Worship services embody a passion for God and an emotional expectancy of his activity among the congregation. Energetic corporate singing, relevant expository preaching and expressions of the Holy Spirit's gifts convey a sense of the immediacy of their relationship with God in the here and now.

Two, God's transformative power is available to any and all through the person of the Holy Spirit. Leaders encourage parishioners to "open" themselves to God's intervention in their lives by praying for the Holy Spirit. Congregants have but to ask for him to tap into his presence and power. Church sermons promote the importance of a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. Corporate worship reflects church teaching of a transformative apprehension of God, an encounter that affirms his love and acceptance, his purpose and direction for their lives, and his empowerment of a belief system and way of life. The teaching is pertinent to emerging adult participants who desire to retain Christianity. Participants said the preaching is "real" and "relevant" to their lives. A defining and decisive encounter with the Holy Spirit can empower life changes appeals to participants. All but one said they have prayed to receive or to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Three, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are manifestations of God's presence. The *charismata* or gifts of the Spirit recorded in the New Testament are available to individuals from all walks of life. Anyone gifted by the Spirit is authorized to minister to others and make a difference in the world. This understanding is based in a literal reading of the New Testament, an interpretive approach consistent with an Evangelical hermeneutic. As heirs of Pentecostalism, Charismatic views of the Bible affirm it as the prominent authority in religious matters and they read it literally (Robbins 2004: 120). Oral expressions of the Spirit's verbal gifts such as prophecy are encouraged. Congregants who have experienced these divine actions are asked to come forward to share publically. The verbal manifestations of these gifts in church services indicate divine intervention. Prophecy is highly valued because it indicates God is speaking directly into the lives of congregants. Whilst any individual can prophesy, the prophetic word is attributed to God who is the "'real' speaker" (Csordas 1997: 330). These occasions can provide assurance of faith and guidance of life. The expression of gifts by lay people is characterized as a "radical egalitarianism of the Spirit" (Cartledge 2004a: 186). Ideally this egalitarianism resists a hierarchical order composed of qualified ministers who are appointed for work of ministry. Ordinary people are equipped by the Holy Spirit to be a channel of God's work in the lives of others. The prospect of divine intervention can be alarming. Simon said God could "intervene in my life in such a dramatic way that it might freak me out so I'm kind of scared by it as well. But I think if I had it and I was sure that if it was a religious experience then it would definitely help." Though initially offsetting to most participants this signifying practice of the Spirit's work proves to be attractive as a potential resource to address their anxiety of uncertainty.

These three practical aspects accentuate an experience of the reality of God which can affirm faith, empower change, and grant authority to act in life. Word and Spirit teaching and practices are of particular interest to participant spiritual quests for intimacy with God. Participant concerns with access to experiential divine knowledge are related to their struggle with the reality of their Christian faith (see 4.2). They acknowledge a problem with God's presence in their lives, a sense of distance

from him that generates intense anxiety characterized by questions, doubts and uncertainty about the status of their Christian faith. The prospect of an encounter with the Holy Spirit offers participants the spiritual experience of a transformative “release,” an overwhelming feeling of God’s presence that can resolve their anxiety of uncertainty. Case studies are presented below which highlight the relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to participant lives (see 5.2.4).

## 5.2 Analysis: Word and Spirit: Mediating the solitary reader’s apprehension of God

The anthropology of Christianity is germane to an understanding of the relation between Bible reading and reader apprehension of God (see 1.4.3 and 2.4). This field of inquiry highlights the importance of explicating pertinent aspects of the reading context for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon of Bible reading. Writings in the field offer a contextually-sensitive theoretical framework to account for participant interpretive structures that govern the relation of the Bible and religious experience.

As communities of practice, churches supply certain “channels of mediation” of divine knowledge (Bielo n.d.; Bielo 2009). These channels come in the forms of theological teaching and signifying practices which offer a response to the problem of God’s presence. This problem has to do with the paradoxical nature of the deemed absence and presence of God in human experience (Engelke 2007: 12). Religious communities define meaningful representations—“certain words, actions, and objects”—by means of which the immaterial or spiritual can be apprehended (Engelke 2007: 9, 19). Church teaching and practice privilege certain representational mediums in resolving the problem of God’s presence. These channels comprise interpretive dispositions that have the power to structure reader orientations to the Bible (Bielo 2009a).

The problem of God’s presence emphasizes the role and function of the Bible and the Holy Spirit in mediating the reader’s relationship with God. Engelke (2009: 155) addresses the importance of understanding the local relation between “the materiality of the text and the immateriality of the Spirit it presents.” The connection between the text’s sign and spiritual reality is impacted by the theological tradition and community of practice in which the Bible is read (Engelke 2009: 152). A community’s theological commitments and forms of practice are pertinent sources of a “semiotics of faith” that render connections between the material and the spiritual (Engelke 2009: 170). The spiritual significance of the text’s signs is grounded in the community’s views of how its material qualities should be received (Engelke 2009: 155, 170) as divine communication and communion. Reader understandings of the Bible’s divine message are analytically inseparable from semiotic aspects of its theologically informed practices (Engelke 2009: 170).

Keane (2003, 2007) has developed an analytic framework that enables the recognition of the semiotic modes of signification by which the relation between signs and objects is determined in social life. His model is interested in the rationale that authorizes relations between words and world, verbal signs and spiritual reality. He makes a distinction between a “representational economy” of intellectual abstraction that binds signs and things, material and immaterial in social life and the “semiotic ideology” that supplies the assumptions that mediate their relation (2003: 410, 421). A semiotic ideology mediates the word-world relation that is structured by the representational economy (2007: 19). The signifying practices that match words and objects, people and actions, materiality and immateriality are situated and framed in a representational economy (2007: 19). A semiotic ideology encapsulates the underlying logic of these relations. It spells out the assumptions that underwrite understandings of the relations that are embodied in an economy’s signifying practices (2007: 18). In the making of these distinctions Keane emphasizes the logical-causal character of such relations rather than a focus on linguistic conventions alone to arbitrate them (2003: 411, 413).

The sections below reflect the relations between the theological structure of sign and things (representational economy), the signifying practices that make connections between immaterial meaning and materiality (semiotic forms), and the rationale that justifies the signifying practice (semiotic ideology). Mosaic’s signifying practices of Evangelical textuality of biblical literalism and orality of Charismatic experience (5.2.2) are situated within Word and Spirit teaching (5.2.1) and are grounded in the logic of restorationism that is embodied in them (5.2.3). Word and Spirit economy, sign and Spirit signifying practices and their underlying restorationist rationale qualify as investigable aspects of Mosaic’s mediatory channels of the divine. These factors offer constructive ways to comprehend local Christian understandings of the role and function of Bible reading in the experiential apprehension of God. This framework is useful to the elucidation of ways in which participant readers apprehend divine knowledge via Bible reading.

### 5.2.1 Word and Spirit: theological economy of experiencing God

Word and Spirit are respectively the designated theologies of divine revelation and the person and work of the Holy Spirit. These theologies offer crucial concepts for answering a very basic question: “how is God heard or seen to be present in the human world?” (Williams 2000: 110). “God communicates or ‘interprets’ himself to the world by mediation of Word and Spirit” (Williams 2000: 110). The theological rationale offered by Word and Spirit relation plays an important role in biblical interpretation (Thiselton 1992; Vanhoozer 1998). The role of the Holy Spirit is deemed to be significant to “the way in which divine reality and human reality can be connected at the experiential level” (Heitink 1999: 193). Word and Spirit theologies are concepts that mediate understandings of

how an individual Christian can apprehend God. The following description of church teaching seeks to track the contours of the Word and Spirit hybrid.

Mosaic's Word and Spirit theologies structure the believer's interaction with God. Church teaching is expressed in this way: "We are committed to both Word and Spirit. We realize the importance of strong evangelical roots. And we also are committed to the charismatic. Our expectation is that God will break in during our meetings. He will guide us, speak to us and change us" (Hatch 2008: 9). The church's teaching of Word and Spirit is related to Evangelical and Charismatic theological positions. (A statement of the doctrinal commitments of Mosaic Church is presented in Appendix L and a definition of the term 'charismatic' is presented in Appendix M.) The biblical text of God's Word and the Holy Spirit's presence and action are theological norms of divine communication and communion with believers. These theological traditions are in need of brief explanation.

One prominent feature of Mosaic's 'evangelical roots' is a strong commitment to the divine status of the Bible. The Bible is "inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings, and they are the supreme and final authority in faith and life" (Hatch 2008: 17). The Bible is God's Word. It is a primary handbook for apprehending God. "The Bible is God's manual for life....It shows us how we can truly know God and grow into the men and women that he has planned that we should become" (Hatch 2007: 32). The concepts derived from the linguistic inscriptions of the biblical text are essential to the Christian's knowledge of God and his will. This position is consistent with Evangelical theology's strong emphasis on the divine origin and authority of the Bible as the source for Christian faith and way of life (McGrath 1995: 55). The Word of God is in the biblical text (Vanhoozer 1998: 423). The biblical text is the privileged agent in the reader's actualization of the communication of divine message. "We read scripture in order to hear God addressing us—us, here and now, today" (Wright 2006: 18).

The church also espouses a robust adherence to Charismatic belief. "Our expectation is that God will break in during our meetings. He will guide us, speak to us and change us" (Hatch 2008: 9). The gifts of the Holy Spirit are essential to his teaching and guidance of the church. The Holy Spirit "teaches the Church and guides the Church in all truth" and also "gives varieties of gifts for the common good of the Church and guides the Church and the individual believer in service for the church and in service towards the world" (Hatch 2008: 17). The Holy Spirit's coming into the Christian's life is a conscious personal experience. "The Holy Spirit is the personal presence of God. Salvation is an experienced reality, made so by the person of the Spirit coming into our lives and filling us so we can experience His power and gifts" (Hatch 2007: 23). "The individual believer is indwelt...and is supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit" (Hatch 2008: 17). The expectation of God's intervention during worship services and powerful experiences of the Holy Spirit are consistent with

Charismatic theology's imperative of the manifestation of his gifts as distributed to the assembly and a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit and (Cartledge 2003, 2004a). Charismatic belief and practice advocates the personal experience of the transformational working of the Holy Spirit as evidence of God's activity in the world. The Holy Spirit is the privileged agent in the believer's experience of divine communion.

The double helix of DNA presents a useful biological metaphor of Mosaic's Word and Spirit teaching. The 'Word' strand represents the Bible and the 'Spirit' strand stands for the experienced work of the Holy Spirit. Each strand is indispensable to the other. The Word is in the authoritative biblical text which serves as the definitive source of knowledge of God. The acquisition of such knowledge is attainable through the literal reading of biblical texts. Biblical knowledge is required to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian spiritual experience. The Bible says the Spirit manifests God's presence and action in the world as he carries out his will in the Christian's life. An experience of the Holy Spirit is paramount to the living of a Christian life as revealed in the Bible. Spoken reports of manifestations of the Spirit are a medium of divine knowledge. A dialectical relationship between the textuality biblical literalism and orality of charismatic experience forms Mosaic's sense of spirituality. Each strand reinforces the other. The Word and Spirit hybrid supports the ideological role the Bible plays in affirming the importance of Christian religious experience. It also supports the epistemic role spiritual experience plays in confirming the reality of Christian faith to which the Bible bears witness. DNA's set of intertwined factors provides a viable description of the church's theological economy of apprehending divine knowledge.

### 5.2.2 Textuality and Orality: signifying practices of experiencing God

Mosaic's theological economy of Word and Spirit authorizes certain signifying practices of the apprehension of God. Biblical literalism and oral testimony are signifying practices that embody the DNA of Evangelical textuality and orality of charismatic experience. Knowledge of God is channeled via the biblical text and oral testimony of the Holy Spirit's activity. These modes of signification specify the conditions by which God's activity can be realized. As practices they embody Mosaic's sense of Christian spirituality.

Vanhoozer (1998) explains how for Evangelicals the biblical text is the locus of the Word of God. The Word of God is in the biblical text: "*the Word of God for today (significance) is a function of the Word of God in the text (meaning)*" (p. 423, italics in original). Evangelicals emphasize the importance of grasping the literal meaning of the Bible, the original sense shared between the author and his contemporaries. Literal interpretation is "common sense hermeneutic realism" (p. 208). Hermeneutic realism means "there is something prior to interpretation, something 'there' in the text,



which can be known and to which the interpreter is accountable” (p. 26). The communication of God’s Word is derived from the text’s original meaning and the reader’s communion with God is related to the spiritual significance of this divine message. The interpretation of the text’s literal sense is “ultimately a matter of spirituality” (p. 407). An authentic spiritual connection with God is rooted in a literal reading of the biblical text. Biblical literalism is consonant with Evangelical textuality.

According to Hanks (1989), one primary feature of textuality is the status afforded the text. Textuality is an orientation by which the community of practice renders its signs interpretable as a “communicative phenomenon” (p. 96). The community’s characterization of the text functions pragmatically as an interpretive frame that shapes the social production and reception of its meaning (p. 106). It is by means of this normative frame that readers find textual cues that can “signal how the sign is to be interpreted” (p. 107). Text, then, is “a way of reading” within a “communicative habitus” (p. 112). The hermeneutic realism of Evangelical textuality is an interpretive orientation to the Bible.

Mosaic Church mirrors Evangelical textuality and its focus on the literal interpretation of the Bible. Books on Evangelical hermeneutics and Bible study methods are displayed on the church’s book table. Evangelical biblical hermeneutics is a matter of “enlightened common sense” according to one volume prominently displayed on the book table (Fee and Stuart 1993: 14). The expository teaching of the Bible by church elders demonstrates a commitment to the recovery of the literal meaning of the text. One example of Mosaic’s biblical literalism is found in the use of Jesus’ baptism as support for the practice of believer’s baptism by immersion. “Here at Mosaic we believe that the Bible teaches that believers should be baptized by full immersion, as Jesus himself was, as an outward sign of inwardly dying to the old life and being raised to new life in Jesus Christ” (Mosaic Church e:news 30 June 2009). “Not only did Jesus set the example by being baptized himself but commanded us to be baptized” (Hatch 2008: 12). The baptism of Jesus, who was a Jew situated in Palestinian Judaism, is used as evidence for a Christian practice of baptism by immersion for today. This interpretive move is a one-to-one correspondence between Jewish and Christian baptisms. It decontextualizes differences between the historical, literary and theological environments in which baptism is presented in the New Testament. Common-sense correspondence underwrites the interpretive relation of the baptism of Jesus to believers today. Also it is by means of this literal hermeneutic church leaders interpret the Bible to support male primacy and female subordination. Only males are permitted to be elders in the church leadership structure.

Participants often find Mosaic’s teaching to be helpful in understanding the Bible and express confidence in it. (Selected quotations of interview transcript excerpts are presented in Appendix O.) Clara, for example, says “you’re not just trying to figure it out yourself what it’s saying in the Bible like they’re – well not telling you what it says but helping you understand what it says” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview

14 May 2009, lines 1555-1557). “Like they make it sound so very obvious that that’s what it means or that it’s true.” Melanie also finds Mosaic teaching prevents her from misunderstanding the Bible: “The people preaching at Mosaic have ah studied the Bible a lot more than my friends and so they’ll ah know what they are talking about a bit more and I won’t misinterpret things or be taken up by someone’s else’s opinion that might not be the right one” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 09 September 2009, lines 1160-1163).

The phenomenon of charismatic testimony is a locus of the Spirit’s activity. It is “charismatic ritual language” and is recognized by charismatic communities of practice as a “verbal manifestation of the sacred” (Csordas 1997: 322). As a form of “inspired speech” it conveys the “reception of revelation through ‘words, pictures, visions and dreams” that is “supremely located at the encounter phase” with the Holy Spirit (Cartledge 2006: 69). The divine ritual of oral testimony can be expressed in a number of recognized ways: prophecy, preaching and teaching, prayer, and the sharing of spiritually significant matters in conversation and stories (Csordas 1997: 322). Prophecy is a spoken word from God and is granted by the Spirit’s gifting of individuals in the assembly (Csordas 1997: 321). Personal encounters with the Spirit are also expressed in conversation. Charismatic testimony is structured by the Bible’s narrative power, “as people simply tell and retell their stories about life with, through and in God” (Cartledge 2003: 55). It expresses a narrative understanding of the Spirit’s guidance by connecting individuals and the church with the overarching biblical story of the journey of God’s people (Cartledge 2006: 83). It embodies an “oral-narrative liturgy” of God’s immanent activity (S. Land quoted in Smith 1997: 54). It is based in “the belief in the continued presence of Christ in the community” which secures the normative authority of the Spirit’s guidance (Smith 1997: 69). God makes himself known through oral testimony. “It is the social mechanism of testimony that is of supreme importance to Pentecostal and charismatic understanding of our knowledge of God” (Cartledge 2003: 53). This “orality of liturgy” is significant factor in the global growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity (W.J. Hollenweger quoted in Robbins 2004:126).

Of equal importance to oral testimony is the granting of a hearing to reports of charismatic experience. Smith (1997: 50) argues the expression and reception of spoken testimony is related to the “oral/aural charismatic way of being.” Early Christianity was “a religion of the Word” rather than “a religion of the Book” (p. 50). This is especially the case in regard to prophecy. Prophecy is indicative of the early Christian community’s “vital and dynamic relationship” with the risen Lord, and its manifestation served as evidence of his “continued presence in the person of his Spirit” (p. 52). The prophetic gift given the early church continues to be a privileged medium by which an expectant charismatic congregation hears “a word from the Lord” (p. 51). The oral/aural liturgy manifests the live performance of the “freshness of the Spirit” that cannot be reiterated (p. 55). Faith can be experienced by hearing the spoken word and responding to its “symbol and gesture” of the divine

presence (p. 56). At work in the congregational phenomenon of oral/aural charismatic testimony is “a fundamental hermeneutic of trust” and “faith in the guidance of the Spirit” (pp. 69, 70). The signifying practice of oral testimony effectively makes reports of spiritual experience a primary mode of divine knowledge. The function of this ritual in the oral community of practice offers a way to organize its divine spiritual experience. Mosaic reflects the Charismatic commitment to oral testimony of an experience of the Spirit. The congregation is encouraged to bear oral witness to experiences of the Spirit’s manifestation power and gifts in worship services. Oral testimonies of charismatic experience are a regular feature of congregational life (see 5.1).

The signifying practice of oral testimony of charismatic experience offers an influential means by which congregants can come to know indicators of an experience of God. Repeated social enactments can disclose ways to identify divine experience. At issue is “how people learn to make the judgment that God is present” (Luhrmann *et al.*, 2010: 66). Involvement with religious practices is something of an “initiation process” in which the parishioner comes to discover “specific skills and ways of being, and how those skills deeply shape their experience of faith” (Luhrmann *et al.*, 2010: 67). Oral reports of live encounters with the Spirit can have a heuristic effect on ways the divine is understood to be apprehended. Charismatic testimony can express the sense of an overwhelming feeling that often accompanies an experience of God. Charismatic experience “conveys a sense of the wonder, reality, love and power of God’s presence” (Cartledge 2004a: 180). Affective and somatic phenomena are associated with conscious charismatic experience. Affective phenomena of “excitement, peace, release, lightheartedness, and power” complement an experience of intimacy with God (Cartledge 2004b: 48). Somatic phenomena of “physical expressions signify the immanence of God” and constitute a sacramental “symbol of intimacy” (Cartledge 1998: 131-132). As culturally constituted forms of awareness, sensory modalities of somatic phenomena are ways by which we can come to know about reality (Csordas 1993: 139). The practice of these modalities through repeated enactment contributes to one’s interpretation of an experience of God (Luhrmann *et al.*, 2010: 68). It is through religious practice that an experience of God can be identified through the body’s responses (Luhrmann 2004: 519). Interpretation of sensory perceptions of somatic phenomena becomes congruent with religious understandings of an experience of God (Luhrmann 2004: 522). The liturgy of oral expression of a manifestation of the Spirit can lead practitioners to identify markers of an experience of God.

Participant reports feature affective-somatic phenomena of Charismatic experience. (Selected quotations of interview transcript are excerpts presented in Appendix O.) Participants who reported experiences of God highlighted emotional and sensory aspects of the encounter. Kevin experiences elation when he feels close to God in worship at Mosaic. His descriptions of his experience — “excited,” “passionate,” “high,” “best feeling in my life” — communicate the idea of embodied

rapture which causes him to want to talk to God (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 February 2009, lines 482-486). Simon experiences intimacy with Jesus when he participates in communion at Mosaic Church. It offers him the reassurance that “Jesus is there” and that he will “help you out if you need him” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 382-383). He prays after taking the bread and the wine, tells Jesus about his “worries.” “I’ve been able to speak to Jesus and he’s listened.” He says, “I just feel better in myself” when talking communion. Participant reports of sensory perception of intimacy with God were very common. Physical sensations were powerful and affected subjective feeling states. Melanie said she feels a “warmth” and “comfort” when she asks for the Holy Spirit to come into her life. She identifies the sensation and feeling state with being close to God. She said the experience is empowering as it “spurs me into action” to pray, read the Bible, and go to church more often. One frequently reported physical expression was a tingling sensation. It was interpreted as feeling close to God. Deborah experienced “moments where you tingle all over” during times of singing at Mosaic’s worship services and when she read the Bible. She linked this sensation with God “pouring more affection on you” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 March 2009, lines 1649, 1658). Bradley experiences a “shiver down the spine,” a sensation that he believes is spiritually significant since it occurs when he is praying during Mosaic’s worship services. The sensation indicates he is “aware of the Spirit” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 19 April 2009, lines 927, 941).

### 5.2.3 Restorationism: the underlying logic of experiencing God

The semiotic ideology of restorationism mediates Mosaic’s Word and Spirit theological economy and signifying practices of biblical literalism and oral testimony. Restorationism is the logic that underwrites the apprehension of God.

British restorationism is a Christian movement predicated on a theology of the recovery of ecclesial patterns orchestrated by charismatic gifts. It supposes “the reacquisition of the life, power, operation, and structure of the church of the New Testament” (Kay 2005: 24). It is based on the idea the modern church is in need of spiritual renewal and unity, especially given the cultural and statistical decline of Christian churches due to the profound impact of secularization (Kay 2008:40). It is characterized by the “radical” belief that church affairs should be ordered by the exercise of charismatic gifts rather than “legalistic constitutional and denominational machinery” (Kay 2008: 35). Christian restoration is possible by means of a return to biblical authority and “to the pattern laid down in the New Testament” (Kay 2007: 21). Highlighted in the church’s return to the biblical pattern is the recovery of the manifestation of charismatic gifts, including the influential ministry gift of an apostle (Kay 2007: 20). The role of the apostle is that of a “master builder,” a pattern found in the New Testament that is characterized by a relational rather than hierarchical style of ministry yet holds the authority to start new congregations and designate their elders (Kay 2006: 161). The focus on the development of

“apostolic networks” is a key characteristic of restorationism (Kay 2007: 31). These networks are comprised of apostles who seek to establish new autonomous charismatic churches and who exercise oversight of their affairs (Kay 2008: 35). Spiritual renewal and unity is thought to be an outcome of this mechanism that is reflective of the biblical pattern of apostolic leadership.

New Frontiers International (NFI) is a Christian restoration movement in Britain (Kay 2007: 64). The oversight ministry of Terry Virgo, NFI’s founding apostle, has been characterized as one of providing leadership to produce local churches with a focus on expository preaching and charismatic gifts (Kay 2007: 79-80). Mosaic Church, a NFI church plant, approves of NFI’s restoration aim to “base church life on New Testament principles” (Hatch 2008: 5).

At issue is the logic of the ideology of restorationism that authorizes the biblical model of a church governed by charismatic gifts. The restorationist vision of a renewed Christianity believes New Testament reports of *charismata* of the Holy Spirit are normative for today. Christian churches today are granted the same first-century experience of the Holy Spirit. There is a presumption of continuity between biblical and contemporary accounts of spiritual experience. The correlation reflects “a hermeneutical process from *within* a worldview” (Cartledge 2003: 54, italics in original). The expectation that “the God of the Bible is at work in a similar kind of way today” is rooted in the Pentecostal understanding that the church “continues to live in” the drama of the biblical story (Cartledge 2006:28). Charismatic emphasis on the importance of a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit is consistent with this view (Cartledge 2006: 69). The similarity of experience of the Spirit is the link between the early church and the present church’s continual living of the biblical story. The epistemic basis of the hermeneutic relation between Bible and Spirit can be seen in the conviction that the Spirit will be repeatedly encountered in the church’s living of the biblical story. “This understanding is based upon a correspondence theory of truth and assumes that the experience of today *corresponds* with the experience of the early church” (Cartledge 2003: 54, italics in original). This rationale functions as an interpretive structure of Christian spiritual reality. The Evangelical common-sense literal interpretation of the Bible ties well with restorationist correspondence rationale. The notion of congruence between biblical and contemporary accounts reflects a reading consistent with biblical literalism. Belief in the continuity of accounts affirms the literalist notion of the role of charismatic experience. Restorationism embraces textuality of biblical literalism and orality of charismatic testimony.

Mosaic Church believes there is a direct correspondence between biblical accounts of the Spirit’s work and contemporary Christian spiritual experience. “The Holy Spirit continues to manifest himself through the gifts as described” in the New Testament (Hatch 2008: 17). The Christian religious experience advocated in Word and Spirit teaching underwrites the apprehension of God.

It is in the semiotic ideology of restorationism that the character of the connection is displayed between church practice of literal biblical interpretation and the Bible's status. A transitive relationship exists in the attribution of restorationism to the Bible. Malley (2004: 83) discusses the "assumption of transitivity" in Evangelical hermeneutics. "The assumption of transitivity makes interpretive traditions possible because it allows propositions to be regarded as interpretations of a text even when they are not identical to the text" (p. 84). One practical aspect of belief in biblical authority is the justification of an interpretation of its texts as evidence to support existing understandings of faith. "[T]he text is held to be true and authoritative, and beliefs are justified not in terms of their rational or intrinsic truth but in terms of their basis in a text" (p. 79). A function of biblical authority in actual practice is to justify an interpretive tradition. The practical connection between the Bible and an interpretation lies in the interpreter's assumption "that there is (or can be) a transitivity from a text to ideas derived from it" (p. 83). The use of a text to support an interpretation involves the reader's ascription of the interpretation to the text (p. 84). For example, in Malley's congregational study a Bible verse was used to support belief in the proposition that God cannot lie. The text reads, "a faith and knowledge resting in the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2, NIV). The text was rendered to provide a biblical basis for a belief in God's character. The Bible justifies the meaning of a text as it exists in relation to an inquiry of an interpretive tradition. In this way an interpretation is granted a biblical basis. In short, "the goal of evangelicals' hermeneutic activity is to establish *transitivity* between the text and the reader's understanding" (p. 84, italics in original).

The transitivity of restorationism is important to an understanding of reader appropriations of the Bible to account for God's presence and action in life experience. Restorationism frames what the reader of the Bible can do. The interpretive structure of correspondence between text and life authorizes reader appropriation of textual meaning. It provides an interpretive frame of Christian religious experience. The assumption of transitivity in restorationism serves to justify textual interpretation in support of an occurrence of Christian religious experience. It also renders plausible the reader's ascription to the text of an interpretation of life experience or state of affairs. The biblical text is a harbinger of charismatic experience and its interpretation confers a biblical basis to the reader's encounter with the Spirit in life experience. Restorationism reveals how Bible reading functions in the formation of Christian understandings of religious experience. It informs the individual reader's appropriation of actualized meaning in a solitary reading.

The direct correspondence in restorationism between biblical accounts and contemporary experience of the Holy Spirit offers participants an appealing interpretive framework. Participants manifest a need of reassurance about their Christian faith and find church teaching attractive (see 4.2). Their spiritual quests take place in the midst of the confusion of emerging adulthood, a cultural phase of life

marked by intense change (see 4.3). The prospect of the comprehension of biblical texts and personal apprehension of God appeals to emerging young people who are seeking to retain Christian faith. Divine knowledge is attainable. The Word's certainty and the Spirit's accessibility offer participants a crucial sense of assurance as they navigate their way through a critical life transition. Charismatic experience "offers access to a source of authority (the Spirit)" and assurances "that God's presence and love is immediately present, active, and powerful" (Sheldrake 2007: 203). The potent mix of Evangelical textuality and Charismatic orality resonates deeply with young people who are in flux.

#### 5.2.4 Relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to participant orientations to the Bible and charismatic experience

The following case studies indicate the impact on participants of Mosaic's Evangelical-Charismatic teaching. A case study was prepared for each participant and the three cases that are presented here were selected from the group. Each of the additional case studies is presented in Appendix N. Each case study indicates the relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to participant concerns with apprehending God. They desire intimacy with God and seek to identify his presence and action in their lives. Participants recognize church teaching offers ways to come to know God. The effect of this teaching on their spiritual quests is revealed in their views. The cases demonstrate the help or hindrance to reader quests of church approaches to the apprehension of God. In certain cases it was necessary to provide background information to aid an understanding of the role church teaching plays in the participant's thinking and expectations of God activity in her or his life. Interview transcript excerpts of selected participant quotations are presented in Appendix O. Selected quotations are marked by references to interview round, date, and lines.

Participants have been involved with activities sponsored by the church. All have attended Sunday church services, weekday small group Bible studies, The Alpha Course and/or The Beta Course. Church involvement situates them in a local Christian institution with a particular tradition of belief and practice. This formal setting was not of their own making as it was constituted prior to their personal involvement and it exists beyond their daily life conditions. By virtue of their church involvement participants have been confronted with an institutional and doctrinal structure in which their beliefs and practices can be shaped. It is within this formal setting participants encountered Mosaic's Word and Spirit teaching on apprehending God.

#### *Melanie's relationship with God comes alive via the Holy Spirit*

Mosaic's teaching has been influential on Melanie. "They've sort of taught me about the importance of the Holy Spirit in building relationship with God." The Bible and the Holy Spirit are very

important to her living the Christian life. The Bible gives her a “grounding for what we believe in and it gives us the information.” She reads the Bible to find “help with a problem” and to “learn more about God basically.” The Holy Spirit “brings everything alive.” “I think it’s the Holy Spirit that assures me of the reality of my Christian faith more than the Bible” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 09 September 2009, lines 1101-1102). Raised in a Christian family she attended church with her parents. “In Sunday School we learned about God the father and about the stories of Jesus but we never really talked about the Holy Spirit and it’s only through personal experience that I’ve come to know about the Holy Spirit and about what it means.” Since attending Mosaic she has gained assurance of the reality of her Christian faith. “Like before it felt like I didn’t really have the right to” receive the Holy Spirit. “Whenever I ask for the Holy Spirit now then it’s just given to me....It’s just something that confirms God is real and God is there and present in your life and is within you and around you.” She feels “recharged” when she asks for the Holy Spirit, especially when she senses she is losing “energy” and “enthusiasm” in her relationship with God. The Spirit renews and empowers her faith. He “will make me feel closer to God. It makes me want to go to church more. It makes me want to read my Bible more and pray with people more. And it just sort of spurs me into action really to move close to God again.” Church services are empowering to her faith. Sermons have “really struck a chord with me.” Worship times make her want to “tell people about God.” “I don’t feel it as much at other churches but you can really feel the Holy Spirit in the room ah in Mosaic I think.”

*Bradley is learning to become more aware of the Holy Spirit*

Being “aware of the Spirit” is something Bradley is learning to do since his conversion to Christianity and his attendance at Mosaic Church. He believes it is “integral really to who I am.” Bradley attended Mosaic’s The Alpha Course within days after he became a Christian. He then attended the church’s worship services regularly and got involved in a mission group. He is aware of the Holy Spirit when he is “in the zone” and “opening myself and worshipping God” at Mosaic or when reading his Bible. “It’s a weird feeling.” He gets “this shiver down my spine” when he is “really close to God.” “It usually happens when I’m praising God or sometimes when a particular verse strikes me or when I’m praying. Like I’ll get that feeling and ah it’s just that I’m more aware of the Spirit really.” He prays for his family and non-Christians for “the Spirit to speak to them and reveal himself there.” Mosaic teaching also helps him with his Bible reading. He says it “expands” and “shed[s] light on a new way” of understanding scripture.

People at Bradley’s mission group pray “prophetic words of encouragement” over an individual at meetings. Prophetic words were prayed over him before he left on his mission trip to Asia. These prophecies “came into people’s heads while the Spirit was breaking in” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 19 April 2009, lines 1075). He was given a written list of the prophecies to take with him on the trip. Someone wrote,



“Expect God to speak to you profoundly about your long-term future.” While on the trip Bradley said “God really did speak to me profoundly about my future.” Since he has been back he is raising money for an Asian orphanage project and wants to return to help orphans there. Another wrote they had a picture of him “surrounded by lots of shields and protected by God.” Someone wrote of a “special place to stay” which will be “significant.” Bradley said the trip was difficult, one with many security restrictions. “We didn’t have one problem with security or anything like that which is almost unheard of” given his destination. One place he stayed was a “cool” sanctuary, “a real place of safety and refuge.” He said each of the prophecies came to pass in some way.

Bradley senses the “Spirit will speak to me through the word of God” when he reads the Bible. But he does not feel he is “spiritually mature enough” to pray or speak prophetically. “The whole concept seems slightly odd. It’s like something just comes into your head and you speak it and you know it’s the Spirit talking to you. I struggle to identify when the Spirit is talking to me and when he’s not.” He finds it confusing to know if and when “God is saying anything to me that I could quote.” This is especially the case when he is praying with someone or in a group. He finds himself “waiting for something coming down through the Spirit and talking to me.” There was one occasion when he was confident of God speaking to him. He was scheduled to be baptized at Mosaic and invited his non-Christian friends to attend. He was “gutted” when his friends did not come. But he sensed the “Spirit kind of speaking to me and just saying ‘you know it’s ok because it’s all in God’s time it’s in God’s plan.’”

#### *Deborah’s spiritual experiences tell her God is real*

Mosaic Church was instrumental in Deborah’s conversion. Her non-Christian parents took her to the local Church of England at Easter and Christmas. She found it “dull and full of old people and Jesus was not really anyone important.” However, she began attending church there on her own when her beloved grandmother died as it provided a sense of connection to her.

While at university she became more curious about Christianity and attended Mosaic’s The Alpha Course. Christianity “started to make sense” to her and she attended Sunday worship services. She found the preaching made Bible passages “relevant” to her: “Like they translate them into today’s English way of life.” She says she “can’t connect with the crazy vicar” at her home church because he “does not appear very spiritual” or “enthusiastic at all.” “Ah and there’s no sort of spiritual feeling or anything. And then ah there is at Mosaic.” She finds Mosaic pastors to be “very passionate,” an attitude that got her “interested and keen to learn more or to learn what they’re going on about.” Also her Christian friends at the church “showed me God.” She came to God during one service in which she experienced an intense feeling of love in the church. At her baptism she spoke of that moment and

said she thought “either all these people are completely off their rocker or God exists.” It was then she realized that “God was actually real” and that “it was all true” and became a Christian at that moment. She went on attending church and completed The Beta Course.

Since becoming a Christian at Mosaic her worship, in church and private, and Bible reading offer her ways of being close to God. She “first felt God” in church worship, an experience she continues to enjoy. Her Bible reading grew in importance as a way to understand more of God. “I think you can feel him in worship but you don’t get to know him. You don’t know – you don’t find out how to live as he wants you to live til you read the Bible” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1838-1840). In either case she gets a “funny tingling” sensation in worship and Bible reading which she takes to mean God is present and that he is “pouring more affection on you.” “When I read the Bible I do get that tingly feeling – that you know – God’s just sitting next to me with his arm around me chilling out.”

Since her conversion Deborah has “fleeting moments” of doubt about God’s existence. This is especially the case when she does not feel close to him. For example, as she got out of here car and was walking home one day she thought “is this a big joke?” “But then once I’m inside you know look at my Bible and stuff and that’s fine.” When she has doubts there is a tendency to think her doubts may be right and she feels she does not want to connect with God and to “just leave him out of it.” When at that point she believes it is important for her to “step back into the God blanket.” The ‘God blanket’ refers to God’s “constant presence in my life,” an experience of which she is not always cognizant.

Reading the Bible offers her a vital means to reconnect with God. She believes the Bible is “God’s word so it’s speaking to me.” “I read it and then he’s there.” She approaches her reading with an attitude of “come on convince me...that you’re real.” “Hey where are you?” She desires an immediate response from God when she experiences doubts. “When I have this doubt I don’t need I don’t want to wait two weeks or an answer. I want it there and then. So then that’s when I read the Bible.” She likes to go to the Gospels of Matthew or John and read Jesus’ teachings. It is important that it is “actually Jesus” who is speaking and “saying ‘do these things.’” She finds this reassuring: “then you can say to God ‘ok God you’re there. Now I’m going to try and live like Jesus in these ways that he’s told me.’ And then you know the doubt just goes.” She says her doubts are part of her transition as a new Christian from being in the “non-Christian world” and moving to the “Christian world.” When reading she experiences a change in “my emotions and my feelings”, a change she describes as a “shifting between the two worlds” of God being a big joke and God being real.

The Holy Spirit is important to Deborah’s daily life. Asking for the Holy Spirit is “one of the first things I do” each day. She believes the “Holy Spirit gives you sort of a hunger to know Jesus so that

by being filled with the Holy Spirit I'll want to read the Bible and I then also the Holy Spirit sort of fills me with a knowledge so that when people ask me difficult questions then I sort of have that confidence to answer them." She takes exception to Mosaic's use of language of God 'breaking in' during church meetings as it "makes me think that he's not there and occasionally when you ask him he'll come. I like to think that he's a continuous presence."

### 5.3 Interpretation: Church's ideology of restorationism: the logic of experiencing God

The focus of this chapter has been to situate participant readers within the Evangelical-Charismatic *habitus* of Mosaic Church. The semiotic ideology of restorationism mediates the church's Word and Spirit theological economy and signifying practices by which God can be experienced. The logic of direct correspondence of biblical accounts of the Holy Spirit's activity and contemporary charismatic experience serves as an interpretive structure of God's presence and action. Biblical literalism and oral testimony are forms of signification that mediate understandings of how to come to know God. The biblical text properly interpreted is the authoritative handbook for apprehending God. Testimony of charismatic experience is a social medium of divine activity. Repeated charismatic enactments can disclose indicators of an experience of God. Affective-somatic phenomena are often associated with conscious experience of the Holy Spirit. The ritual of oral expressions of a manifestation of the Spirit can tutor practitioners in identifying certain sensory perceptions as being indicative of an experience of God. These signifying practices have a shaping influence on participant views of the Bible and Christian religious experience. The case studies highlight the impact of the signifying practices of Mosaic's teaching. They reveal the relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to their quest of experiencing God to retain Christianity. Participants find church teaching to be helpful to their understanding of the Bible. They also report physical sensations of charismatic experience which they deem as evidence of intimacy with God. These experiences are reassuring.

The reader's apprehension of God through solitary Bible reading is the topic of this research. The data analysis finding of the institutionally situated interpretive structure of restorationism provides evidence in support of the ideological dimension of participant readers' orientation to solitary readings of the Bible. The ideological aspect refers to the set of church teachings and practices that serve as interpretive frames to apprehend God. The findings of participant solitary readings of the Bible are addressed on pragmatic and ideological levels (see 1.7). Case studies reveal the relevance of church beliefs and practices to resolving their anxiety of uncertainty of the status of their Christian faith. The significance of this finding for the overall line of reasoning of this thesis is that the interpretive structure of restorationism is a salient feature that informs the reader's reading stance towards the biblical text. The signifiatory modes of experiencing God have a shaping influence on reader orientations to the Bible. An assumption of this thesis is the importance of reading stance to the

relation of Bible reading and religious experience (see 1.6). The pragmatic reading disposition and institutional ideology of Bible reading are pertinent intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that contribute to participant reading stances towards the biblical text. A reading stance can be characterized by the particular blend of pragmatic and ideological aspects. The following chapter will present the impact of reading stance on one reader's solitary biblical transactions (6.0).

