

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH IN SOME POST- CHRISTENDOM MODELS AND
ACCORDING TO SOME AUTHORS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY WITH MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

by

MARIO WEYERS

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SUPERVISOR: PROF W A SAAYMAN

CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF C STENSCHKE

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SUMMARY

In this thesis the researcher has investigated which of the two concepts: *believing before belonging* or *belonging before believing*, is a more accountable perspective in regards to ministry in post-Christendom society.

With the final stages of the modern period the power of hegemonic ideologies is coming to an end as people identify less with grand ideologies and more with subcultures related to technology and social and economic networks of different kinds. The post-Christendom phase has begun and is radically challenging Christendom notions of ministry.

We have to assume that among post-Christians the familiarity with Christian concepts will fade as the decline of Christendom has meant that Christianity has been losing its status as a lingua franca, only to be understood in the long run, by those who are professing Christians. It is therefore important that the church will anticipate longer journeys towards faith and not move on to disciple new converts too quickly. Post-Christendom evangelization will consequently take longer, start further back and move more slowly.

In the context of post-Christendom, knowledge of Christianity is rather limited and people need to come to an understanding of what Christianity entails. For those seekers, exploratory participation at first is safer than making a definite commitment.

Postmodern society is also suspicious of institutions and eager to find whether Christian beliefs also work in practice and not only in theory. Therefore is *belonging before believing* very much necessary for seekers to test whether Christians live out in their communities what they claim to be true?

Keywords: believe, belong, behave, Post-Christendom, seekers, insiders, outsiders, fundamentalist, evangelicals, emergents.

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that: *The nature of the church in some post-Christendom models and according to some authors in the New Testament: a comparative study with missiological implications* is my own original research and that every source that has been incorporated into this thesis has been done with reference.

All biblical quotations and references have been taken from the Modern King James version.

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CHAPTER 1

1. Introduction

In this research I shall identify those post-Christendom¹ church models that have established themselves since the end of the so-called *Corpus Christianum* (approximately the early 1940's) era, referring to the age when every citizen of a specific nation-state was considered to be a member of the state church, and the start of post-Christendom (approximately from 1945). In the years following World War II, Europe was frequently described as a post-Christian society and by the 1960's theologians were reinterpreting the Gospel in the light of secularization (cf. Shenk 1995). Therefore it is necessary to identify church models that are functional and that are applicable to the dawning of a new era.

The first three centuries of the New Testament church were energized by its overwhelming missionary praxis. One only needs to study the Book of Acts to find descriptions of Paul's three consecutive missionary travels. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and the new believers' zeal for the risen Christ, new frontiers were won for the Kingdom of God.

In the long run, however, as church history has taught us (cf. Bosch 1993: 53), any missionary praxis does need an ecclesiological system to structure future ministry. Without a local church welcoming new believers and helping them to become themselves disciples and followers of Christ, an initial Kingdom vision for the future could be lost. Christoph Stenschke highlighted this truth by showing the significance of Paul's effort to plant churches with "ecclesiological foundations" to which he returned regularly, to eventually find "ecclesiological results" (Stenschke 2010: 72).

However, when the missionary praxis of the church loses its vitality and only its ecclesiological needs are met, an ecclesiastical empire arises that is different from the Kingdom of God. This indeed happened when Constantine proclaimed the edict of tolerance allowing not only Christianity in the Empire, but attempting to use Christianity to reunite the Roman Empire as a political force of its time (cf. Smith 2001: 131). The

¹ See my definition below

impact of Christendom as a religious system was further revealed on a universal scale by means of colonialism that spread from Western Europe to the rest of the world. Colonialism was therefore indeed the final grand project of Christendom.

Could there otherwise be a positive connection between missiology and ecclesiology? I believe that the answer lies in the *apostolic* call of the church as described by van Ruler (1948) and other scholars. Shortly after World War II, thinking about the church's calling outside of its own confines moved to the forefront. The general discussion among (especially) Reformed theologians in this period was that although the apostolic ministry of the twelve apostles as such is not directly applicable to the church's current evangelistic ministry, the church calling to influence the world outside of its comfort zone is nevertheless a timeless vocation². In this regard it was understood that the church has a continuous missionary calling to reach out to those living outside of the range of its ministries. In a sense the apostolic calling of the body of Christ had been entrusted to the local church. It is indeed this apostolic church that is the bearer of mission (cf. Van Wyk 1958; cf also Saayman 1984). It was the Theologians of the Apostolate which pointed out the reality that many, if not most, local churches were not aware of this biblical meaning of the apostolate of the church (which churches confess every Sunday). Understandings of the church (ecclesiology) had to be revised in the light of the apostolic mission of the church (cf. Saayman 1984:130). This rethinking I understand as *missionary ecclesiology*, a recognisable dimension of ecclesiology as such. My thesis therefore does not deal with the whole field of classical ecclesiology; it deals with this specific dimension of ecclesiology (cf. Saayman 2009).

Hoekendijk, a leading theologian in this movement, criticized the so-called *ecclesio-centrism* of the church whereby the church can easily get stuck in its own agendas and thus lose sight of its missionary calling. The remedy, according to Hoekendijk, is for the church to recognise the Kingdom of God as the true focus point and therefore to fix its gaze not on itself, but on the Kingdom of God. As the Kingdom of God is constantly reaching to impact the world, the church will do well to focus on the Kingdom and in so doing be constantly energized to reach the world for Christ (Hoekendijk 1964). When

² This stream was called "the theology of the apostolate".

following this theological debate in regards to the tension between ecclesiology and missiology, Wurth recognised that the church is not called only to protect and guard its boundaries against the world, or to permanently fix its gaze on the world, but to exist solely for God's pleasure. Wurth tried to accomplish a synthesis by not recognising that the church exists for the sake of the salvation of the world, as Hoekendijk explains, but for the sake of God alone (cf. Van Wyk 1958: 48-49).

How does the idea of cultural distance relate to Christendom and our situation now? The transformation of the church from pre-Christendom (as a marginal movement) to Christendom (as a central and powerful institution) was realised with the Edict of Milan, whereby the Roman Empire in time declared Christianity to be the official state religion. The Roman Empire went beyond proclaiming Christianity as they sought to bond church and state together: "The church provided religious legitimation for state activities and the state provided secular force to back up ecclesiastical decisions" (Hirsch 2007: 59). It was therefore a Constantinian model of civil religion.

Before the Edict of Milan and thus before Christianity was to be the official state religion, the decision to identify with the Christian community or not was an important issue for new believers in Christ. *To belong* to the fast growing Christian sect was life threatening and the Roman Empire was indeed a terrible enemy. In A.D. 303, what is often referred to as the *Great Persecution* took place. Christians were thrown out of the army and civil service. Churches and Scriptures were also destroyed. With the coming of the Edict of Milan and therefore proclaiming the Christian faith to be the official state religion, a new challenge was facing Christianity. This time the issue was how *to believe* in the deity of Christ. In A.D. 318 Arius, who was a senior official in the church of Alexandria, Egypt, challenged the very substance of the relationship between God and Jesus (cf. Smith 2001: 133-137). Arius was eventually defeated, but many more issues of belief would follow as now it became dangerous or disadvantageous *not* to accept the general faith formulation (guaranteed by the Emperor).

In the post-Christendom phase the fear of church sanction fell away, and the church found itself in an emerging church culture, in some aspects comparable to the Early apostolic church. The issue of the *dualism between belonging and believing* became very relevant.

According to Jonker (2008: 19) it is this period following the end of World War II that is recognised as the age that a generation, inspired by the sentiments of the Enlightenment and impatient with the failure of Western society (referring to the two World Wars), started campaigning to be freed from traditional religion. According to Jonker (2008) this period in the history of Western Europe is linked to the closing of the age of Constantine – meaning the age when every state member was also considered a member of the state church. Since then new emerging forms of Christianity appeared on the scene. To mention only two: The Social Gospel Movement and Liberation Theology.