## 6.0 Text and Experience: Reading stance and solitary Bible readers' apprehension of God

*Chapter Abstract: The objective of this final findings chapter is to show how reading stance structured the way one participant reader relates the Bible to readings of God in his life. This extensive case study highlights the influence of the reader's blend of personal faith-life anxiety and the rationale of church teaching of apprehending God on his biblical transactions. These intrapersonal and interpersonal factors composed a reading stance towards the text. The reader's unique appropriated actualizations reflect the impact of his individual reading stance. Reader accounts of Christian religious experience reflect the biblical transactions of actualization and appropriation of meaning. This finding indicates the significant role reading stance plays in his biblical transactions. It suggests the impact of the reader's reading stance on meaning-making activity in solitary readings of the spiritual life of the Bible. The chapter format reflects a sequence of data description, data analysis, and interpretation of data for thesis argument.*

### 6.1 Description: The link between solitary Bible reading and readings of God

This final installment of the three findings chapters seeks to investigate the role of an individual reader's reading stance in solitary acts of Bible reading. Reading stance has a shaping influence on the reader's selection of elements to which he or she responds in the transaction (Rosenblatt 1994: 43). It sets the stage for the reader's transactions of actualization and appropriation of meaning. The actualization of the text's meaning potential and its appropriation as an apprehension of God are aspects of the reader's production of meaning during reading (see 1.4.4). Reading stance is a significant mitigating factor in the reader-text relation which highlights the reader's role as meaning maker in Bible reading.

An extensive case study on one participant, Simon, is presented in this chapter. It indicates the impact of reading stance in this reader's appropriation of the Bible to his life experiences and state of affairs. It reveals the reader's stance constitutes an important point of contact between the biblical text and apprehensions of God. The participant reader's reading stance structured his appropriated actualizations. His textual orientation was impacted by the blend of his personal anxiety of uncertainty of Christianity and adaptation of Mosaic Church's semiotic ideology of restorationism.

Restorationism assumes a direct correspondence between biblical accounts of the activity of the Holy Spirit and contemporary Christian experience of the Holy Spirit. This mix reflects the pragmatic (see 4.2) and ideological (see 5.2.3) dimensions of interest to participant readers. Transaction theory maintains the reader's attention to the text's verbal symbols is affected by the "mix of public and private elements of sense" inherent in a reading stance (Rosenblatt 2005: 10). His reading stance was composed of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. As such the case study contributes towards the prospect of the development of a holistic model of Bible reading and Christian religious experience.

These pertinent factors suggest the importance of the role reading stance plays in the relation of material text and immaterial apprehension of God in Bible reading. Reading stance impacts the

reader's transaction of the meaning of the referential potential of the text's verbal symbols. "The transaction is basically between the reader and what he senses the words pointing to" (Rosenblatt 1994: 21). The religious qualities of experience are contingent upon the reader's association of the sense of the text's words and extralinguistic referents. The solitary Bible reader's production of meaning involves the effort to relate the sense of what the text's symbols signify in their context and their referents in reality (Schneiders 1999: 15). This activity is basic to the reader's efforts to make intelligible an apprehension of God in life experience or a state of affairs. This is an important aspect of the reader's appropriation of actualized meaning.

## 6.2 Description: Extensive case study of Simon' solitary readings of the Bible

At issue is the basis for the choice of the particular case study being presented in this chapter. The generalizability and transferability of case study was addressed earlier (see 3.3). One benefit of an extensive case study is that it offers depth given that its narrative contains the "complexities and contradictions of real life" which is conducive to the prospect of contributing to knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2001: 84, 86). According to the purview of the research project the presented case study qualifies for selection by virtue of the fact that it makes very plain the pertinent factors which are judged to impact participant reader's readings (see 1.4ff for review of factors). Schofield (2000: 78) states the researcher's selection of a case "on the basis of typicality" can enhance potential applicability of the research. She mentions Wolcott's ethnographic study of a principal "who was typical of other principles in gender, marital status, age, and so forth" as an example of a choice that increased the transferability of the research (Schofield 2000: 78). No case can be considered 'typical' in all matters, yet the extent to which an example is typical of its kind is likely to enhance applicability (Schofield 2000: 78-79). These factors are numerated below.

First, the selected case study epitomizes the impact of an individual blend of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors on Bible reading. It reflects main aspects of the research that are important to an understanding of how God is deemed to become real to solitary readers of the Bible. The faith-life tensions and church interpretive structures personal are factors commonly shared by participant readers (see 4.0 and 5.0). These factors are critical to reader readings of God in life experience and their appropriations are characterized by these salient features. The readings of the participant reader selected reflect his faith-life anxiety and engagement of restorationism to resolve it.

Second, the chosen case exemplifies the impact of emerging adulthood on Bible readings. The selected participant encompasses well the pressing concerns associated with emerging adulthood (see 4.3). His Bible readings offer appropriations of a key moment in his significant life transition from adolescence to independence. The participant was being supported financially by his parents during a

particularly important time between university graduation and obtaining gainful employment. His appropriations of religious experiences at church events from this critical period offer insight into the role of Bible reading in the religious life of an emerging adult.

Third, selected case clearly illustrates the influence of church interpretive structures on reader's appropriation of meaning. As such it offers an excellent example of the situated character of solitary acts of Bible reading. It reveals the participant reader's attraction to institutional religion as he navigates the anxious tension between his doubts about Christianity and his desire to retain his faith as a way of life. He engages with Mosaic Church's semiotic ideology of restorationism in his readings. He incorporates the church's signifying practice of oral testimony of charismatic experience in his interpretive approach to the Bible. The reader privileges charismatic experience in his conceptions of the apprehension of God. His adaptation of restorationism offers special insight into the use of institutional structures to apprehend God to resolve a personal faith-life dilemma. The interpretive frame of the institutional setting powerfully affected his readings.

Fourth, the chosen case aptly demonstrates the difficulty of appropriating the Bible in deemed apprehensions of God. It reveals the challenge of assigning the religious meaning of life experience. A life story is not a fixed entity but is subject to reinterpretation and retelling, even within a given verbalization of it (Brookfield 1998: 105; Lieblich *et al.*, 1998: 7). One of the participant reader's appropriations was contested over the course of the interview schedule. His adaptation of restorationism affected the shifting character of the appropriation. His prioritizing of religious experience to resolve his faith-life dilemma shaped his valuations of the meaning of this religious experience. The subject's appraisal of religious experience highlights the impact of restorationism on his apprehension of God.

Finally, the selected study presents a crystalline case of the impact of reading stance on the individual reader's meaning-making activity in solitary acts of Bible reading. His readings demonstrate the shaping influence of the logic of restorationism on his reading stance. His unique readings highlight the role of reading stance on the production of biblical meaning and the framing of accounts of Christian religious experience. Reading stance emphasizes the meaning-making function of the reader in deemed apprehension of God. The case contributes evidence to the assumption that reading stance is an essential factor in the relationship of the Bible to the reader's apprehension of God.

Simon's extensive single case study qualifies as a case subject to critical thinking about the role reading stance plays in the relation of the Bible reading and religious experience. Simon's case is selected to falsify the assumption of this research of the importance of the reader's stance to the relation of Bible reading and religious experience (see 3.2.4). Case study method is characteristically

biased toward falsification (Flyvbjerg 2001: 83, 84). Whilst theory building is beyond the purpose of this research, the thesis is an effort to contribute towards the building of a theory on the nature of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality. The single case study can occasion the generating and testing of hypotheses that can contribute to theory building (Dooley 2002). Simon's case study, which reflects the pattern of the individual mix of pragmatic and ideological dimensions of the reader's reading stance, offers a testable case. Popper (2002: 9-10) presented falsification as a deductive test of theory and the propositions derived from it. This critical test offers a procedure that can be used to falsify propositions in case study (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230): If the concept of the importance of reading stance to religious experience is not valid in Simon's extensive case then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases. However, if the finding from this single case is valid it does not verify that it is valid in all cases.

The following extensive case study of a participant reader's transactions with the Bible is divided between the intrapersonal and interpersonal conditions of meaning making. A description of the participant reader's faith-life anxiety will be presented first (6.2.1). The quotations from Simon come from his interviews. This will be followed by a report of his Bible readings (6.2.2). In addition, an analysis of the reader's readings will be given as well as a discussion of pertinent factors in the process of the reader's production of meaning (6.3). This analysis will highlight the impact of the reader's faith-life anxiety and church teaching of experiencing God on his actualized appropriations.

### 6.2.1 Simon's dilemma

Simon is caught on the horns of a dilemma. He is divided between his desire to believe Christianity and his concerns with the truth of it. "But there is still kind of this mingling feeling in me which says yeah. It might be true but it also might not be true. So don't kind of put all your eggs into one basket and don't completely trust it. Although I'd like to." He counts himself as a believer but he is plagued by his doubts about Christianity. He does not want to "drift away" and lose his connection with his birthplace Christian faith. At the same time he wants to know if Christianity is real.

I consider myself a Christian but I don't necessarily believe totally in everything Jesus did or what Jesus said. I'm still kind of trying to understand everything which he did. But I think you can be a Christian and not be a hundred percent a true believer in – in Jesus.

It is important to Simon to have valid reasons to believe. He wants to believe because it is true and not because he has been brought up to believe it is true. "Not just because I've been brought up so I should believe in a way that I should believe because I've been to church when I was younger and been baptized ah take communion be confirmed but why you know why I should believe." His



dilemma is an issue he cares about deeply. “I am torn, yeah but that’s what is keeping me interested in it all.”

Simon’s doubts of faith and desire for a stronger faith are two issues that are directly related to this dilemma. First, his doubts about Christianity are based upon his Catholic upbringing and his studies in university. Both have caused him to question Christianity. Second, his strong desire to validate Christianity by means of a special religious experience offers him a way to address his dilemma. He expects such an experience would help to resolve his dilemma. A brief examination of each aspect is warranted.

First, Simon’s dilemma is related to his concerns about his birthplace religion and the intellectual challenges to his faith that he encountered in formal education. He was raised a Catholic and attended church with his mother and brother. His father, who was raised a Protestant, stopped attending church when he was young man. He fears the institutional religion of his upbringing conditioned him to accept things as true that may not necessarily be true.

Simon is predisposed to think philosophically about his Christian faith. “Just that I think just who I am as a person and what I’ve studied that kind of shapes a lot of how I think about things.” He took a BA joint honours course in History and Philosophy at university.

Like I really enjoy studying history so I kind of evaluate different data and philosophy. Obviously philosophy is all about different points of view and how well you can argue certain points so I think those have a big effect on how I view things. And that’s why at times I don’t really know where I am or what I’m trying to say. It’s how I’m really kind of feeling if that makes sense.

Simon’s scepticism of Christianity accentuates the importance of thinking things through for himself. “Yeah. I feel the need to evaluate every detail to kind of come up with a acceptable conclusion.” His need of assessment is driven by the need to compensate for his own temperament. “I’m quite easily influenced by things but I won’t necessarily accept it just cause someone’s told me that’s what it is.” But his philosophical stance comes at a price: “So I just don’t know my standing point and my own perspective on certain issues. That’s why I kind of have to question kind of build sort of knowledge of it before I commit to something.”

The price exacted by his outlook extends to his view of Christianity. His educational experiences at A-levels and philosophy of religion class at University raised intellectual challenges about the historical reliability and divine status of the Bible. He says about the Bible, “It was written so long after Jesus was alive you can’t help but question, especially the dialogue, is what those people were

saying what Jesus was saying the conversations between them actually accurate or not.” He also questions the Bible’s claim of divine origin: “I don’t know whether to take the Bible as literally true the word of God or more of a historical document”. He says he wants to believe it is but “I don’t want to just accept that it is because I’ve been told ‘oh it’s the word of God you know it must be because it’s such a powerful book.’” Mosaic Church has a strong commitment to the Bible’s divine origin (see 5.2.1). The church’s statement of faith says the Bible is “inspired by God and inerrant in the original writings” (Hatch 2008: 17). Simon’s concerns about Christianity underwrite his doubts and contribute to his lack of possession of a robust faith.

Second, Simon wants to have a “total faith” commitment. If Christianity is true he wants to accept it completely: “I believe I need to put more faith into what Jesus says so that I can build on the faith I already got.” His view of salvation is related to his concern to have a stronger faith. He thinks the basis for obtaining salvation lies in doing what Jesus has asked of his followers. He says, “if you have belief then you can be saved, so although I don’t have total belief, I do have a large element of belief.” “Ah but – yeah as to whether or not I’ve personally been saved yet then I don’t know.” Knowledge of salvation is associated with a strong faith.

Simon’s insistence on appraising the truth of Christianity raises the question of why he wishes to believe in the first place.

Ah I mean I believe more than I don’t believe. Because the alternative of not believing is kind of what’s the point of everything. Whereas believing kind of gives a reason for living and an answer to things. But I don’t know. I suppose it’s my environment the people I’ve met things I’ve studied I’ve kind of seen lots of different points of view and not one hundred percent sure of my own point of view. I can’t really pinpoint

Simon believes his faith has grown since he has been involved at Mosaic Church. He first got involved with the Alpha Course, sponsored by Mosaic. “It just got my mind ticking again and thinking about things and asking questions and yeah.” At the conclusion of the Alpha Course he began to attend church services off and on in the ensuing months. The sermons and conversations with people there have got him thinking more about the Bible and his faith. But he says he wants a “stronger faith” and he believes he knows how this can be achieved. He believes the way to resolve his dilemma is to have a convincing “dramatic experience” that would serve as “overwhelming proof” of the validity of Christianity and the authenticity of his faith. “I mean anyone can say ‘I believe’ but if you can really show yourself to believe or have like a certain experience which confirms your beliefs or converted your beliefs I think that holds quite strongly.”

Simon's involvement at Mosaic Church influences his view of the role dramatic experience could play in resolving his dilemma. He states,

Cause I hear these people at church who get these voices before and they've had this overwhelming feeling of the Holy Spirit and they feel it regularly whereas I don't really feel I've felt it much at all. So I'm not saying it isn't necessarily fair but why do they keep feeling it whereas I kind of want to feel it but I'm not feeling it at times.

Oral testimony of charismatic encounters with the Holy Spirit is characteristic of Mosaic Church belief and practice (see 5.2.2) and a feature of Sunday worship services (see 5.1.1). Church teaching affirms God's direct intervention in human experience (see 5.2.1). When asked what such an "overwhelming feeling" would do for him, he replied, "it would be further proof of things that have been preached to me – things that I'm reading."

An occurrence of a dramatic religious experience would address two issues for Simon. In response to my probe "is the issue one of validity or authenticity"—meaning would a special experience validate Christianity or the authenticity of his personal faith—he said,

I think it would confirm both. That it would confirm what I believe and there is a point to everything that's been written about Jesus and it's not just – I don't know – just a story. But also, yeah. The practicing – there's so many different faces in Christianity I can't necessarily say oh that would mean my Catholic practices are right, but it would mean that the overall kind of reasoning behind what it's all about would be – would be all right.

He is convinced an experience of divine intervention would triangulate his position to Christianity. It would give him confirmation of the truth of Christian faith he wants and at the same time show him where he is in relation to it: "Just so I kind of know where I'm at." He views the prospect of a convincing spiritual experience as offering a compass.

Simon prays for an "outside experience," a "divine intervention" over which he has no control. This sign from God would be evidence of Christianity beyond his own Catholic "conditioning" and would suffice to address his intellectual challenges. "I mean if I'd had ah like a vision or like a voice that come to me and, but I already have faith before then, that experience confirms and really gives my faith some strength" A spiritual experience would confirm the reality of his Christian faith and show that he is acting on the merits of the case for Christianity and simply "not following the crowd." Simon desires confirmation that will quell his doubts about Christianity.

### 6.2.2 Simon's Bible readings

Simon's appropriated actualizations indicate the existence of a distinct internal tension that is consistent with his Christian dilemma. His dilemma can be seen in two appropriations of his readings, his Ilkley prayer and Mosaic communion experiences. First, in his Mark 6 reading Simon makes an attribution of God's guidance in getting a much needed job due to his "Ilkley experience," as he referred to it. He read Mark 6: 32-44 for our 31 January 2009 interview. He read the passage one week and reread it the day before our meeting. He said verse 34 was especially relevant to him: "that passage relates to me perfectly." The passage reports Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. The verse says, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began to teach them many things" (NIV). Commenting on the verse he said,

Verse 34 it said when Jesus compares the people as sheep without a shepherd. There are times in my life where I felt lost and not sure where I'm going and just wanted to know the meaning of things and I think in certain times that passage relates to me perfectly because although I'm not always actively seeking to find the shepherd I am kind of this wandering sheep which just needs some guidance now and then. And I found that when we went to Ilkley Moor that time ah we prayed and things like that it kind of I don't know it felt I did feel a presence at that. I ah I was being guided in some way because up to that point I'd been in [northern England city] a few months ah there was no structure to my days. I wasn't working or anything like that and I was finding it difficult to find work and just a bit lost from why I was here and then after that week-end the following week or the week after or two weeks after I obviously got my job and started to meet a few more people through my work and I just felt a bit more secure and happier with life. (1<sup>st</sup> interview 31 January 2009, lines 42-55)

Second, in Simon's John 6 reading there is an attribution of Jesus' presence in his partaking of communion at Mosaic Church. He read John 6:22-59 for our 31 July 2009 interview. He read the entire Gospel as part of a selection process of a passage for the interview. If anything, Simon is a motivated and bright reader of the text who is attentive to its features. In his written comments he stated, "I find it important that this passage explains who Jesus is and again what is needed for us to gain salvation." The text is a story of an interaction between Jesus and a crowd. They are looking for a sign from him to verify who he claims to be: "So they asked him, 'What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?' Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (6:30-31 NIV). In reply to them Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (6:35 NIV). The crowd is upset by his claims: "At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven'" (6:41 NIV). Jesus then rebukes the crowd and tells them, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (6:54 NIV). Simon is impressed by two features of the passage, each of which happens to relate to his dilemma.

One aspect of the John 6 passage which impressed Simon is its reference to communion as a way to obtain salvation. He based this reading on verse 54. The verse states, “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (NIV). Simon takes Jesus’ statement to be a reference to communion. He said he follows the Roman Catholic interpretation of the verse but rejects transubstantiation in favour of Mosaic Church’s view of the elements as symbols of Jesus’ death.

Obviously the bread represents his body. The wine is blood and through taking bread and wine at communion ah you’re kind of doing what Jesus has asked you to do. And you’re making that connection with him through communion. So when you take the bread and drink the wine you can kind of have a quiet moment where you pray and give thanks or ask for forgiveness or whatever. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 247-252)

He also says he experiences a personal connection with Jesus when he partakes of communion. He further describes the character of this connection:

Mike: So you feel that you should be doing what Jesus says in verse 54 – eat his flesh, drink his blood. And that for you is the communion.

Simon: That – that for me, yes, symbolizes what the communion is.

Mike: Ok so when you eat the flesh and drink the blood you have a connection?

Simon: Yeah.

Mike: What is that connection?

Simon: Ah it is in a sense a spiritual connection. To me it just kind of feels right and that’s what I should be doing. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 319-331)

In his written comments he states, “This connection allows you to have a conversation with Jesus and pray, giving thanks, asking for forgiveness etc, so it is an inter-met moment.” He also says of this special moment occasioned by the taking of communion, “I’ve been able to speak to Jesus and he’s listened and if I have any worries I can, through the communion, if I have them at that time I can pray for them once I’ve taken communion” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 344-346). His communion connection offers him the prospect of obtaining personal salvation:

Mike: Ok. By doing the thing [communion] that Jesus asked you to do that means what?

Simon: Well from what Jesus says it means you’ll have eternal life but I don’t really know how to explain it any more. It’s just something I’ve always done and I’m just in favor of doing it more often. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 435-439)

Simon's attention was also drawn to the number of times in the John 6 passage that Jesus said "I tell you the truth" (verses 26, 32, 47, and 53).

Just through these readings I've kind of – that's one of the things I've put down is ah have an impact on my life ah because throughout the first passage Jesus says that I tell you the truth four times. He didn't just say it once. He keeps repeating himself kind of, I don't know reassure, persuade the crowd that he's talking to that he's the person like he says he is. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview lines 31 July 2009, 177-181)

Jesus' repeated attempts to convince people of who he is offers some reassurance to Simon:

Well that kind of suggests to me that he expects the people he's speaking to not to just necessarily accept what he's saying straightaway. He's gonna have to work on them a bit.... I think he keeps having to remind them. Well not necessarily remind them but kind of state who he is constantly. Not just say it once and expect them to just believe him. Other of his disciples and other of his – in other passages in the Bible they've – their just kind of doubts all the way through and he picks up on that all the time. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 188-190; 194-198)

The Jesus repetition highlights for Simon his need to "just have more faith in him and in what he's saying to build on the belief I already have" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1637-1638).

### 6.3 Analysis of Simon's readings

How do Simon's readings of the Bible shape his readings of God? The focus here is on pertinent factors of the fundamental processes of the production of meaning that make possible the solitary reader's readings of biblical texts and his or her readings of God's activity. The activity of the production of religious meaning from Bible reading involves the reader's actualization of the text's potential and an appropriation of it in an apprehension of God in life experience or a state of affairs (see 1.4.4 and 2.5.3). Reading stance impacts the reader's association of extralinguistic referents and the sense meaning of the text's words. These connections make intelligible an apprehension of God. According to transactional theory the structure of the reader's literary experience corresponds to certain primary shaping influences on meaning making. They are the reader's engagement of the stimulus of the text via a reading stance, selective attention to evoked referents and responses to textual stimulus, and synthesis of selected elements into a reading via interpretive assumptions and consensus of the reader's reading community. The following brief review of the role of reading stance in the reading process is taken from Rosenblatt's (1994, 2005) writings (see 2.5.3).

The reader, consciously or unconsciously, assumes a reading stance toward the text which affects the features in the reading transaction to which he or she pays attention (2005: 10). The reading stance adopted by the reader differentiates reading activities which can be described as aesthetic or

nonaesthetic (1994: 23). Reading stance manages the active selection of elements from the “wide range of referential and affective responses” that can be potentially activated by the reader’s engagement with the stimulus of the text’s verbal symbols (1994: 75). The reader’s consciousness of the text’s words is in actuality his or her selective attention to the acquired associations with its pattern of symbols (1994: 72). “The transaction is basically between the reader and what he senses the words as point to” (1994: 21). In the process of reading, the reader associates with the text’s words certain extralinguistic referents. “The reader’s attention to the text activates certain elements in his past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols” (1994: 11). There are “public and private” dimensions of the reader’s linguistic and experiential capital which funds the connections (2005: 10). The reader’s interpersonal experience contributes to his or her pool of referents. There are “social origins and social effects” to the reader’s transactions (1994: 157). The reader’s intrapersonal “present interests” and “preoccupations” also affect what connections he or she attends to in the reading (1994: 20). The reader synthesizes selected elements of the literary experience into a completed reading (2005: 14). The connections made between words and world occur within a social context and according to some interpretive frame of reference of what constitutes an acceptable reading (1994: 129, 135). The reader’s adopted stance towards the text establishes a particular kind of relationship with the text in which meaning-making activity occurs. The reader’s appropriation of an actualized reading as a deemed apprehension of God in life experience is impacted by this relationship. Reading stance is a significant factor in Bible reading that shapes the reader’s readings of God in his or her life experiences.

There is a two-fold objective of the following analysis of Simon’s readings. The first is to present a brief theoretical analysis of his reading stance according to transactional theory (6.3.1). The second is to present an extensive examination of his readings for evidence of the salient intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that contributed to his reading stance (6.3.2 and 6.3.3).

### 6.3.1 Simon’s reading stance and his appropriations

Transactional theory accounts for Simon’s selective activity of his Ilkley and communion appropriations in his readings of Mark 6 and John 6. First, Simon’s readings reflect his activity of singling out specific evocations to the text. “From the very beginning, and often before, some expectation, some tentative feeling, idea, or purpose, no matter how vague at first, starts the reading process and develops into the constantly self-revising impulse that guides selection, synthesis, and organization” (Rosenblatt 2005: 8). In his reading of Mark 6:34, the phrase “sheep without a shepherd” evoked Simon’s sense that he was a “wandering sheep” in need of guidance. Simon associates John 6:54—“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”—with the practice of communion. According to transactional theory the reader’s production of meaning is

contingent upon the synthesis of selected referential and cognitive-affective evocations that are activated by the text's verbal symbols. As noted, the reader's readiness to attend to certain textual evocations and responses is attributable to reading stance. The reader's adopted reading stance channels the process of picking those elements that emerge in the reader-text relationship to which he or she responds (Rosenblatt 2005: 10). The reader actively selects relevant evocations to the exclusion of other features from the scope of potential responses to the text's stimuli. Simon drew upon the capital of his fund of language and past experiences to make connections between the text's words and referents, between his evocations and meanings.

Second, Simon's appropriations are a synthesis of his association of the extralinguistic referents and his sense of textual stimuli. His readings indicate activated responses in terms of the external referents of his sense of the text's verbal symbols. In his reading of Mark 6:34 Simon said "I'm not always actively seeking to find the shepherd and I am kind of this wandering sheep which just needs some guidance now and then." He then linked this response to the text's verbal symbols to his feeling of "a presence" and to his sense that he "was being guided in some way" when he prayed at Ilkley Moor. He went on to report he eventually found a job and "felt a bit more secure and happier with life." Simon says John 6:54 "symbolizes what communion is" and he associates his experience of a "spiritual connection" with Jesus with this sense of the text's meaning. He says "it just kind of feels right and that's what I should be doing." Transactional theory states reading stance has a shaping influence on the reader's association of extralinguistic referents and sense of the text's words. The reader attends to elements of "external reference [and] internal response" that are activated during reading (Rosenblatt 1994: 11). His religious experiences were integral to his textually activated responses. In each reading Simon linked his sense of the text with certain religious experiences. He made a connection between his Mark 6 reading of needing guidance and the external referents of his Ilkley prayer and his newfound state in life. He also made a link between his John 6 reading of communion and the external referent of his intimacy with Jesus. Simon's accounts of his apprehension of God are related to his reading stance that rendered his associations of extralinguistic referents and the texts' sense.

Finally, Simon's reading stance played an important role in his synthesis of selected elements into a completed reading. His transactions are infused with personal and institutional factors. Transactional theory maintains that "both public and private elements are present in all reading" (Rosenblatt 2005: 24). There are influential interpersonal and intrapersonal aspects of the reader's connections of words and world. The reader's readings are a "product of the reverberations between what is brought to the text and what it activates" (Rosenblatt 1994: 174). The reader's stance "may be determined by factors in the broader environment or within himself even before he sees the text" (Rosenblatt 1994: 81). The stimulus of the sought after text activates the reader's attention to past experiences and present



worries that may be associated with text's symbols (Rosenblatt 1994: 11; 20). Simon's personal faith-life preoccupations were evoked during his reading of each text. "The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader" (Rosenblatt 1994: 20). A more detailed treatment of his readings is required to highlight the impact of his individual faith concerns and his adaptation of institutional interpretive structures on his readings.

Simon's appropriated actualizations of Mark 6 and John 6 offer evidence of his faith-life anxiety and the influence of Mosaic's semiotic ideology of restorationism. His qualifications of the appropriations of religious experience highlight the distinctive mix of personal and public aspects of his reading stance. His relation of the text to apprehensions of God is ordered by a combination of these factors. In the following, Simon's appropriations will be first examined for evidence of his faith-life tension (6.3.2) and then investigated for influence of the logic of restorationism (6.3.3).

### 6.3.2 Simon's appropriations reveal his anxiety of uncertainty

Simon's appropriations display his faith-life tension. This can be observed in his readings of Mark 6 and John 6. In Mark 6 he equivocates on the meaning of his Ilkley experience. In John 6 he qualifies the value of his communion experience. Each of these appropriations will be discussed in order.

First, Simon's reading of Mark 6 included an attribution of God's activity at a time in his life when he was in need of divine help and guidance. In his reading of verse 34, he saw himself as being "lost" and a "wandering sheep" in need of a shepherd's guidance. These evocations are his responses to the text's wording of "sheep without a shepherd." His evocations also included a prayer experience at the conclusion of Mosaic's 'Alpha Day Away' in Ilkley Moor. Attendees were asked to gather together in small groups to pray. Simon was prayed for by a group of young men: "they were you know like touching me and just asking God for guidance to help me at this point in my life. It felt quite warm and nice and just kind of secure and safe and yeah in that kind of sense" (1<sup>st</sup> interview 31 January 2009, lines 130-132). There was also a time afterwards when he prayed on his own to ask God for help: "I was just kind of 'please just show me the way the right way and just help me just help me out'" (1<sup>st</sup> interview 31 January, lines 491-492). It was in reference to Ilkley prayers when he said he experienced "a presence" and the sense that he was "being guided in some way." He also associated Ilkley prayers with his job offer. "I got this job quite soon after we went to Ilkley and had the [Alpha] session and prayed." Simon referred again to this initial account of God's activity in his third interview which he summarily described as "the experience when I got prayed for and then I got my job and my life seemed to be falling into place and I kind of knew where I was" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July,

lines 1265-1266). This summary reading of God's guidance when he was lost in his life reflects his initial appropriation of Mark 6:34 in his first interview in January 2009.

Simon's initial attribution of God's guiding presence in his job and life proved to be tenuous to him. His attribution was revisited and subsequently revised in the first and in later interviews. His equivocations of the meaning of the Ilkley prayer experience are indicative of his faith-life dilemma. For example, later in the first interview he recalled raising the issue of whether his job was attributable to God or happenstance.

Simon: Well at first I was kind of like great I've got this job which I really want. And then I didn't think much more of it and then I thought well I got this job quite soon after we went to Ilkley and had the session and prayed. And I thought is it possible there is a kind of connection? My prayers have been answered? Or yeah. That that's kind of the question. I'm not sure whether my prayers were answered or it was just coincidence there.

Mike: But you considered that possibility?

Simon: Oh I definitely considered that possibility yeah. But I mean after Ilkley I had all the interviews which I wasn't successful in. Ah but as they say whatever if you fail at things it makes you stronger later on so yeah. Again I'm not sure whether it's I mean I believe it's possible that it could have been my prayer being answered but it could also just be coincidence because I was handing lots of application forms and having quite a few interviews so the likelihood was I was bound to get one of them at some point. (1<sup>st</sup> interview 31 January 2009, lines 501-516)

In response to a follow up question on his comment that failure makes you stronger, he made a further statement about the connection between his prayer for God's help and his subsequent job offer. He attributes his interest in the job to "guidance" that linked his suitability for the job and desirability of the work location. He said:

Ah I think how it made me stronger was just through experience of how to go about approaching interviews and you know saying the right things. I mean my first interview I kind of I came across as a bit flippant about the job. I wasn't really that into it and that's the one thing I think that possibly that there is a connection between me praying and the job that I wanted because my interviews before that which I wasn't successful in they were places which I wasn't really suited to work there and they weren't really places where I really wanted to work. Whereas this place ah I really wanted to work I looked around it when I went to get my application form and I loved it. And also it's right next to Kirkstall Abbey. I'm not sure if you've been to the old ruin of the abbey. And I walked around there and I felt it was just it was really quiet just kind of no one around and I was just walking around it and I thought there's something really powerful there's a real atmosphere here. And I really want to be a part of this. I want to work here in this I just felt this is where I wanted to be. And walking around the abbey kind of cleared my mind and I was just kind of a bit blown over by the whole experience of the day I handed in my application form because it was complete spur of the moment. I wasn't going to hand in the application form because it was late in the day and I didn't know whereabouts it was I had to get there but when I went there yeah. I did feel there was something and I'm not sure what but it felt kind of right and I wasn't sure

whether that was this kind of guidance telling me you got to go to this place and you've got to have a look around or whether it was just I don't know. If you get it. [Laughs] (1<sup>st</sup> interview 31 January 2009, lines 533-554)

In the second interview he was asked to explain what he meant when he said in the first interview that he felt a presence at the Ilkley prayer event. He then questioned whether it was a spiritual experience or simply a new experience:

Well I'm not sure whether it's just kind of a spiritual presence or it's just kind of like an emotional kind of feeling that I had. I've never had someone actually put a hand on me and pray for me before. So that whole experience was kind of new to me. Ah so I'm not sure whether it was spiritual or just a new experience which I wasn't familiar with. (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 28 March 2009, lines 236-240)

In his last interview Simon was again asked about his prior views of the Ilkley experience. Quotes from his previous accounts were read to him. He said, "I was really kind of convinced I had an experience and then a few months later into the second interview it could have been, it could not have been" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1301-1302). When asked how he views that experience now he said,

Ah I see it as a valuable experience and one which could possibly have been kind of intervention. Ah I'm kind of torn between the two sides. But then again I have to keep going back to the point that I've never been in a group where people prayed for you on a certain point. And just that whole day being in that surrounding – I'd never been to Ilkley before or anything like that so – I kind of have to assess the two viewpoints. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1311-1316)

Simon's equivocations are indicative of his faith-life dilemma. He believes an accounting of his job offer includes considerations of possible options, including the possibility of God's guidance. His intellectual concerns were critical to his assessments. Simon admitted in his first interview that there are equally viable perspectives that can be drawn from his offer of a job:

Simon: It could be it could be one it could be another way or it could be completely if you believe in fate or whatever so that's the kind. But that's the interesting thing just through all these options there's just not this straight and narrow it's because of this. Because that that that's just boring. It's nice to think it could be that or it could be this or it could be that or it could be something else.

Mike: So you, you are comfortable then evaluating different ways of thinking about

Simon: I like to see every possibility in equal light not to just accept it one way and I suppose that's where my philosophy comes into things because there are so many things which appear random and strange doing philosophy and yeah it just gets you thinking about everything and I don't want to just accept things just because I see I see something and think oh that's there because it's there or whatever. This I don't know I just don't like accepting things at face value. I think you need to look at things in more detail and kind of find out the story and the history behind certain things. Yeah. (1<sup>st</sup> interview 31 January 2009, lines 577-595)

Simon's links his refusal to accept the matter at face value to his study in philosophy and its distinction between appearance and reality. As noted, his educational experiences made him aware of intellectual challenges to the Bible's historical reliability. This contributed to his doubts about Christianity and his indirectness about the experience. His anxiety of uncertainty constrains the making of a verdict on his Ilkley experience.

Second, Simon makes an unambiguous attribution of his experience of Jesus' presence at communion in his reading of John 6. His appropriated actualization renders his communion experience a "spiritual connection" with Jesus. He understands the statements of Jesus in verses 35 and 54 about eating his body and drinking his blood to refer to the practice of communion. He sees the promise of salvation in Jesus' words and the prospect of a personal encounter with Jesus. This actualized meaning underwrites his ascription of his communion experience as an "inter-met moment" with Jesus. He believes he encounters Jesus when partaking of communion and that his prayers have been heard by him. This appropriation offers a sense of assurance that he is doing what Jesus has asked him to do.

However, the *value* of the communion experience to the resolution of his dilemma is in doubt. This religious experience fails to qualify as the dramatic spiritual encounter he believes is needed to resolve his dilemma. His communion experience is not a "direct" spiritual experience, one that is outside of the "controlled environment" of religion. He demands "further proof" that Christianity is real and not the product of his religious upbringing. This can be seen in his distinction between a special experience and a personal experience:

Simon: I don't know I think there are different levels of experience. Like for me a dramatic experience would be a real like feeling like overwhelming of the Holy Spirit or voices or like a flash or a vision. To me they're more dramatic whereas like more of a personal experience in the sense of like say prayer or taking communion. I see those on a different level.

Mike: Ok, tell me the difference between them.

Simon: Well cause of prayer it's more you're talking to God. Or communion you're taking and bread and wine and then making a connection through talking with God. Whereas the other experiences are more – it's external to you. It's from outside coming into you whereas communion is more you going out to Jesus. Whereas like a flash, you're not in control of that flash of light or that voice that is coming into your head or the vision whereas prayer you're in control of what you're saying that prayer. And if you get a response to that prayer through the voice I would then take it up to a dramatic experience. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 592-607)

His qualification of the meaning of his communion experience is indicative of his yearning for a special dramatic experience to resolve his faith-life dilemma. Prior to the preceding interview segment

he raised the matter of why hearing a voice or seeing a vision would be an important experience for him to have:

Mike: So you're in a position where if you can't find reasons to justify the doubt or if you can't find reasons to justify the faith, ah, that's preferable or better than if you doubt but don't find reasons for doubt. Or if you have faith but don't have reasons for faith.

Simon: Yeah, I'd agree with that, yeah. I mean anyone can say 'I believe' but if you can really show yourself to believe or have like a certain experience which confirms your beliefs or [indistinct speech] your beliefs I think that holds quite strongly.

Mike: So here we have reason and experience. If you have reasons for belief, that's beneficial to you. An experience can be – can confirm belief. But it's almost as if there are two different issues here.

Simon: Well I think experience can more ah support the reason. I mean if you had experienced to – I mean if I'd had ah like a vision or like a voice that come to me and – but I already have faith before then that experience confirms and really gives my faith some strength and I find, yeah. Experience can strengthen (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 508-524)

Simon reasons that special religious experience would confirm his Christian faith. His yearning for such an experience reveals the intensity of his faith-life anxiety.

Simon also experiences a tension between his desire for more proof and his sense that he is grumbling against Jesus because of his doubts. Simon thinks Jesus is annoyed with the crowd because they are persistent in their request for a sign from him to prove who he is. He recognizes there is a limit to Jesus' patience with the crowd's requests for proof. He also wonders if Jesus is annoyed with him for asking for special experience:

Simon: Well it seems to be from reading the text people keep asking Jesus and Jesus seems quite abrupt in his responses. He seems like – oh, you know, I've gotta keep proving myself to you. That's the kind of impression I get – that.

Mike: So you feel like maybe you're

Simon: He's getting annoyed a bit – keep asking [laughs]

Mike: He's a little annoyed with you because you keep asking for additional proof.

Simon: Yeah, I'd say so. Yeah.

Mike: Ok.

Simon: I don't know whether he is but I'd get annoyed if someone kept asking me – if you've already given it and I've not seen it then.

Mike: But you have mentioned in [John] 6, they keep asking and he keeps saying, 'it's

me.’ So so you kind of feel the sense I get is that you are torn.

Simon: I am torn. [Laughs] (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1365-1385)

Simon’s admission—“if you’ve already given it and I’ve not seen it”—is revealing. This glimpse of his dilemma takes place within the context of the dissonance he feels when he asks for confirmatory special experience. He thinks he repeated requests may be an annoyance to Jesus. Earlier in the interview he identified himself with the grumbling crowd who demand proof. He referred to verse 41 which reads “At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’” (NIV)

I kind of looked at 6:41 which is talking about the crowd’s response to Jesus where he says at this the Jews began to grumble. And I kind of – I could relate to that because although I say you know I believe and everything I still do have these doubts and still question ah the truth behind all that’s been said and whether the Bible is actually the Word of God or it’s just a historical document written so many years after Jesus was alive. And so I’ve written [his notes] ah – should I read straight off what I’ve written? I’ve put that the Jews listened to what Jesus said and seen what he’s done and yet these two verses I continue to question who Jesus is. And then I’ve written, this is like me at times. I know who Jesus is and I know what he’s doing but I still question his truth. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 467-477)

Simon is torn between recognizing his spiritual connection with Jesus at communion as sufficient evidence of the truth he seeks and his desire for a dramatic experience to resolve his dilemma.