Some of the emerging post-Christendom church models will therefore be analysed in the light of some parts of the New Testament. I consider it necessary to study New Testament theology in researching post-Christendom models, as it enables one to understand which church models broadly agree with the criteria of the New Testament and could therefore be considered to play a missiological role in the future of the church. My strategy will be one of evaluating the New Testament witness for useful criteria in identifying a biblical stance on post-Christendom church models.

1.1 Stating the problem:

How do we become a church of the future and yet stay true to the New Testament? In a national newspaper, Die Burger (2008), F Rossouw wrote an article in the weekend supplement, called “By”. He stated that in his opinion the institutional churches are suffering from spiritual cancer and are therefore terminally ill. Why according to Rossouw are the institutional churches so ill? He is of the opinion that there are three reasons:

- The way people refer to God ... write, preach and sing about Him in the institutional churches proves that He retired from being existentially involved with those people. The language that the church uses to refer to God is outdated and dysfunctional.
- Because of the institutional churches' moral concept its message has no relevance for those in search of true compassion. Church religion has lost those in search of spiritual spontaneity.
- Because the institutional churches are dying we will rather find Jesus in the marketplace among common people living a simple life.

Rossouw (2008) is thus claiming that established religion is not keeping up with postmodern expectations and that true religious spontaneity cannot be found in pre-packaged liturgical worship. Instead he wants us to look for Jesus among the commoners, going about their everyday life, as this is where true religion meets the marketplace.

Rossouw is not keeping in mind that the church as *organization* is an authentic part of the church ministry. The two aspects of the church - *institute and organism* - must not be played off against each other. Although the church is a breathing, growing, maturing and living organism; it also comprises of a certain order (1Cor 14:40), with institutional norms (1Cor 5:1-13), doctrinal standards (1 Cor 15:1-2) and defined rituals (1Cor 11:23-26) (cf. DeYoung and Kluck 2009:170).

Fensham (1990), in his doctoral thesis, Missiology for the future - A missiology in the light of the emerging systemic paradigm, is concerned with the abovementioned problem. His main concern is that we need a new vision as Christians to deal with the future in a creative way. He emphasises the importance and the need for a way of thinking that is wider than simply the institutional church.

This concern is due to the fact that traditional patterns of living are changed and shaped by the future and therefore the enduring institutions of society are threatened if they do not take action in constantly adapting to the ever changing challenge of the future: “It is not adapting, but rather that religious institutions that do not adapt to the shifts that are taking place in religious perception due to rapid change will dwindle and eventually lose their relevance” (Fensham 1990: 126).

Cilliers (2001) in, Wat is die storie met die kerk: - Kan ons die kerk nog glo?, (What is wrong with the church? – Is the church still trustworthy?), describes three reasons why new post-Christendom churches are coming to the forefront:

- People are not comfortable with the established belief of the historical church as being infallible as is the case in the Roman Catholic and some Orthodox churches.
- People are not comfortable with the proclamation of universal truth claims from Scripture by historical churches.
- People are not comfortable with the established system of the church. Hereby people will follow charismatic leaders and individual spiritual leadership rather than commit to ecclesiological traditions and historical creeds.

His conclusion is that society has parted from the *Volkskirche* (a phenomenon characteristic of the *corpus Christianum*) because of the above.

DeYoung and Kluck (2009:16-18) in, Why we love the church, explains four (additional) possible reasons why people are disillusioned with institutionalized religion. People find a *missiological* lack in institutionalized religion. Members find their congregation not growing in the sense that there is no new converts or baptisms taking place and that young people are not sticking with the church after high school. Many insiders as well as outsiders have *personal* objections towards the institutionalized church. The church in the eyes of many is filled and occupied with antiwoman and antigay issues. They find the church legalistic, oppressive and hurtful. Many experience

the institutionalized church as corrupted beyond recognition and blame this on *historical* grounds. They blame the first few centuries where Greek thinking overtook the Hebraic mode of thinking. Some blame Constantine and the evils of Christendom. Fourth is the *biblical and theological* critique. Many do not consider it important anymore to participate in an institutionalized church service as it is believed that all you need for church is two or three people who worship Christ together, wherever they are.

In regards to the critique of *missiological* lack in the institutionalized church one should keep in mind that there is no biblical teaching to indicate that the size of the church in regards to numerical growth is by any means a measure of success. Only in regards to salvation should it be a concern. In regards to *personal* objections one should keep in mind that the Gospel is by nature offensive. For all of us there is a biblical passage or sections of scripture that will oppose our modus operandi or our philosophy and therefore we can find it offensive. If the pastor or elder touches on sensitive issues it could become personal. *History* gives us the advantage of understanding our context and gives us the opportunity to learn from others mistakes. Let's say we are sorry and move on to some other way of impacting the world through the kingdom of God. *Theological and biblical* motivation for breaking away from the institutionalized church to start a home or cell group over and against the local congregation sets up the important question of Biblical accountability.

Lukasse (2009: 31) describes in his new publication, Delen en vermenigvuldigen (Dividing and multiplying), the radical religious change that has taken shape over centuries gone by. In *Victorian times* the church was shaped in the linear form of: **behaving** – *belonging* – *believing*. In the time of *modernism* it was shaped in the linear form of: **believing** – *belonging* – *behaving*. Now in the *postmodern age* it is shaped in the linear form of: **belonging** – *behaving* – *believing*. Neither religious values nor evangelical beliefs are as attractive to postmodern people as unconditional acceptance into spiritual and faith communities.

Nel (2003) is involved with research in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of Namibia. In his book, Op soek na God buite die kerk (In search of God outside the church), he explains the troublesome results he found in doing research on

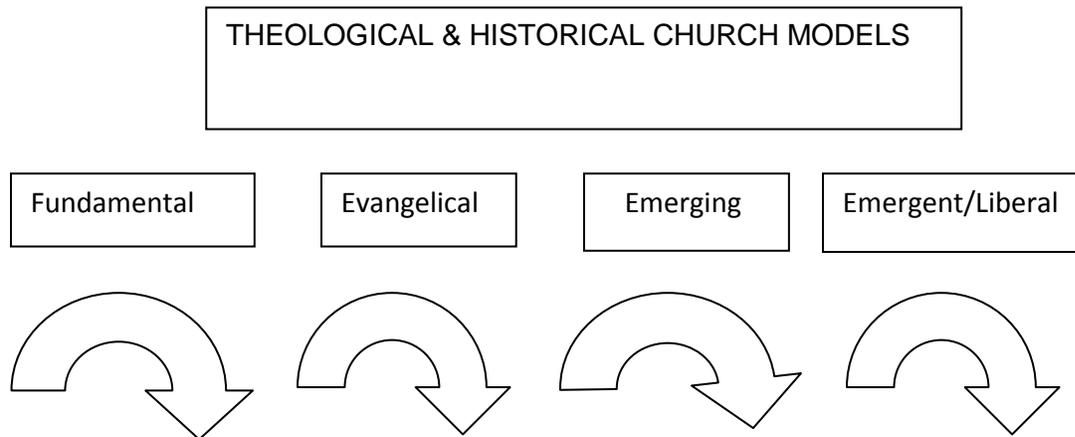
why postmodern people are not experiencing God in the *Volkskirche* and are following post-Christian ministries:

One of the most moving occasions during our research conversations was when people, usually towards the end of the chat, spoke of their personal search, and many of them were on the search. Colin was burned up with anger at the institutional church. Another man explained sadly that he had been unable to find a church open enough to accept him as a searcher (Nel 2003: 189).

Nel's conclusion is shocking, but not unusual. Because the institutional church has made mistakes in the past (probably Nel is referring to the Dutch Reformed Church in South-Africa and its involvement in Apartheid) and has thereby caused many tensions in South-African society, one can expect that in future postmodern religious communities would rather want to investigate those ministries with a post-Christian character than those of a strong Christendom background. In the South African context many families still feel betrayed and misled by the Dutch Reformed Church, to which they have for generations been loyal to its dogma and political indoctrinations (cf. Durand 1985: 49).