In conclusion, Simon’s Ilkley and communion appropriations from his readings of Mark 6 and John 6 respectively offer evidence of his anxiety of uncertainty of his Christian faith. Simon’s dilemma can be observed in his contestation over the course of his interview schedule of the relation of his job offer to his Ilkley experience of prayer for God’s guidance. On the one hand he acknowledges that his Ilkley experience is evidence of God’s guidance when he was lost in life. On the other hand this initial sense of divine guidance could simply be an emotional response to a new experience of being prayed for by others, and his offer of a job could be attributable to the odds of his getting one given his many applications. His ongoing equivocations of the meaning of the event make apparent an internal faith-life dialogue: “I kind of have to assess the two viewpoints.” His internal dialogue is a crucial factor in his readings, a feature consistent with “reflexive deliberation” (Archer 2003, 2007). This tension is also revealed in Simon’s qualification of his communion experience as constituting insufficient confirmatory evidence of the reality of his Christian faith. His deemed spiritual connection with Jesus is modified as a lower level religious experience. It lacks the overwhelming proof that an experience of a dramatic vision or voice could provide him. He admits there is a tension between his reading of Jesus’ annoyance of the crowd’s and of his requests for special experience to resolve his dilemma. Yet Simon’s appeals to Jesus’ repeated attempts to persuade people of who he was and his lack of access to physical presence of Jesus lessens this tension. These appeals accommodate his desire for a

dramatic sign from God. This tension is also indicative of his dilemma: “I am torn yeah but that’s what is keeping me interested in it all.” His biblical transactions resonate with his preexisting faith and life tensions. These persistent qualities of Simon’s appropriations are evidence of his predisposition towards the text. As such, his anxiety of uncertainty is reflective of his reading stance.

### 6.3.3 Simon’s appropriations reveal the influence of the logic of restorationism

Simon’s accounts of his communion and Ilkley experiences indicate the shaping influence of Mosaic’s semiotic ideology of restorationism (see 5.2.3). British Charismatic restorationism is predicated on the recovery of biblical patterns of the manifestation of charismatic gifts of the Holy Spirit, including the apostolic gifts of ministry (Kay 2007: 21). Restorationism assumes the direct correspondence between New Testament reports of the activity of the Holy Spirit and contemporary charismatic experience. There is an expectation that “the God of the Bible is at work in a similar kind of way today” (Cartledge 2006: 28). This logic emphasises the importance of a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. The rationale also underwrites the signifying practice of charismatic oral testimony as a channel of the apprehension of God. Participants reports indicate testimony of charismatic experience is a pertinent institutional practice that informs solitary reader orientations to the activity of the Holy Spirit (see 5.2.2). Simon’s appropriations highlight the affect of restorationism on his interactions with the Bible.

Simon’s involvement with Mosaic Church affected his interest in spiritual experience. A marked shift in his understanding of the role spiritual experience plays in his thinking can be observed in the comparison of two comments. First, is his response to a talk that was given at Mosaic’s ‘Alpha Day Away’ on the question, ‘What does the Holy Spirit do?’ The leader highlighted three kinds of appetites that the Holy Spirit instills in the Christian: a “hunger to know Jesus, to become like Jesus, and to serve Jesus.” Attendees were asked to meet in groups to discuss two questions: “Have you experienced the hunger that HS gives, if so how and in what areas?” and “Would you like to experience the hunger that the HS gives, if so how and in what areas?” In the group Simon said “Alpha is inspiring me” and “I have a hunger to experience my beliefs.” However, he also said at the time “I’m not motivated yet.” (Field notes 29 November 2008, ‘Alpha Day Away’) Second, his subsequent attendance of Mosaic worship services and conversations with church friends appear to have contributed to his understanding of the importance of role special experience could play in building a stronger faith to resolve his dilemma:

Mike: And it wouldn’t – do you feel like your faith is clearing up your doubts now?

Simon: Ah it’s definitely got stronger. I do turn to it more than I did. But it’s by no means there yet. I mean, yeah. It’s by no means total. It’s like – probably getting over that

hill. I mean if some doubts are cleared up I'll end up having doubts about something else. It could be an endless chain. But if I did have some dramatic experience then I'd like to think that'd clear it up for me and make things more clear. But I still may have doubts after that. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1919-1926)

Simon's stated desire for "some dramatic experience" stands in contrast to his earlier lack of motivation to experience the Holy Spirit. His subsequent involvement at the church highlights it as an influential source of his thinking about a promising way to increase his faith. As will be noted below, Mosaic Church's signifying practices are a significant contributing factor to his interest in special religious experience.

The influence of restorationism can also be seen in Simon's qualification of the value of his appropriated actualization of John 6:54. As noted, he maintains his experience of a personal "spiritual connection" with Jesus during Mosaic's communion service does not qualify as the dramatic experience he believes is needed to resolve his dilemma. Oral testimonies of charismatic experience at Mosaic Church affect his views of the kind of special religious experience he believes he could have. The following extended interview segment highlights the impact of charismatic testimony on his distinction between levels of spiritual experience and his expectation of the effect it would have on his faith.

Mike: Ok. Now can you tell me the value – the value to your faith of these two different experiences?

Simon: Ah, I think taking communion is very valuable as I've already said, I find it really important. Ah but yeah I still have these doubts – am I just doing it because I've been brought up in an environment and that's what you do on a weekly basis. Whereas if like a flash of light or a vision – if I got this vision then and this voice telling me – that to me is not necessarily stronger but that would be more of a overwhelming proof that I'm the kind of belief I already have.

Mike: So being a birthplace religion Catholic, growing up with a sense of faith, being responsive to the things you have control over, taking communion, attending church, reading the Bible, that in and of itself isn't enough evidence that you have faith –

Simon: Well I think that's very important and you can get faith from that but that's more of a controlled environment that you've just been brought up in so I think if you experience something external like the other week they were talking at Mosaic, that [name] guy – you know that [name]? He healed someone in the street. To me, I didn't see that but if I saw something like that then that would be – I don't know. That's – I suppose that's again where I link the Jews in the story. Because they ask Jesus to kind of pro – to do more miracles to show us. And he's already saying you know,

Mike: Where is that?

Simon: It might be in John 10 [pause] yeah it's in John 6. 'So they ask him what miraculous sign then will you give so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?'



And so I suppose from what I've been saying I'm kind of asking the same question as what they asked then.

Mike: Is that good thing, or?

Simon: Ah yes and no. I think there's nothing wrong to ask. Because you know for them then Jesus stood in front of – Jesus isn't in front of me now telling me what he's telling them – I'm just reading it because it's been written down. But for them there I don't know if there's all these stories going round that Jesus performed these miracles and ah – they want to see one in front of them at that point at that time. So

Mike: And that would mean what to them? If they could see a miracle?

Simon: I think for them that would be direct proof

Mike: Of?

Simon: Of who Jesus says he is.

Mike: Ok. So if you really are who you say you are, prove it through a miracle.

Simon: I'm not saying I'm asking that.

Mike: No, but that's what you understand the text to say?

Simon: Yeah, that's what I understand that to say.

Mike: . Now you also said that you see yourself as being in that mode.

Simon: At times, yeah.

Mike: Ok

Simon: Cause I hear these people at church who get these voices before and they've had this overwhelming feeling of the Holy Spirit and they feel it regularly whereas I don't really feel I've felt it much at all. So I'm not saying it isn't necessarily fair but why do they keep feeling it whereas I kind of want to feel it but I'm not feeling it at times.

Mike: So in a sense you kind of identify with you know – why can't I have this overwhelming feeling of the Holy Spirit like they have. If I had that overwhelming feeling, what would that do?

Simon: Well, it would be further proof of things that have been preached to me – things that I'm reading.

Mike: Ah – now you believe but you want to build on your belief

Simon: Yeah

Mike: and you think an experience of the Holy Spirit would help in that?

Simon: I think that would – yeah, that would definitely help. I'm not saying that's the only thing I'll need to develop my faith but just since this last year I feel my faith is really grown and I haven't had this overwhelming experience but I'm – I have felt my faith has grown. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 624-708)

The impact of charismatic testimony on Simon can be seen in two ways. First, its influence is apparent in the distinction he makes between levels of spiritual experience. He contrasts extraordinary phenomena of “a flash of light or a vision...and this voice telling me” with the routine religious environment of communion in which his personal connection with Jesus occurs. The main difference between his communion experience and extraordinary experience is that a vision and voice are phenomena over which he has no control. The evidence offered by his communion experience, important though it is to his salvation, does not contribute to the resolution of his faith dilemma because it can be attributed to its controlled setting and religious conditioning. His judgment that his communion experience fails to provide the “overwhelming proof” offered by the sort of dramatic evidence he seeks reflects the influence of charismatic testimonies of a special encounter with the Holy Spirit.

Second, his two references to oral reports affect his expectation of the benefit a dramatic encounter would bring to his faith. In his first reference Simon spoke of a healing testimony that took place during a July 2009 Sunday morning worship service (Field notes 5 July 2009, Mosaic observations 10:30 service). In response to pastor Henry’s introduction a young man shared some stories of his healing encounters on the streets. He said he met a female on his way to the market who claimed she had a 30 year history of headaches due to being battered by her husband. The young man asked if he could pray for her and then placed his hands on her head and prayed for the headaches to go away. She said afterwards the headache was gone. The young man also told of a wheelchair bound man who stood up and danced in a circle after he prayed for him. Following the young man’s accounts of healing the sick Henry said “we believe Jesus loves to heal. It’s evidence that the kingdom is come, his message is true and he’s real.” Henry’s comments are consistent with restorationism (see 5.2.3). In his second reference Simon spoke of listening to church people who report experiences of hearing voices accompanied by an “overwhelming feeling of the Holy Spirit.” Earlier he talked of a “flash of light or a vision” and a “voice” speaking to him as constituting “overwhelming proof.”

The point Simon is making with his references to oral reports is that the proof offered by an experience of extraordinary phenomena supersedes the evidence of his “spiritual connection” with Jesus occasioned by communion. Charismatic testimony of dramatic experiences has sharply affected Simon’s sense of the importance to his faith of a dramatic personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. The shaping influence of restorationism can be seen in his yearning for extraordinary experience. Congregational reports of dramatic encounters are occasions of Mosaic’s signifying practice of restorationism. Charismatic oral liturgy offers a means by which phenomena of religious experience can be understood and identified. The reports of visions and voices are consistent with charismatic testimony which conveys the speakers “reception of revelation through words, pictures, visions and dreams” which are phenomena associated with an encounter with the Holy Spirit (Cartledge 2006:

69). Simon's granting of a hearing to reports of charismatic experience is consistent with an "oral/aural charismatic way of being" which places trust in the fresh guidance of the Spirit (Smith 1997: 50, 69). The "overwhelming feeling of the Holy Spirit" expressed in the reports is consonant with affective experience of the divine which can carry "a sense of the wonder, reality, love and power of God's presence" (Cartledge 2004: 180). Simon's search for additional proof of extraordinary religious experience is indicative of the impact of Mosaic's semiotic ideology of restorationism.

There is a second qualification in Simon's reading of John 6 that is noteworthy. His reading reveals a tension that is precipitated by his search for dramatic religious experience. As noted earlier, Simon identifies himself with the crowd in his own questioning of Jesus and wonders if he is wrong to ask for a sign to confirm his Christian faith: "And so I suppose from what I've been saying I'm kind of asking the same question as what they asked then." He understands that the crowd insists Jesus perform a miracle as proof of the claim of who he is even while Jesus repeatedly claims it is who he is that constitutes the proof they seek. Simon understands that Jesus' refusal to give further proof to the crowd is highly relevant to his desire for a dramatic spiritual experience. He recognizes the tension his yearning for special experience generates. However, the pressing concern of his personal dilemma leads him to make a case for special circumstances: "Jesus isn't in front of me now telling me what he's telling them." He reduces this tension between Jesus' refusal to provide further proof and his desire for divine intervention by contrasting his situation with the one of Jesus' day. His desire for dramatic experience is justified because doubting people today cannot see Jesus to decide for themselves. Jesus' contemporaries had an advantage over modern Bible readers who are struggling with faith and doubt. Confirmatory proof is needed today because of a lack of access to the physical presence of Jesus. A special, dramatic experience of divine intervention in his life would directly address his dilemma and offer a way to validate his Christian faith: "Well it would be further proof of things that have been preached to me—things that I'm reading." This reasoning prevents him from being accused of what John's Gospel says the crowd was guilty of—demanding proof when Jesus claims he himself is the proof. In fact, Simon's understanding is further justified by the fact that Jesus repeatedly attempted to persuade the doubting crowd about the truth of who he was. He was struck by the numerous times Jesus said "I tell you the truth." This repetitious effort reveals Jesus understands the human condition. Therefore, it is not wrong to ask God for proof to believe fully. "I think there's nothing wrong to ask." Besides, such an experience of the Holy Spirit "would definitely help" strengthen his faith. The view of an understanding Jesus reassures Simon. His reading draws attention to the importance of dramatic experience as proof to resolve his dilemma. That his desire for special experience trumps this tension suggests the degree to which restorationism has affected his thinking.

In the light of his desire for special experience, Simon also revisited his Ilkley experience in our final interview. As noted earlier, he maintains his Ilkley experience, just like his communion experience,

does not qualify as a dramatic religious experience. In the interview, he unexpectedly raised the possibility that his Ilkley experience is the special religious experience he desires:

Mike: So is that related to the idea of there being something God doing something outside of you that you have no control over that that would really clinch it for you?

Simon: I think so, yeah. I mean if I had this outside experience I mean, like I said in the other interview – the experience when I got prayed for and then I got my job and my life seemed to be falling into place and I kind of knew where I was – then that could have been my ah kind of outside experience in a sense – the intervention. And I’ve just not realized – that’s why Jesus says – then I connect it to what Jesus says there when they asked him for miracles and he said ‘oh you know I’ve stood right here in front of you, what more do you need?’ That could have been my experience then that that experience is right in front of – ‘I’ve done what you’ve needed’ in a sense but I’ve just not seen it as that, if you get where I’m coming from. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1260-1273)

Simon again wrestles with the fact that his desire for special experience links him with the grumbling crowd and their persistent demand that Jesus prove himself to them. So much so, it appears that he is willing to reconsider that his Ilkley experience was in fact the dramatic intervention he desires his life: “‘oh you know I’ve stood right here in front of you, what more do you need?’” It is noteworthy that once again he struggles with this tension. The persistence of this tension reveals that he is in fact caught between two dilemmas, the existence of which highlights the resilience of restorationism. There is his initial dilemma between faith and doubt to which special religious experience would offer confirmation of his Christian faith. There is also the subsequent puzzle of reconciling his desire for special experience with his reading of John 6 in which Jesus claims that he himself is the proof the crowd seeks. Simon’s desire for more dramatic experience is akin to demanding Jesus do more for him. It is this second dilemma that causes him to revisit and reassess the possibility that his earlier Ilkley prayer experience is the dramatic experience he is searching for. Restorationism is a significant contributing factor to his ongoing dissonance between his desire for dramatic experience and his recognition of the possibility of God’s presence and guidance in his past.

I then reminded Simon of his earlier statements that some dramatic experience would be helpful to his faith and wondered if he still has a need for this to happen. He said,

Simon: I don’t know well no, but I mean, like I say I’ve had that experience if it was a religious experience up in Ilkley and if I’m asking for another one then to me that doesn’t sound very, very nice just keep asking for things. But that’s but maybe I should if I do want more, to ask for it. And I have asked for more when I’ve prayed. I have asked to kind of like filled with the Holy Spirit and

Mike: You talked about that before. In our second interview you said, ‘I asked for it’ but at the time you haven’t recognized anything as happening. Ah since then have you prayed and asked for the filling of the Holy Spirit or a spiritual experience?

Simon: Yeah. I have did. I have done. Yeah.

Mike: How do you interpret

Simon: I haven't really felt as though I've felt anything from asking for that.

Mike: Ok.

Simon: So that's kind of why I've asked for it more than once.

Mike: Ok.

Simon: But it might be a gradual thing [indistinct speech]

Mike: So it's still an open-ended thing for you?

Simon: Yeah. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1338-1358)

Despite his concern that his repeated requests are not “very nice,” Simon makes it clear that he craves an encounter with the Holy Spirit: “I do want more.” The fact that he asks for more displays his dissatisfaction with his Ilkley experience. This is consistent with the distinction he makes between two forms of religious experience, the spiritual experience over which he has some control and the dramatic experience of an overwhelming encounter with the Holy Spirit that is outside of his control. His repeated requests reveal the role he believes a dramatic encounter would play in his life. Once again his yearning for special religious experience overrides the tension he feels when his requests for such are similar to the crowd's demands that Jesus prove himself in John 6. When compared to the dramatic evidence available in charismatic testimony his Ilkley experience fails to provide the proof available in a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit. Simon's repeated trumping of the tension that is inherent in his reading of John 6 and that is present in his persistent contestation of his Ilkley experience is attributable the influence of restorationism.

It is worth noting that Simon's rendering is ironic given that restorationism presumes a literal reading of the Bible to support its rationale of the correspondence of experience of God between the church of the New Testament and the church of today. Mosaic Church affirms the literal meaning of the Bible, the original, customary sense shared between the author and his contemporaries (see 5.2.1). It highlights the relation of the Bible and experience, a subject I raised near the end of the interview:

Mike: We're still back to that tension between Bible and experience. Now you seem to be emphasizing that experience and the Bible are on equal plane – equal position in regards to affirming the reality of a faith. Whereas before I was thinking that maybe the Bible had a higher level of authority over experience. But I seem to get the impression that you think they're on the same plane.

Simon: I think that if the Bible is what it is and what it says to be then it's extremely important. If you get an outside experience which is something you can relate to in the Bible, then you kind of, it can only help your faith. But I still question whether the Bible is what it completely claims it is.

Mike: But that emphasizes the importance of experience then?

Simon: It does.

Mike: In place of the Bible?

Simon: But I think you need both. Cause I may have an experience but not recognize that it was a [indistinct speech]. It could just be anything. Whereas if I have a bit from some of the Bible and the Bible says something which is similar to the experience that I've just had then I don't know.

Mike: So then the Bible can help you understand the experience

Simon: Yeah

Mike: but you need the experience. So they're kind of on an equal plane.

Simon: I'd say they are on equal plane. Yeah. (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 1927-1955)

This final example indicates the impact of restorationism on Simon's thinking. The Bible can make sense of religious experience: "if I have a bit from some of the Bible and the Bible says something which is similar to the experience that I've just had." The Bible's accounts of spiritual experience can inform the reader's interpretation of a similar experience. This reasoning reflects the logic of direct correspondence and is indicative of restorationism. Furthermore, Simon's doubts about the divine status of the Bible highlights the importance of an "outside experience" to the resolution of his faith-life dilemma. In effect, his remarks on the Bible and experience as being on an equal plane only heightens the importance of experience given his doubts about the Bible.

It is worth noting the role personality can play in expressions of religious meaning. Village and Francis (2005) note the relationship between psychological type and reader preferences for certain biblical interpretations. Their research was an inquiry into the personality types of Anglican lay people and their biblical interpretations of a healing story from Mark's Gospel. They focused on the shaping influence of readers perceiving (sensing or intuition) and judging (feeling or thinking) processes on their interpretations. Their findings show sensing-type interpretations were highest among Charismatic and Evangelical participants (p. 83). Readers with sensing-type perceiving revisit passage details and accentuate sensory information in interpretation (p. 85). In their analysis they argue that sensing-type interpretations appear to be appropriate for "those who treat the Bible more literally" (p. 86). Their data also indicates that "both conservative beliefs about the Bible and psychological preference for feeling had additive effects in causing people to choose more feeling

than thinking-type interpretations” (p. 86). According to their research sensing-type perceiving and feeling-type judging processes are consistent with Charismatic-Evangelical participants and with those who identified with conservative beliefs respectively. However, Village and Francis also found that church tradition and education levels were not significant predictors in interpretive choice after they allowed for personality type and theological beliefs about the Bible (p. 87). What this means is that psychological type “had an influence on interpretive choice over and above beliefs about the bible in general” (p. 86). This research supports the notion that “the reader is the key locus of meaning” (p. 87). As such it strengthens the view of this chapter that the spiritual life of the Bible in Simon’s solitary acts of reading is related to the individual character of his transactions of its meaning. If there is a connection between reader personality type and preference for religious meaning, then it arguably reflects the influence of the reader’s intrapersonal and interpersonal factors. The idiosyncratic character of Simon’s combination of his faith-life anxiety and restorationism is manifested in his expressions of his Christian faith.

In conclusion, Simon’s appropriations of his readings of John 6 and Mark 6 reveal the influence of restorationism. This can be observed in his qualification of the value of his Mosaic communion experience of a “spiritual connection” with Jesus. His personal connection does not qualify as the overwhelming encounter with the Holy Spirit that would confirm his Christian faith. Charismatic testimony of dramatic encounters informs his thinking on the differing levels of spiritual experience and has a shaping effect on his readings. In addition, Simon’s reconsideration of his Ilkley experience occurs in a context of tension between his yearning for dramatic experience and his unease with the demand that Jesus offer him more proof. However, the need for special religious experience trumps this tension as he wants more than what his communion and Ilkley experiences offer. Restorationism accounts for Simon’s expressed need for a dramatic encounter to resolve his faith-life dilemma. It is a major factor in the meaning of his appropriations. His biblical transactions reverberate with the logic of restorationism. They offer evidence of his orientation towards the text and are reflective of his reading stance.

Simon’s case study reveals his appropriations corresponded to intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that strongly influenced his production of meaning. His personal mix of faith-life anxiety and restorationism shaped his selection of evoked referents and responses to textual stimuli and affected their synthesis into readings. His reading stance reflects the blend of these factors. Simon’s reading stance structured his transactional modes of meaning making.

#### 6.4 Interpretation: Relation of findings to the thesis argument

This research project is an examination of the role of the solitary reader in the spiritual life of the Bible. It seeks to provide an account of the salient intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of meaning making that inform participant reader transactions. The personal and structural, the pragmatic and the ideological, offer frames for investigation. The personal is composed of the participants pressing faith-life anxiety and the structural of the Mosaic Church's semiotic ideology of restorationism. The character of reader transactions cannot be accounted for solely by either personal faith-life anxieties or church ideological structure. Data analysis reveals these pertinent factors are commonly shared by my readers (see 4.0 and 5.0). Readers evidence anxieties of an uncertainty of their Christian faith. These anxieties are related to a critical life transition to becoming an independent adult, a cultural process referred to by sociologists as "emerging adulthood" (Arnett 2000). These tensions occasion an "internal conversation" (Archer 2003, 2007). Mosaic Church's Evangelical-Charismatic theology affirms the role of the Bible and Holy Spirit in the apprehension of God. Church based signifying practices of biblical literalism and oral testimony of charismatic experience offer ways to come to know God, to apprehend personal knowledge of the divine. They highlight a personal, immediate, and experiential knowledge of God. The relation between the material and immaterial is underwritten by a "semiotic ideology" (Keane 2003; Engelke 2007). The logic of restorationism that underlies these interpretive practices is deemed by readers to address their anxiety of uncertainty of faith. In their spiritual quest of intimacy with God readers find assurance in the rationale of direct correspondence to resolve faith-life anxieties. Participant experience of God's presence and action in life is important to this quest.

The research findings presented in this chapter indicate Simon's idiosyncratic mix of personal faith-life concerns and church ideological structure had a shaping influence on his orientations to Bible reading transactions. His adaptation of restorationism provided him with select modes of meaning making in his transactions to address his pragmatic concerns. His qualified communion and Ilkley appropriations indicate he frames his accounts in terms of the modes of signification afforded him by restorationism. His privileging of experience as locus of authority and his preference of an affective-somatic mode of detection of an experience of God affects the character of his interpretive relation to the biblical text. However, a focus on semiotic ideology alone does not account for the flexibility found in Simon's appropriations. The purpose of his spiritual quest of intimacy with God plays a significant role in his adaptation of restorationism as an interpretive structure and is related to his internal conversation of faith and life tensions. His pragmatic concern to resolve his faith-life dilemma affected his adaptation of restorationism. The fact that his readings do not reflect total adherence to the local interpretive logic of signifying practices indicates that his reading stance reflects the influence of his particular combination of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors (discussed in 7.0).



This suggests the reader altered or revised the semiotic ideology to address the reader's pressing personal concerns. This insight into the individual composition of his reading stance offers evidence of the role reading stance occupies in the production of meaning in Bible reading.

In addition to the numerous case studies on the shaping influence of pragmatic and ideological dimensions of reader appropriations of biblical texts as apprehensions of God (see 4.0, 5.0, and Appendix N), Simon's case suggests the emerging adult's spiritual readings of the Bible can be related to the contribution made by the reader's individual blend of intrapersonal and interpersonal factors that comprise the reading stance adopted in solitary acts of Bible reading. There is no attempt here to try to establish a broad generalizability of these findings. Yet there is a claim of limited generalizability of the findings of Simon's case study and shared responsibility with an end user for transferability of findings to situations other than this research site. There is in qualitative research a reconceptualising of generalizability (see 3.2.3). It is conceived of in terms of a fitting of findings of the research site to other contexts (Schofield 2000: 93). Small scale research offers the possibility for transferability of "a sufficiently discriminating generalizability" to other settings (Pike 2002b: 37-38). This means the character of end user judgments of research findings is important, especially given the lack of absolute certainty or infallible criteria of validity (Hammersley 2008). In Simon's case I have sought to provide generous and significantly thick and rich descriptions of his mix of pragmatic and ideological factors that comprised his reading stance in order for the end user to make sense of his spiritual readings of the Bible and his concerns of an apprehension of God in life experience.

Furthermore, Simon's extensive single case study offers a contribution to our understanding of the role reading stance plays in reader apprehension of God via solitary acts of Bible reading. As noted earlier (see 3.2.3), case study can shed light on findings that offer the possibility of theoretical applicability. Case studies can be useful to the explanation of a theory or testing of a proposition and are analytically generalizable in terms of theories and propositions (Yin 1994: 3, 10). The generating and testing of hypotheses in a single case study can contribute to theory building (Dooley 2002). In the light of the research aim to contribute towards the building of a theory on the nature of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality, I deemed it important to test critically the qualitative finding of reading stance. Popper's (2002) deductive test of falsification offers a logical procedure (see 3.2.4). If deductive testing refutes the proposition of a theory under consideration then the relevant theoretical aspects have been "*falsified*" and the proposition is unacceptable and in need of revision (Popper 2002: 10, italics in original). There can be both positive and negative outcomes of deductive testing that are of use to the researcher as the test serves either to verify or falsify the proposition (Popper 2002: 10). Since in-depth case study method is normally biased toward falsification (Flyvbjerg 2001: 83, 84) it offers an up-close approach that can give rise to one observation that falsifies a proposition: "if just one observation does not fit with the proposition it is

considered not valid generally and must therefore be either revised or rejected” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 76-77). My approach to the testing of reading stance in Simon’s case study is simply this: if the concept of reading stance is not valid in his extensive case then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230). Simon’s case study does not falsify the assumption of this research of the importance of the reader’s stance to the relation of Bible reading and religious experience. It does not contradict or refute the notion of reading stance under consideration. As such it withstands a deductive test of falsification and there is no reason to reject it. However, the validity of this finding of the importance of reading stance to religious experience from Simon’s case does not verify that it is valid in all cases and its truthfulness should not be assumed to have been irretrievably established. His case suggests the importance of reading stance to theorizing about the relation of Bible reading and religious experience. Theoretical and pedagogical implications of this case study will be discussed in the next two chapters (7.0 and 8.0).

## 7.0 Bible and Experience: Simon's reading stance: personal aims and church norms

*Chapter Abstract: The focus of this chapter is a discussion of the relation of Simon's reading stance to his biblical transactions. His stance is situated within the frame of the relation of his pragmatic reading aims and the theological norms of interpretation of Mosaic Church. Simon's adaptation of restorationism to address his anxiety of uncertainty of his faith reveals a tension between his views of the Bible and charismatic experience. Sweeney's (2009) framework of institutional and ordinary theologies shows that Simon's understandings of the apprehension of God occur within the tension between formal doctrine and lived experience. The variation in Simon's reading aims and the church's norms is situated theoretically and theologically in the tensions respectively between literary theory and theology and the relation of Word and Spirit in biblical interpretation. The individual and communal dimensions of spirituality, which are shaping influences in his Bible readings, complicate Pike's (2003a) notion of "spiritual literacy." The tension between Simon's pragmatic aims and his use of the church's interpretive norms suggests something of the complexity surrounding the formation of spiritually literate biblical transactions within an interpretive community. The spiritual life of the Bible for Simon exists within this tension.*

### 7.1 Simon's reading stance and the aims and norms of biblical interpretation

Boersma (2010) notes certain changes among young Evangelicals that are indicative of the development of a meaningful spiritual focus in their use of the Bible. He notes a resistance to historical criticism in biblical studies and a focus on recovery of "spiritual interpretation" of the Bible (p. 20). This perspective advocates "the literal meaning of Scripture sacramentally points to a spiritual meaning" (p. 24). The text's meaning points toward "a participatory or sacramental view of reality" (p. 20). There is also a shift in faith expressions from "propositional truth" to less definable manifestations of "narrative, image and symbol" (p. 20). Boersma sees this development as evidence that Evangelical theology is in process of recovering from its consent to modern rational approaches to the Bible. The phenomenon of the sacramental reading of the Bible among young Evangelicals highlights the importance of the role of the reader in spiritual interpretation. It also raises the issue of the relation between the emerging-adult reader's religious concerns which are a significant part of a believer's engagement with the Bible and the theological norms of biblical interpretation which are a feature of the reader's reading community of practice.

The relation between the individual reader's pragmatic aims of spiritual reading of the Bible and the interpretive norms of the Christian reading community is an important issue in biblical interpretation. On the one hand, the reader's subjective religious concerns impact interpretation. "The way in which we 'hear' scripture, and thereby hear God's voice speaking to us through scripture, is bound up with all kinds of 'subjective' factors. None the worse for that, of course. If it isn't subjective, it isn't in that sense, real for us." (Wright 2006: 188-189). On the other hand, traditional Christian theology of biblical revelation affirms the capacity of the biblical texts to transform readers from outside of the interpretive structures of their reading communities. Readers can approach the text with their own

“agenda, interests, expectations, assumptions and goals” but “as vehicles of address from God” the texts “enlarge reader horizons to form new horizons” (Thiselton 1992: 618). Many Christian churches read the Bible to hear God’s Word.

Theologian Jeroslav Pelikan (2003) presents the traditional Christian understanding of the relation of so-called ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ aspects of faith. “To make this distinction, it has become customary in theological Latin to speak about this objective faith as ‘the faith *which* one believes [*fides quae creditur*]’ and about subjective faith as ‘the faith *with which* one believes [*fides qua creditur*]’” (pp. 48-49, italics in original). He illustrates this distinction by means of the well-known statement of the apostle Paul: “That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9 NIV). Paul’s statements “‘Jesus is Lord’” and “‘God raised him from the dead’” can be understood as the ‘objective’ aspect of faith—that *which* one believes. The phrases “‘if you confess with your mouth’” and “‘believe in your heart’” can be understood as the ‘subjective’ aspect of faith—that *with which* one trusts. Christian faith involves both assent and trust. Christian theology indicates the importance of epistemic and volitional dimensions to religious Bible reading.

The relation of personal aims of reading and theological norms of interpretation provides a frame by which to examine Simon’s reading stance. Simon’s stance highlights the impact of his anxiety of uncertainty about his faith and his use of restorationism to address this anxiety (see 6.0). Restorationism is the belief in the correspondence between the Holy Spirit’s charismatic activity in the Bible and present day encounters. The influences of his pragmatic reading aims and the theological basis of Mosaic Church’s interpretive norms are reflected in his stance. This chapter is a discussion of some implications of his use of the church’s interpretive norms to address his pragmatic aims. Simon’s readings reveal a tension between the Bible and charismatic experience which suggests a variation between his reading aims and the church’s interpretive norms. The character of the tension between the Bible and charismatic experience in Simon’s readings will be presented (7.2). Also, the individual and social dimensions of Simon’s reading stance will be discussed (7.3). Simon’s adaptation of interpretive norms to address his pragmatic aims reveals the individual character of his stance.

The individual nature of Simon’s reading stance has implications for what constitutes spiritually literate biblical transactions. Pike (2003a: 49) maintains the literary transaction between the reader and the biblical text can occasion “a spiritual transaction between the reader and divine author.” He argues that the possibility of an occurrence of a spiritual transaction is related to the reader’s “spiritual literacy,” a learned sensitivity to the Holy Spirit’s guidance in reading which develops within a Christian interpretive community (p. 49). The variation in Simon’s pragmatic aims and the church’s

norms complicates this notion of spiritual literacy. The frame of pragmatic aims and interpretive norms needs to be situated within a set of theoretical and theological tensions. The theoretical tension between literary theory and Christian theology and the theological tension between Word and Spirit sets the stage for an understanding of the impact of the individual reader's reading stance on the spiritual life of the Bible.

Simon's case suggests the importance of reading stance to theorizing about the relation of Bible reading and religious experience. Whilst this qualitative research project is not an attempt to establish a broad generalizability of findings, a limited generalizability and transferability exists (see 3.2.3). A qualitative understanding of generalizability is expressed in terms of a matching of findings of a particular site to other contexts. There is a shared responsibility between researcher and end user for transferability of research findings to situations outside of the research site. Since they are not representative of populations case studies cannot be statistically generalizable yet they are analytically generalizable in terms of theories and propositions (Yin 1994: 10). For example, case study can be useful to the explanation of a theory or testing of a proposition (Yin 1994: 3). In-depth case study can falsify preconceptions, assumptions and hypotheses and compel revisions in theories and suppositions (Flyvbjerg 2006: 235). Flyvbjerg (2001) argues the theoretical usefulness of case study is related to Karl Popper's concept of falsification, as the concept offers the researcher a way to generalize analytically on the basis of a single case study (see 3.2.4). Popper's (2002: 10) deductive test of falsification states if critical testing proves to refute the proposition and necessarily those aspects of the theory of which it is a conclusion then they have been proven false and the proposition is unacceptable and in need of revision. Popper's theory of deductive testing offers a line of reasoning that can be used to falsify the concept of reading stance: If the finding is not valid in one case, then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230). However, this finding of the importance of reading stance to religious experience from Simon's case does not verify that it is valid in all cases. Reading stance is a pertinent factor in Simon's appropriations of Bible reading as deemed experiences of God.

## 7.2 Aims and Norms: the theoretical tension between literary theory and Christian theology

There is the theoretical tension between modern literary theory and traditional Christian theology. Modern literary theory reflects the impact of the "epistemological revolution" (Tompkins 1980a: xxv). New understandings of the relation of the reading agencies of text, reader, and context have changed the once familiar landscape. "We can no longer take for granted traditional assumptions about the nature of reading processes" (Thiselton 1992: 15). The concept of literary meaning has shifted from one of a cognitive transmission of a stable meaning across contexts to that of a linguistic and semiotic production within the reader's sociocultural context (Thiselton 1992: 28). Literary

theories posit the generation of textual meaning via the reader's historically formed, culturally situated, and socially embedded interpretive structures. Reader-response theories in particular assert the meaning of the inert inscriptions of the physical text is contingent upon the mental activities of the situated reader. This phenomenon impacts previously existing notions of what it means to read. "Texts were once considered discrete entities containing an unchanging meaning that a careful reader could discover" (Galda and Beach 2001: 66).

### 7.2.1 Norms: God's Word and the interpretive community

The sociocultural frame of modern literary theory challenges traditional Christian theological norms of biblical interpretation. At issue is whether the reader's registering of textual effects is primarily attributable to the socially embedded interpretive conventions of his or her reading community or to the spiritually transformative power of God's Word. There is a critical concern about the capacity of biblical texts to change readers from outside of the contexts of their reading communities. Thiselton (1992: 550) acknowledges the problem when he writes, "the notion that biblical texts do not transform readers 'from beyond', or that they merely evoke 'construction' drawn from the hitherto undiscovered inner resources of the reading community do not cohere readily with Christian theology." Christian theology affirms "an encounter with something in the text not of our own making" (Vanhoozer 1998: 407). If what the text does to the reader is to be understood solely in terms of the reader's sociocultural context then the extralinguistic referential power of the text is restricted. The critical issue, to abridge a borrowed phrase into a question (Marshall 1995: 73), is what kind of knowledge about a text can the reader's interpretation claim to be? The character of the problem is that a socially constituted text "transposes the meaning of texts into projections which are *potentially idolatrous* as instruments of self-affirmation" (Thiselton 1992: 550, author's italics).

The hermeneutic concern of Christian theology is to provide a defensible basis for interpretive norms by which the meaning of the situated reader's textual effects can be claimed to be dependent. Vanhoozer (1998: 392) argues there are interpretive norms that underwrite the "covenant of discourse" between reader and text and that they are rooted in a theology, epistemology, and morality of knowledge. The norms regulate the interaction of reader and text in order to preserve the possibility of transformative understanding in the meaning-making encounter between them. The norms seek to safeguard the roles of reader and text "*without losing* either the horizon of the text or of the reader and *without confusing* the horizons (Vanhoozer 1998: 389, italic in original). This means there is a limit to the range of acceptable literary theories by which meaning is deemed to be produced (Thiselton 1992: 68). In the relationship between readers and the biblical text it is a reader who is responsible for making meaning. This activity is important to the notion of the communication of God's Word. The Holy Spirit is deemed to work through the ordinary processes of human understanding of literary

communication (Thiselton 1992: 92). Readers use texts in such a way for them to “*say something about something*” (Croatto 1987: 14, italics in original). This is especially true of Bible reading. “When they truly read the Bible as if their lives depend on it—as is normal in authentic readings of the Bible as Scripture—believers strive to make sure that it is truly some aspect of the biblical text (and not their imagination) which has this effect upon them and their lives” (Patte 1998: 16). The character of the reader’s role in meaning making can be seen in the analogy of reading as a musical performance (see 2.5.2). The musician’s playing is guided by the notations of the composer’s score even as the musician draws upon his or her experience in the performance (Rosenblatt 1994: 13-14). Thiselton (1992: 587, italics in original) speaks of “a *good performance as being one which includes both faithfulness to the score (pace Fish), and a creativity which transcends merely wooden, mechanical, or repetitive routine.*” Theologically-informed norms are important to the regulation of the relation of pragmatic reading aims and interpretive frames used in various readings.

### 7.2.2 Norms: Biblical text and Christian tradition

There are different conceptions of theological norms in biblical interpretation. This matter goes to the heart of the epistemological dimension of hermeneutics discussed above. The writings of Vanhoozer (1998) and Thiselton (1992) are important to this theological issue (see 1.4.2). The authors agree on the spiritually transforming power of God’s Word. Vanhoozer (p. 9) conceives of the reader’s interpretive activity “as a theological task.” He argues the act of reading demands the reader retrieve the biblical text’s determinative meaning. Thiselton is primarily concerned to understand the character of the reading processes that are theologically conducive to the reader being addressed by God’s Word. At the heart of the matter is the conception of the relation of Word and Spirit. The accepted structuring of the Word-Spirit relation impacts the interpretive activity of Bible readers’ actualization and appropriation of a divine message. There are two general theological positions of the relation. The Word of God is in the literal meaning of the biblical text as brought to life by the Holy Spirit or it is in the church’s Spirit-guided living tradition of biblical understandings (Vanhoozer 1998: 410-412). There is an ordering of Word and Spirit in each view in which priority is given to one or the other. In essence the Word of God is in the Bible and delivered by means of the Spirit or God’s Word is bestowed by means of the Spirit-directed tradition of biblical understanding. In the former, the Bible is identified as the Word of God. In the latter, the Word of God is associated with the role of the Spirit in the church’s interpretive tradition. In the Bible-centered position, the role of the Spirit is to unveil the present significance of the past communication; he makes known what the biblical text means today based upon what God’s Word originally meant (Vanhoozer 1998: 421). In the Spirit-directed tradition view, the Spirit guides the church into readings of the biblical text that address contemporary readers as God’s Word; he fuses the text and reader through the discovery of new meanings

(Vanhoozer 1998: 415). Word and Spirit views provide theological underwriting of interpretive norms of Christian reading communities.

Vanhoozer and Thiselton have different conceptions of theologically-informed interpretive norms by which readers render the meaning of the Bible's divine message. Vanhoozer approaches the issue primarily from a theological perspective whilst engaging with literary theory in detail. Vanhoozer locates the interpretive norm in the biblical text itself. He is critical of the impact of church tradition on the reception of the biblical text as the reader is unable theoretically to generate meanings apart from the boundaries of its accepted conventions. The reader's role is the recovery of the text's original and customary meaning, an act that ensures its theological status as God's Word. Retrieval of the meaning of a past communication serves as a basis for its contemporary spiritual significance. For Vanhoozer, Spirit-quickened autonomy of the biblical text is the norm of biblical interpretation. Vanhoozer's position will be further discussed in the epistemological model of Evangelical Bible reading in the next chapter (8.3.2).

Thiselton privileges the roles of Spirit and tradition as norms in biblical interpretation. He presents a theologically informed yet philosophically oriented discussion of biblical hermeneutics. Drawing upon philosophers and major literary theorists he argues a philosophy of human understanding of texts affirms the importance of the role of the historically and socially situated reader in Bible reading activity. Following Gadamer, he affirms intersubjective meaning is possible because of tradition. Tradition supplies conditions of understanding that make interpretation possible. The Spirit works in and through human processes of understanding (1980: 90). He maintains the musical score of the text "*must be played*" by a reader (1992: 587; italics in original) who inhabits a stable interpretive tradition not subject to relativism or perfunctory literalism. He argues the understanding of the communication of the Bible's divine message is a "co-operative shared work" in which "the Spirit, the text, and the reader engage in a *transforming process*" (1992: 619; italics in original). This philosophical perspective is not inconsistent with the theological view of the Spirit's direction of the church's interpretive tradition. He asserts the need for "metacritical reflection" on the interpretive norms used by reading community to check readings, and sees reader-response theory as being a useful in this task (1992: 587). Christian reflection must be a sign of "the ongoing creativity of the living God" (1992: 617).

The teaching of Mosaic Church is akin to the theological norm of the literal meaning of the Bible. The church's Word and Spirit teaching highlights the roles of the Bible and the Holy Spirit in knowing God (see 5.2.1). Church leaders practice the literal interpretation (original customary sense) of the Bible in their preaching and teaching (see 5.2.2). Restorationism is an example of church teaching that reflects a literal interpretation of the Bible (see 5.2.3). Restorationism is the belief in the



correspondence between charismatic activity of the Holy Spirit in biblical reports and in present-day encounters. Belief in biblical authority and New Testament's apostolic pattern is necessary to the recovery of the Spirit's *charismata* for today and the reversal of the decline of the modern church (Kay 2007, 2008). The restorationist emphasis on the Spirit's activity today is predicated on the priority of the Bible in the Word and Spirit relation. Church teaching underwrites the equality of the practices of biblical literalism and charismatic testimony in apprehending God. Mosaic's Word and Spirit relation serves as a backdrop for discussion of the practical tension between the Bible and charismatic experience in Simon's readings.

### 7.3 Aims and Norms: the practical tension between the Bible and experience in Simon's readings

Simon's readings reveal a tension between the Bible and religious experience. This tension can be seen in two issues: his subordination of Word to Spirit and his affinity for embodiment rather than representation as a mode of detection of divine presence. The character of the relation of Simon's pragmatic reading aims and Mosaic Church's interpretive norms is reflected in this strain.

#### 7.3.1 Aims: Word and Spirit variance in Simon's readings

Simon's readings reflect the tension between the Bible and religious experience. He says he places the Bible and charismatic experience on the same footing in an effort to address his anxiety of uncertainty: "I'd say they are on equal plane." Mosaic Church's teachings reflect an equal commitment to Word and Spirit (see 5.2.1). But Simon's stated dialectical relationship between the Bible and dramatic experience—an experience can be related to the Bible and the Bible can make sense of experience—betrays an underlying tension between Word and Spirit in his readings. The case study reveals his doubts about the Bible and his affinity for charismatic experience (see 6.2.1). His readings show restorationism offers a means to resolve his faith-life dilemma (see 6.3\3).

Restorationism functioned as an interpretive frame for his appropriations.

Simon's stated qualifications of both his communion and Ilkley appropriations of religious experience highlight his affinity for charismatic experience. For example, his appropriated actualization of John 6: 54 of a "spiritual connection" with Jesus at communion affirms that it was a deemed religious experience. But he is torn between the recognition of this communion connection as constituting validating evidence of his Christian faith and his search for a dramatic religious experience to resolve his faith-life dilemma. He maintains his apprehension of God at communion does not qualify as the extraordinary Christian religious experience he desires.

In addition, Simon's attraction to charismatic experience can be observed in his 'second dilemma' (see 6.3.3). In his reading of John 6 he acknowledged that his yearning for special religious experience beyond the contested Ilkley experience linked him with the grumbling crowd's demands on Jesus to prove himself to them through a miracle. Simon recognized his repeated prayers for a dramatic encounter with the Holy Spirit is akin to a demand that Jesus perform more for him than what might have been already initiated in his Ilkley experience. His desire for extra religious experience however trumps any negativity that may be attached to his repeated prayer requests.

Simon's readings suggest the locus of authority to adjudicate God's activity actually lies in charismatic experience. Dramatic accounts of religious experience offer him a viable interpretive framework by which he can assess the status of his Christian faith. Charismatic testimony offers him the prospect of a direct experience of God outside of the religious conditioning of his Catholic upbringing. A personal encounter with the Holy Spirit would confirm his Christian faith which would also empower his critical life passage of emerging adulthood. This emphasis on charismatic experience in his readings suggests a variance between Word and Spirit. It also reflects the possibility of a tension between pragmatic concerns and interpretive norms.

Woodhead and Heelas (2000) present a spectrum of views of the authority of the Bible and religious experience in Evangelical and Charismatic Christianity that illustrates the tension between these features (Figure 7.1). Their spectrum provides a way to demonstrate the character of Simon's Word and Spirit variance. According to the spectrum's descriptions, the Evangelical-Charismatic position is located in the center-right sectors. The shift from an equal privileging of the Bible and experience to the authority of experience over the Bible is an outcome of the emphasis placed on the role of religious experience.

<b>Biblical Pole</b>		<b>Experiential Pole</b>
Scriptural Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism (religions of difference) Authority of the Bible higher than that of experience	Equal authority of Bible and experience	Evangelical-Charismatic and Pentecostal (experiential religions of difference) Authority of Experience higher than that of Bible

**Figure 7.1:** The Tension between Views of the Bible and Religious Experience from "The Spectrum of Evangelical-Charismatic Christianity" (Woodhead and Heelas 2000: 149)

It is noteworthy that the footing on which Simon says he places the Bible and charismatic experience mirrors Mosaic Church's dual commitment to Word and Spirit theologies which mediate ways to apprehend God (see 5.2.1). The church emphasizes equally the roles of the Bible and *charismata* in coming to know God. The divine can be apprehended through both signifying practices of textuality

and orality, of biblical literalism and charismatic testimony (see 5.2.2). As such the description “Equal authority of the Bible and experience” aptly reflects the church’s position. However, Simon’s position is more consistent with the spectrum’s label of “Experiential Pole” than with the “Equal authority” position. His readings reveal a search for an extraordinary experience independent of the Bible to confirm his Christian faith. Charismatic experience of restorationism offers him an authority apart from Evangelical textuality to validate Christianity. His posture effectively makes religious experience the primary medium of apprehending God. The role of the Bible is relegated to identifying Christian religious experience: “Cause I may have an experience but not recognize that it was.”

Simon’s subordination of the Bible to the authority of charismatic experience suggests his pragmatic reading aims are at variance with the Word and Spirit interpretive norms of his reading community. Malley’s (2004) account of ‘transitivity’ offers an analytic tool to help clarify the character of this tension. He contends Evangelical uses of biblical authority in actual practice serve to preserve beliefs that are attributed to the Bible:

Evangelicals’ tradition presents the text as an object for hermeneutic activity, but the goal of that hermeneutic activity is not so much to establish meaning of the text as to establish transitivity between the text and beliefs. The maintenance of transitivity between the Bible and a set of beliefs is the core of the interpretive tradition. (2004: 146)

Malley argues the viability of an interpretive tradition is related to the preservation of transitivity between the Bible and belief claims. Accordingly, Mosaic’s Word and Spirit interpretive tradition is upheld by the assumption that restorationism rests upon biblical authority. The logic of the semiotic ideology of restorationism underwrites the *charismata* of the Holy Spirit as reported in the New Testament as being normative for today (see 5.2.3). The recovery of the Spirit’s *charismata* for today necessitates a return to biblical authority. The Bible affirms the correspondence between New Testament accounts of the Holy Spirit’s activity and contemporary Christian religious experience. Simon’s reservation about the divine status of the Bible has the effect of drawing into question the viability of the transitive relation between the Bible and restorationism. On the one hand, the feasibility of special religious experience for Simon appears to be contingent upon transitivity between the Bible and restorationism. He accepts the rationale of restorationism that underwrites of the signifying practice of oral testimony. Oral testimony of charismatic experience is especially influential on his understanding of how to come to experience God, a prospect that offers the resolution of his dilemma. On the other hand, Simon’s doubts about the Bible do not call into question the viability of charismatic experience. He accepts the concept of Christian religious experience authorized by restorationism. He defends the prospect of charismatic experience as an instrumental way to address his faith-life dilemma even as he questions the Bible’s authority on which restorationism is based. This discrepancy highlights the importance to Simon of his retention of

Christianity. This tension between an ordinary reader's pragmatic aims and the interpretive norms of his reading community can be situated in Sweeney's (2009) heuristic framework.

Sweeney (2009) differentiates between institutional and 'ordinary' theologies, between formal doctrine and the lived experience of theologically informed faith practices. He further differentiates between "operant" and "espoused" aspects of an 'ordinary' theology; 'operant' theology inheres in the embedded faith practices of a formal theology and 'espoused' theology is an institution's rhetorical expression of doctrine (p. 1). "A group's operant theology, forming and informing its practice in unacknowledged and implicit ways, is in some tension with its espoused theology" (p. 4). There can also be a tension between institutional and ordinary theologies. In his research, Sweeney found a preoccupation among Roman Catholic and Anglican congregants with "*my* faith...rather than *the* faith" (p. 2, italics in original). What was important to participant experiences of faith was their "'mood'—the deep structure of emotions that frames the experience" (p. 4). He suggests this emotional frame is a determinative factor of a group's ordinary theology and that this 'mood' "carries over into subsequent theological articulation" (p. 5). The meaning of faith experiences of ordinary theology finds expression in the living Christian tradition. He also suggests ordinary theology is "susceptible to cultural conditioning" that is at odds with formal theology (p. 8); "there is a need to ground ordinary theology in something more than itself" (p. 9). He found the operant theology of some participants was "transformed" by the group's espoused theology (p. 5).

Sweeney suggests the tension between operant and espoused theologies inheres within the relation of the congregant's lived experience and the church's formal doctrine. Simon's subordination of the Bible to the authority of charismatic experience is indicative of the tension between ordinary and institutional theologies. His readings reveal an adaptation of the interpretive norm of the church's espoused theology of restorationism to address his pragmatic aims. Simon's reading stance is attuned to the operant theology of the church's faith practices even as it differs from the espoused theology of the church's Word and Spirit teaching. However, the church's operant and espoused theologies were influential in his use of restorationism. The role restorationism plays in his readings reflects the culturally sensitive 'top down' processing of experience from existing schemata that defines it as religious (Taves 2009: 98-99; see 2.2.2). Perhaps Simon's view of the Spirit as primary locus of authority for the apprehension of God can be seen as an alignment of the church's operant theology of charismatic experience and his pragmatic concerns. His intrapersonal faith-life anxiety is a significant factor in his selective use of restorationism as an interpretive frame for his readings. The operant theology reflected in his pragmatic reading aims creates an ambivalent role for the Bible.

The tension between the Bible and religious experience inherent in Simon's readings is relevant to cross-cultural studies of Bible reading. Bialecki's (2009) study of 'Shores' Vineyard church in

southern California addresses factors in the dialectical relation of the Bible and charismatic experience. The Vineyard movement's rationale of Bible reading privileges religious experience but holds vague views of the Bible which maintain it is authoritative but not read literally (p. 140). In fact, a focus on rendering meaning can be an obstacle to communion with God (p. 147). Even though the reasons for the Bible's centrality are ambiguous God's presence can be associated with its reading (pp. 142-143). The practice of Bible reading authorizes communion with God. The Bible "speaks to each person as part of an anonymous collective who all have equal access to the document" (p. 154). Egalitarian access to the Bible affirms equal access to God. Constraints on this practice of a "biblical hermeneutics of presence" (p. 149) are grounded in "routine sensibilities" discerned in practice rather than in critical knowledge (p. 152). The reader's acquired sensibilities function to keep the authority of presence in check.

Also Coleman's (2006: 165) study of reading and speaking practices of the "embodiment of divine text" among Swedish Faith Christians highlights the difficulty of distinction between biblical text and religious experience. The Word of Life Bible Centre in Upsala, Sweden manifested a practice in which believers perform the reading-speaking of the Bible and "become living representatives of and vehicles for the Word" (p. 163). So much so that the biblical "text can be conceived of as acting upon, even penetrating, the person of the believer" (p. 165). He suggests this translation of the scripture is an incarnation of the Word of God in which "human subjects can act as vessels for the language that acts as an index of the presence of divinity" (p. 165). The individual reader-speaker's appropriation of God's Word in terms of oral repetition serves to reposition the language of the biblical text. He asserts, "Charismatic 'scripturality' carries with it a set of incarnation practices that confound easy distinctions between person, text, and the events of biblical narrative" (p. 161).

The findings of these two cross-cultural studies resonate with the Word-Spirit variance of Simon's case study. In Bialecki's (2009) study, the Bible is deemed to be relevant to charismatic experience even though its status is unclear. In Coleman's (2006) study the believer's embodiment of scripture blurs the distinction between the Bible and religious experience. He says "adherence to scripture does not imply a simple valorization of and concentration on the written text" as communion with God can occur in the recitation of his Word (p. 161). These studies highlight the complex relationship between the Bible and religious experience. The focus on religious experience is the same though the rationales of the practices that specify the relation of the Bible to God's presence are different. The written text of the Bible functions as a means for the reader/speaker to experience God's presence. The Bible's status is ambivalent. These studies suggest the normalcy of tensions between a church's operant and espoused theologies. They highlight the conditions that contribute to the tensions between the lived experience of ordinary readers and the church's formal doctrine and faith practices. One's

interpretation of spiritual experience as informed by formal doctrine can exist in tension with the institutionally espoused beliefs that contributed to the interpreted experience.

### 7.3.2 Aims: Appeal of sensory over discursive signficatory modes in Simon's readings

The studies of Bialecki (2009) and Coleman (2006) also suggest that considerations of the role of the Bible in charismatic experience must take into account the signficatory modes of apprehending God which actual readers embrace. Mosaic Church believes God can be apprehended through signifying practices of textuality and orality, of biblical literalism and charismatic testimony. There are discrete modes of detection inherent in the signifying practices of biblical literalism and oral testimony. These modes offer indicators by which a religious experience can be interpreted. Simon is disposed towards a distinct mode signifying God's presence, a mode authorized by restorationism.

Subject possession of divine knowledge is accounted for primarily either through the acquisition of cognitive and linguistic representations or attention to physical and internal sensations as embodiments of spiritual experience (Luhmann *et al.*, 2010: 67-68). These forms are based in paradigms of textuality and embodiment (Csordas 1993: 136). Discursive and sensory modalities offer connections between the material and immaterial. This distinction between representation and embodiment is useful as each mode offers indications of when an experience of God transpires, of how he is deemed to become real by a subject. Cognitive-linguistic depictions from the Bible help identify an apprehension of God. A literal reading of the New Testament supports this meaning mode. Simon's appropriation of John 6: 54 as a "spiritual connection" with Jesus at communion is an example of this mode. This experience corresponded with or represented his understanding of the meaning of the text's verbal symbols. Also, descriptions of affective states and somatic phenomena can be used to identify an experience of God. The ritual of oral testimony of charismatic experience reflects participatory accounts that support this detection mode. Testimony can disclose ways to recognize an experience of God (see 5.2.2). The enactment of reports can have a heuristic effect on identifying modalities of perception of an apprehension of God. Simon referred to a report of a vision and a voice, visual and aural modalities, as evidence of a dramatic experience. Participants also reported experiencing certain affective and sensate impressions such as a "tingling" sensation that were associated with deemed religious experiences (see 5.2.2). Bible reading can be conducive to these phenomena as the text is "interpreted experientially" by the reader, an interpretive process which involves the reader's engagement of "emotional intelligence" (Cartledge 2006: 130-131).

Simon's privileging of experience as the locus of authority to make judgments of an experience of God offers an example of the affective-somatic mode of detection. His affinity for affective-somatic phenomena can be observed in the qualification of his "spiritual connection" appropriation of John 6:

54 as not constituting the dramatic religious experience to resolve his faith-life dilemma. He is searching for religious experience of radical discontinuity with his previous controlled religious experience of communion. Oral reports of radical disruption of religious experience are attractive to him. He has heard reports of a remarkable interruption of ordinary life experience on the occasion of divine intervention in a person's life. He contrasts ordinary experience of religious "conditioning" with extraordinary religious experience of "divine intervention" over which he has no control. The affective-somatic modes of detection offer phenomenal evidence beyond existing representational or discursive aspects of an apprehension of God. The privileging of oral testimony affirms charismatic experience as a source of authorizing judgments of God's activity.

Simon's inclination toward phenomena of charismatic experience to address his faith-life dilemma draws attention to the underlying tension between discursive and sensory modalities. His doubts about the Bible discount the acquisition of divine knowledge through cognitive-linguistic representations alone. The appeal to Simon of a sensory-somatic mode of identifying an experience of God is in keeping with his search for dramatic religious experience. His affinity for this signficatory mode plus his subordination of Word to Spirit indicates the inherent tension between the Bible and charismatic experience in his readings. This tension, as situated within the frame of pragmatic aims and interpretive norms, reveals the existence of an individual reading stance. The tension between the Bible and spiritual experience in Simon's readings reflects the individual character of his reading stance. As he says, "I think you need both." His stance displays his adaptation of interpretive norms to address his pragmatic aims. Simon's stance highlights the locus of the formation of the spirituality of his Bible reading.

#### 7.4 Aims and Norms: Simon's reading stance and individual and social dimensions of Bible reading

Flory and Miller's (2007: 203) report of their study of 'post-boomers' highlights the importance of religious community to their "physical experience of the spiritual." They found evidence of an "*embodied spirituality*" in their study of about 100 interviewees from urban congregations of numerous major American cities (p. 203, italics on original). Post-boomers, offspring of Baby-Boomers, "want a faith that makes rational sense to them and that is also an expressive, embodied spiritual experience" (p. 216). They seek "spiritual fulfillment through a physical experience—whether visual, aural, or physical—primarily in the context of the religious community" (p. 204). The meaning of religious experience is related to the engagement of the practices of the religious community of which they are a part (p. 215). Flory and Miller's finding highlights the relation of individual pragmatic concerns with communal norms of religious experience. The embodied spirituality of Flory and Miller's subjects was linked primarily to their commitments to the religious

community rather than to their individual search for spiritual fulfillment (p. 215). This study highlights the individual and social dimensions of the locus of authority for the apprehension of God.

Simon's readings can be situated within the frame of the relation of individual and communal dimensions of Bible reading. The impact of communal context in Flory and Miller's study on post-boomer accounts of individual religious experience raises awareness of the contextual influences on Simon's reading stance towards the Bible. Studies in the anthropology of Christianity highlight cultural logics that underlie historically formed and socially embedded forms of mediatory frames and practices of religious experience (see 2.4; 5.2). These studies undermine the picture of the individual reader who scripts the meaning of his life experience from a private or solitary act of reading of the Bible. There is a "cloud of witnesses" that influences the encounter between reader and text (Marshall 1995: 78). Yet Simon's adaptation of restorationism to resolve his dilemma also reflects the individual character of his spiritual quest. His reading stance, composed of his personal religious concerns and his adaptation of restorationism, is reflected in his pragmatic reading aims. His appropriations reveal the impact of his reading stance. At issue are the individual and communal dimensions of the interpretive frames that cohere in a Christian narrative account of an experience of God. Simon's reading appropriations can be situated within the tension between communal narrative and individual story.

Christians are story makers and storytellers (see 1.4). The conceptualization and narration of life experience as having personal spiritual meaning is an emphasis found among a broad range of Christians, from liberal to fundamentalist (Jacobs 2003). The rendering of the events of their lives into stories is believed to be an obligation by some (Jacobs 2008: 12). The meaning of life experience is not self-evident but is generated by interpretive frames: "Experiences are constructed *by* us as much as they happen *to* us" (Brookfield 1998: 105, italics in original). The making and expressing of meaningful stories of life is ongoing. One's life stories should not be considered as fixed entities but rather understood as being subject to reinterpretation (Brookfield 1998: 105). Christian spirituality is concerned with the understanding of life experience from the viewpoint of faith. The responsibility to generate accounts of religious life can influence reader appropriation of the biblical text. The narrative trajectory of the Bible expresses providential purpose in the apparently random occurrences of its history's events. The Bible offers the prospect that individual life events can be woven into a meaningful and coherent life narrative. "Like Scripture itself, their [Pentecostal] autobiographies are testimonies, honed repetition, as well as assorted chronicles of selected events" (Martin 2006: 36). The public sharing of life stories is a feature of Evangelical and Charismatic congregations. Social discourse such as congregational testimony has a shaping influence on the understanding and composition of individual Christian life experience.



There is a focus in Christian spirituality on the individual's role that is emphasized to the exclusion of the formative influence of community on spirituality. Marshall (1995: 73) highlights the "Reformation principle that all individuals must work out salvation for themselves" as a robust historical feature of Protestantism that contributes to the autonomy of the individual in deciding spiritual matters today. This principle carries over into the responsibility of Christians to encounter the God's Word individually (1995: 74). Wolfeich (2009) believes practical theologians tend to overstress the individual aspect of spirituality and underestimate the impact of context on individual practices of spirituality. They "too often assume that spirituality focuses primarily in the individual's personal journey of faith" (p. 129). She criticizes such notions as "individualistic, privatized, and disembodied understandings" of spirituality (p. 129). Counter to such a tendency she emphasizes the importance of "attending to the interrelationships of culture, context, church and tradition" as a locus of understandings of practices of spirituality (p. 121).

There is also an emphasis in Christianity on the influential role of community that diminishes the importance of the personal faith journey of the individual. Jacobs (2008: 3) believes the emphasis on the paradigm of community in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century has "come to displace the language of personal conversion, transformation, and development" that was predominant in Protestant Christianity for most of the century. He argues that what is needed to counteract the "complete subsumption of all personal narrative" into the web of discourse of community life is the development of "better and more responsible and more coherent personal stories" (p. 8). Jacobs (2008: 39), who decries Evangelicalism's "pathology" of approved formulaic stories, nevertheless asserts individuals can use genres of Christian speech (ex., testimony) and congregational life (ex., Eucharist) in order to compose a spiritual autobiography.

Communal influence is evident in Simon's adaptation of restorationism, the impact of charismatic testimony on his conceptions of religious experience, and his affinity for affective-somatic modalities of detecting God's presence. A decisive change in life direction, a feature of the testimony genre (Jacobs 2008: 22), was a factor in his attraction to dramatic experience. In keeping with Wolfeich, Simon's sense of religious experience cannot be attributed to an idiosyncratic notion of spirituality. However, his equivocations and qualifications of religious meaning of his Ilkley and communion experiences of God highlight the existence of an individual take on these matters which cannot be solely attributed to communal context. It is his temperament to look at differing views on a matter and he does not easily accept any one position straightaway. In keeping with Jacobs, Simon's efforts to achieve a personal account of religious experience reflect connections with charismatic testimony of dramatic experience. Yet his attempts do not appear to be completely subsumed into a communal narrative. As noted earlier, Bialecki's (2009) study of a Vineyard church affirms the communal underwriting of an egalitarian sensibility in which individual experience of God's presence was linked

to Bible reading. Simon's readings highlight some of the opportunities and challenges inherent in the task of narrating personally meaningful interpretations of religious experience within a communal context. The intrapersonal and interpersonal are pertinent factors in shaping his stories. These factors are also influential features in the tension between operant and espoused theologies.

The extent to which Simon's appropriations are deemed to be an outcome of social interaction and the extent to which they reflect an individual's account of religious experience can be framed in terms of Archer's (2003, 2007) sociology. Archer (2004a) avoids reductive models that explain human actions in terms of an individual self or a communal self (see 2.3). She maintains both the social structures in which individuals find themselves and the personal concerns they care about most in life exert a strong shaping influence on the making of their way in life. It is by means of the exercise of mental processes of a reflexive self-talk that an individual can mediate social opportunities and constraints and personal concerns of their way of life. The character of Simon's appropriations of the Bible reflects the influence of restorationism and of his personal spiritual quest. Jacobs (2008: 39) affirms that Christians make use of speech genres to aid them in the formation of interpretations of life. He allows for the prospect that "there are meaningful connections between the shape of lives and the shape of some stories" (Jacobs 2008: 27). As a socialized Catholic, Simon's engagement with an Evangelical-Charismatic community of practice to address his faith-life dilemma provides a glimpse of the influence of his individual spiritual quest on his way of life. The individual character of Simon's reading stance was shaped in this communal context. The activity of Simon's reflexive inner dialogue can be observed in his equivocations and qualifications of religious meaning, a meaning-making process that appears to reflect his personal spiritual quest (see 6.3.2).

The individual character of Simon's reading stance complicates Pike's notion of "spiritual literacy." Pike (2003a: 49) claims the literary transaction between the reader and the biblical text can occasion "a spiritual transaction between the reader and divine author." The prospect of an occurrence of a spiritual transaction is related to the reader's "spiritual literacy," which he defines as a learned sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's guidance in reading which develops within a Christian interpretive community (p. 49). Sweeney's framework of institutional formal theology and ordinary theology of lived experience reflects the conditions within which tensions can exist between an individual's experience of operant theology and the community's espoused theology. Simon's adaptation of restorationism as an interpretive frame indicates something of the ordinary and espoused theologies at work within the interpretive community. This suggests that the formation of his spiritual literacy within the interpretive community is a complex undertaking and one not easily achieved. Is the reader's learned sensitivity a feature of operant or espoused theologies? The individual character of Simon's reading stance suggests the relation between the reader's pragmatic reading aims and the church's interpretive norms might offer a frame for understanding the tensions within which spiritual

literacy is formed. Arguably, Pike's goal of shaping the reader's awareness of the Spirit's presence in spiritual transactions is a significant feature of the spirituality of Bible reading. The viability of the 'spiritual literacy' also may be enhanced by Archer's concept of inner reflexive conversation which affirms individual and social agencies.

In conclusion, Simon's reading stance was examined within the frame of the relation of pragmatic reading aims and theological norms of interpretation. The variation between his personal aims and the church's norms was revealed in the tension between the Bible and charismatic experience. This tension was reflected in Simon's subordination of Word to Spirit and his affinity for embodiment rather than representation as a mode of detection of divine presence. His adaptation of restorationism to address his pragmatic concerns was situated within Sweeney's (2009) heuristic framework of institutional and ordinary theologies. Simon's reading stance is more attuned to the operant theology of the church's faith practices than to the espoused theology of the church's Word and Spirit teaching. The institutional theology of restorationism contributed to his theological conceptions of spiritual experience. It is within the tension between the lived experience of ordinary readers and the church's formal doctrine and faith practices that Simon's understandings of the apprehension of God takes place. The individual and social dimensions of Simon's reading stance complicate Pike's notion of "spiritual literacy." Simon's case study suggests that the shaping of the reader's awareness of the Spirit's guidance within an interpretive community is a complex task. The individual nature of his stance indicates his spiritual literacy can be located in his adaptation of church norms to address his pragmatic reading aims. This implies something of the difficulty of shaping the process of the formation of spiritually literate biblical transactions within an interpretive community. This discussion of the individual character of Simon's reading stance emphasizes the importance of the dynamic of pragmatic aims and interpretive norms to an understanding of the locus of the formation of the spirituality of Bible reading. The frame of aims and norms is rooted within a set of theoretical and theological considerations. Some theological and pedagogical implications of Simon's spiritually engaged biblical transactions will be addressed in the next chapter (see 8.0).

## 8.0 Towards a holistic model of Bible Reading

*Chapter Abstract: The focus of this chapter is a discussion of the theoretical and pedagogical aspects of the development of a new model of the spirituality of Bible reading. The discussion reflects the concern in this thesis with the development of a holistic model of Bible reading. Pike (2003a) asserts the need of a “new synthesis” in biblical interpretation which embraces the pragmatic readings of ordinary readers. Postfoundationalism offers a frame of the relation of epistemology and hermeneutics as a way of thinking about a holistic model. The conceptualization of the spirituality of Bible reading reflects the privileging of an interpretive configuration of the reader, text and context that is based upon some epistemological assumption. The viability of Rosenblatt’s reading stance continuum is considered for theorizing the relation of reading stance and the spirituality of Bible reading. The reading stance that is implicit in Evangelical hermeneutics is presented as problematic. The epistemological assumption of “hermeneutical realism” (Vanhooser 1998) is discussed. The implications of this interpretive model prove it to be an obstacle to the growth of active and responsible readers as advocated by Pike’s (2000a, 2003a) pedagogy of “responsive teaching.” A holistic model of the spirituality of Bible reading affirms the importance of the role of teachers to the growth of spiritually engaged readers.*

### 8.1 The need for a new synthesis of biblical interpretation

Pike (2003a: 39) asserts the need for a “new synthesis” in biblical interpretation which acknowledges both what the text *meant* to its original readers and what it *means* to its contemporary readers. The need is based upon the dominance of the historical paradigm in biblical studies which conceives of the aim of biblical interpretation as a recovery of the text’s original meaning. There are two implications of his call for a fusion of past and present interpretations that are worth elaboration. One, the different kinds of interpretations represented in Pike’s synthesis indicates a distinction between what can be called ‘ordinary’ and ‘critical’ *readers* of the Bible. Pike’s model incorporates the believing reader’s responses to the text as well as the scholar’s reconstruction of its historical setting. Patte’s (1996) recognition of “ordinary” and “critical” readers of the Bible is useful here. He characterizes an “ordinary reader” as someone who has not taken the time to be self-conscious about the process of reading which he or she performs” (p. 268). An ordinary reader’s interpretive confidence is born of an ability to read and the experience of making sense of texts. He or she is solely concerned with rendering the text meaningful during reading. A “critical reader” possesses a self-consciousness about the interpretive categories and value judgments used during reading that render the text meaningful and significant (p. 268). It is this critical understanding that makes it possible to recognize the “*how and why*” of the reader’s reading of a text; how it was interpreted and why it is important (p. 268, italics in original). It is often the case for critical readers that a critical reading presupposes an ordinary reading (p. 266). Patte draws attention to the inherent tension between these two types of readers:

According to the traditional conception, propagated by male European-American scholars, critical readers tend to present themselves as possessors of a knowledge (about the Bible and how to interpret it) which they impart to ordinary readers who lack such a knowledge and are

therefore bound to have improper readings of the Bible as long as they are not properly instructed. In such common practices, critical readers convey the right way of reading to ordinary readers who presumably have wrong ways of reading that they should abandon. (p. 364).

One implication of Pike's model of the fusion of past and present interpretations is its affirmation of the legitimacy of the ordinary reader of the Bible. Lategan (1996: 254) condemns "the structural imbalance between scholar and reader" and seeks to "strengthen the position of the reader" in an effort to "ensure that the reader is operating on an equal basis." Pike's model appears to be an effort to ensure the ordinary reader is operating on an equal basis with the critical scholar.

Two, the difference between readers represented in Pike's synthesis indicates a distinction between what can be called 'pragmatic' and 'historical-critical' *readings* of the Bible. Patte (1998) identifies various interpretive frames and reading aims that characterize meaningful Bible reading. He identifies "text-centered," "fusion-centered," and "life-centered" approaches to Bible reading (p. 15). They represent different reading goals: a text-centered reading seeks information and knowledge; a fusion-centered reading seeks the transformation of the reader's understanding of text and life; and a life-centered reading seeks a new way of seeing a life situation. In each case the text is rendered meaningful by the existence of a particular reading aim and an analytic frame that is employed consciously or unconsciously. The legitimacy of the reading is contingent on it being based upon textual features, aspects of the text to which the reader's attention is drawn by means of the interpretive frame employed (p. 11). 'Life-centered' readings reflect the "pragmatic dimension" of biblical interpretation and 'text-centered' readings reveal the "historical paradigm" of critical biblical scholarship (p. 16). 'Fusion-centered' readings reveal aspects of the other two kinds of readings. The reader-text relationship is conceptualized differently in these kinds of readings. In pragmatic readings of the Bible, believers expect and "allow *the biblical text to 'read' their life-experiences*" (p. 16, italics in original). In historical-critical readings, scholars first derive the text's meaning and then transfer it for present-day appropriation. Patte (p. 16) states pragmatic readings are "usually excluded from critical biblical studies, because such faith-interpretations inappropriately 'read into the text' (eisegesis) and thus are *a priori* illegitimate and implausible." Such a model subordinates the believer's pragmatic Bible reading aims to the exegesis of the text as "faith-interpretations and analyses/exegeses are not part of the same reading process" (17). He also claims critical readers fail to recognize the contribution pragmatic readings can make to their knowledge of the text as the textual features which are of importance to these readings might be overlooked in their analytical readings (p. 16). The second implication of Pike's model of the fusion of past and present interpretations is its affirmation of the reading aims of ordinary readers of the Bible. The pragmatic dimension of a religious or spiritual interpretation of the Bible is legitimate. The model suggests a

reconceptualization in which pragmatic and critical dimensions of Bible reading can exist in the same reading process.

Pike's new synthesis of biblical interpretation raises the issue of the relation of knowledge and interpretation. This matter has been an important consideration in Christian theology, especially since the rise of postmodernism. Shults (1999: 29) highlights significant theological concerns about the relation of epistemology and hermeneutics when he asks, "How do we justify theological claims to knowledge and theological interpretation of experience?" Van Huyssteen (1997) identifies three philosophical responses to this question as foundationalism, nonfoundationalism, and postfoundationalism. He defines foundationalism as "the thesis that all our beliefs can be justified by appealing to some item of knowledge that is self-evident or indubitable" (p. 2). Nonfoundationalism rejects the notion of the existence of a manifest ground for rationality and knowledge and emphasizes "the crucial epistemic importance of community, arguing that every community and context has its own rationality" (p. 3). Postfoundationalism acknowledges the contextual character of knowledge and the role tradition plays in shaping rationality yet it claims a notion of rationality that reaches beyond the boundaries of contextuality towards the discovery of persuasive criteria of knowledge in the shared resources of interdisciplinary discourse (p. 4). It allows for "the creative fusion of hermeneutics and epistemology" (p. 4). Postfoundationalism enables the acknowledgement of Christian commitment to beliefs about God and his activity in the world and recognizes the role of interpreted experience in the way we relate to our world and faith (p. 4). A postfoundationalist Christian theology consents to the critical interrogation of epistemological assumptions that underwrite belief as well as to the critical inquiry into religiously interpreted experience. Postfoundationalism steers a course "between the Scylla of foundationalist dogmatism and the Charybdis of nonfoundationalist relativism" (Shults 1999: 26).

The focus of a postfoundationalist inquiry into the fusion of pragmatic and historical-critical aspects of Bible reading encompasses the epistemological as well as hermeneutic dimensions of the relation. The predominant character of Pike's model is hermeneutic. That his model seeks to incorporate past and present, pragmatic and critical readings of the Bible reflects this. His concern is that the Bible's meaning for readers today should receive the same attention that biblical studies grant its original meaning. The reading event however reflects more than the hermeneutic activity of ordinary and critical readers. It is also an occasion for "epistemological formation" (Bielo 2009a: 12). For example, the relation between belief and experience impacts what the contemporary reader understands the text to mean to him or her. The reader's beliefs play a significant role in interpreting life experience. It is the explanatory power of these beliefs that can inform the meaning of the reader's literary experience. In turn, life experiences can also inform the reader's belief system. Literary experience can serve to justify or alter the reader's beliefs. Postfoundationalism affirms the "reciprocal relation between belief

and experience” (Shults 1999: 46). There is a mutual relation between beliefs that inform one’s interpretation of experience and interpreted experience that informs one’s belief system.

Epistemological and hermeneutic categories are necessary to the construction of a new synthesis of biblical interpretation.

The consideration of epistemological and hermeneutic dimensions of a new synthesis of biblical interpretation has implications for instruction in Bible reading. Candler (2006: 15) argues an important component of Christian pedagogy is “the training of Christians to ‘read well.’” There are differences in theological conceptions of knowledge that underwrite understandings of this pedagogical task. He maintains there is a difference between a “grammar of representation” which affirms the text’s autonomy in the reader’s synthesis of discursive information about God and a “grammar of participation” which privileges the reader’s interpretive community in the synthesis of textual inscriptions (pp. 34-35). The ‘representation’ and ‘participation’ approaches to reading emphasize respectively the reader’s “immediate apprehension” versus his or her eventual apprehension of divine knowledge (pp. 34-35). He argues in Protestant theology the ability to read well is “effectively learned in private” whereas in Catholic theology “this ability can only be learned by participation in an ecclesial readership” (p. 15). He claims the task of Christian pedagogy is to guide believers into a participation of the life of God and not merely to obtain information about him (p. 34). Candler’s designations oversimplify the nature of the irreducible interaction of individual and communal dimensions in learning to ‘read well.’ Nevertheless his point about Christian pedagogy highlights the differences of epistemological underwriting of biblical interpretation in Protestantism and Catholicism. The conceptualization of the pedagogical task of ‘reading well’ reflects the privileging of some configuration of the reader, text and context that is based upon some epistemological assumption.

## 8.2 Modeling reading stance and spirituality of Bible reading

Simon’s case study raises the issue of the religious value of personally relevant Bible reading experiences. His reading stance in his readings was a significant factor in his appropriations of religious meaning (see 6.0). This thesis highlights the intrapersonal and pragmatic aims (see 4.0) and interpersonal and ideological interpretive structures (see 5.0) of participant readers’ orientations to the Bible. What is it about a reading stance that impacts the reader’s religious appropriation of Bible reading? The focus of this section is a discussion of the theoretical relation of reading stance to appropriation of religious meaning in life experience. In order to address this matter we must evaluate the utility of Rosenblatt’s reading stance continuum for understanding *religious* readings of the Bible. The following is a discussion of the relation to Bible reading of Rosenblatt’s efferent and aesthetic

categories of her reading stance continuum. This objective is to determine the viability of Rosenblatt's concept for theorizing about reading stance and the spirituality of Bible reading.