In the contributions of eighteen theologians, found in the work of the editor Botha (2001) in, Ja vir Jesus, nee vir die kerk (Yes for Jesus, but no to the church), on the question of the dying church and the impact of postmodernity on society it is clear that it will no longer be state policy or culture that will open up new religious possibilities, but new upcoming post-Christendom church models. Upcoming (charismatic) Christian leaders do not necessarily find inspiration in the religion of their parents and grandparents – the *Volkskirche* – but in a Jesus who is connected to the everyday demands of the marketplace and in a local Christian community that He might lead them into.

1.2 Defining the area of research:



In defining the area of research I shall pay close attention to four post-Christendom models indicated above. One has to keep in mind that this is a personal outline to clarify a spectrum of only four theological and historical church models and is therefore not a comprehensive representation.

Dekker, a religious sociologist from the Netherlands, in his research called Oude wijn in nieuwe zakken (Old wine in new wineskins) (cf. Jonker 2008: 29-30) has identified three possible Christian religious positions in regards to the post-Christendom challenge. He describes the challenge facing the established Christian church in a post-Christendom context, of wanting to be relevant without losing its evangelical witness. He identified three post-Christendom ecclesiastical positions. The *traditionalist or fundamentalist*, who at any given time will not easily let go of their traditional religious convictions and could eventually have little influence in a rapid changing society. The next position is that of the *liberal movement*, which wants to uphold a historical connection with the established Christian religion, but finds it equally important to be culturally relevant. The risk of identifying with this position is one of discarding core Christian beliefs. Finally he refers to basic *Christian communities emerging* not from an institutional background, but

from social and economic local activity whereby people are empowered to be the church in the marketplace and not merely to belong to the church.

I have positioned a fourth model, called the *evangelicals*. The influence of the Evangelical Church (cf. Webber 2003) in local and international events should not be underestimated as this movement has also positioned itself as a role player among others in the quest of being relevant in a post-Christendom context.

Fundamentalism has generally been an opponent of post-Christian theology and postmodernism. Therefore it is debatable whether fundamentalism can be regarded as a post-Christendom model. It has, though, definitely positioned itself as a theological model that participates actively in current affairs³ (and is even a growing factor among religious groups) as a sustainable option in post-Christian times. It may be closer to the truth to refer to *neo-fundamentalism* as a sustainable option in post-Christian times, as it is a specific response to the greater openness which came with post-Christendom. It attaches great value to a literal understanding of Scripture and following the age-old articles of faith. Jonker (2008) refers to this model in post-Christendom terms as the *orthodox model*. In using the word *orthodox* he does not refer to the Byzantine times and its ecclesiology (cf. Bosch 1993: 212), but rather uses the expression to express the value of a religious tradition as being conformed to accepted standards. With *accepted* standards it is meant that which is considered traditional in religious doctrine and practice. Orthodox Christianity or “proto-orthodoxy” (cf. Marshall 2007: 30) was but one of many Christianities that appeared around the ancient Mediterranean world.

In the Reformed tradition, for instance, one will find among the orthodox a strong belief that only men are allowed to be ordained as ministers of religion. Women who are part of the church leadership are confined to the position of deacons. Another example of Reformed orthodoxy in the Western ecclesiology of religious doctrine is the practice whereby only rhymed versions of the Psalms may be sung in a church meeting.

³ As is the case, for example, in the United States of America.

General criticism of this type of model is that orthodox Christianity is not taking the challenge of the Enlightenment seriously enough and is not contributing to the issue of coping with the reality of secularisation (Jonker 2008: 31).

Evangelicals in general feel strongly that apart from Jesus Christ, no salvation is possible, that the Bible is the only criterion for faith and Christian living and they are therefore passionate concerning witnessing and evangelism.

The *biblical* use of *evangelical* refers to the good news of salvation that has realised in Christ's mediation and which must be proclaimed to the ends of the world. The *theological* use of *evangelical* refers to those who affirm Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. The *historical* usage of *evangelical* refers to evangelical renewal movements among monastics during the Protestant Reformation, pietism, the Oxford movement and many evangelical awakenings. According to Webber (2003: 14-15) it is the *cultural* use of the term that is complex due to the fact that evangelical faith is facing a new paradigm change. Culturally defined evangelicals have used the modern paradigm of thought that emphasized reason and the empirical method. This modern paradigm of thought is coming to a close as it is experiencing a new *emerging* cultural context.

It is common to find numerous evangelicals in different established Christendom churches. This is true in the case of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, due to the influence of early Scottish theologians. The preacher and theologian, Andrew Murray influenced many in regard to the evangelical and pietist tradition. The pietists' response to ecclesiological problems and challenges is usually a practical one, because their type of "vertical" relationship with the Holy Spirit keeps them from going to Scripture too readily to find a normative answer to problems outside the specific context:

The pietist will be less likely to justify social actions by an appeal to unchanging biblical principles or to use the historical situation in which he finds himself as a grid for biblical interpretation. Their evangelical-pietist background rebelled against identifying a social and political policy with biblical principles. Ultimately they had a greater sense of the ongoing processes of history than their counterparts who tried to mould history according to a set of fixed principles [orthodoxy], supposedly derived from God's creation (Durand 1985: 48-49).

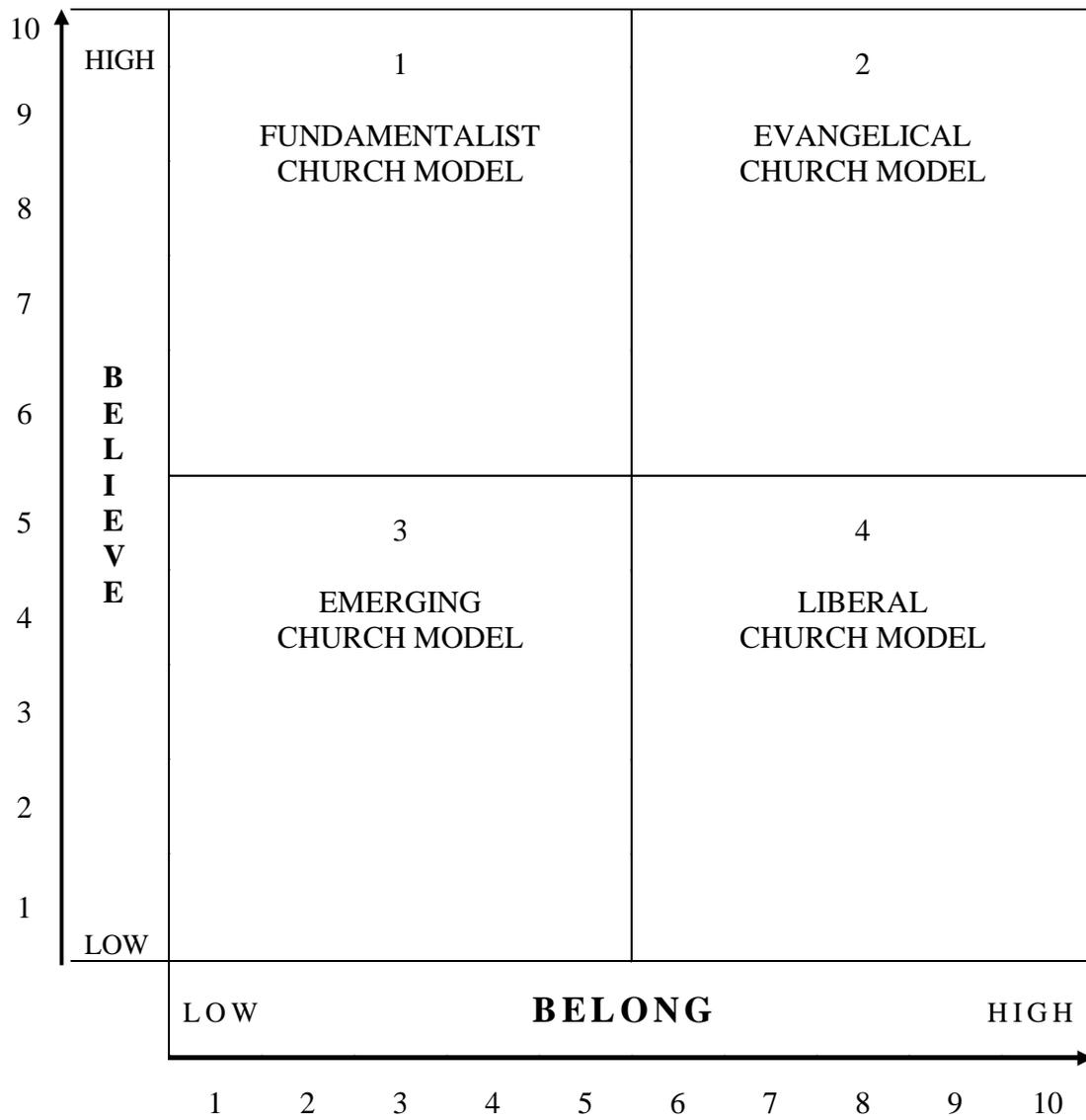
This would not only apply to evangelicals' missionary zeal among natives during South-Africa's history of Apartheid, but I suspect the above statement to be also true in regards to the missionary-ecclesiological challenge facing the church nowadays on the issue of *believing before belonging*, or *belonging before believing*.