### 8.2.1 Rosenblatt's reading stance continuum and spirituality of reading

It is helpful to revisit Rosenblatt's (1994) reading stance continuum (see 2.52.3). The reader's focus of attention during the temporal process of reading shifts fluidly along a continuum of reading stances. The two distinct poles of the continuum are the "efferent" and "aesthetic" stances (p. 37). An efferent stance is characterized by a focus upon useful information that reader carries away from the reading (p. 24). An aesthetic stance reflects the reader's concern with the literary experience of the "web of feelings, sensations, images, ideas, that he weaves between himself and the text" (p. 137). The character of these reading stances can be seen in the simple difference between reading to take an exam and reading with a view to examine one's responses.

There is a significant question about the theoretical contribution of Rosenblatt's continuum to our understanding of the relation of reading stance and the spirituality of Bible reading. Its viability is contingent upon it being conducive to the religious value of Bible reading. Pike (2003a) and Smith (2004) recognize the potential benefit of Rosenblatt's transactional theory to Bible reading. However, they see differently the value of the use of Rosenblatt's continuum to account for the relation of the reader's reading stance and the religious meaning of Bible reading.

Pike believes the potential for the reader's spiritual formation lies mainly in his or her adoption of an aesthetic reading stance towards the biblical text. His three-year longitudinal study of six readers focused on the cognitive, aesthetic, and motivational aspects of their respective personal reading styles (Pike 2000b). He maintains "that reading occurring at the aesthetic end of Rosenblatt's continuum often provides reader's with distinctly spiritual experiences as readers consider issues of fundamental importance in their lives" (Pike 2003a: 43). He highlights the spiritual importance of personal responses to the stimulus of the biblical text: "Reading a biblical text as a 'stimulus' connects the text with readers' experiences so that it becomes relevant to all and spiritually significant for some" (Pike 2005: 199). The personal relevance of the biblical text is linked to the individual reader's freedom to respond aesthetically to it (Pike 2003a: 45). Aesthetic reading "may facilitate a fuller and truer apprehension [of literature] than is possible in most other ways" (Pike 2004a: 160). It is the reader's personally relevant aesthetic experiences which can prompt the readers' spiritual experiences and journey (Pike 2002a: 10; 2003a: 43). It is the individual reader's personal interpretation that can facilitate spiritual and moral formation (Pike 2003b:161).



Smith (2004) challenges the adequacy of Rosenblatt's continuum to account for the religious meaning of the reader's experience. His study, based on student responses to a classroom reading of a poem and his analysis of one of Kierkegaard's meditations, led him to some insights on the relation to Christian spirituality of Rosenblatt's reading stances. He affirms the spiritual potential of either an efferent or an aesthetic stance in reading, yet he cautions that the prospect of the reader's spiritually formative reading "should not be identified too closely with the aesthetic stance on the grounds of its experiential focus" (p. 151). Smith also notes that whilst Rosenblatt's continuum addresses experiential aspects of reader engagement with texts it falls short of addressing the complex of relationships within which Christian spirituality transpires during reading. He maintains the theoretical connection between the reader's literary experience and spirituality requires attention to "the role of belief frameworks and the ways in which belief and experience are integrated with behavior" (p. 152). Whilst the reader's initial aesthetic experiences with the text offer the prospect of spiritual experience it is the character of the relation between the reader's beliefs and behavior that contributes to actual spiritual formation. The possibility of spiritual formation is best conceived of in terms of the reader's life change as an outcome of the belief-behavior relation in Bible reading than in terms of the reader's personally meaningful aesthetic experience as a product of the reader-text relation.

#### 8.2.2 Reading Rosenblatt's reading of the relation of reading stance and religious meaning

What is the contribution of Rosenblatt's continuum to a theoretical understanding of the spirituality of Bible reading? This inquiry raises the importance of Rosenblatt's understanding of the relation of reading stance and religious meaning. In her brief discussion of reading stance and religious reading, Rosenblatt (1994) maintains the Bible can be read efferently and aesthetically. However, the religious value of an aesthetic reading of the Bible appears to be uncertain. An understanding of her view can only be ascertained via a thorough reading of her comments in their context. She writes:

The same text may even be recreated variously as an efferent utterance or a poetic experience. For instance, some works, viewed originally as religious or hortatory—hence mainly read efferently—may, under different conditions or by people with different urgencies, may be experienced as works of art. The Book of Isaiah and the Song of Songs have been transformed in this way by many contemporary readers. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address seems to be undergoing such a shift in response. The change, of course, occurs in the attitude of the reader, in what dimension of his response to the text becomes central to him. The religious or political implications may persist, but of primary importance will be the awareness of the qualities of thought and feeling generated by the words during the reading of the text; the aesthetic reading of Lincoln's Address would find its place in our continuum somewhere near the reading of, say, Mark Antony's speech in Julius Caesar. Thus, too, some historians—from Herodotus to Parkman—though superseded by later research, continue to be read perhaps more for their immediate experiential values than for the information they present. (p. 36)

At issue is the meaning of her statement about the Bible being “mainly read efferently.” Smith (2004: 147) maintains Rosenblatt categorizes the religious reading of biblical texts as an efferent activity due to the simple reason that the focus of the reader’s attention is primarily “on what is to be done in response to their ‘hortatory’ emphasis.” If so, then Rosenblatt’s efferent designation seems to be the default outcome of her choice between stances, a choice predicated upon the contrast between the reader’s religious intent of following the text’s instruction after reading with the reader’s aesthetic aim of experiencing the text during reading. However, the religious reading of the Bible encompasses more than the gathering of a message or information for use in life. For the “layperson” Bible reading can occasion a variety of responses from “being comforted, inspired, confused, frustrated, angered, and so forth” (Powell 2001: 56). It is also an occasion for the reader’s communion with God as well as the communication of a divine message for living life (Vanhoozer 2000). As such the theoretical value of Rosenblatt’s continuum to an understanding of the spirituality of Bible reading appears to be one dimensional as it is limited to the information the reader transmits to life.

Pike (2003a: 43) challenges the limits of Rosenblatt’s aesthetic reading and claims that it offers value to the reader beyond the reading experience: “I would contend, contrary to Rosenblatt, that the reader may actually take away more from the reading event when operating at the ‘aesthetic’ end of her continuum.” Arguing that the reader retains the benefits of an aesthetic encounter after reading, he critiques Rosenblatt’s continuum as “nothing more than an intellectual cover device to protect her binary division from criticism. Arguably, all the benefits of ‘efferent’ reading where information is retained after the event, are derived from aesthetic reading” (Pike 2003c: 65). If so, one potential efferent benefit of an aesthetic reading stance is the prospect of the reader’s spiritual formation from the experience. As such the theoretical value of Rosenblatt’s continuum to an understanding of the spirituality of Bible is that it appears to offer a framework by which to conceive of the relation between the reader’s aesthetic and spiritual experiences.

These differences in interpretation between Smith and Pike are evidence of the contested theoretical value of Rosenblatt’s continuum to an understanding of the relation of reading stance to religious readings of the Bible. This discrepancy highlights the need to reread Rosenblatt to understand what, if any, is the contribution of her continuum to a theoretical understanding of the spirituality of Bible reading. A more tenable position can be attained from a thorough rendering of Rosenblatt’s written comments.

First, the larger context of her remarks indicates her advocacy of the efferent-aesthetic continuum of reading stances as offering a basis for the “systematic understanding” of the literary value of texts. She claims her reading stance continuum has the potential for classifying as aesthetic and non-aesthetic various genres of literature, such as the essay, history and religious writings like the Bible, as

well as poetry and plays. She is concerned to show that it is the reader's selective activity rather than a recognized literary property or pattern that qualifies a text as a work of art. "The differences reside in the range of elements permitted into the center of attention—in the manner, say, of the enlarging or narrowing of the shutters of a window" (p. 36). Rosenblatt's identification of the Bible with efferent reading merely serves as an illustration of a kind of literature that can be read non-aesthetically and aesthetically. She also uses Lincoln's Gettysburg speech as an example of efferent reading which also can be read aesthetically. The point of her discussion about Bible reading is that it is the reader rather than the text that determines the kind of literature it is. She maintains religious "implications may persist" in an aesthetic reading of the Bible, a qualification that implies the reader's religious reading of the Bible is related to his or her shift in reading stance.

Second, Rosenblatt highlights the literary and religious value of the Bible is a matter of social-cultural reception. She mentions the difference between original and contemporary receptions of Isaiah, the Song of Songs, and Lincoln's Gettysburg speech. The change in reader responses to these texts is related to the existence of "different conditions" which warrant the adoption of an aesthetic reading stance towards them. Even though she emphasizes the role of the reader's attitude—"different urgencies"—in the shift of reading stance her description supports the understanding of a change in the larger cultural reception of the Bible beyond that of the individual reader. Lincoln's speech, like the Bible, "seems to be undergoing such a shift in response." The present day reception of the Bible by readers has transformed it from how it was viewed and read originally. She hints that the underlying reason for the modern-day change in reading stances towards the Bible is the assumed swing in Western epistemic attitudes towards the cultural status of the Bible. She mentions historians "from Herodotus to Parkman" can be read aesthetically even though their writings are "superseded by later research." Rosenblatt implies the reason why the Bible is read more as a text that offers the prospect of "poetic experience" than as a source of "efferent utterance" is that it, like these historical works, has been supplanted by modern research. The Bible was once viewed as a book of divine origin whereas now it is seen arguably as an influential book in Western literature. As a consequence of this change in epistemic attitude among modern readers the literary character of the Bible is more akin perhaps to a work of historical fiction than divine revelation. Such a sea change in attitude qualifies the Bible for aesthetic attention in the same vein that there is experiential value in reading Lincoln's speech as one would read Mark Anthony's speech in *Julius Caesar*.

Third, there is also a pragmatic dimension to the individual reader's aesthetic reception of the Bible. Rosenblatt highlights the role of the reader's "urgencies" in the shift in reading stances. The reader's reading purpose or aim can dictate a change in "attitude" toward the text which determines what it is in the text that becomes vital. The reader's selection of an aesthetic reading stance accentuates the "experiential values" of the text, the "awareness of the qualities of thought and feeling generated by

the words during the reading of the text.” Accordingly any text can have religious implications but such implications are not the primary purpose of the reading. The religious connotations of reading are incidental to the aesthetic reading stance. As noted, the reader’s choice of stance determines the literary character of the texts read and the reading stance continuum overcomes the dichotomy of literary and nonliterary texts. It is the reader who controls the window shutters and the amount of sunlight that enters the reading. It is against the backdrop of the epistemic shift in Western culture that the religious value of the Bible is contingent upon the reader’s pragmatic reading aims.

Ross (1974) presents certain reading concepts that offer a frame on Rosenblatt’s view of reading stance and religious reading of the Bible. He presents two focal points in reading that are useful to my interpretation of Rosenblatt’s remarks. Ross (1974: 100) makes a significant distinction between the reader’s “opaque perception” and “transparent perception” of the text in reading. In a meaningful reading of the text’s visual array of inscriptions the reader perceives some referential sense through an apprehension of the meaning of the linguistic symbols presented. The reader’s production of meaning is related to focal points in reading of the perception of linguistic sense or the perception of a referential state of affairs through the apprehension of linguistic sense, or a combination thereof (p. 101). In an ‘opaque perception’ the reader’s focal point is the apprehension of some sense of meaning of the text’s language. In a ‘transparent perception’ the reader perceives some referential event or state of affairs beyond an apprehended linguistic meaning.

Ross (1974: 100) maintains the reader’s formation or suspension of an “epistemic attitude toward the state of affairs” as linguistically presented is basic to meaning production in reading. In a transparent reading the reader perceives something of the “actuality of the state of affairs symbolized” and in an opaque reading the reader perceives some sense of linguistic meaning “without formation of an epistemic attitude toward its actuality but with formation of affective states toward its actuality” (p. 100). The reader’s epistemic attitude in transparent perception is most likely accompanied by an “emotive attitude” toward the text’s state of affairs (p. 98). To illustrate the difference Ross uses the statement “‘Lincoln was shot on Good Friday, 1864.’” (p. 98). In the reader’s opaque reading of the sentence he or she understands what it means without an evaluation of the actuality of what it claims. In the transparent reading the reader assumes some epistemic attitude toward the actuality of what the sentence claims.

Ross (1974: 99) argues these different kinds of perceptions are fundamentally different ways of reading: transparent perception is “critical” reading for information and opaque perception is “aesthetic” reading for appreciation. The reader’s epistemic relation to a statement inheres in the sense of what it means to read: “in one sense, a person reads a certain document only if he comes to form some belief about some thing or state of affairs symbolized; and in the other sense, the person may

read even if he does *not* form such epistemic attitudes” (p. 101, italics in original). We can use the Lincoln sentence to illustrate how the reader’s epistemic relation to the sentence is reflected in his or her critical or aesthetic reading of it. The reader’s critical reading of the Lincoln sentence occasions the formation of epistemic attitudes of belief or disbelief to provide a basis of judgment of its truth. The reader’s aesthetic reading can occasion an understanding of the linguistic meaning of the sentence and even an appreciation of some of the intellectual and emotional aspects of its symbolization. For example, the reader may find it ironic that it was on Good Friday that he was shot, a view that requires some epistemic relation to the sentence. Yet, the reader can appreciate aspects of the sentence without having to form an epistemic attitude to judge its claim to truth. The reader’s formation or adjournment of an epistemic attitude toward the actuality of the event is apparent in critical and aesthetic reading. “There is an enormous difference between perceiving the linguistic meaning of the inscriptions presented in the visual array and perceiving some state of affairs through apprehension of linguistic meaning of the inscriptions which form the visual stimulus” (p. 100).

Rosenblatt’s efferent and aesthetic stances have much in common with Ross’s transparent and opaque readings. It is helpful to render Rosenblatt’s comments on the relation of reading stance and religious reading of the Bible in terms of the reading concepts Ross presents. Rosenblatt links aesthetic reading of the Bible to the reader’s change of “attitude.” The reader’s focus on “qualities of thought and feeling” indicate a shift from an efferent to an aesthetic reading stance, from a focus on “hortatory” to one on “poetic experience.” According to Ross the focal point in an aesthetic reading is the reader’s opaque perception of the sense of the text’s language “without formation of an epistemic attitude toward its actuality but with formation of affective states toward its actuality.” What this means to our understanding of the significance of the shift of stance is that the reader’s change in attitude is a switch in the readers epistemic orientation towards the actuality of the text’s linguistic references. Accordingly, the epistemic implication of the reader’s attitudinal change is that he or she can appreciate the intellectual and emotional aspects of a Bible reading experience without having to supplement the experience with attitudes of belief or disbelief as a basis of judgment of its truth. The reader’s obtaining of matters of truth or fact is not characteristic of aesthetic reading.

In the light of this reading of Rosenblatt we can now assess the contribution of her continuum to a theoretical understanding of the spirituality of Bible reading. A benefit of Rosenblatt’s continuum is its provision of ways to conceptualize available textual orientations from which readers can choose to adopt when reading to access the meaning potential of the text. However, I believe there is a significant reservation about the adequacy of her continuum to conceptualize the ways in which readers make religious readings of the Bible. The spirituality of Bible reading encompasses more than her conceptions of reading options permit. For example, she notes Isaiah and the Song of Songs may be “experienced as works of art” by the reader but the religious value of such an experience is

dubious. The shift in stance from an efferent to an aesthetic reading is a consequential swing in the reader's epistemic orientation towards the biblical text. What makes Bible reading religious is the character of the reader's epistemic attitude and life response. What the reader can carry away after the reading—for example, encouragement or exhortation to live in a certain way—is premised upon a certain epistemic attitude towards what is meant in the text. It is problematic to traditional notions of Christian spirituality for spiritual reading to be conceived as a personally relevant interpretation of the biblical text that is divorced from the reader's actualization and appropriation of its truth potential.

My reading of Rosenblatt differs from the views of Pike. If, as Pike states in opposition to Rosenblatt, “the reader may actually take more away from the reading event when operating at the ‘aesthetic end’” of her continuum then the Christian concern would be the epistemic character of the experiential focus of that engagement. In support of his view Pike maintains Rosenblatt's continuum is “an intellectual cover device” and that aesthetic reading carries an efferent dimension. His appraisal of Rosenblatt's continuum as a clever sleight of hand is based upon a notion of what truly underlies the relation of her senses of reading: the cognitive-affective aspects of an aesthetic reading furnish the benefits of an efferent reading. His point appears to be that it is the reader's personally meaningful intellectual and emotional engagement of the text that makes possible the informational outcomes associated with efferent reading. Yet the actual character of the relation of these two reading stances is disputed. Ross (1974: 100) asserts that even though a convincing explanation of the relationship is yet to be located it is better to surmise that opaque (aesthetic) reading “would not even be possible if the ‘transparent’ reading were not already within our competence.” He uses the example of one's epistemic relation to ‘make believe’ stories: “Our ability to do opaque reading is consequent upon our having learned, in the use of oral language for story telling and adventure spinning, to suspend epistemic commitment toward actuality and ‘to make believe’” (p. 100). An aesthetic reading of a text is feasible because of the reader's ability to read efferently. This reading suggests experiences associated with aesthetic reading of the biblical text may offer the prospect of spiritual experience but it is the reader's life judgments based upon an epistemic orientation towards the literary experience that determines the state of their actual contribution to his or her spiritual formation. According to Ross' analysis it appears that the religious value of the spirituality of Bible reading cannot be readily equated with the experiential values of aesthetic reading. As Smith observes Rosenblatt's continuum fails to attend to a significant issue in Christian spirituality which is “the role of belief frameworks and the ways in which belief and experience are integrated with behavior.”

### 8.2.3 Rosenblatt's reading stance and spirituality of Bible reading

Pike's envisioned model of biblical interpretation is in need of reformation in the light of the inadequacy of Rosenblatt's reading stance continuum for religious or spiritual Bible reading. A

holistic model of biblical interpretation demands attention to the reader's epistemic orientation towards the text. This is especially the case given the theological nature of Christian belief (see 7.0). Still the general concept of reading stance in Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading is viable. Her notion of reading stance provides a way of conceptualizing the reader's orientation to the text to actualize its meaning potential. It offers a way of thinking about the role the reader's stance plays in the meaning-making process. Reading stance is the reader's differentiated attention to elements in the transaction that are in keeping with the reading purpose (Rosenblatt 2005: 10). Stance reflects the reader's orientation to public and private aspects of meaning; it guides the selection of linguistic and experiential meanings that arise in the reader's consciousness in his or her relationship to the text (Rosenblatt 2005: 12). Simon's case study indicates the spiritual life of his readings of the Bible is impacted by his reading stance (see 6.0). His orientation towards the text had a shaping influence on the appropriations of his readings as deemed apprehensions of God. His aim in reading is reflected in his readings. It is Rosenblatt's general concept of reading stance that is a viable conceptual device for use in theorizing about the role reading stance plays in spiritual readings of the Bible.

### 8.3 Towards a holistic model of reading stance and spirituality of Bible reading

#### 8.3.1 Reading stance in Evangelical biblical interpretation

There is a particular reading stance implicit in the epistemology of Evangelical biblical interpretation. This implied reading stance raises some pertinent theoretical and pedagogical concerns that must be recognized. The important issue of the spiritual meaning of the reader's reading is overshadowed by a concern with the single, correct meaning of the biblical text. The epistemological underwriting of a literal meaning of the Bible demands clarification. The role reading stance plays in Evangelical biblical interpretation can be situated within the frame of the relation of epistemology to hermeneutics. This frame has its basis in postfoundationalism.

My view is that a critique of the reading stance implied in this epistemology is important to the development of a holistic model of spiritually engaged Bible reading. I want to acknowledge the importance of the role of critical exegesis of the Bible for the Christian faith. Powell (2001: 56) rightly notes the necessity of the principles of the exegetical practices employed by critical biblical scholars to the preservation of orthodox Christian theology. Yet he asserts, "But Christianity is more than dogma, and preaching is more than the exposition of doctrine" (p. 56). And reading the Bible is more than an occasion for an interpretation of its literal meaning. The epistemology of the Evangelical hermeneutic has an impact on the spiritual life of the Bible.

It is also important to note that Charismatic biblical interpretation is compatible with the epistemological underwriting of Evangelical hermeneutics. Traditionally the Bible is viewed by Pentecostal and Charismatic adherents as the eminent authority in religious matters and is read literally (Robbins 2004: 120). The Charismatic movement has been characterized by its critics as practicing a “naïve biblical literalism” (Sheldrake 2007: 203). Village (2005) found in his study of biblical literalism among Anglican laity in Britain that belief in literalism ranked higher among Evangelicals and was also ranked higher among adherents of Charismatic theology. He found belief in charismatic experience was a factor. “Charismatic belief upholds the direct intervention of God in the world through the agency of the Holy Spirit, so it may predispose believers to interpret literally stories that are otherwise hard to explain” (p. 36). Mosaic Church believes the Bible is God’s Word and its leaders practice the literal interpretation (original customary sense) of the Bible in their preaching and teaching (see 5.2.2). Restorationism is an example of church teaching that reflects a literal reading of the Bible (see 5.2.3). It assumes a correspondence between biblical and present-day charismatic experiences of the Holy Spirit. The logic of direct correspondence between the Spirit’s activity in contemporary settings and New Testament reports of *charismata* is in keeping with an Evangelical approach to biblical interpretation. The history of Evangelicalism reveals Christian adherence to the proper approach to biblical interpretation is believed to bridge the historical gap between reader and text: readers can “leap over almost two thousand years of history and land safely back in the presence of the prophets and apostles themselves” (Lundin *et al.*, 1999: 35).

The following sections include my critique of the epistemological underpinnings of an Evangelical hermeneutic (8.3.2) and the implications for religious readings of the Bible of the implied reading stance of this epistemology (8.3.3). The Evangelical concern for having a correct reading also tends to overlook the pedagogical importance of producing active and responsible readers of the Bible. Suggested approaches to learning activities conducive to growing active and responsible readers also will be presented (8.4).

### 8.3.2 The problem with the epistemology of Evangelical hermeneutics

Vanhoozer (1998) presents an Evangelical understanding of biblical interpretation. Evangelical theology privileges the text as the locus of the authorization of meaning. The Word of God is in the biblical text (p. 423). There is a “final unified truth” that exists in the text that Christian readers should recognize and seek to attain (p. 419). The interpretation of the biblical text’s “single correct” meaning as brought to life by the Holy Spirit is consistent with the text’s final, unified and determinate truth (p. 420). “The biblical text can have diverse, even inexhaustible significance, and yet have determinate meaning” (p. 416). The Spirit “discloses the significance of the (past) Word of God as it relates to all times” (p. 421). A variety of readings of the text may be required to achieve its



proper meaning and “the single correct meaning may be richer than any one interpretation of it” (p. 420). No one reader has God’s eye view of the text’s final single correct meaning. The historical-critical method of interpretation helps the reader to understand more about the text in order to understand the meaning of the text (p. 286).

Vanhoozer’s (1998) presentation of Evangelical hermeneutics is based upon a certain epistemological commitment. This view of biblical interpretation rests upon the epistemology of “*hermeneutical realism*,” the belief that text’s meaning exists independently of the reader and prior to the reader’s interpretation of it (p. 48, italics in original). Proper biblical interpretation requires an ethically responsible reader who seeks to retrieve the text’s sole determinative meaning. This epistemological underwriting of the text’s final determinate meaning differentiates the literal or original customary meaning of the text and the text’s religious or spiritual meaning for the reader. The emphasis on the literal sense of the text avoids the difficulty with “spiritual interpretation [which] enables the text to mean something other than it says” (Vanhoozer 1998: 415). There is a robust concern that what the text meant originally is in danger of being “subordinated” to the interpreter’s interests of what it means today (p. 412). The text’s determinate meaning prevents arbitrary and conflicting interpretations of a biblical text (pp. 415, 417).

The distinction in hermeneutical realism between literal and spiritual interpretations of the text effectively creates a two-tier hierarchy in the reader’s meaning-making activity. Lundin (Lundin *et al.*, 1999: 36, italics in original) explains each step: “In the first stage, careful historical and textual analysis is meant to yield the fixed *meaning* of the text. With that meaning secured, the interpreter is then free to articulate the *significance* of the text for the present day.” The reader first mines the proper information from the text through analysis and then and only then does he or she apply its spiritual significance to life. The reader must discover what it meant in order to understand what it means today. Religious meaning follows upon the retrieval of the text’s determinant meaning.

The focus of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation is similar to the ‘close reading’ approach of New Criticism. Text-centered practitioners share with New Criticism the common focus on an “efferent analysis” of textual features (Rosenblatt 1995: 294-295). The New Critics of mid-20th Century America focused on the text as the only viable domain of criticism of the reader’s interpretive activity (Eagleton 2003). They held meaning resides in the textual object and the reader gains this knowledge through a detailed analysis of its features. Detailed analyses are basic to an understanding of the meaning of the autonomous text. The ‘affective fallacy,’ a doctrine of New Criticism, maintained the meaning of the text must not be confused with the effects it produces in the reader. Like New Criticism, the reading focus of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation qualifies

as an efferent reading stance towards the text. Personal meaningfulness is a step removed from textual analysis. This kind of approach to biblical interpretation equips readers to be critics of the text.

### 8.32.1 Critique: the Cartesian method of the two-tier model

A preoccupation with method characterizes the two-tier model of Evangelical biblical interpretation. This methodological preoccupation can be understood in the light of the shaping force behind the model. “The impulse to equate truth with methodologically certified knowledge is a modern Cartesianism” (Grondin 1994: 142). The Cartesian paradigm has had an impact on Evangelical interpretive method. The paradigm fosters a way of thinking that promotes the pursuit and use of a controlled method whereby readers can “achieve a reliably correct interpretation” of a text (Marshall 1995: 73). The approach offers a reasonable benefit to solitary acts of reading in that “we do seek some way of dealing with the work so as to assure that our understanding is true, and that it can count as knowledge” (Marshall 1995: 73). Lundin (Lundin *et al.*, 1999: 41) remarks both conservative and radical literary theorists “are Cartesian in that they conceive of texts as objects waiting to be operated upon by solitary subjects.” The Cartesian preoccupation with method to ensure correct interpretations has a shaping influence on reading stance.

Evangelical preoccupation with method can be seen in a characteristic approach to biblical interpretation. The “propositional” method is indicative of Cartesian influence on the underlying epistemology of Evangelicalism’s ‘single-meaning’ hermeneutic (Wilson 2003). Wilson (2003: 62) argues this hermeneutic presumes the text’s language conveys explicit information that is to be understood propositionally: “[A] text is considered propositional not because it is written entirely in propositional form, but because it contains propositions, embedded at varying levels of obscurity, which may be recovered” by the interpreter. The biblical interpreter first seeks the text’s propositions (truths) and then applies them to life (Wilson 2003: 81). This means when the language of the biblical text is non-propositional then “it must be converted to propositional form in order for truth to be known and appropriated” (Wilson 2003: 62). This is especially challenging to the reader of the Bible’s narrative passages. Propositional interpretation is a product Cartesian rationalism and its focus on certainty that tends to mute reader concerns in reading: “the need to establish the truthfulness of conclusions overshadows considerations of how to respond to them” (Wilson 2003: 21). Wilson (2003) cites as major flaws of the propositional method “an insufficient description of how the Scriptures were written and intended to function in the lives of believers” (p. 63) and the “impoverished view of truthful living” it reflects (p. 81). These features are characteristic of the reading stance implied in this interpretive model.

### 8.32.2 Critique: the theoretical basis of the two-tier model

The Cartesian way of thinking about method fails to take into account the nature of human understanding. Inherent in the matter of the reader's understanding of the meaning of the text is the meaning of understanding itself. Schwandt (2000: 192), who highlights the distinction between philosophical hermeneutics and 'objectivist' hermeneutics, challenges the latter's epistemological understandings of human understanding. Its epistemology "considers understanding to be an intellectual process whereby a knower (the inquirer as subject) gains knowledge about an object (the meaning of human action)" (pp. 193-194). The interpreter in 'objectivist' hermeneutics "remains unaffected by and external to the interpretivist process" as he or she "stands over and against" the interpreted text (p. 194). Contrary to this notion he asserts that "in the act of understanding there are not two separate steps—first, acquiring understanding; second, applying that understanding. Rather, understanding is itself a kind of practical experience in and of the world that, in part, constitutes the kinds of persons that we are in the world. Understanding is 'lived' or existential" (pp. 195-196). Human understanding of the world arises from lived experience.

The Cartesian paradigm also downplays the impact of historical context on human experience. The contextual nature of human experience has significant consequences for understandings of hermeneutics. Sheldrake (1991) draws attention to the impact of historical context on human understanding of texts. "The present situation, as experienced by the reader, affects the meaning of a text and a text alters the reader's understanding of the present" (p. 172). An understanding of the 'situatedness' of the reader has implications for the interpretive process. "Understanding implies a constant reinterpretation of a text by people who question and listen within their own historical circumstances" (p. 173). 'Understanding' also implies a change in the primary focus of concern in biblical interpretation.

The theoretical basis of the two-tier model fosters an explicit reading stance towards the Bible. Lundin (Lundin *et al.*, 1999: 5) maintains the shift from a Cartesian model to the 'understanding' approach of philosophical hermeneutics reflects a change of emphasis from certainty to trust: "A contemporary hermeneutical theory informed by the Christian faith will be more concerned, that is, with questions of trustworthy fidelity than with those of absolute certainty."

### 8.32.3 Critique: the impact of the two-tier model on ordinary readers

The reading stance favored by the two-tier model is apparent in the downgrading by biblical scholars of ordinary believer's readings. Patte (1998: 15) draws attention to the rejection in critical biblical studies of "faith interpretations" of the Bible by believers who expect the text to 'read' their lives.

These interpretations are a feature of pragmatic Bible readings which see the text as addressing life concerns. He acknowledges the predisposition in academic biblical studies to recognize as legitimate faith interpretations *only* when they are appropriations of content arising from textual analysis (p. 16). Such life-oriented readings are only plausible when “the text is conceived as having a meaning-content...which is appropriated by being transferred in a modern container for contemporary readers” (p. 16). Pragmatic readings of the text’s meaning for present-day life “are completely subordinated to the analyses/exegeses of the text; indeed, faith interpretations and analyses/exegeses are not part of the same reading process” (pp. 16-17). Patte (1998: 4) disapproves of this model for biblical studies given the fact that scholars already construct the text via analytic frames. He approves of a believer’s pragmatic readings that attend to textual features that scholarly interpretations overlook: “one needs to recognize that faith-interpretations often end up contributing to our knowledge of the text” (p. 16).

The two-tier method also poses a number of challenges to ordinary readers of the Bible. Thiselton (1992) critiques the rationalist nature of post-Reformation biblical interpretation. He draws upon Labberton (1990) and bases his criticism on reader-oriented theory. First, the method effectively takes the Bible out of the hands of the laity. The interpretation of the biblical text is placed in the hands of an educated minority due to the emphasis on historical-grammatical tools needed to do justice to the Bible. Such an approach is criticized as “*a rationalist over-emphasis on the ‘professional’ interpreter*” (p. 533, italics in original). In addition, this approach to the Bible undermines the communal character of Bible reading. Dependence upon a class of interpretive experts eclipses “the *theological* principle that reading biblical texts is an activity of the *whole* community, including the ‘ordinary’ reader” (p. 532, italics in original). Furthermore, the method reduces reading to what Thiselton calls the “mechanical interpretation” of the text’s meaning (p. 220). The focus upon the ‘plain’ and fixed meaning of the text assumes the availability of this meaning regardless of interpretive tradition or context. Such an assumption is problematic due to “*the fallacy of assuming that ‘natural’ meaning would be perceived as ‘natural’ from within any given tradition as if the notion were context-free*” (p. 533, italics in original).

#### 8.32.4 Critique: inadequate reading theory implied in the two-tier model

In addition, the Cartesian paradigm fails to take into account an adequate theory of reading. Rosenblatt’s (1994, 2005) transactional theory rejects the epistemology of the two-tier model and the subject-object dualism of the Cartesian paradigm on which it is based. It accepts the pragmatist insistence of the importance of the role of the observer in the observation, the responsibility of the knower in the construction of knowledge (1994: 180-181). She maintains the reader can relinquish the preoccupation with absolute meaning inherent in the Cartesian dualism “without abnegating the possibility of responsible reading of texts” (1994: 183). Transactional theory posits a reciprocal rather

than a subordinate relationship between the reader and the text. The use of the term *transaction* reflects the function of an organic system of elements in which each is conditioned by its connection to the other (2005: 40). Meaning is an outcome of the “two-way transactional relationship of reader and text” (1994: 151), a “product of the reverberations between what is brought to the text and what it activates” (1994: 174). Meaning is conceived of as a feature of the “lived through” relationship of reader and text (1994: 14) rather than as a fixed entity that exists in the text and that must be mined by the reader. “The ‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text” (2005: 7). The reader does not arrive at the text’s meaning through methodical analysis of its deemed linguistic patterns but rather meaning “comes into being in the live circuit” of the reader’s transaction with the text (1994: 14) as the reader draws upon his or her linguistic and experiential capital to make sense of the transactional experience. Meaning emerges from the historically formed, socially embedded and culturally situated transaction between a particular reader and a particular text (1994: 181).

Transactional theory also maintains the compartmentalization of the two-tier model is untenable in actual reading practice. This model of biblical interpretation artificially compartmentalizes reading activity into separate spheres of the text’s original, customary meaning and its spiritual significance to the reader. Rosenblatt maintains the reader knows from the retracing of the reading experience that a variety of activities transpired which cannot be partitioned:

We know that in a reliving of the work, he does not read coldly, arriving first at something called the meaning or the paraphrasable sense and *then* starting to feel or think about it. In an actually creative reading, all these things may go on either at the same time or in many different phases: emotional response, the formation of ideas, and tentative general views about the emotional attitudes, the characters or the situations that the work treats. (1995: 270-271; italics in original)

An artificial separation of the reader’s meaning-making activities does not reflect the complexities of the temporal process of reading. There is a back and forth weaving between the stimulus of the text and the responses of the reader. Conscious of evocations and responses to the text’s words, the reader goes through a period of guessing and testing to construct a framework from within which he or she orders the selection and synthesis of these elements into a completed reading. “The relation between reader and text is not linear” (Rosenblatt 1994: 16).

The personal meaningfulness of an act of reading can be related to the occasional nature of reading in the reader’s life.

Of course, powerful personal reverberations and moments of intensity or illumination may be the result of the coming-together of the reader and the text at an especially propitious moment. The reader, it can be said, provides at that point in his life or in that social situation,

a particularly receptive context, a kind of amplifier, for what he derives from the text. (Rosenblatt 1994: 157-158)

For example, Simon said in his reading of Mark 6: 34 he was a “wandering sheep which needs some guidance now and then” from the shepherd. He said he was “lost” after graduation and without a job. His particular life context was a significant factor in his activation of the text and he was receptive to these elements in the transaction. Rosenblatt (1994: 60) maintains it is the reader’s “selective attention to components of consciousness rather than on logical analysis” that facilitate associations of words and responses. Changes in reading time and place in the reader’s life occasion a “different circuit, a different event—a different poem” (1994: 14).

### 8.3.3 Implications of Evangelical model of hermeneutics for spiritually-engaged reading

The two-tier model of biblical interpretation has significant implications for the religious reading of the Bible. The model’s implied reading stance highlights the disjuncture between the biblical text and the reader’s life of faith. This has significant consequences for Christian spirituality. Schneiders (2002: 141) criticizes the orthodoxy of objectivity in academic biblical studies that “require[s] the disengagement of the researcher from any personal involvement with the subject matter being studied” that results in “an implicit denial or any real or necessary connection between study of the text and its role in the life of faith.” Dempsey (2007: 121) affirms this disconnect when he writes, “Few biblical scholars engage in spiritual readings of scripture, and many who do seldom specialize in historical-critical and literary methodologies.” The historical-critical hermeneutic privileges the autonomy of the text: “Historical perspective and consciousness is often determinative of our interpretation” (Sullivan 2007: 34).

The two-tier interpretive method engenders a detached and impersonal reading of the text. Sullivan (2007: 28) critiques the spiritual consequences of this kind of reader-text relationship: “Rather than standing in authority over the text, interrogating it with critical tools, deferring commitment, questioning its authenticity, the religious reader stands under or in the light of such a text.” He argues the critical reading approach has generated an academic culture of interpretation in which the reader approaches the biblical text in a disinterested scholarly manner (p. 34). The “instrumental approach” to Bible reading engenders readers who “interrogate a text for useful data they can deploy without being changed in the process” (p. 26). He issues a call for a more holistic model of spiritually engaged reading.

The two-tier model effectively creates a meaning-making hierarchy in which spiritual applications are subordinate to critical interpretations. This can be seen in the contrast between a premodern religious

reading practice and post-Reformation methods of reading the Bible. *Lectio divina*, holy or sacred reading, is an ancient Christian Bible reading practice. It accentuated the spiritual purpose of reading in which the reader seeks union with God through the mediums of prayer and meditation. The spiritual reality of the text was contingent upon the active reader. Historical-critical scholarship in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries challenged this earlier approach to the biblical text. This modern academic method of reading texts emphasized the objective historical reconstruction of the meaning of the Bible's texts. It also placed an emphasis on learning the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek. This interpretive model posits the locus of the relation of textual meaning to spirituality squarely in the cognitive-linguistic domain. Its emphasis recasts the subject-object relation in Bible reading from a focus on the reader's subjective union with God by means of the text to the reader's rendering of the text's objective meaning via historical-critical methods and then applying its spiritual significance to life.

The religious impact of the two-tier model also can be seen in the discrepancy between what the minister and congregants find important in Bible reading. Powell's (2001) writes of the probability of variance of the minister's message and the parishioner meanings of Bible readings in church services of the various denominations he frequents. He recounts his typical church experience of an ordained minister who takes the read Gospel text—one to which he thinks the congregation probably responded “emotionally and aesthetically”—and then

attempts 1) to tell everyone what message the author intended to convey to his original audience and 2) to identify (on the basis of this) a message that the story may now convey to us today. Of course, this all may be very important, and it may be very well done, but that does not disguise what is happening: the preacher is answering a question (‘What is the message of the story?’) that few people were asking. Meanwhile, the divergent effects that the story itself had on those listeners are gradually diluted as the sermon proceeds and perhaps forgotten by the time it reaches conclusion (Powell 2001: 56).

The reading stance implied in the two-tier model underwrites the need for movement towards pedagogy of spiritually engaged Bible reading.

#### 8.4 Towards pedagogy of the spirituality of Bible reading

The two-tier model fosters an artificial opposition between critical and spiritual readings of the Bible, the creation of an ‘either-or’ framing of reading approaches in which religious aims and analytic methods are at odds. For example, the critical reading of biblical scholars in an academic environment can generate a culture of interpretation in which the reader “is expected to display objectivity, disinterest and detachment” (Sullivan 2007: 34). It is not unusual for such an approach to be deemed inimical to the spiritual purposes of reading: “the proper form of biblical interpretation does not

consist in technical mastery but in humble surrender and prayer for illumination” (Dempsey 2007: 128). In addition, a devotee of critical reading can characterize a reader’s attention to select elements in a spiritual reading as a disregard of significant textual features that are important to a proper interpretation. A supporter of spiritual reading can characterize a reader’s methodical analysis of the text in critical reading as the sacrificing of the spiritual dimension of the Bible to intellectual analysis. An artificial hierarchy fosters a false dichotomy. Must spiritual reading neglect analysis in interpretation? Must critical reading be devoid of a spiritual purpose? This false dichotomy must be overcome in order for a more holistic model of spiritually engaged reading to be promoted. It raises the importance of the teacher overcoming the Cartesian legacy.

The discrete aspects of spiritual and critical reading do not need to exist in theoretical opposition but rather their respective predominant elements can be conceptually reframed so as to be conducive to a more holistic model of spiritually engaged reading. In spiritual reading the reader’s disposition towards the text is significant. “Religious reading depends upon a certain kind of relationship between the reader and what is read, a relationship that allows the text to address, to question and to challenge the reader, and at the same time it adopts an attitude of reverence and obedience towards the text” (Sullivan 2007: 28). In critical reading the reader’s analytical frame of interpretation is of importance. Patte (1998) describes the critical process by which the text becomes meaningful to biblical scholars. They adopt certain frames by which to interpret the text. The legitimacy of these frames is related to their being present in the text. For example, the focus of a historical or theological frame would be related to elements in the text. These frames form the basis for an analysis of the text and the reader’s interpretation is a function of them. The respective features of spiritual and critical reading do not have to be inherently inimical to each other. In a spiritual reading the reader’s disposition is vital to the quality of the reading experience. In critical reading the reader’s method of analysis is crucial to interpretation.

The “hermeneutical arc” (Stiver 2001) of Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation offers a way to conceptually reframe the issue. Ricoeur (1976: 74-76) highlights understanding, explanation, and appropriation as significant interpretive activities in reading: the reader seeks to validate through explanation an initial understanding, the meaning of which he or she appropriates in life. In an effort to explain the initial sense of the text it is common that the reader engage with some interpretive method. The reader’s appropriation involves analytical activity. Ricoeur’s theory indicates some form of analysis is inherent in the reader’s appropriation of meaning. Theoretically, this means there are temporal phases during reading in which are accentuated ‘critical’ *and* ‘spiritual’ aspects of the reader’s activity.



Ricoeur's model of interpretation offers a way to overcome the Cartesian legacy. The teacher can reframe conceptually the artificial opposition between critical and spiritual readings of the Bible. The conceptual reframing of Bible reading is an important step in the move towards a more holistic model of spiritually engaged reading. The spiritual disposition of the reader does not have to be sacrificed or subordinate to analytic methodology. The reader's analytical frame does not have to be inconsistent with the religious purpose of reading. A spiritual reading should not have to overlook textual features and a critical reading should not have to neglect religious appropriations of meaning. A holistic model of spiritually engaged Bible reading can involve the significant factors of the reader's spiritual disposition and critical analysis.

#### 8.4.1 Towards pedagogy of growing active and spiritually engaged readers

How readers read is influenced by the design of learning activities. It is by means of some mode of education that readers "are led to participate in literary works" (Rosenblatt 1994: 135). The kinds of questions asked and the type of assignments given have a shaping influence on student's spiritual encounters with biblical texts. Smith and Shortt (2007: 5) believe how readers read texts has a bearing on their spiritual formation and that "it is possible to teach with the goal of spiritually engaged reading in mind." The ways in which teacher's frame the activity of reading "imply and foster particular reading stances both in and out of the class" (p. 8). The kind of spiritually engaged stance the teacher implies and fosters in the classroom can have far reaching effects as this can promote or deter the student's consideration and practice of certain approaches to Bible reading. Teachers can teach in ways that make it less likely for the student to read in a spiritually engaged manner (p. 5).

The goal of spiritually engaged reading puts the spotlight on pedagogy. The teacher's approach to reading can foster the individual reader's active as opposed to passive reading of texts (Pike 2003b: 161). Rosenblatt (1994: 81) maintains "the reader's stance may be determined by factors in the broader environment or within himself even before he sees the text." As noted above, the student can be conditioned to assume that the adoption of a particular orientation towards the biblical text is more conducive to Christian spirituality than others. A teacher's pedagogy can impact the religious character of the student's Bible reading practices.

Pike (2000a, 2003a) highlights the importance of a transactional pedagogy to educational settings. He advocates a strategy of "responsive teaching" in which the teacher starts with the student's response to the textual stimulus and then engages with it (2000a: 20). Each aspect of this strategy is important to the design of teaching and learning methods for spiritually engaged reading. First, the teacher starts with the reader's response to the textual stimulus. He argues "the key is to teach from pupils responses, to use their interpretations and not the teacher's notes or ideas of critics as the starting

point” (2000a: 22). He identifies belief in ‘knowledge transfer’ as the basis of a pedagogy which supposes the teacher must provide students with an adequate understanding of the historical background or literary criticism of the text before they are able to respond to the text appropriately (2000a: 20). He maintains the text-oriented curriculum of many churches and schools emphasizes the teaching of the Bible’s distinctive literary features as a means of reader engagement with the text rather than the actual reader’s reading transactions with the text (2003a: 44). Contrary to this pedagogy Pike asserts the teacher’s primary focus initially should be on the reader’s response to the text as ‘stimulus’ rather than as ‘blueprint’ (2003a: 46). Rosenblatt (1994: 11) maintains “the text is the stimulus that focuses the reader’s attention” on the fund of linguistic and experiential elements that arise in the transaction. The student’s spoken and/or written responses can be facilitated through discussions in paired or small groups or the entire class and they can be initiated by asking someone to begin sharing (2000a: 20, 22, 24).

Pike’s pedagogical approach also reflects an educational objective of growing active readers. Given the emphasis on historical-critical reading of the Bible it can be easy for ordinary readers to feel intimidated by Bible reading and so relinquish to experts the task of biblical interpretation. Rosenblatt (1994: 141) affirms a basic reality of the transactional relationship between reader and text: “no one else, no matter how much more competent, more informed, nearer the ideal (whatever that may be), can read (perform) the poem or the story or the play for us.” The passive reception of the critic’s reading has the effect of rendering the reader’s encounter with the text as a matter of largely support the critic’s interpretation (p. 148). “To learn the critic’s interpretation before our own encounter with a text often inhibits a spontaneously personal reading. Expectations have been aroused; we ‘know what to look for.’” (pp. 147-148). Bible study notes and biblical commentaries have their place; however, they are not a substitute for the ordinary reader’s reading. Starting with the reader’s responses cuts against the grain of “mechanical replication” which Thiselton (Lundin *et al.*, 1999: 137) decried.

#### 8.4.2 Towards pedagogy of growing responsible and spiritually engaged readers

Pike (2000a, 2003a) also encourages the teacher to engage with the reader’s response. To start with the student’s response is not to say that the teacher favors personal response at the expense of criticism. The teacher “responds to a pupil’s response and engages with this” (2000a: 20). At this point the teacher’s primary concern is the student’s engagement with the text as ‘blueprint.’ Rosenblatt (1994: 88) maintains the reader draws upon his or her fund of linguistic and experiential capital “to realize the blueprint provided by the text.” As such “the text helps regulate” the reader’s synthesis of elements to which he or she attends in the transaction (Rosenblatt 1994: 11). Pike’s (2000a: 26) focus is on the development of the student’s ideas and responses. The relevance of teacher instruction about historical and literary features is derived from student responses. The teacher’s

knowledge can supplement the student's interpretive efforts and it is the student's response which determines when such information is of value in the discussion (2000a: 24-25). Student knowledge of historical background and literary criticism can contribute to the "maturation of [their] responses over time" (2000a: 27).

Pike (2003a: 49) introduces the notion of "a spiritually literate teacher" in the classroom who seeks the development of the student's "spiritual literacy," which he defines as a learned sensitivity to the Holy Spirit's guidance in reading that develops within a Christian interpretive community. He maintains the student's spiritually literate readings offer the prospect of a "spiritual transaction" with God (2003a: 49). A precondition of spiritual literacy is the student's active engagement with the text rather than merely his or her passive reception of it. As noted above, it is the character of the reader's epistemic attitude and life change that makes Bible reading religious (see 8.2.2). As such, the belief-behavior relation in Bible reading would be a feature of the spiritually literate teacher's engagement with the reader's religious response.

Rosenblatt (1994: 146-147) highlights the role group discussion plays in developing readers' evaluative judgments of various interpretations:

Perhaps we should consider the text as an even more general medium of communication among readers. As we exchange experiences, we point to those elements of the text that best illustrate or support our interpretations. We may help one another to attend to words, phrases, images, scenes, that we have overlooked or slighted. We may be led to reread the text and revise our own interpretation. Sometimes we may be strengthened in our own sense of having 'done justice to' the text, without denying its potentialities for other interpretations. Sometimes the give-and-take may lead to a general increase in insight and even to a consensus. Sometimes, of course, interchange reveals that we belong to different subcultures, whether social or literary.

This learning activity highlights the importance of the teacher's role in guiding the arc of the discussion from the reader's initial responses to an evaluation of their interpretations. At issue is the development of the reader's ability to make an informed judgment about the soundness of his or her reading. The validity of the reader's interpretation is a vital feature of transactional theory (Rosenblatt 1994: 115). The quality of judgment is related to the accepted interpretive criteria of the reader's community of practice and the values that inhere in them as well as the reader's capacity for self-criticism. This matter of sound judgment is one of assessing when a reader's reading is an actualization of the text's potential and when it constitutes an unsound or erroneous interpretation. The teacher can inquire about what is being interpreted. "What in fact does the reader respond to? What does he interpret?" (Rosenblatt 1994: x). Group discussion can occasion teacher engagement with reader interpretations that contradict elements in the text or which have no basis in the text. The teacher engages with readers' responses given that they do not attend to all the features offered by the

textual stimulus. What the reader brings to the text and what the text activates in the reader need to be situated within the stimulus and constraints of the text.

The reader, on the one hand, respects the limitations set by the verbal cues, and on the other, draws upon his own resources to fill in the gaps, to realize the blueprint provided by the text. Recognizing the essential role of the text as the stimulus to the creativity of the reader has as its corollary recognition both of the openness of the text, on the one hand, and on the other, its constraining function as a guide or check. (Rosenblatt 1994: 88).

The teacher can help readers learn to read their readings and to critique their reading experiences that gave rise to them. There is a valuable pedagogical distinction to be made between the ‘what’ of interpretation and the ‘how’ of literary experience that gave rise to it. The importance of the reader’s self criticism *during* reading can be emphasized. It is at various points in the act of reading that the reader criticizes his or her responses to the text: “an element of self-criticism vis-à-vis the text—a concern with validity—enters into the very evocation of the work” (Rosenblatt 1994: 137-138). At points throughout the reading the reader “can turn to the text to judge whether his reported evocation, that is his interpretation, either ignores elements in the text or projects on it experiences for which there is no defensible basis in the text” (1994: 137). Teacher engagement can give rise to reader awareness of the elements that comprised the ‘lived through’ quality of the reading experience and contribute to their maturation in judgment of the meaning of the work. In honoring the reader’s active relationship with the text (Rosenblatt 1994: 10, 140), the teacher also communicates the need for readers to assume responsibility for their readings.

The teacher’s design of learning tasks which have the potential for the growth of responsible readers is an important part of instruction. “Critical to the success of a transactional approach is moving beyond readers’ initial responses to explore, expand, reconsider, and refine meanings as different readers share their thoughts during the process of warranting judgments about texts” (Connell 2008:116-117). Spiegel’s (1998: 41) review of research on reader-response oriented pedagogies indicates that as a result of their implementation students become “better responders and better readers.” One of the six findings from the studies she reviewed highlights student growth in critical levels of thinking about the text in response to participation in group discussions: “They become more reflective, more critical readers, moving to higher levels of thinking and a richer understanding of literature” (pp. 43-44). Group discussion is significant to reader-response pedagogy. The ordinary reader can become a critical reader.

In conclusion, the focus of this chapter has been a consideration of certain theoretical and pedagogical aspects inherent in the construction of a new model of the spirituality of Bible reading. Pike’s (2003a) assertion of the need of a “new synthesis” in biblical interpretation highlights the importance of

pragmatic readings of ordinary readers. Scholarly readings of the Bible do not tend to affirm as appropriate the actual readings of commonplace readers. The frame of the relation of epistemology and hermeneutics as advocated by postfoundationalism offers a way of conceptualizing the spirituality of Bible reading. The interplay of some interpretive configuration of the reader, text and context and some epistemological assumption is important to the development of a holistic model. Rosenblatt's general concept of reading stance is viable, even though her efferent-aesthetic continuum is problematic, for theorizing the relation of reading stance and the spirituality of Bible reading. The conceptual device of reading stance offers a way of evaluating reader orientations to the text, a feature which Simon's case study indicated was significant to his appropriations of Bible reading in deemed apprehensions of God. The reading stance that is implicit in Evangelical biblical interpretation was shown to be problematic. The epistemological assumption of this hermeneutic advocates the recovery of the text's single, correct meaning in reading. The spiritual significance of the text's meaning for the reader is subordinate to this meaning. The reading stance of Evangelical biblical interpretation promotes critical reading and disinterested readers. Spiritually engaged reading requires active readers rather than detached, passive ones. Overcoming the obstacle of the Cartesian legacy in Evangelical biblical interpretation is important to spiritually engaged reading. Pike's (2000a, 2003a) pedagogy of "responsive teaching" advocates the importance of the role of teachers to the growth of active and responsible readers who are spiritually engaged. The theoretical and pedagogical considerations of the chapter inform movement towards a holistic model of the spirituality of Bible reading.

## 9.0 Conclusion: The role of reading stance in solitary spiritual readings of the Bible

*Chapter Abstract: This chapter serves as a conclusion to the thesis. It consists of the following: a summary of the research findings and their significance to the thesis line of reasoning (9.1); a succinct presentation of the contributions of the research (9.2); a brief reference to the limitations of the research (9.3); and a concise statement of suggested areas of future research (9.4). Research findings suggest the individual character of the reader's reading stance has a shaping influence on the spiritual life of the Bible in solitary acts of reading.*

### 9.1 Thesis summary

The aim of this research has been to investigate reader appropriations of actualizations of solitary acts of Bible reading. The examination of the relationship of Bible reading and religious experience focused on the solitary readings of nine church-situated British emerging adults. The introductory case study of the thesis reported a variety of spiritual readings of the same Bible verse (see 1.1). Four participants' responses to the same text manifested different spiritual understandings of them. The differences indicated a variety of appropriations of deemed activity of God, or lack thereof, in their lives. The interpretive differences raised awareness of the role of the reader in the spiritual life of the Bible in solitary acts of reading.

The concern of this research project is the role reading stance plays in how readers' readings of biblical texts guide their readings of experiences of God in their lives. The importance of reading stance to the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality became apparent in data analysis. Reading stance emerged as a significant shaping influence in the connection of Bible reading to religious experience in participant readers' readings. Reading stance, the reader's selective awareness of elements in the transaction of reader and text, shaped the reading. It is a significant mechanism by which readers related the Bible to their lives. As such, the main line of inquiry became the role of reading stance in the relation of solitary acts of Bible reading and reader apprehension of God.

The investigation took into consideration pertinent intrapersonal and interpersonal factors at work in reader orientations towards the Bible in solitary acts of reading. Personal faith-life concerns and institutional structures were influential in reader readings. Readings reflected a faith-life anxiety associated with emerging adulthood, a major life transition of becoming independent, as well as engagement with church interpretive structures that authorized reader apprehension of God. The impact of personal concerns and contextual structures on the emerging adult reader's orientation to the Bible reading was examined. Also explored was the affect of these factors on reader appropriation of actualized meaning as deemed apprehensions of God.

Research concentrated on pragmatic and ideological dimensions of Bible reading. Data analysis findings of participant solitary readings of the Bible reflected the influence of the reader's pragmatic aims and an ideological frame of interpretation. The pragmatic dimension refers to the situated reader's personal uses of the Bible to apprehend God. The ideological dimension refers to the historically formed and socially embedded set of church teachings and practices that serve as interpretive structures to apprehend God. A reading stance can be characterized by the reader's particular blend of pragmatic and ideological aspects.

The evaluation of the importance of reading stance to our understanding of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian religious experience proceeded along a basic line of reasoning. Research findings developed this line of reasoning. The first data analysis finding is reader preoccupation with the resolution of an anxiety of uncertainty of Christian faith which is indicative of a general disposition towards solitary acts of Bible reading (see 4.0). The significance of this finding for the line of reasoning is that the reader's reading disposition is a pertinent pragmatic feature of the reading stance towards biblical texts. The second data analysis finding is the relevance of church Word and Spirit beliefs and practices to participants' faith-life anxiety (see 5.0). The church-situated logic of restorationism provides readers an interpretive structure by which to identify deemed apprehensions of God. Reader use of this frame offers the prospect of the resolution of uncertainty about their Christian faith. The significance of this finding for the line of reasoning is that the interpretive frame of restorationism is a salient ideological feature that informs the reader's reading stance. The third data analysis finding is the impact of an individual blend of urgent personal faith concerns and church interpretive structures on the reader's orientation towards biblical texts (see 6.0). An extensive case study revealed the reader's adaptation of ideology of restorationism supplied him with modes of meaning making to address his pragmatic reading aims. These personal and contextual influences structured meaning making in solitary acts of reading. The significance of this finding for the line of reasoning is the reader's appropriations indicate the spiritual life of the Bible is shaped by the idiosyncratic mix of pragmatic and ideological features of his reading stance. The overall line of reasoning suggests the spiritual reading of the Bible is related to the reader's adopted reading stance whose composition reflects an individual blend of intrapersonal and intrapersonal factors. Whilst this thesis is not an attempt to establish a broad generalizability of research findings, there is a claim of limited generalizability of the conclusions and a shared responsibility with an end user for the applicability of findings to situations other than this research site (see 3.2.3). Generalizability in qualitative research is reconceptualised in terms of a fitting of findings of a research site to other contexts (Schofield 2000: 93). I have sought to increase the potential for generalizability and end user judgments of transferability by providing substantial case studies and significantly thick and rich descriptions of the research site, the pragmatic and ideological aspects of reading stance, and participants' solitary uses of the Bible to make sense of their apprehensions of God.

In the light of the research aim to contribute towards the building of a theory on the nature of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality, I deemed it important to test critically the qualitative finding of reading stance. Simon's extensive single case study offers a contribution to our theorizing of the role reading stance plays in reader apprehension of God via solitary acts of Bible reading. The generating and testing of hypotheses in a single case study can contribute to theory building (Dooley 2002). The logic of Popper's (2002) deductive test of falsification provided the basis for a critical line of reasoning in the thesis (see 3.2.4; Flyvbjerg 2001, 2006). Both positive and negative outcomes of deductive analysis are of use to the researcher as the test serves either to verify or falsify the proposition (Popper 2002: 10). If deductive testing refutes the proposition of a theory under consideration then it is "*falsified*" and its relevant theoretical aspects are unacceptable and in need of revision (Popper 2002: 10, italics in original). My approach to the testing of reading stance in Simon's case study was simple: if the finding of the importance of reading stance to religious experience is not valid in his extensive case then it is unlikely that it is valid for other cases. The idea is that if the finding is invalid in one case, then it is reasonable to assume that it is unlikely to be valid for other cases (See Flyvbjerg 2006: 230). However, the validity of the finding from the one case does not verify conclusively that it is valid in all cases. Simon's case study did not falsify the finding of the reader's stance to the relation of Bible reading and religious experience. It demonstrated his reading stance towards the biblical text, an idiosyncratic combination of his pragmatic reading disposition and adaptation of Mosaic Church's interpretive ideology, shaped his appropriations of deemed apprehensions of God. Simon's case study suggests the importance of reading stance to theorizing about the relation of Bible reading and religious experience. As such, it is an original finding that contributes toward the building of a theory. However, the concept of reading stance should not be assumed to have been irrevocably established. This finding is qualified as further deductive testing is needed on the role of the reader's reading stance in the apprehension of God in solitary acts of Bible reading. The case study offers only one test in a potential series of progressive tests by which the shaping role of reading stance could be proven acceptable or unacceptable.

The role reading stance plays in the individual reader's biblical transactions suggests some significant theoretical and pedagogical implications of spiritually engaged Bible reading. First, the concept of reading stance can be used to highlight the particular orientation of the reader that is implied in Evangelical biblical interpretation. The reading stance of the Evangelical model of Bible reading gives rise to a detached reader who reads the text critically at first and then relates the meaning of this reading to his or her life. It is the epistemological underwriting of modern Evangelical hermeneutics that sanctions such a reductive methodological approach to interpretation. This method of reading compartmentalizes the reader's activity into two stages: the reader mines the text's single correct meaning and then applies the spiritual significance of this meaning to his or her life. This model which assumes a linear orientation to spiritually-engaged meaning making betrays a misunderstanding



of how readers actually interpret texts. Rosenblatt's transactional theory offers a critique of this model of interpretation. Meaning arises from the transaction between the particular reader and a particular text at a particular setting and time of reading. The artificial separation of mining and applying meaning fails to account for the complex back-and-forth weaving of the stimulus of the text and the responses of the reader into a completed meaning during the temporal process of reading.

Two, the concept of reading stance can be used to call attention to the character of spiritually engaged readings of the Bible. The Evangelical model, which encourages a disinterested reader, affects the conceptualization of spiritual readings of the Bible. Critical methods prevent impressionistic 'spiritual' meanings and avoid readings that are symptomatic of the reader's pragmatic concerns. The important issue of the spiritual meaning of the biblical text is eclipsed by the reader's attention with its single, correct meaning. Such a focus tends to overlook the pedagogical importance of growing active and responsible readers of the Bible. Through the design of learning activities teachers can contribute to an awareness of a spiritually engaged reading stance. Students may come to assume by means of classroom learning methods that the adoption of a particular orientation towards the biblical text is more conducive to Christian spirituality than other approaches. Pike's (2000a, 2003a) pedagogy of "responsive teaching" affirms the importance of teacher approaches to the growth of active and responsible readers who are spiritually engaged. Approaches to stance can be characterized by a respect for the reader's moral and spiritual formation as well as a concern with knowledge about the text's features. These theoretical and pedagogical considerations contribute towards the development of a holistic model of the spirituality of Bible reading.

## 9.2 Research contributions

The research project is an inquiry into the role of the church-situated British emerging adult readers reading stance in the relationship of solitary acts of Bible reading to their deemed apprehensions of God in life experience. In the light of this main research inquiry there are three contributions to knowledge. First, the research reveals the impact of the cultural process of emerging adulthood on reader orientations to Bible reading. Participant readers gave evidence of an anxiety of uncertainty of their Christian faith. This internal tension is related to a critical life transition of becoming an independent adult. The questioning of faith is a common feature associated with this transition. Readers are caught between doubts about faith and the retention of their faith as a way of life. They are on a spiritual quest to resolve this anxiety of uncertainty. Reader preoccupation with this faith-life tension contributed to an interpretive disposition in Bible reading. Their readings were characterized by efforts to retain their Christian faith. To the best of my knowledge the finding of an interpretive disposition among emerging adult readers of an anxiety of uncertainty about Christianity and its impact on their Bible reading orientations constitutes an original contribution.

Second, the research reveals the influence of church-situated interpretive structures on reader orientations towards the apprehension of God in Bible reading. Church teaching and practices had a shaping influence on reader appropriations of actualized meaning. Reader conceptions of the apprehension of God were impacted by church theological norms of Word and Spirit and semiotic ideology of restorationism. The logic of restorationism and the signifying practices of biblical literalism and charismatic testimony were relevant to participant quests to experience God in order to resolve their faith-life anxiety and to retain Christianity as a desired way of life. These contextual factors shaped participant understandings of the Bible and Christian religious experience. They informed reader orientations to Bible reading and the apprehension of God. To the best of my knowledge the findings of the uses by emergent adult readers of theological norms and restorationist rationale to make sense of God's activity in life experience constitute original contributions.

Third, the research reveals the influence of the individual blend of anxious reading disposition and church interpretive structures on one emerging adult reader's orientation towards Bible reading. One benefit of a qualitative study of Bible reading is that it offers an understanding of the pertinent factors that shape the reading processes of actual readers. An extensive case study highlights the impact of the reader's mix of personal faith-life anxiety and the rationale of restorationism on his biblical transactions. The particular combination of these intrapersonal and interpersonal factors contributed the composition of his reading stance. The mixture had a shaping influence on the reader's appropriation of actualized Bible readings as his deemed apprehensions of God. The case study indicated the reader's production of meaning is related to the individual character of his adopted reading stance. In the light of the qualifications on generalizability and deductive testing reviewed earlier (see 9.1), this suggests the spiritual reading of the Bible is related to the individual character of the reader's reading stance. To the best of my knowledge the finding of the significance of an emerging adult reader's adopted reading stance to the appropriations of Bible reading as apprehensions of God in life experience constitutes an original contribution.

### 9.3 Study limitations

This research project has generated qualitative data of rich description yet it is not without its limitations. First, there are some methodological limitations of the research project. One is its lack of representativeness. By virtue of the purposive sampling strategy employed, I do not claim research participants were representative of the church or of British emerging adults being studied. In addition, ethnic minorities were not included in the study. Furthermore, this research makes no claim on broad generalizability. Qualitative research admits a limited generalizability of the findings, including the single case study (see 3.2.3). As a method of critical inquiry, case study contributes to knowledge (Flyvbjerg 2006: 241). This case study contributes to our understanding of the role of the reader's

stance in the solitary act of Bible reading. It supports the model of a reading stance composed of pragmatic and ideological factors that impacts the reader's production of meaning. These research findings may be of interest to educators in the church and the academy who instruct emerging adults and or the biblical interpretation and spirituality but their application is limited.

Second, whilst a psychological study of participants was not within the remit of research aims, a limitation of the study is the lack of psychological types or temperaments that might shed light on the individual interpretive differences of participant readers. Finally, a lack of engagement with analytic models representative of the 'linguistic turn' such as conversation analysis and discourse analysis is a limitation of this study. The focus of linguistic inquiry is not on participant cognitive states but "talk-in-interaction." The underlying feature of these forms of linguistic criticism is the existence of multiple and fluid socially-derived conventions that constitute concepts of self or identity and which are accessed and constructed during social encounters (Murphy *et al.*, 1998; Silverman 2004; Holstein and Gubrium 2004).

#### 9.4 Future research

This research project suggests pedagogy of spiritually engaged reading is in need of a holistic model of the spirituality of Bible reading. The research maintains the conceptualization of spiritually engaged reading must move beyond the reading stance implied in Evangelical biblical interpretation and towards the development of more active and responsible readers who are spiritually engaged with the text. The critically distant reader fostered by the epistemological underwriting of Evangelical hermeneutics follows a methodological approach that isolates the text's single meaning from his or her personally meaningful and spiritually significant responses to the text. The critical focus on the retrieval of the text's correct meaning tends to obscure the importance of growing active and responsible readers of the Bible. The postfoundationalist concept of the interplay of epistemology and hermeneutics, the reciprocity of belief and experience, offers a promising way of overcoming the obstacle to spiritually engaged reading of the Cartesian legacy in Evangelical interpretation. Pedagogy of a spiritually engaged reading stance seeks learning activities which can encourage the formation of active readers rather than detached ones.

The single case study of this research project contributes towards the building of a holistic model of the relation of solitary Bible reading and the reader's apprehension of God in life experience. It offers a beginning for a comparative account of case studies. The theoretical feasibility of the development of such a model is contingent upon the comparative study of multiple cases of solitary Bible reading. Qualitative case studies are important to theory building and the prospect of generating theory increases with additional case study research (Dooley 2002: 344, 345). Additional qualitative case

studies can contribute to our understanding of important factors in the production of meaning that underlie the relationship of religious experience and the transaction of the situated reader and text. Such studies could focus on the theological and world and life view matters related to the interpretation of biblical texts. Further qualitative case studies would be pertinent to theory building of a holistic model of spiritually engaged Bible reading.

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## Appendix A: Bibliographic Searches

Bibliographic searches for empirical investigations of the relationship of Bible reading and Christian spirituality were undertaken from autumn of 2007 and to spring of 2010. Two dissertation databases, the Web of Knowledge database, Google database and University of Leeds library catalogue were used. In addition a number of professors were contacted in United Kingdom and United States for reference suggestions. I estimate the searches covered over 5000 articles and books. For example, on 02 July 09 I searched 120 articles in *Journal of Empirical Theology*. These searches revealed a vast number of theoretical studies on Christian spirituality and biblical hermeneutics. Searches also exposed a number of empirical studies on the topics of biblical interpretation and Christian spirituality. However, the searches exposed few empirical studies on solitary practices of Bible reading or Christian spirituality. For example, searches on Bible reading revealed empirical studies on: biblical interpretation among laity of the Church of England (Village 2003); Evangelical practices of small group Bible study and the spiritual dimension of shared intimacy within them (Bielo 2009a); and the sharing of personal experience in a group study by means of participant identification with characters of the biblical text (Lehtinen 2005). Searches on Christian spirituality revealed empirical studies on: ways in which Evangelical practice of prayer enabled people to realize God's presence (Luhmann et al., 2010); and an ethnography of the interaction of biblical and spiritual beliefs as a system of checks and balances on spiritual experience in a Charismatic congregation (Bialecki 2009).

Words and phrases used in bibliographic searches were numerous. They included Bible reading and spiritual experience,' 'Bible and spirituality,' 'Bible reading and Christian spirituality,' 'Bible and spiritual experience,' 'biblical interpretation and Christian spiritual experience,' 'spiritual experience,' 'lived spiritual experience,' 'emerging church and Bible reading and Christian spirituality,' 'British and young people and Bible and spirituality,' 'emerging adult and religious and spirituality,' 'Bible and Evangelical and spirituality,' and 'Bible and Charismatic and spirituality.'

## Appendix B: Research Project Information Sheet

*I want to learn from you about your Bible reading and life experiences at Mosaic!*

### ***What you need to know***

- 1) I ask you for your *voluntary participation* in this study. If you give your **signed** consent to be included in the study you can withdraw at any time and for any reason.
- 2) You will remain *anonymous*. A nickname will be used in transcripts instead of your real name. I will work to protect your identity so that no one who reads my research will be able to identify you or track your comments back to you.
- 3) Information about you will be kept *confidential*. Your reputation will be protected. I will respect you and act to prevent any negative consequences to you. Digital files will be stored securely on password protected computers. Hard copies will be kept in a locked cabinet.

### ***What you need to do***

- 1) You are asked to make comments on three 'Bible Reading' forms. These forms are sheets of paper that have Bible verses on them. Also, you might be asked to complete a brief survey about your Bible reading.
- 2) You are asked to participate in three interviews about your Bible reading. An audio recorder will be used for accuracy. You aren't under any pressure to perform. There is no 'right' answer, only your experience. I am learning from you about what happens when you read the Bible and how you relate its meaning to your life. Also, I will ask you to look at some excerpts of the interview transcripts to ensure their accuracy and enhance their validity.
- 3) You *might* be asked to be involved in group Bible study, such as an Alpha Course or a Beta Course. I will observe these group discussions and take notes of the proceedings in order to think about them later. If you see me writing notes you are not being 'analyzed' and what you say is not being judged.

### ***What happens to the information you give***

- 1) All information from your participation will be used for my research purposes. These information uses include writing the dissertation and articles for publication and in presentations at conferences.
- 2) I will type my notes and the recorded interview into a transcript. A transcriber will assist me in doing this.
- 3) I will seek to analyze transcripts to get some sense of possible patterns or themes in the connections between Bible reading, life experience and church context.
- 4) In the unlikely event of the disclosure of illegal activity, I am not under obligation to keep confidential disclosed information about harm to others.

## Appendix C: Bible Reading Comments Forms by Interview Rounds

### Round 1 Bible Reading Comment Form Mark 6:32-44 and Mark 8:1-10

Dear Participant,

Thanks for your willingness to read the attached Bible passages and comment on them! You will find two sections: Mark 6:32-44 and Mark 8:1-10.

#### WHAT DO I DO?

Download the attachment. Please read the Bible verses just as you would ordinarily read them in your personal time with God. For example, if you usually pray before Bible reading, then pray. You can use your own Bible. How personally involved you are when reading will have a big impact on your comments. Comment by typing on the attached sheet or print it off and write on it.

#### WHAT DO I COMMENT ON?

Please tell me something about these three things:

- 1) *What strikes you about these verses?* Pay attention to any ideas, feelings, images, memories, or current concerns that may come to you as you read. Write them down. Highlight words or phrases in the verses that trigger your responses.
- 2) *Do the verses shape how you see your life experience?* If so, tell me how you now see your past life experiences or present concerns in light of them.
- 3) *Does your involvement at Mosaic affect your understanding of Christianity?* Think about the ways in which your activity at Mosaic events may give you a sense of what it means to be and act as a Christian.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

Simply email the Bible form back to me or, if you printed it out, give it to me at church. We will then set up a time to meet to talk about your comments.

Thanks! Your involvement in this study is important to me and Mosaic. Your comments help make sense of how Bible reading affects our understandings of life experience. What you do makes a difference.

Kind regards,  
Michael

**Name:**

**Date, Time & Place:**

**Question:** 1) What strikes you about these verses? 2) Do the verses shape how you see your life experience? 3) Does your involvement at Mosaic have any affect on your understanding of how to live the Christian life?

**Texts: Mark 6:32-44 and Mark 8:1-10 (New International Version)**

**Mark 6:32-44** *Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand*

32So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

35By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. 36Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

37But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They said to him, “That would take almost a year’s wages *a*! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?”

38“How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.”

When they found out, they said, “Five—and two fish.”

39Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42They all ate and were satisfied, 43and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

*a 37 Greek take two hundred denarii*

Name:

Date, Time & Place:

**Question:** 1) What strikes you about these verses? 2) Do the verses shape how you see your life experience? 3) Does your involvement at Mosaic have any affect on your understanding of how to live the Christian life?

**Mark 8:1-10** *Jesus Feeds the Four Thousand*

1 During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, 2“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. 3If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”

4His disciples answered, “But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”

5“How many loaves do you have?” Jesus asked.

“Seven,” they replied.

6He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people, and they did so. 7They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them. 8The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 9About four thousand were present. And having sent them away, 10he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

## Round 2 Bible Reading Comment Form Romans 8:12-17 and Ephesians 5:15-20

Dear Participant,

Thanks for your willingness to read the attached Bible passages and comment on them! You will find below two passages: Romans 8:12-17 and Ephesians 5:15-20.

### ***WHAT DO I DO?***

Please read the Bible verses just as you would ordinarily read them in your personal time with God. For example, if you usually pray before Bible reading, then pray. You can use your own Bible. How personally involved you are when reading will have a big impact on your comments. Comment by typing on the attached sheet or print it off and write on it.

### ***WHAT DO I COMMENT ON?***

Please tell me something about these three things:

- 1) ***What is your interpretation of these verses?*** Highlight words or phrases in the verses that trigger your responses and interpretation. Pay attention to any ideas, feelings, images, memories, or life concerns that may come to you as you seek to make sense of the verses. I'm interested in how they may contribute to your interpretation.
- 2) ***How do you see your life now in light of your interpretation?*** I'm interested in how your interpretation of these verses influences how you see your experience of faith in your life. Tell me how you now see your past life experiences or present life concerns in light of your interpretation.
- 3) ***What sources affect your interpretation of these texts?*** Please recall what sources, if any, (sermons, books, Bible study group discussions, your thinking, etc.) that may have shaped your understanding of the meanings of these texts.

### ***WHAT'S NEXT?***

Simply bring the Bible Reading Comment forms with you to the interview. We will set up an interview time and meet soon after you complete your readings.

Thanks! Your involvement in this study is important to me and Mosaic. Your comments help make sense of how Bible reading affects our understandings of life experience. What you do makes a difference.

Kind regards,  
Michael

Name:

Date, Time &amp; Place:

**Questions:** 1) *What is your interpretation of these verses?* 2) *How do you see your life now in light of your interpretation?* 3) *What sources affect your understanding of these texts?*

Texts: Romans 8:12-17 and Ephesians 5:15-20 (Today's New International Version)

### Romans 8:12-17

12Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. 13For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

14For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. *k* And by him we cry, “*Abba, I Father.*” 16The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

*k 15* The Greek word for *adoption to sonship* is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture. *l 15* Aramaic for *Father*



**Name:**

**Date, Time & Place:**

**Questions:** 1) *What is your interpretation of these verses?* 2) *How do you see your life now in light of your interpretation?* 3) *What sources affect your understanding of these texts?*

Romans 8:12-17 and Ephesians 5:15-20 (Today's New International Version)

**Ephesians 5:15-20**

15Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. 18Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Round 3 Request for Participant Selected Texts for Bible Reading

Dear Participant,

First, I wish to ask you for your suggestions of Bible passages we can use for your upcoming interview. In previous interviews I've sent you my selections of texts for you to read. This time I would like for you to get involved in the selection of Bible passages. I desire to learn from you what texts you have found to be important in your life or relevant to your personal life concerns. To help you think about this I've listed a few prompts below. Please think about them and in your reply to this email please list your suggestions of TWO Bible passages.

- Have you read something in the Bible that changed your life? Perhaps you have read something that you found to be particularly important to you in your life.
- Was there a particular time in your life when you looked to the Bible and what you read was of help to you? Perhaps you read something that addressed your concerns at that point in your life.
- Is there a favourite Bible passage you have found meaningful? Perhaps when you read it you find it offers you help and encouragement.

There is a possibility that you may not have a Bible passage that you could suggest. If so could you please tell me what you have found to be of importance to you when you read the Bible? Please think about what you find to be particularly meaningful and spiritually beneficially to your life. Tell me about these things and I will then suggest some passages for you to read.

Next, I am preparing a schedule for our third round of interviews in our Bible Reading and Life Experience Study. I wish to know when it would be convenient for you to do the next interview. Do you have a preference of doing the interview in May or June? Please let me know what month and your preference of a weekday or weekend. I will seek to set up a date that works for you.

I will send you at a later time a Bible Comment sheet like the ones you've had in the past with the selected Bible passages.

I'm looking forward to our next interview. Again, thank you for being willing to be a valued part of this ground breaking research project!

Many thanks,  
Michael

### Round 3 Bible Reading Comment Form Participant Selected Texts

Dear Participant,

Thank you for choosing the Bible passages and for your willingness to comment on them! You will find below your selections of biblical passages.

#### ***WHAT DO I DO?***

Please read the Bible verses just as you would ordinarily read them in your personal time with God. For example, if you usually pray before Bible reading, then pray. You can use your own Bible. How personally involved you are when reading will have a big impact on your comments. Comment by typing on the attached sheet or print it off and write on it.

#### ***WHAT DO I COMMENT ON?***

Please tell me something about these two things:

- 1) ***What is it about this passage that is important to you?*** Tell me what you have found in this passage that is significant to you in your life. Highlight any words or phrases in the verses that you find vital.
- 2) ***What about your life do you see differently from this passage?*** If this passage helps you to make sense of your life then tell me about it. Give me an idea of what understanding you have of your life—past, present or future—from this text.

#### ***WHAT'S NEXT?***

Simply bring the Bible Reading Comment forms with you to the interview. We will set up an interview time and meet soon after you complete your readings.

Thanks! Your involvement in this study is important to me and Mosaic. Your comments help make sense of how Bible reading affects our understandings of life experience. What you do makes a difference.

Kind regards,  
Michael

### Appendix D: Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Text Selection

It is important to discuss further the last criterion presented in 3.34.1 of potentially spiritually-engaged reading. There are theoretical and practical aspects to the selection of texts that may be deemed to have potential for a spiritually formative literary experience. One theoretical consideration is the basic notion that ambiguous and difficult texts can make for demanding and disquieting literary experiences. The assumption is that such texts can challenge readers to resist conventional interpretations. Hanks (1989: 110) describes the character of habitual readings that reflect “the relative automaticity of interpretation—that is, the degree to which it is expectable or routine, and hence locally derivable with little work.” Fish (1980a: 88) makes a good case for such an approach in his selection of texts for study:

In general I am drawn to works which do not allow a reader the security of his normal patterns of thought and belief. It would be possible, I suppose, to erect a standard of value on the basis of this preference—a scale on which the most unsettling of literary experiences would be the best (perhaps literature is what disturbs our sense of self-sufficiency, personal and linguistic)—but the result would probably be a reflection of a personal psychological need than of a universally true aesthetic.

Also Culler (1980: 116), in describing literary competence, supplies additional supporting material for selecting texts that do not lend themselves to an easy rendering:

An awareness of the assumptions on which one proceeds, an ability to make explicit what one is attempting to do, makes it easier to see where and how the text resists one’s attempts to make sense of it and how, by its refusal to comply with one’s expectations, it leads to that questioning of the self and of ordinary social modes of understanding which has always been the result of the greatest literature.

One practical feature is the anticipated reception of selected texts among emerging adult readers. Participants are in a critical transition of moving away from their parental home to a new place and way of life. They see in Mosaic Church a spiritual way of life that offers a sense of reassurance (see 4.0). In the light of these features, texts should be considered that offer levels of emotional and cognitive engagement and that are relevant to the spiritual concerns of transitional living. The selection of texts should take into account the fact that the participants are looking for life direction and that their identity is in a state of flux. Connell’s (2005) review of Rosenblatt’s impact on classroom teaching of literature highlights the practical value of locating against-the-grain biblical texts in my study. She maintains the more diverse the readings “the greater the potential for these texts to serve as an educationally liberating force” and varied reading experiences can provide readers “with an appreciation for the complexity of human life” (pp. 73-74).

## **Appendix E: Interview Guides for Participants and Leaders**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Round Interview Guide**

- 1) What strikes you about this passage? What do you think it means? What is the main point of this passage? Explore reader responses and probe Bible Reading Comment notes.
- 2) Do the verses shape how you see your life experience? Does the text help you to make spiritual sense of your life experience? How do you see your life now in light of your interpretation? Focus on what accounts of life experience are produced from their interpretations.
- 3) Does your involvement at Mosaic have any effect on your understanding of how to live the Christian life? What sources affect your interpretation of these texts? Focus on whether Mosaic's teachings have any affect on their understandings of these texts.

### **2nd Round Interview Guide**

- 1) Read excerpts from 1<sup>st</sup> round interview transcripts for member checking of my understandings and probe issues raised in the discussion.
- 2) What is your interpretation of these verses? Explore reader responses and probe Bible Reading Comment notes.  
Probes: What is the main point of this passage? What strikes you about this passage, and what do you think it means?
- 3) How do you see your life now in light of your interpretation? Focus on what accounts of life experience are produced from their interpretations.  
Probes: Does the Bible help you to make spiritual sense of your life experience? Does God speak to you through Bible reading? What affect does your understanding of these verses impact the way you now see the role of Christian faith in your life?
- 4) What sources affect your interpretation of these texts? Explore their responses to Mosaic's teaching on these verses to see if there is any affect on their understanding of them and on how to live the Christian life.  
Probes: Does Mosaic's teaching on these verses have any effect on your understanding of them and on how to live the Christian life? What does Mosaic church mean to you? Is there anything that concerns you about your involvement at Mosaic? How would you explain Mosaic/Charismatic experience to member of a traditional church? Are there any belief or spirituality developments or occurrences of concerns or issues from your involvement at Mosaic? What do you think of the vision of Mosaic Church? What kind of changes have your roommates or housemates or course mates observed in you, if any, since our last interview?

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Round Interview Guide**

- 1) What is it that is important to you about these passages?
- 2) What in your life do you see differently from this passage? Explore any effects of Bible reading in recognizing God's work in their lives.  
Probes: Did you gain some perspective or direction for life? Is there a new understanding of past and present life experience? Anything particularly meaningful and spiritually beneficial to you and your life? Do they affect how you see God's work in your life? What understanding of your God's work in your life do you have from this passage? In reading the passage(s) did you sense God's presence or His speaking to you about the concerns you had at the time? Did you feel closer to God? What is your understanding of what God/Jesus/ Holy Spirit wants you to do, how to live?
- 3) Ask participant to complete questionnaire. Compare section 1 answers on 'Frequency of activity' of Bible reading practices with Section 2 on 'Bible beliefs and views. Look for any discrepancies and ask for their responses. Probe answers in Section 3 on 'Bible reading and life.' Probe answers on

Section 4 on 'Importance of Bible reading' to find their usefulness of Bible reading with any emerging adult life experience.

4) Ask series of questions about the importance of the Bible, Christian friends, and Mosaic teaching on the following:

- a) What most often helps me to make sense of God's work in my life?
- b) What most often helps me to form my own beliefs about Christianity?
- c) What most often helps me to decide what is important in life?
- d) What most often helps me to make the right decisions in the primary relationships in my life?
- e) What most often assures me of the reality of my Christian faith?
- f) What most often helps me realize the changes God wants me to make to follow Jesus?

5) Concluding questions: Anything you wish to say that hasn't been said? Have our interviews affected your thinking on beliefs and practices of Bible reading and Christianity? If so, how?

### **Mosaic Church Leader Interview Guide**

Abridged from Kendall Project Questions for the clergy / people in authority

#### 1) Personal history

Describe your history with Mosaic.

Is there a focus you bring to worship services? If so, what?

How is the Holy Spirit understood to be operating in worship service?

What spiritual experience do you think people get out of the service?

What are the keywords and key notions that sum up worship service?

#### 2) Characterizations of church and congregation

How would you describe theological position of Mosaic church?

Tell me about New Frontiers.

What do you see as being the most important role of your church?

#### 2) Power, authority, decision making and funding

Tell me about the eldership.

How are decisions made in the church? What structures of authority are there?

How is the service planned? Is something like a Lectionary used or not? Is there a worship group / committee or is it the sole responsibility of the minister? How are worship decisions made in the church?

What do you see as being your role as a minister, your relationship with your congregation?

How long have you been here? Have there been any significant changes in your time with the congregation?

#### 3) Membership and attendance numbers

How many people participate in weekly worship on average? Does this include children?

How many children do you get?

Has the congregation grown / declined in recent years?

#### 4) Other activities

What is the relationship between the church and the wider community? Is the church involved in charitable or other social action activities?

How would you characterize your relationships with other churches?

## Appendix F: Bible Reading and Life Experience Questionnaire Questions and Results

Name:

Date:

### Section 1: Frequency of activity

*Please indicate how much you participate in the activity listed in the following statements by placing an "X" in the appropriate box.*

1) How often do you read the Bible outside your church and school related activities?

[1] Everyday [4] More than once a week [1] Once a week [0] Twice a month [0] Once a month [3] Rarely

Bradley Clara, Kevin, Lee, Deborah Melanie Simon, Helen, Andrew

2) How often do you attend Sunday worship service at Mosaic Church?

[4] 3-4 times a month [3] 1-2 times a month [2] 1-2 times a quarter

Bradley, Kevin, Melanie, Clara Lee, Deborah, Simon Andrew, Helen

3) How often do you attend mission group sponsored by Mosaic Church?

[5] 3-4 times a month [3] 1-2times a month [2] 1-2 times a quarter

Deborah, Simon, Kevin, Melanie, Clara Lee, Bradley Helen, Andrew

4) How often do you feel close to God?

[1] All of the time [3] Most of the time [3] Some of the time [2] None of the time

Deborah Melanie, Kevin, Bradley Lee, Simon, Clara Helen, Andrew

5) How often do you talk with your Christian friends about your Christian life?

[1] Everyday [6] More than once week [1] Once week [1] Twice month [0] Once month [0] Rarely

Lee Melanie, Kevin, Clara, Andrew Helen  
Deborah, Bradley, Simon

Section 2: Bible Beliefs and views

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements by placing an "X" in the appropriate box.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Strongly Agree
6) I believe the Bible is divinely inspired.	0	Andrew	Helen	Lee, Simon, Clara	Melanie, Bradley, Kevin, Deborah
7) I believe the Bible is the authoritative guide for the way I live my life.	0	Helen, Andrew	0	Clara, Simon	Lee, Bradley, Deborah, Kevin, Melanie
8) I believe reading the Bible is essential to living a Christian life.	Andrew	0	0	Melanie, Clara, Helen, Simon, Deborah	Lee, Bradley, Kevin
9) I believe the preaching/teaching at Mosaic Church accurately reflects what the Bible says.	Andrew	0	Deborah	Lee, Clara, Bradley, Helen, Simon	Melanie, Kevin
10) I believe Mosaic' preaching/teaching on the importance of experiencing the Holy Spirit in the Christian life.	0	Andrew	0	Lee, Clara, Deborah, Helen, Bradley, Simon	Melanie, Kevin



Section 3: Bible reading and life

*Please indicate how often you experience the content of the following statements by placing an "X" in the appropriate box.*

	Never	Very seldom	Occasionally	Often	Very often
11) My Bible reading helps me feel close to God.	Andrew	Helen	Simon	Clara, Bradley	Lee, Kevin, Melanie, Deborah
12) My Bible reading helps me to see God's work in my life.	Andrew	Helen	Clara, Simon	Bradley	Lee, Kevin, Melanie, Deborah
13) My Bible reading gives me useful ways to explain to others God's work in my life.	Helen, Andrew	0	Clara, Simon	Lee, Kevin, Deborah, Bradley	Melanie
14) My Bible reading helps me deal with the responsibilities of being a young adult.	Andrew	Helen	Deborah, Simon	Lee, Clara, Bradley	Kevin, Melanie
15) My Bible reading helps me to see how God can use me to help others.	Andrew	Helen	Simon	Lee, Bradley, Clara	Kevin, Melanie, Deborah

#### Section 4: Importance of Bible reading

Please indicate how important Bible reading is to you in the following statements by placing an "X" in the appropriate box.

	Not at all important	Unimportant	Neither important nor unimportant	Important	Very important
16) How important is your Bible reading to forming your own beliefs about Christianity?	0	0	0	Melanie, Clara, Helen, Simon	Lee, Kevin, Deborah, Bradley, Andrew
17) How important is your Bible reading to helping you decide what is important in life?	0	Helen	0	Lee, Andrew, Clara, Bradley, Simon	Melanie, Kevin, Deborah
18) How important is your Bible reading to helping you make the right decisions in your relationships?	0	Helen	Andrew	Lee, Clara, Deborah, Simon	Melanie, Kevin, Bradley
19) How important is your Bible reading to assuring you of the reality of your Christian faith?	0	0	Lee	Melanie, Clara, Helen, Simon	Kevin, Deborah, Andrew, Bradley
20) How important is your Bible reading to helping you realize the changes God wants you to make to follow Jesus more fully?	0	Helen	0	Clara, Simon, Andrew	Lee, Melanie, Kevin, Deborah, Bradley

## Appendix G: Field Note Excerpts of Observations

### Examples of filed notes excerpts of my interview observations:

*24 October 2008 first round interview observations of Kevin:* Kevin wore blue jeans and gray sweater. He sat in a swivel chair to my left. He had the Bible Reading Comment sheets and a page of written notes on the desk in front of him. He would look at his notes and then at me when responding to questions. When talking to me he looked at me directly. There were a few times when he appeared nervous and when he responded to questions his legs were bouncing a bit. He would occasionally turn the swivel chair left to right when speaking....He used his right hand often when gesturing as if to punctuate his statements. A pen was in his right hand. He smiles when he talks about football and when he spoke of becoming a Christian. He drank a few times from a plastic water bottle during the interview.

*31 January 2009 third round interview observations of Simon:* Simon arrived at my apartment about 2:20pm. We had scheduled for 2pm but his bus connection was delayed. He looked very smartly dressed as if he were going out on the town with a dazzling white ironed shirt collar protruding above a dark brown sweater and donning a pair of blue jeans and white sneakers. His blond hair was nicely combed and his face freshly shaven. He sat upright in his chair with both feet planted firmly on the floor. He did not swivel in the swivel chair but faced me straight forwardly. He was very responsive to my questions and said he wished for the interview to “be useful.” He took his roommate’s copy of New Living Translation out of his backpack and showed it to me and he referred to it a couple of time during the interview. He looked at me directly save when he was looking at his notes. A few times he looked away or down as if thinking or unsure of how to respond as if unsure of how his answers would be received by me. One time when talking about his being on the fence of whether or not he believed the Bible to be God’s Word he looked down for a bit talking as if under his breath and then looked up as he continued speaking with his hand on his face as if he was outlining his mouth with his fingers. Otherwise he was at ease much of the time and we conversed for nearly two hours. He is very easy to talk with.

### An example of a field note excerpt of my small group observations:

*17 March 2009 Beta Course observations of Deborah:* Eleven people attended including me. The room was quite warm and the windows had condensation on them. Meeting started after 8pm. The male group leader started the discussion with a listing of various “preconceptions of church.” “What are common views of church by people on the street?” Deborah said “boring” and “too structured” to which others said “rigid.” She also said, “What about the sermon going on too long, boring non-sensical sermon.” The group’s attitudes and comments seemed to reflect their views on traditional church. Deborah asked, “My housemate accused me of being brain washed by church group. What do I say? She’s quite fierce.” The leader said that it’s not a religion and to talk about grace. The leader then asked “How church should be?” Deborah said “joyous or fun.” The leader said “If you don’t feel joy in church...” and Deborah cut in and said “why go.” The leader continued to say that we should have joy since we are saved. A male group member said “relevance” to which the leader responded, “We want to be up to date with the times but keep the truth of the gospel as well.” Deborah said “it should be noisy because in the boring churches it’s quiet.” The leader said that he likes “a time for reflection.” Deborah then said, “but it should be fun. Everyone should be involved. In a boring church no one sings and the organ plays.” She seems to be playing to the group here. What is interesting here is that this is something of a cultural critique of those aspects of church that these young people find unattractive....The leader turned our attention to what the Bible says the church is:

Leader: So what is the purpose of the church? Anyone want to share?

Deborah: Yeah. To worship God. That’s one of them.

Leader: So explain what you mean by worship?

Deborah: I don't know. I just like to praise him and say, 'Hi God we're here.'

Leader: Yeah. So you mean you are talking about singing there.

Deborah: Yeah. Also like church is a place you learn about God and the Bible and things. So yeah I think it's all combined.

Leader: Definitely.

### **Examples of field note excerpts of my church service observations:**

*10 November 2008 Mosaic 5:00pm service observations of sermon and religious practices:* Vincent spoke on "Does Jesus Believe in Hell?" from Luke 16:19-31. He invited the congregation to text questions to his phone number which was put on the projector screen. He said they would be addressed during a Q&A time after the service. After the sermon the congregation was invited to participate in communion. The band played songs and mission group leaders came to the front of the church. Each picked up a plate of bread and a glass of juice from a table and knelt on the floor across the front between the band and the congregation. People streamed to the front, knelt down and partook of the communion elements of bread and juice. The mission group leader broke a piece of bread, handed it to me and said, "This is Christ's body broken for you." He then took the glass of juice and said, "This is Christ's blood shed for you." The band continued playing as people returned to their seats. The congregation sang until all partook.

*05 July 09 Mosaic 10:30am service observations of congregational participation and religious practices:* During worship and singing a young adult girl walked from her seat to Henry in the front row and spoke to him. Later in the service he nodded to her and she went to the front and took the microphone and read Scripture that affirmed God's love of us. Henry then prayed and asked us to "drink deeply of the Holy Spirit; he empowers us." He also said we should be attentive to "God speaking into your situation." Darin spoke later between verses of a song and said "Be open to receive the Holy Spirit, to receive peace." He asked us to pray while a female saxophone player was playing softly.

## **Appendix H: Kendal Project Congregational Observation Checklist**

The questions below were taken from the Kendal Project congregational checklist of observations and were used in my observations of Mosaic Church. This is an abridged checklist reflecting the inquiries used in my observations.

[www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/.../congregationalchecklist.rtf](http://www.lancs.ac.uk/fss/projects/ieppp/kendal/.../congregationalchecklist.rtf)

Accessed October 2008

### **Kendal project observation checklist, congregational domain**

Karin Tusting and Linda Woodhead, Lancaster University, 2000-2002.

#### **Service observation**

##### **Environment and physical setting**

Describe the setting. What does the building, layout, decor tell about the congregation? Are the buildings old or new? Are they well-maintained or showing signs of wear?

What does the entry / porch say about the church to the first-time visitor?

Is there reading material available, e.g. leaflets describing the church's tradition? Is there a bookstall and if so what sort of material is on it?

Are there 'greeters' to welcome people?

What is placed in central or prominent positions? Altar table / lectern / something else? How is the seating arranged?

What props and equipment are used or displayed? Altar, chairs, tables, railed areas, pulpit, musical instruments, choir lofts, audio and video devices, sound systems; explicitly religious artefacts: candles, statuary, scrolls, wall hangings, stained-glass windows, murals, font, shrines; literacy artefacts: Bibles, hymn books, parish newsletters, Missals, service sheets?

Is there anything that visually 'sums up' this church?

##### **People**

What are the demographics of the congregation - age, sex, class, family composition?

How are people dressed? Smart / casual / something else - do they 'dress up' or 'dress down' for church?

Are there significant minority groups or sub-groups sitting apart from the whole? Who is included or left out of the different parts of the event: before the service, during the service, after the service?

Do people seem to know what to do when they come into the church?

How well do they know each other? How do they greet each other?

Roughly how many people are there?

What is the gender balance of the congregation? Do elements of the service or other church activities cater for women's needs? (How is God / Holy Spirit gendered?) (also: Look out for any reference to sexuality, which may be 'visible in its invisibility'.)

How does the church relate to families and children? Are there specific children's elements in the service?

## **The service**

### ***Structure of service***

What happens during the service? How is it divided up? How much time is devoted to different things - e.g., Scripture vs. sacrament?

How fixed / fluid is liturgy? How much of the service is pre-planned and how much spontaneous? Is a lectionary used?

What role is music given in the service? What hymns are used? Are they modern or traditional? What is the lyrical content of hymns? What do the lyrics tell us about the congregation? How is the music led - organ, sound system, folk group etc?

Prayer: What is the place of prayer in the service? Who and what is prayed for? Are prayers structured (if so how) or spontaneous?

What happens at the start? Do people chat, pray silently, hug, something else?  
What happens at the end? Where do people go? What groups stay?

### ***Participation, power and authority***

Who participates in each segment of the service and how? Clergy vs. lay participation? Whole congregation or only some sub-groups? Is this set in advance or spontaneous?

Who has leadership roles or otherwise distinctive roles?

Are the clergy and / or others set apart from the rest of the congregation, e.g. by distinctive dress?

Where is the focus of authority / power in the service? Could this show anything about structures of power and authority in the church?

How is the service orchestrated: by a clergy person; worship leader or worship group; written rubric; unspoken traditions and habits?

How involved do the congregation get in the service? Do they actively participate, take notes, read

Missals or service sheets? Are there visible displays of emotion? Do people fit in completely with the formal service structure or do they whisper, chat, move around?

How much standing, sitting, kneeling is there and what does this seem to signify?

### ***The sermon***

What was the content of the sermon?

What sources of authority are drawn on in the sermon? Things to look out for:

Evangelical

- won't have lectionary
- will preach Scripture by book
- sermon of exposition

Charismatic evangelical

- anecdote from experience
- related to Scriptures

***Other activities***

What evidence is there of other events taking place at the church during the week? Are they announced during the service? Is there a newsletter or bulletin describing other events? What relationship do these activities appear to have with the Sunday service?

What sort of relationship does the church appear to have with the wider society? Activist / sanctuary / civic / evangelical? Are they trying to change things, if so how - by structure / by individual?

**Overall questions for researcher**

***Typologies***

How does the congregation define itself and its relationships with other congregations?

How would you situate this congregation in terms of the Woodhead and Heelas (2000) religions of difference / religions of humanity / spiritualities of life typology and why?

***The turn to life thesis***

Where does emphasis fall between this life / afterlife or above life? Is the emphasis on self-fulfilment / empowerment here and now, or self-sacrifice? Here and now or hereafter? Religion as personal journey of faith or salvation in afterlife?

How is the Bible being used? As authoritative truth or personal resource?

How is the Holy Spirit seen to be operating in this church?

How often do words like 'life', 'spirituality', 'heart and soul' come up?

What place does the 'soul' seem to have?

What sort of turn to life is there? Self / relational / eco or cosmic?

Focus on 'love' and 'community' might distinguish from New Agey stuff.

***Impressions***

How did this church feel? Friendly / formal / enthusiastic / dry / ...? Did you feel welcomed or not?

What experience do you think people get out of the service?

What are the keywords / key notions that sum up this church for you?

## Appendix I: Data Analysis Examples

### First example of meaning-oriented analysis

The following comments are taken from Deborah's first round interview transcript (lines 1225-1289). The biblical texts scheduled for reading were Mark 6 and Mark 8. These passages report interactions between Jesus and his disciples regarding the feeding of the five thousand and four thousand respectively. The context of Deborah's comments is her relation of the biblical texts to her present life experience.

M=Michael D=Deborah

- 1 D: Well I was thinking about that last night cause it says, 'what strikes do these verses shape how you  
2 see your life experience.' And I was thinking about that when I read them last night and the main  
3 thing that jumped out at me is that Jesus is always he's not going to let you down really.  
4 M: What ah what difference does that make to you when you get up in the morning, that sense that  
5 he's not going to let you down? What difference does that make in your life?  
6 D: I don't know. It's like a security blanket isn't it? It's like people can hurt you people are fickle  
7 really aren't they? Compared to like Jesus is never going to do that to you like. I don't know.  
8 Silly things like people letting you down for like not meeting you for lunch or whatever. It's just  
9 like Jesus is never going to do that.  
10 M: So the constancy of Jesus is important to you?  
11 D: Yeah.  
12 M: That's what  
13 D: That's what I want to feel.  
14 M: That's what you want?  
15 D: Yeah.  
16 M: So when you come to faith, did you expect to have that sense of constancy?  
17 D: No  
18 M: Was that something that you have discovered since reading  
19 D: That's something that I've discovered. I didn't really know what I was coming to when I came to  
20 faith. I think I just thought I was coming to love. I didn't realize that there was so much more.  
21 M: Ok. So God's love for you is unfolding  
22 D: Yeah  
23 M: in new ways and you're discovering things about Jesus and God's love through Jesus for you and  
24 God is there for you. You used the phrase 'security blanket.' Can you explain that a little more?  
25 D: Well yeah. Jesus is always going to be there. You can always chat to him. You can always you  
26 know pray to him. Hopefully our prayers are answered. He's not going to run away. You might  
27 run away from him but then that's your decision. And my decision if I start walking in the other  
28 direction that's my fault not his.  
29 M: Why is having that security blanket of his presence and love important to you now at this point in  
30 your life?  
31 D: I don't know. I think maybe because my future is very uncertain. I'm in my final year I might not  
32 get a job or whatever afterwards. Ah I might not get on to the masters I've applied for. People  
33 come and go don't they? All the way through your life.

The underlined areas are statements germane to my inquiry about the relation of Bible reading and reader apprehension of God in life experience. Deborah says her understanding of the biblical texts in line 3 —“Jesus...is not going to let you down”— is important to her current life concerns. She also expressed this meaning in terms of a “security blanket” in line 6. She described the idea of a ‘security blanket’ in terms of intimacy and immediacy of relationship with Jesus (lines 25-26). She went on to relate this meaning to her sense of an uncertain future in lines 31-32. She expressed uncertainty about getting a job or going on to further education after university graduation.



These features of Deborah's relation of her biblical reading to life experience contributed to the identification of the recurring themes in participant interview data of anxiety of emerging adulthood and the importance of spiritual intimacy with God. These two themes were further developed into a conceptually relevant category of participant reading dispositions (see 4.0).

### Second example of meaning-oriented analysis

The following comments are taken from Melanie's second round interview transcript (lines 777-821). The biblical texts scheduled for reading were Romans 8 and Ephesians 5. The Romans passage talks about the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's relationship with God. These passages are mentioned and commented upon in Beta Course materials. Melanie's comments on the Romans passage served as the general context of the interview excerpt. The immediate context is my review of Melanie's comments that were taken from an actual Beta Course discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in her life. On that occasion she commented on the importance of an experience of the Holy Spirit to convince an individual of the reality of God given her perception of the resistance of British culture of Christianity.

M1=Michael M2=Melanie

- 34 M1: It's important for young people to have an evidence for what they believe given the resistance to  
35 Christian faith in the British society.
- 36 M2: Yeah. Because without ah like the Holy Spirit then all you have to go on is what's written in the  
37 Bible or what people tell you and you might have the information there but the Holy Spirit's what  
38 ah provides the actual relationship rather than just the information.
- 39 M1: So the Holy Spirit – experiencing the Holy Spirit ah is incredibly important?
- 40 M2: Yes.
- 41 M1: OK. Again I want to play devil's advocate with you. So here you have the Bible. Could – could  
42 evidence be presented from the Bible to show the reality of Christian faith?
- 43 M2: Ah I suppose like with the feeding of the 5 thousand and 4 thousand that we had before – that's  
44 kind of – it's the miracles that were performed that ah provide the evidence – the you know –  
45 there's something more than just you know human life. There's something higher. Ah so I think  
46 to a certain extent it does – there are so many areas in the Bible that you could talk about that you  
47 know show how God exists but at the same time for someone who doesn't believe they could just  
48 say that someone has made this up. That they've just written it in a book and they could say that  
49 it's not true even though there's historians have shown the elements of the Bible are true and that  
50 there would be no reason for them writing these things unless it was true. But for someone who  
51 really really is convinced that the – that it's all made up then you could say that they would still  
52 not believe after reading the Bible. And so that's why I still think that the Holy Spirit like  
53 experiencing the Holy Spirit is what confirms it. You might believe it – like I did believe that  
54 there was something higher but I couldn't really place what that was until I experienced the Holy  
55 Spirit.
- 56 M1: So that kind of serves as a final verdict for you. I've experienced it, there's evidence in the Bible  
57 but I've experienced it and that gives me a conclusion? A conviction?
- 58 M2: Yes. Yeah. Well yeah. Because I mean even when I experienced it I didn't know much about the  
59 Holy Spirit. And it was only after reading through the Bible – the Bible was kind of my way of  
60 understanding what had happened. Ah so nobody could say that I just read the Bible and made  
61 this stuff up from the Bible. Because I experienced it and then learned about it afterwards. So  
62 yeah that's
- 63 M1: Ok. Thanks for working through that with me. That helps me. Anything else about Romans 8?

The underlined statements are germane to my inquiry into the relation of the Bible and spiritual experience. Melanie's comments highlight the interplay of the Bible to spiritual experience and spiritual experience to belief in the reality of God. An experience of the Holy Spirit is important in order to convince someone who does not believe the Bible is true that God is real (lines 36-38; 46-48;

52-53). She referred to her experience of the Holy Spirit as confirmation of the reality of God (line 53-55). In lines 59-61 she also pointed out that something of the relation of the Bible to her experience. The meaning of her experience was not fully understood until she read the Bible at a later time. This means that her experience supports the truth of the Bible because it happened prior to her reading and that the Bible was important to an explanation of the meaning of her experience.

These features of Melanie's relation of her spiritual experience to Bible reading contributed to the identification of the recurring theme in participant interview data of the epistemic role of an experience of the Holy Spirit. The role of spiritual experience is confirmatory of the reality of God and Christianity. The Bible's role is explanatory. She read her experience in the Bible and read the Bible as justifying her experience of God. This theme was further developed into a conceptually relevant category of the influence of church teaching on participant interpretive structures (see 5.0).

**Appendix J: Subject Consent Form for a Research Study**

Project:

Participant's full name:

Subject project ID:

1. I have read the research information sheet and feel that I have received enough information about this study. YES / NO
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and I am satisfied with the answers. YES / NO
3. I understand the purpose of this study and how I will be involved. YES / NO
4. I understand that this is a research project and that there will be no direct benefit to me from taking part. YES / NO
5. I understand that the data obtained will be held in confidence and that, if it is presented or published, all my personal details will be removed. YES / NO
6. I understand that I am free to withdraw for the study at any time without giving any reason. YES / NO
7. I agree to take part in this research study. YES / NO

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Block capitals): \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K: Interview Transcript Excerpts from chapter 4.0

Presented below are interview transcript excerpts of select participant quotations that appear in chapter 4.0. A substantial or significant quotation is excerpted from *every* participant cited in *each* chapter section in which they are presented. These sample excerpts supply the immediate contexts of the quotations and are intended to provide data in support of the sense of the quotation. Excerpts are organized according to chapter sections.

### Chapter section: 4.2.1 Reader search to justify Christian belief

**Lee's quote:** *He wants to be sure about what he believes and not just accept things and "follow blindly" (1<sup>st</sup> interview 14 October 2008, line 492).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 1<sup>st</sup> interview 14 October 2008, lines 484-501

Mike: You want to make sure if you are going to get into something that you're getting in with an understanding of what you're doing?

Lee: Yeah I mean I'd use that communion example as like you know like I kind of I understand the broader context of it I don't I wouldn't just do it if for an example when I sit in church in Wales they said you know if this doesn't mean what it should mean you know like maybe just like maybe find out more about it or maybe just like pray about it. And then they're not saying don't but just like don't just **follow blindly**. Because I think I got the sense there as well that every Sunday communion everyone just gets up goes there whatever they're thinking whatever I'm not saying that's wrong. But I'm just saying for me I just **want to be sure** about what in that sort of sense that I don't want to do you know what I mean?

Mike: Is there something about communion initially that made you unsure?

Lee: I think it was just that I hadn't done it before and no one had really properly explained it to me. So ah yeah.

**Deborah's quote:** *"I sometimes think if whether or not I'm just being dragged along by a load of wierdos who believe in something that's not really there but they've had this feeling so they've decided that it's God. I sometimes doubt whether he exists at all" (2nd interview 22 March 2009, lines 46-49).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 2nd interview 22 March 2009, lines 38-56:

Mike: Do you have any doubts since we've talked about your faith, about your experience?

Deb: Yes.

Mike: Do you have a different way of seeing yourself now than when you made these comments?  
[Pause] This whole issue of doubting and faith

Deb: No no I doubt sometimes. **I sometimes think if whether or not I'm just being dragged along by a load of wierdos who believe in something that's not really there but they've had this feeling so they've decided that it's God. I sometimes doubt whether he exists at all.**

Mike: What triggered that? Anything?

Deb: I don't know. I just think that because I went to Alpha again and there's lots of people there who are non-Christians and my boyfriend's a non-Christian and he's not fully convince and



then I sometimes find myself thinking after speaking to him well maybe it's all just a big joke and it's not really real.

**Simon's quote:** *He considers himself a Christian but he says, "I don't necessarily believe totally in everything Jesus did or what Jesus said" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 121-122).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 118-129

Mike: Ok. Run that one by me again. The sense I'm getting from you is that you believe you can be a Christian and not believe in Jesus. Am I correct?

Simon: Well maybe not believe in Je – well I consider myself a Christian but I don't necessarily believe totally in everything Jesus did or what Jesus said. I'm still kind of trying to understand everything which he did. But I think you can be a Christian and not be a hundred percent a true believer in – in Jesus.

Mike: Ok. That's interesting to me. Ah – what is it then that makes a person a Christian?

Simon: To follow certain practices and to be willing to know more and ah –

#### 4.2.2 Reader search for authentic faith

**Simon's quote:** *Simon said, "I don't want to just accept everything outright just through reading [the Bible] think it must be true" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 496-497).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 491-506

Mike: So, make sure I understand. Ah at certain points you're questioning or doubts – you can see yourself as being like the Jews that grumble at those times. And because of that you don't want to be that way. You want to build on the faith that you already have.

Simon: Yeah. But I don't want to just accept everything outright just through reading think of it must be, it must be true.

Mike: So you don't want to believe just to believe. You want to believe for the right reasons. But you don't want to doubt just to have doubts because you don't see that as productive either.

Simon: Yeah. I don't see that as – I mean it can be productive – I mean if you manage to kind of find answers to get rid of those doubts - in that sense it's productive. But if you just doubt but then don't try to find any reasons to justify your doubts then you well, for me I wouldn't get any [indistinct speech] very quickly.

**Lee's quote:** *Lee said, "I think it's about being honest and what I don't want to do is like ah I don't wanna pretend that I get things that I don't" (1st interview 14 October 2008, lines 466-467).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 1st interview 14 October 2008, lines 456-485

Mike: What is important to you here? Sticking with something for the right reasons? Having or being prepared in case there's a drop or a slump in your life

Lee: Hmm.

Mike: and you don't want to be viewed as a quitter or drop out and you want to have something to sustain you?



Lee: No I think for me it's just about being honest so if I don't understand something if I'm not sure about something if I'm not comfortable with something ah I think it's about being honest and what I don't want to do is like ah I don't wanna pretend that I get things that I don't like I've one of my friends I talk to quite a lot ah probably too much but yeah like there's things that I'm doing that I still don't understand and it's not I don't know how to get my head around and it's much like as I'd love to like say to her

Mike: About the faith?

Lee: Yeah sorry as much as I'd like to say to her like you know yeah this is you know I get that. If I don't get it I won't I would never like say that I did and if I'm not comfortable with something like if I don't understand something like I think before like I never I guess like taking communion if I'd never done it before and I wasn't really comfortable about what it meant or what you know like why I was sort of doing it so I didn't do it if that makes sense before and I think that's probably a good example you know an example of a church situation if I'm not if I don't understand it if I don't like I just don't want to do it. Does that make sense?

Mike: You want to make sure if you are going to get into something that you're getting in with an understanding of what you're doing.

**Kevin's quote:** *He struggles with what he believes: "Just not as confident as what I believe. Like I'm stuck between the two" (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 27 February 2009, line 360).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 27 February 2009, lines 318-374

Mike: That the Bible is God's word? That you should read the Bible, that God will direct you?

Kevin: Yeah.

Mike: Ok.

Kevin: Ah I think that is what I believe. Ah I think yeah. I mean when I was – when we used to study religious studies at school we used to talk about the three different ah – three different ways of looking at the Bible. I'm not sure I can remember exactly but the fundamentalist view where every single word is true. And liberalist – I'm not sure I can't remember. I'd have to look it up in a book. Like the ah – so some people believe it is the word of God. Others believe it was kind of God-influenced and kind of it is a guide and some believe it's just a – just a I'm not sure – just a thing of the times. It was not – as truthful as it is make out. Ah but yeah. I think that cause of my upbringing in a Christian ah – in a Christian family – in the church and the schools I went to where we always had Bible readings ah. So I think I do believe it. It's definitely a guidance for us.

Mike: Of those 3 positions, which one do you see yourself as now?

Kevin: [Pause] I think the influence of being at Mosaic because – would lead me to say I'm more of a fundamentalist. That I believe everything in there is true. Ah at times I kind of – I don't know. I kind of find myself in between two churches. Cause my church back home is ah a bit different ah – to Mosaic. It's a church of England – an Anglican church. Ah very traditional. Whereas Mosaic obviously is a New Frontiers church. So - so some issues that my mum and dad have been to church all their lives and they will say ah – they will say one thing. And (indistinct speech) Mosaic will say others. So like my dad would say oh no. They were talking about this from the issue of hell which I'll probably get into after – ah was like – my dad was oh and do you actually believe in hell? And I say I'm not sure. I was like oh yeah. It says it in the Bible and like therefore we should ah – definitely believe in hell.



And dad's like oh well I'm not sure about all the Bible words. I would have thought to speak to him to one of the elders at Mosaic. They would say like yeah. We believe in the Bible. Or if it says in there it's hell and like there's a talk on it recently. Ah so sometimes on – on those issues I find myself in between the two because I'm – I obviously love Mosaic and everything about it. And I feel in a way more at home there because it's more youthful. More students there. Ah than at my church back home where it's not very youth – not many young people there. I think being in between those two being brought up in that and then coming to [northern England city] and everyone around me saying and another thing I'm not used to – maybe sometimes I just need - I do. **Just not as confident as what I believe. Like I'm stuck between the two** and just say (indistinct speech) this sex issue we were talking about. My mum and dad when I speak to them they're oh (indistinct speech) oh sex once the relationship is fine whereas anyone at Mosaic would say sex before marriage is wrong in any type. So I find myself kind of in between the two at times and I just need to – I wish I – and I want – I think with time I will get more confidence in just being more sure about what I believe in and I can just be more confident in talking with people about what I believe instead of being – and (indistinct speech) in the Bible that's another thing. I just need to like I said I just want to be sure of what I believe. But I would have said that given how good I feel about everything at Mosaic (indistinct speech) and then the last year and a half that I have felt that the influence that I have rubbed off on me and I would say that I believe – I'm pretty sure – I'm leaning towards the side saying I believe the Bible is God-given.

Mike: What is it about your experience at Mosaic that is – you feel positive about?

**Andrew's quote:** *He has come out of the "Christian bubble" of his childhood faith and now finds himself "questioning my faith in terms of is this really me or is this just what I've been brought up to believe" (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 02 April 2009, lines 63-34).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpts** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 02 April 2009, lines 49-78

Mike: Ah I – you – you then shared a bit about the meaning of it being lost of being lost, that experience of being lost and confused and wandering around. As you look back on that interview now and the, what you said about it

Andrew: Yeah

Mike: is there anything you want to add to that or

Andrew: Ah I think at the time I was coming out of sort of the Christian bubble that I'd been brought up to sort of understand and at that particular point in time I was still in a place where I was a bit confused about things. Didn't really understand what was going on but I was just like ah I wasn't going to let it get me to the point where I'd question my faith, to the point where I'd say I'm not really sure this is exactly right, not sure what's going on here. Ah I'd – think I was questioning – **questioning my faith in terms of is this really me or is this just what I've been brought up to believe** or at the same time there's a little battle going on in my head where it was sort of now this has to be right. Ah basically it was like having a person on each shoulder. One telling me that it must be there and the other one saying no just ignore that. You've always believed it and it's always been fine. So just – just accept it sort of. And ah at that point in time I was really wrestling with these two sort of conflicting views and ah yeah.

Mike: So when you – when you said that you – you were feeling lost and confused and wandering around

Andrew: Yeah



Mike: you felt like you were coming out of this God bubble?

Andrew: Yeah

**Deborah's quote:** *Deborah thinks Jesus "doesn't mind" that she has a non-Christian boyfriend with whom she is sexually active (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, line 1958).*

**Interview transcript excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1951-1962

Deb: Yeah but I think that's just because I was getting in a state. Because obviously all my friends that go to Mosaic are all you know – have boyfriends that are Christians and things. Ah but

Mike: What do you think Jesus wants of you? Does Jesus want you to have a Christian boyfriend or a non-Christian boyfriend or is that something that you think about?

Deb: I think that Jesus now doesn't mind.

Mike: Ok.

Deb: I think that ah Jesus – as long as he's number one in my life then it doesn't matter.

#### 4.2.3 Reader search for intimacy with God

**Andrew's quote:** *"It's like I just want to text God and just get a text back from Him. It's like when I'm praying sometimes I feel like I'm just talking to myself and things like that" (1<sup>st</sup> interview 05 October 2008, 568-570).*

**Interview transcript excerpt:** 1<sup>st</sup> interview 05 October 2008, lines 559-578

Mike: You also state 'current struggles, relationship with God is not what it was.' I'm quoting there.

Andrew: Yeah. Ah sometimes I feel emptiness when I'm struggling, um, I feel distant from God, which is sure a phrase you have heard before. Ah...yeah. My faith dwindles sometimes that I've got all these stories and I can speak the way that I do about how I've gone through things in the past. Sometimes I don't know, I do question, not His existence, that's not the case, but like his power and his commitment to me. It's...I just, I don't know, I find it hard to see at the moment. I sort of struggle a little bit because I don't know. It's like I just want to text God and just get a text back from Him. It's like when I'm praying sometimes I feel like I'm just talking to myself and things like that. Whereas I know that in the past I've really felt passionate when I'm praying. I've known I'm speaking to God, I've known that He's hearing me. Ah, at this point in time I'm not at that place anymore. Ah...

Mike: Do you see yourself now as thinking you should be able to understand more or sense God's presence more having seen Him at work in your life?

Andrew: Yeah. Definitely. Definitely.

**Lee's quote:** *Lee says "sometimes I feel quite far from God" and wants to be close to him more often (3<sup>rd</sup> interview lines 20 May 2009, line 1338).*

**Interview transcript excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview lines 20 May 2009, lines 1331-1352

Mike: in that Wakefield time – you describe that as a as a spiritual experience. Anything you want to add to that account, that description?



Lee: Yeah ah

Mike: You recall that Wakefield

Lee: yeah I definitely do – I guess like **sometimes I feel quite far from God**. And actually in the sense of – in the sense of like I wish kind of that – I hope that happens more. Like ah doing that. And like I'm less caught up and I spend more time kind of like talking rather than listening to God. And actually kind of hearing God. I think the two are related really.

Mike: So here you – you were receptive to that and that

Lee: Yeah

Mike: kind of reception or receptivity is something that you wish to have mark your life more often?

Lee: Yeah. Just like really just asking God to come and just fill me – take away all the other stuff.

**Deborah's quote:** *"It's because I think when you go from being a non-Christian to a Christian there is the sort of transitions stage between you know the – you know you think the non-Christian world is the real world. And you're going into this new world where you know – I do see things differently now that I'm a Christian"* (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1441-1445).

**Interview transcript excerpt** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1425-1462

Mike: The image that comes to mind when you use that language, 'retreat,' is this picture – and we call them training wheels in the States. It's a bicycle when you first learn to ride a 2-wheel bicycle –

Deb: Oh you have the 2 on the side. Yeah.

Mike: What do you call them here?

Deb: Stabilizers.

Mike: Stabilizers. Ok. That the God blanket may function for you like a stabilizer

Deb: Yeah

Mike: so you can ride the bike or whatever.

Deb: Yeah. I think it probably is. It's like – I don't know. **It's because I think when you go from being a non-Christian to a Christian there is the sort of transitions stage between you know the – you know you think the non-Christian world is the real world. And you're going into this new world where you know – I do see things differently now that I'm a Christian.** And I think it's the bit where I'm seeing things differently and then I think, 'Hang on. The real world is just' you know and so I skip back into the real world and then think 'no – back into the Christian world.'

Mike: And that was going on

Deb: Yeah

Mike: around the time of this interview?

Deb: yeah yeah



Mike: And since then you're more assured?

Deb: Yeah. I think – yeah I think now because you know everything is sort of – yeah different. I think I do see things differently now. I'm always in the God blanket. But it doesn't – it doesn't necessarily need to be a security blanket now.

**Kevin's quote:** *Yet he is not certain that his choices are always God's will: "maybe that's God talking to me or whether that's just me saying what I really deep down what I want" (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 27 February 2009, lines 1450-1452).*

**Interview transcript excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 27 February 2009, lines 1442-1464

Mike: Ok. Let's continue the Ephesians 5. Anything else you'd want to share?

Kevin: Ah [pause] ah Ephesians 5. Where – yeah that's ah an interesting point where it says 'therefore do not be foolish but understand what God's will is.' I've always – it's like with the Spirit kind of thing. So I just find it hard to determine exactly what God's will is. Ah there's times where I'll have prayed like God I just pray that you will guide me and stuff. You just let me know what your will is right now and it's like understanding the issue or understanding what actually is for me. Like never really been sure of like what I'm thinking like I'm thinking that maybe that's God talking to me or whether that's just me saying what I really deep down what I want or just being sure of what God's will is at times. Just like ah example as of when I was with my girlfriend and once or twice we'd have maybe problems and we would say like we'd bring it up like say things better if we part – if we split up for a bit. And so like big decisions and I really want God's guidance in it. So I'd pray like I just wanted to know what God's will was but I just wasn't sure whether that wasn't me saying yeah I wanna split apart. Saying no God's saying don't split up and that was just me saying don't split up because I don't wanna split up. So when it says 'understand what God's will is' I'd love to know how – I'd love to be able to understand this straightaway. So that was ah just a topic that I'd just love to get better on. Ah then when it says ah do not get drunk –

Mike: May I ask you a question just to follow up what you've just said about your break-up with your girlfriend?

**Melanie's quote:** *Her sense of the Holy Spirit coming into her life when she prays for it "confirms that God is real and that God is present in your life and within you and around you" (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 07 June 2009, lines 711-712).*

**Interview transcript excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 07 June 2009, lines 685-717

Mike: Can you tell me more about that?

Melanie: About the Spirit?

Mike: In your life.

Melanie: In my life. Ah well I never really – I never used to understand what the Holy Spirit was. I mean in Sunday School we learned about God the Father and about the stories of Jesus but we never really talked about the Holy Spirit and it's only through personal experience that I've come to know about the Holy Spirit and about what it means. And ah for me – I mean I – on this same holiday when I was about 15 or 16 – I can't remember – I think I was 16 actually. Ah I was praying with this girl who had a problem with her knee – after one of the activities. She had like recurring problems with her knee and I prayed with her and it was kind of like I felt the Spirit go through me into her. And ah I don't know what you call it. But when they like start shaking and things. And I had no idea what was going on. And ah they actually

called an ambulance out there – everything was fine obviously. But that was the first experience of the Spirit. And that's kind of what confirmed to me that God is real and you know the – my faith was justified. Ah because that's something that you can't really explain to a non-Christian. And that's the thing that makes my relationship with God real and not just something I've imagined. Because you can't imagine that sort of like feeling of the Holy Spirit. And whenever I ask for the Holy Spirit now then it's just given to me. And it's sort of – it's the same as what I was saying with that feeling. And I suppose that feeling is the Holy Spirit coming into my life. And ah it just – you've probably experienced it as well but ah – yeah. It's just something that confirms that God is real and God is there and present in your life and is within you and around you. So.

Mike: So the – so the role that experiencing the Holy Spirit in your life – the role that that plays is evidence that God is in your life.

Melanie: Yeah.

## Appendix L: Doctrinal Commitments of Mosaic Church

[http://www.mosaic-church.org.uk/about/what\\_we\\_believe/](http://www.mosaic-church.org.uk/about/what_we_believe/) Accessed 03 February 2009

We believe that...

The Bible is utterly trustworthy and inspired by God. It is enough (sufficient) for teaching us what to believe and how to live. The Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Bible.

God is one God but three persons - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (This mystery is called the Trinity).

God made everything that exists, and he keeps it all going.

Although men and women were made perfect in the beginning, they turned away from God. Because of this, mankind is now spiritually dead, born sinful and completely unable to turn towards God - without the Holy Spirit giving life (regeneration).

Jesus Christ is fully God. He is the second member of the Trinity. Yet he became fully human when he was born from a virgin (incarnation).

Jesus Christ earned our way to heaven (salvation). He did this through His perfect life and His death on the cross. He became our substitute and traded His perfection for our guilt. God punished Jesus instead. (This is called the atonement).

Jesus Christ rose from the dead on the third day (not just spiritually but physically). There were many witnesses. Soon afterwards he was taken up to heaven where he is now ruling over everything and praying for his church (interceding).

Men and women can now receive - by faith - the perfection (righteousness) of Jesus as a free gift, because of atonement. This means people can be completely forgiven and made righteous - even though they are sinners. (This is called justification).

The Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus after His return to heaven. He comforts, counsels, empowers and leads believers. He also challenges non-Christians about their sin (conviction) - and brings them to Jesus (conversion). He also works to make believers more holy (sanctification) and gives them gifts to help them serve God.

Jesus is building His new community called the church. There is the universal church (all the Christians in the world) and the local church, - a group of believers, in a particular area, who are committed to Jesus and to each other. The local church should bring in the rule of God (His Kingdom) wherever they are. God is worshipped and His word is preached. People are born again, the poor are cared for and sick people are healed. Believers are baptised in water as a sign of commitment and as a symbol of their death and resurrection in Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is also followed, to celebrate Jesus' death.

God's Kingdom will come in its fullness with the personal and glorious return of Jesus to earth. He will judge all of mankind. He will give everlasting joy to the righteous (believers) and everlasting punishment to the wicked.

### Appendix M: Definition of Charismatic

The word *charismatic* is in need of historical and theological definition. Modern Charismatic Christianity is a global cross-denominational phenomenon with roots in twentieth century Pentecostalism (Kay 2007). Pentecostalism, an early twentieth century emergent form of a “supernatural and experientially robust Christianity”, is characterized by belief in “second blessing of the Spirit” intended to provide evidence of conversion (Robbins 2004: 120). Dramatic post-conversion experiences of the Holy Spirit are often manifested in phenomenal occurrences during worship services of speaking in tongues, physical healing and proclaiming prophecy, basic features of an “inclusive definition” of Pentecostalism (Hollenweger 2004: 125). Charismatic theology is drawn from Pentecostalism’s emphasis on the Christian’s second critical experience with the Holy Spirit subsequent to conversion, a phenomenon often referred by modern charismatics as an expected frequent ‘encounter’ (Cartledge 2003: 25). Charismatic belief and practice emphasizes the importance of encounters with the Holy Spirit as part of Christian living: “at the heart of there is and should be an *encounter with the Holy Spirit*. This encounter is free, spontaneous, dynamic, transformative and should be an ongoing experiential reality within the purposes of God” (Cartledge 2006: 25, italics in original). The early 1960s marks the beginnings of the charismatic movement (Kay 2008: 35). In Britain the charismatic movement’s initial focus on spiritual renewal across denominational boundaries was challenged by the emergence of restorationism, a conviction characterized by a return to biblical authority and the apostolic pattern of the New Testament (Kay 2008: 35). New Frontiers International (NFI) is one manifestation of the spread charismatic restorationism in Britain. It is committed to renewal of the church through a recovery of belief in the Holy Spirit and openness to manifestations of his work. The ministry of Terry Virgo, NFI’s founder, is marked by a dual commitment to Calvinistic theology and a Pentecostal theology of the Holy Spirit (Kay 2007: 66). NFI is characterized as having a “strong biblical teaching ministry and openness to the charismatic” and this twin emphasis of “Word and Spirit have worked together” to the benefit of its churches (Kay 2007: 81). Mosaic Church embraces NFI’s Evangelical and Charismatic foci. The church affirms the importance of encounters with the Holy Spirit and its manifestations of prophecy, speaking in tongues and healing yet she critically distances herself from a Pentecostal activism that falls short of Evangelical theological constraints. For present purposes the term ‘charismatic’ refers to re-contextualized Pentecostalism. The phrases ‘charismatic experience’ and ‘charismatic spirituality’ refer to Christian religious experience of a personal, direct, and immediate encounter with God the Holy Spirit that is often manifested via his gifting of individuals to prophesy, speak in tongues and heal.



## **Appendix N: Case studies show the relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to participant orientations to the Bible and spiritual experience**

### *Lee's journey to God*

Lee has been on a faith journey. His initial search for logical answers to his questions about Christianity gave way to his drive to understand more of the faith. "I'm now journeying with it because I know it's not about being sure anymore it's just about exploring probably." He came to an important point of decision at Mosaic Church. "But like it's only when you really open yourself up that God really comes into your life sometimes." The road he has travelled has been influenced by church teaching.

Lee first attended church with his mother when he was young but his father did not attend with them. He recalls church attendance was a matter of "going because that's what you did on Sunday." Eventually his mother stopped going to church. He did not count himself as a Christian but was interested in Christianity. Later he participated in Mosaic's The Beta Course. Over the course of the meetings he became a Christian. "I came to being a Christian through being interested in it but I didn't really feel like I needed to be a Christian. Does that make sense? It was something that I was interested in and I got to know more about it you know like it's kind of been a really gradual thing."

Lee began attending Mosaic. He was anxious at first about attending church services because, for one, "it had been a while since I'd like been to church." He was also taken aback by the size of the church— "Mosaic is a really big church." The congregation's expressiveness in worship was uncomfortable to him. "I guess I'm quite a reserved person when it comes to like singing kind of praising and praying out loud like I'm not as comfortable with that I guess." Mosaic was "outside my comfort zone." In addition, he was bothered by what he observed to be "blind followers" whose loyalty to church teaching and practice was short-sighted and unquestioning. "I just need to make sure I understand what (pause) if that doesn't mean anything to me if I just do it because everyone else is doing it then I'm missing something." At the time he wished to ensure that his reasons for accepting Christianity were "honest." "I just want to not get carried away" by the church experience.

Over time Lee has become more involved in the church. He enlisted in the kitchen crew that serves teas and coffees after church services. He joined with a mission group and started leading some of the Bible studies. He finds the Bible to be an important part of his Christian life as "God speaks to me through it." He first read the Bible in an impressionistic manner looking for features of the text that were "relevant" to his life. Conversations with friends at Mosaic brought about a shift in his approach to reading. He now says he focuses more on the context of the passage and seeks to understand it with the view that God will still communicate to him through it. He reads his Bible each night, an activity that he describes with two metaphors. His Bible reading is similar to "reading through an old diary or something. Like I guess this is not my life that is in the Bible but actually it is like things that other people are doing which you can directly translate into your life." There is also a challenging aspect to Bible reading which is similar to the performance reviews he has on his job. The Bible evaluates him like when "you've sat down with your manager and they've gone through the goods and the bads and after coming out of there you kind of get the feeling like 'wow. I got some really good feedback there and there's also some stuff I could do differently and wow.'" He is resolute that "God does speak to me through reading the Bible."

Lee has also come to agree with Mosaic's teaching on the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit "brings to life" his Christian commitment. "It's like you're not alone. God is right there and is inside us as well you now." He is quick to point out the Holy Spirit is "not a drug" but a person who "re-energizes" his walk with God. Generally he has the sense of being filled with the Spirit during worship services. The experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit is "overwhelming" to him.

It makes me feel humble and it just makes me feel so loved like when I let God like fill me rather than you know like I get rid of all these things that I hold on to and all the things that I

think are important and all the mess of life that's happening all around us and I kind of like just really do focus in on God. And kind of like ah talk with him.

Lee also shared an intense and intimate encounter with God he experienced outside of church. It occurred after he made an important presentation at work. Before the meeting he prayed and asked God to help him with it. Afterwards he felt positive about the session. As he was driving home he began to "feel really close to God and feel God speaking to me." "I felt like he was right beside me in an almost overpowering way." God was saying to him "I didn't let you down." He found himself wanting to be expressive in response to God's presence and action. He said he "let go" and asked God to "just take over." He found the experience difficult to describe:

I was just talking out loud to God and just thanking him and just praising him and just like I guess the only equivalent thing I can think of is like a human maybe when you're really you know you're just so close to someone and you just like you just feel like everything's just let out. You know like it's more intense than that but like that's I guess the closest like human feeling I can ascribe to it.

He goes on to say, "maybe it's like when you ask a friend to do something and they do deliver and you just really feel like putting your arm around them and going 'you're amazing. You're really cool.'"

Lee does not feel an "original" experience of the Holy Spirit is "something that I really need or like you know rely on." "I know God is real." He does not think such an experience is unwarranted to help people realize God is real. "I think I would really struggle to be a Christian if like I didn't know God was real." For now, he simply wants to be more dependent on the Holy Spirit's guidance to "lead me into what I do." "So like the Spirit is—I don't want to say friend because it's more than that—but it is kind of that equivalent." He finds himself "naturally" asking God to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He thinks Mosaic Church leaders "want God to essentially lead the service....Like I think that Mosaic does use the Holy Spirit and it's good." He is also thankful for church teaching because "they teach from the Bible and what they're teaching is relevant and does feel like God's word coming through."

### *Clara's search for an elusive dramatic encounter with God*

Clara finds Mosaic's Word and Spirit emphasis to be challenging to her faith. The combination of biblical teaching and charismatic testimonies has generated mixed views for her in the role of the Holy Spirit in her life. They have proved difficult and often frustrating to her even as they have contributed to her search of assurance of the reality of her Christian faith. She was invited to Mosaic Church by a friend. "Other people seem to be more passionate. Like know more what they were doing. I would sit in a corner and not really say very much." She sensed she was missing something in her life that others at Mosaic possessed. She was attracted to the church and attended regularly. She heard people "give their testimony" of a sudden, decisive and transformative experience of God.

"It's like they were really atheist and never believed in God and everything was rubbish and – and like very very against it. And then they suddenly go to Alpha course and all of a sudden that's that. Or they just go to church one day and then suddenly it's like they suddenly believe. When before they thought everything– like when they were very against it– like going from being atheist to being Christian is quite a big step."

Confronting these conversion accounts impacted her. She said "there wasn't one day where I was very against it and all of a sudden it was like 'yes, this is true.' I think it was just generally I thought it was true and then I decided that 'yeah ok. It was true and all that.'" The impressive testimonies also caused her to call into question the reality of her own faith. She feels "there must be something that makes people believe when they didn't really believe before that maybe I've missed." She "never really had that big revelation" in her spiritual experience. She felt she was lacking a decisive spiritual change, a dramatic encounter with the Holy Spirit. She did not know very much about the Holy Spirit

until she attended Mosaic. She knew from the teachings of her home church (Church of England) that “dramatic things happened” on Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles.

She became increasingly aware of the absence of the Holy Spirit in her life with her involvement at Mosaic. “I often feel that I lack the Holy Spirit.” This gave rise to a quest. “And so is that something that has changed them ah is it in my life or is it not? And is it just that it’s always been there and so I don’t notice it as well? Or it’s that it’s not there or that it is there and I just haven’t recognized it.” She eventually became frustrated in her search. “I was feeling like there was nothing there and so he [Holy Spirit] made me almost not want to bother like keeping on trying to find out at times.” “I think I was just getting frustrated at not feeling any different.” The lack of special spiritual connection with God initiated a “vicious circle” in her life. She felt she was “praying to a brick wall.” It made her “not want to bother reading the Bible or pray or whatever because I wasn’t feeling anything was there.” She would go through the motions of attending church and that was the extent of her faith. Then she would become more “engaged” and read her Bible and pray to try to break the impasse. But this effort was to no effect and she would find herself back where she started with not wanting to be bothered. The cycle only “compounded the problem” of the reality of her faith.

The lack of confirmatory spiritual experience is nagging to Clara as it would put to rest the issue of whether or not she possesses the Holy Spirit in her life. She has come to understand more about the Holy Spirit from Mosaic teaching and her friends at the church. She realizes now that there is a biblical basis for believing she already has the Holy Spirit and that she is a Christian, even though she has not fully recognized this. Mosaic teaching quotes 1 Corinthians 12: 3 “No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (NIV). This verse is used in church materials to support the view that the believer experiences the Holy Spirit at the moment of conversion (Hatch 2007: 22) [The Beta Course] But there are times when she feels she does not have him. “It’s quite a step to actually accept that you’re not going to necessarily know.” One piece of the puzzle is still missing from her life. She has not been able to resolve this tension but continues to pursue ways to address it.

### *Helen’s guarded desire for God to provide closure*

Helen took Christianity for granted until she lost her faith. She went through an ordeal in which she found God was “not there.” “If it’s not there why isn’t it there?” She found losing her faith difficult “because it was kind of going against everything that I know.” She felt a spiritual emptiness. She says Christianity is “in me” because she was brought up to believe and finds she “can’t quite get rid of it.” Overtime she embraced a functional agnosticism, a position with which she is content. “I think my level of spirituality is ‘look it’s a really nice day. Isn’t it amazing?’” However she is compelled to find out if Christianity is “really real.” Bible reading is important to her in her pursuit of finding the reality of her birthplace Christian faith. However, she does not believe the Bible is an authoritative guide for her life. Reading it is not important to her decision making about life or her relationships.

In an effort to address this issue she attended Mosaic’s worship services on occasion and then The Alpha Course and part of The Beta Course. She feels very positive about Mosaic. “I still really like Mosaic and I think ah that of the churches I’ve gone to I think that’s one of the few that’s managed to get it a lot more right than other ones have.” She senses people feel connected with God when worshipping but has not had an experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. She identified with the “slight enviousness of the people that did seem very ah inhibited about kind of the expression like in the worship and things like that.” She believes it would be important for the Christian to experience the Holy Spirit but she does not count herself a Christian.

Helen finds a tenuous connection between church teaching on the Holy Spirit and her present condition. “Well maybe the fact that I keep on coming back to it is the Spirit prodding me and going ‘it’s still there’ or ‘I’m still here and I’m going to carry on prodding you until you do something about it.’” Yet part of her attributes her return church to the fact she was brought up to believe. She also says “I’d prefer if God decides to stick a big finger out and prod me and go look I’m real. Just get on with it now. Then that would be quite useful.” This is the kind of proof that would be of help to her.



But then she resists the idea of God's intervention in her life to confirm he is real. She is pessimistic of this prospect:

I think I've got far too good security on my walls to let it in. I'm surprised. I don't know. It's that ah if that happened then great you know. That solved one problem. But I'm at the position where I don't know if it really will and that's the other half of me going 'well everybody wants that.' Everyone wants proof even if it's their own personal proof. That's what everybody wants. Just because you want it doesn't mean that's what you're going to get.

However, she is looking for something to provide her with a "definitive answer" on the question of whether Christianity is true or just a matter of social conditioning. "I'm kind of sitting on the fence and I'm quite happy if someone pushed me off on one side but I don't really mind which one at that moment."

### *Kevin feels close to God at Mosaic*

Mosaic Church 'Word and Spirit' teaching has impacted Kevin's formation of his beliefs. This is true of his views of the Bible. He says church teaching has "rubbed off on me" and he is "leaning towards" believing the Bible is "God-given" and that "everything in there is true." This "fundamentalist" view is different to what his parents believe about the Bible. His father questions if everything in the Bible is true. Since attending Mosaic Kevin has come to understand he is transitioning from an adherence to what his parent's believe about Christianity to forming his own beliefs. It has been "a journey with God." He finds himself navigating his way between different belief systems. "I've not nailed down what I truly believe." His view of the Bible affects his readings of it. He believes God will help him deal with life concerns when he reads the Bible.

Ah I expect from God that he's help me out that when I read the Bible that he'd guide me through so that I could get through that situation or whatever it was and I could get though like successfully so in the end everything would be OK that I'd be happy that I wouldn't offend other people and that everyone would be happy.

Kevin feels an intimacy with God at Mosaic's worship service, especially during the singing time following the sermon. He prays when the first song after the sermon is being played. It is then he begins to "feel closer" to God. He says it is a "great feeling to be filled with the Spirit." Kevin asks God to "fill me with your Holy Spirit." Asking to be filled with the Holy Spirit is a staple of Mosaic teaching and is present in church materials. And God helps by "giving me the strength giving me the ability to do things." He describes the ensuing experience as euphoric:

I just feel a good happiness just knowing that I feel inside of me that there's something else there that I can just say that I—it's just so on my mind that I can look up to the sky and just in my mind it's the first thing I think about—that God's there. I just feel really close to God. Ah just so excited by it. So passionate about it. Just really wanting to just like talk about God. Just really just on such a high in a way. Ah just like just a feeling of like life—you can say the best feeling say in my life that I love football so like the best feeling like you just won your team or you just scored a goal just so happy so elated—so it's just like the kind of feeling that towards the end of a Mosaic service it's just like really say let's just sit down and wanna pray to God. Wanna tell God this or wanna ask God that. And just say thank you. Yeah just really excited. Really maybe just feel refreshed kinda peaceful and maybe God's peace and his Spirit.

Kevin's spiritual experiences of feeling close to God in worship at Mosaic play an influential role in his acceptance of church teachings. Raised in a Christian home his family and he attended a Church of England congregation in his home town. While at university he attended Mosaic Church. "I find myself between the two churches." "And if I find myself kind of a bit involved kinda between the two—if I feel close to God in one of them then I would have said I would side with what they are

saying if you get what I mean.” He also believes God has a plan for his life and “if I’m not doing it right or if need be he will break in and he will guide me another way or change me.”

*Andrew’s bitter confusion over his lack of an immediate connection with God*

Andrew feels bitterness towards Christianity. He is critical of the “Christian bubble” in which he was raised to enact belief in a certain way of life. Leaders of his hometown Baptist church encouraged him to be baptized, a step of commitment to God that required him to break up with his non-Christian girlfriend. He now regrets that he followed their direction. He feels “very naïve” and “stupid” for accepting and doing what was asked of him. His assessment of his birthplace religion has generated an intense reaction to a “rules and regulations” version of Christianity. The pendulum has swung far and wide.

Andrew finds Mosaic Church’s approach to Christianity to be preferable to that of his home church: “it’s not as much do’s and don’ts and this and that about the teachings.” He was involved with Mosaic Church off and on for over four years, attending church services more regularly in his last year at university. He played football on the church team and participated in The Alpha Course as a co-host at one of the tables. In his last university year he experienced a growing tension over how to have a relationship with God and he stopped attending church services. He expressed confusion about how a relationship with God actually works in his life. He wants to talk to God but feels like he is “talking to a brick wall.” “I want to text God and just get a text back from him.” He believes “there is something out there and Christianity does make sense on a fundamental very basic basis.” But he rejects the idea that he has to conform to church teaching or practices to engage with God. “What I’m not open to is having to discipline myself around Christian sort of teachings and going to church and ticking all the boxes of being a Christian so many people have generated.” These things serve as an obstacle to experiencing God:

I shouldn’t have to read a book even if it is the Bible to have a relationship with God. I don’t enjoy reading the Bible cause it sort of—why can’t I just have a relationship with God like I have a relationship with you or with anyone else? Why can’t I just enjoy God’s company? God’s presence? And why can’t he make his presence felt to me in a way that I enjoy it? That’s something else I’m confused about as well.

Bible reading no longer plays a part in his life. “Well it’s locked up in the cupboard at the moment.” Andrew also thinks God should be accessible individually apart from the mediation of a church.

I don’t need to go to church to experience God...God’s gonna meet me wherever I am if he’s there....I’m happy to accept the basics and things but from that being a Christian going to church what’s the actual relevance of that? Like you learning how to do this and that. But that’s going down the rules that’s sort of going down the line of rule and regulations and do’s and don’ts...if the Holy Spirit’s in us and doing and showing us how to do it then it should be internal and between me and God....

The “internal” work of the Holy Spirit in making possible an experience of God is not a teaching typical of Andrew’s home church. Bible teaching on the Holy Spirit there focused on his role as a “helper in living the Christian life.” The church did not stress dramatic spiritual experience as the congregation is “not very expressive in that way.” As such he dismisses “happy clappy charismatic things” at Mosaic as not being “what I’m about.” He questions the expressions of spiritual experience he observes during Mosaic worship. “That’s just that person being just expressing themselves. So I wouldn’t say that was an experience of the Holy Spirit.” However he is attracted to the church’s emphasis on a personal, direct, and immediate encounter with God. “I wonder what it would be like to experience the Holy Spirit.” “I’d like it to happen.” He is very open to God’s “intervention” in his life. “So when I say I’m open to Christianity, I’m open to God stepping into my life at any point and letting me know he’s there.” Such an experience would help him settle matters about what it means to have a relationship with him. “I want a relationship with God. If God – I don’t know what that means

like I said I've stopped searching because I don't understand how it works. But ah I'd quite like it if God had some sort of divine expression towards me. I don't know. I'd like a relationship with God if he's there." Such an experience would carry value in his thinking. "Ah [pause] because it confirms to me that he's there and that he is who he says he is despite all the questions and the things that seem to come with that that are confusing."

Andrew feels an "emptiness all the time" since his decision to stop searching for a way to resolve his concerns about relating to God. Some days "I feel like I've lost something." Sometimes he feels like the issue has been dealt with. There are other times when he lies in bed in the morning and asks "What's going on? Where do I stand?" He thinks this is all part of "growing up" and not being a "kid anymore." He wonders if his desire for a relationship with God will ever be satisfied. "Ah what I'm saying is I'm open to God stepping in and doing something in me. But it's going to take more than just speaking to somebody to do it. Because that – that doesn't satisfy. Has to be God."

## Appendix O: Interview Transcript Excerpts from chapter 5.0

Presented below are interview transcript excerpts of select participant quotations that appear in chapter 5.0. A substantial or significant quotation is excerpted from *every* participant cited in *each* chapter section in which they are presented. These sample excerpts supply the immediate contexts of the quotations and are intended to provide data in support of the sense of the quotation. Excerpts are organized according to chapter sections.

### Chapter section: 5.2.2 Textuality and Orality: signifying practices of experiencing God

**Clara's quote:** *Clara, for example, says "you're not just trying to figure it out yourself what it's saying in the Bible like they're – well not telling you what it says but helping you understand what it says" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 14 May 2009, lines 1555-1557).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 14 May 2009, lines 1541-1561

Mike: [Pause] Ah if you were to rank one, two and three, in what order would you put these 3 things: Bible reading, Christian friends, Mosaic teaching. Bible reading, Christian friends, Mosaic – in what order would you rank them – one two three as having – as providing you with the most understanding of your relationship with God. Bible reading, Christian friends, Mosaic teaching. One two three.

Clara: Christian friends is one. Mosaic is two and Bible reading is three.

Mike: Ok. And why would you order them that way?

Clara: Because I think with friends you can like hear what they've got to say and question them and throw things back and forth so you can get to a deeper understanding and like things that they say can I found it helpful. Ah like Dave and Grace and being at mission group and stuff. Just stuff that they've said that I've thought oh that's good. Ah Mosaic teaching because it's like you're not just trying to figure it out yourself what it's saying in the Bible like they're – well not telling you what it says but helping you understand what it says. So I think that that's really important as well. Because it helps me to understand. And then Bible reading obviously reading. Obviously it's really important but I find it quite difficult sometimes to see what it's actually saying. So I think that's why I put them in that order.

**Melanie's quote:** *Melanie also finds Mosaic teaching prevents her from misunderstanding the Bible: "The people preaching at Mosaic have ah studied the Bible a lot more than my friends and so they'll ah know what they are talking about a bit more and I won't misinterpret things or be taken up by someone's else's opinion that might not be the right one" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 09 September 2009, lines 1160-1163).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 09 September 2009, lines 1149-1163

Mike: And next question. What source most often helps you form your own beliefs about Christianity? Bible, Christian friends?

Melanie: I'd say the Bible with that because

Mike: So your Bible reading helps you to form your beliefs about Christianity?

Melanie: Yeah

Mike: And what would you put second?



Melanie: Ah, Mosaic probably because ah – the people that are preaching at Mosaic have ah – studied the Bible a lot more than my friends and so they’ll ah know what they’re talking about and won’t misinterpret things or be taken up by someone else’s opinion that might not be the right one.

**Kevin’s quote:** *His descriptions of his experience —“excited,” “passionate,” “high,” “best feeling in my life”— communicate the idea of embodied rapture which causes him to want to talk to God (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 February 2009, lines 482-486).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 February 2009, lines 473-498

Mike: And that that helps move you toward a confidence in the Bible and a confidence that God can direct you through the Bible. Ah what does feeling closer to God, what’s that like for you? What do you sense? What do you feel when you say you feel closer to God? What happens?

Kevin: Hard to explain. Ah [pause] ah I’m not sure. I just – just feel a good happiness just knowing that I just feel inside of me that there’s something else there that I can just say that I – it’s just so on my mind that I can just look up and just look up to the sky and just in my mind it’s the first thing I think about. That God’s there. I just feel – just feel really close to God. Ah just so so excited by it. So passionate about it. Just really wanting to just like talk about God. Just really just on such a high in a way. Ah just like just a feeling of like life -you can say the best feeling say in my life that I love football so like the best feeling like you just won your team or you just scored a goal just so happy so elated – so it’s just like the kind of feeling that towards the end of a Mosaic service it’s just like really say let’s just sit down and wanna pray to God. Wanna tell God this or wanna ask God that. And just say thank you. Yeah just really excited. Really maybe just feel – feel refreshed kinda peaceful and maybe God’s peace and his Spirit. But yeah. Just I’d say that yeah.

Mike: So you – you’ve described for me, in my term, like a euphoria. You used the word ‘high.’ You used the word ‘happiness.’ You used the word ‘peace.’ Like there’s this state of where you feel open to God and that God is near you. Am I understanding you correctly?

Kevin: Yeah. Yes.

**Simon’s quote:** *Simon experiences intimacy with Jesus when he participates in communion at Mosaic Church. It offers him the reassurance that “Jesus is there” and that he will “help you out if you need him” (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 382-383).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 31 July 2009, lines 367-384

Mike: Ok. Ah so your view of taking the communion is that this is an important practice, you feel connected with Jesus, it gives you an opportunity to pray ah – the importance of it is related to your understanding of John 6:54.

Simon: Yeah this kind of confirms to me that it is an important practice.

Mike: And it is important because?

Simon: Ah well kind of see my notes again – [pause]

Mike: I’m gonna shut one of these window, Chris. It’s a little noisy. [Pause]

Simon: I’m going to 6:35. Here it says that “he who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes me will never be thirsty.” And I kind of see that as – as symbolic and in the sense you can do that in the practice, through communion – that Jesus, if you turn to Jesus he’ll



always be there for you and ah – fulfill whatever problems or just help you out if you need him. He’s just there, he’s always there to turn to. He’s never not there.

**Deborah’s quote:** *Deborah experienced “moments where you tingle all over” during times of singing at Mosaic’s worship services and when she read the Bible. She linked this sensation with God “pouring more affection on you” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 March 2009, lines 1649; 1658).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 22 March 2009, lines 1641-1672

Mike: So the ‘breaking in’ has to be kind of understood within the backdrop of the ongoing presence of the Holy Spirit

Deb: Yeah

Mike: in our lives

Deb: Because sometimes you feel him more than you see there’s always the presence of the Holy Spirit and hopefully Jesus. But then you get those moments where you tingle all over don’t you? And that’s maybe

Mike: What does that mean when you tingle all over?

Deb: I think that maybe that’s God.

Mike: Ok.

Deb: That’s pouring more affection on you than he would be like say for now now I’m not tingling.

Mike: Ok.

Deb: But there

Mike: But there are moments. When does that happen?

Deb: Ah sometimes during worship sometimes when I read the Bible.

Mike: So when you’re at worship ah here at Mosaic. Are you talking about singing within the service?

Deb: Yeah yeah.

**Bradley’s quote:** *Bradley experiences a “shiver down the spine,” a sensation that he believes is spiritually significant since it occurs when he is praying during Mosaic’s worship services. The sensation indicates he is “aware of the Spirit” (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 19 April 2009, lines 927; 941).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 19 April 2009, lines 1919-1942

Mike: Post conversion. Since conversion. Have you had any sense of sometimes people say when they’re worshipping or when they’re reading the Bible ah they’ll have this breaking in or some kind of experience like that. Is that something that’s important to you or is that something you feel is, is

Bradley: I don’t know. I suppose subconsciously there’s an awareness of the Spirit. Ah but I not I suppose I haven’t really identified that ah in my life. Ah but I suppose with worship that’s what’s I suppose I’m praying when you’re really with God that there is a sense there’s a

feeling that I get shivers down my spine when I'm really ah feel like I'm really opening myself and worshipping God.

Mike: Is this at church service? Or personal

Bradley: Both. Sometimes it it can just be a there's always a I don't know. It's a weird feeling. Perhaps not everyone gets it but I just sort of get this when I feel like there's something really ah important and I'm really close to God. I just sort of get this shiver down my spine kind of thing. It's weird.

Mike: And what do you think that means?

Bradley: I don't know. Because I get the same shiver when something sometimes happens on ah you know in a film or something. I just ah I just I suppose I account it to that meaning that it's got importance or value to it and I'm aware of the Spirit inside of me or something. I don't know.

#### **5.2.4 Case studies: Relevance of Word and Spirit teaching to participant orientations to the Bible and charismatic experience**

##### ***Melanie's relationship with God comes alive via the Holy Spirit***

**Melanie's quote:** *"I think it's the Holy Spirit that assures me of the reality of my Christian faith more than the Bible"* (3<sup>rd</sup> interview lines 09 September 2009, 1101-1102).

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 09 September 2009, lines 1085-1106

Mike: In section 3, numbers 11 through 15 you all check very often – ah ok. And now section 4 on items, question 16, how important is your Bible reading to forming your own beliefs about Christianity, you put important. On number 19, how important is your Bible reading to assuring you to the reality of the Christian faith, you put important. On the others you put very important. Any reason why there's

Melanie: Ah I think the reason I put important rather than very important is again, with the Holy Spirit ah – and also I'm not saying that you should select certain part of the Bible that you believe more than other parts but I think that ah – there are other ways like through the church – I know that like obviously they read things from the Bible in their teaching but also discussing things with other Christian friends, finding out their take on like the Christian faith – I think that's ah important as well. It all links in with the Bible cause you're often talking about what a certain passage means but if you're just reading it then you might misinterpret it so discussing it with other people is important – just as important. And with the question 19 **I think that it's the Holy Spirit that assures me of the reality of my Christian faith more than the Bible.**

Mike: Ok. Thank you for that. Ah – just a couple more things here....

##### ***Bradley is learning to become more aware of the Holy Spirit***

**Bradley's quote:** *People at Bradley's mission group pray "prophetic words of encouragement" over an individual at meetings. These words "came into people's heads while the Spirit was breaking in"* (2<sup>nd</sup> interview 19 April 2009, lines 1075).

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 2<sup>nd</sup> interview 19 April 2009, lines 1061-1095

Mike: May I look at that?



Bradley: Yeah.

Mike: So you wrote these down while these were being said?

Bradley: Someone wrote them down and gave them to me as at the end before we left mission group.

Mike: And what do you understand these prophetic words of encouragement to be? Ah you attribute them to like the phrasing here in the book says 'God breaking in,' what is your sense of it?

Bradley: Ah to some degree. But I do definitely because it did was encouraging and I do perhaps think that you know they were thoughts that came into people's heads while the Spirit was breaking in in that sense. But it's also something I struggle with myself because I don't know how I can't it's difficult for me to understand how you can speak prophetically. Ah because it is obviously a gift. And I don't know. I'm not so sure.

Mike: So when you heard these things being stated, how did you receive them? What attitude or what?

Bradley: I just felt really encouraged at the time and ah a lot of the things that I was worrying about it sort of just put to bed a lot of the fears and obviously while we were there ah I almost it was quite fun just to tick off the things that sort of had had relevance while I was there and that kind of thing so.

Mike: Tick off the things?

Bradley: Just you know ah the different like the safety. We didn't have one problem with security or anything like that which is almost unheard of in Burma. We didn't have any problems so there's that. And the idea that it would be a significant trip. Expect God to speak to you that kind of stuck out. All those things just I felt like in some shape or form seemed to come to pass and ah yeah. I appreciated it.

### ***Deborah's spiritual experiences tell her God is real***

**Deborah's quote:** *Her Bible reading grew in importance as a way to understand more of God. "I think you can feel him in worship but you don't get to know him. You don't know – you don't find out how to live as he wants you to live til you read the Bible" (3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1838-1840).*

**Interview Transcript Excerpt:** 3<sup>rd</sup> interview 03 June 2009, lines 1818-1849

Mike: So you start out new in the faith or exploring the faith, the worship is a big deal, Bible reading – the importance of it, the activity grows and you start seeing connections to your life in relation with God.

Deb: yeah

Mike: And so we move from worship, the Bible, to worship, to Bible

Deb: Yeah I think with worship it is – it is just highlighting how amazing God is. And also just ah you know – you know come to me now. And then – so come to me and worship me. And then – so you do that and then you think 'ok so now I need to know more.' So then you go to the Bible. Cause the worship doesn't explain that you know that Jesus did.



Mike: So how would you describe the difference then between worshipping as a connection with God and the Bible as a connection with God? They seem to have different roles in your life or

Deb: Yeah no they do. I think that definitely they do because ah I think worship you – you know – you praise God and you glorify him. And then in the Bible you get to know him. I think I think you can feel him in worship but you don't – you don't get to know him. You don't know – you don't find out how to live as he wants you to live til you read the Bible.

Mike: And do you find yourself reading the Bible more

Deb: yeah

Mike: now than you did when you first

Deb: yeah definitely because I talk about things more and like I question things more and people say 'go and read this passage go and read that passage.'