Emerging refers to the church movement of the early twenty-first century which started in the North Atlantic (USA, Canada, Britain and central Europe) and whose participants seek to engage postmodern people, especially the un-churched and post-churched who are in need of belonging and in need of being socially accepted. They believe it is necessary to deconstruct modern Christian dogma and avoid the use of irrelevant Christian language. They have not sought to be considered "movement builders" (Wells 2008: 16) because that would defy their purpose of pulling away from power and structures. Those following this post-Christendom model are mostly orientated to the Bible and slightly postmodern in their worldview. The Emerging movement encourages diversity of belief which makes it difficult to track, but with regard to Jonker's (2008) analysis of church movements after the *Corpus Christianum* and the full blown effect of the Enlightenment, one could consider the Emerging movement as *neo-orthodox* in so far as it emphasises the importance of the Enlightenment for the human race and wants to re-interpret the Gospel message meaningfully in this changed state of affairs (2008: 50).

Emergent and **Liberal** are closely associated in this research. In the Emergent movement there is a sub-culture of followers who have assimilated to the social and political agenda of the day to such an extent that there is barely a distinction between world and church. They are mostly postmodern in orientation and much less orientated to the Bible. This sub-culture has fully conformed to the character of the Enlightenment and thus places people at the centre of life, practice theology anthropocentrically and aims to dissolve any tension between the Gospel and the world. The central aim of liberal theology is to make it possible for humankind "to be both an intelligent modern and a serious Christian" (Smith 2001: 393). Protestant Liberalism asked itself from the beginning: How do we show our world the relevance of faith? In Jonker's presentation

the historical *Liberal model* of yesterday has now a new face and agenda – called Emergent/Liberal (2008: 39).

1.3 Research Hypothesis:



Fensham (1990) uses Richard Niebuhr's distinction (in *Christ and Culture*, 1956) to describe and position these models.⁴ He would consider the fundamentalist model (block 1) as what Niebuhr termed as "*Christ against culture*". This, Fensham considers to be an escapist position which causes contradiction and tension as one can never really escape the pervasiveness of culture. The Evangelical model (block 2) would (according to Fensham) be considered as a model where God works his plan "*through culture*" (in Niebuhr's terms). The Emerging church model (block 3) is regarded by Fensham as Niebuhr's "*Christ in culture*". Understanding the pervasiveness of culture, this model holds true to the belief, that God not necessarily endorses culture, but that God is being manifested in human culture. The main problem with this model is the lack of critical perspective in its viewing of culture. The fourth block (Liberal church model) can in Fensham's view be considered in the light of Niebuhr's "*Christ above culture*". This is the classical position where God is not involved with our day-to-day lives (in a cultural context) as all things are predetermined. God was once involved in history, but now we are left with creating and maintaining our own history and our own religion; we are becoming our own gods.

These above four positions are loaded with implications for ministry and missiology. To mention only the "Christ against culture" position, we find different plausibility structures. This implies that when a person is involved in church her or his plausibility structure is determined by the Christian faith. When she is not involved in church activity and its direct ministry, her plausibility structure is determined by the mechanistic influences of her society. In other words two different and unrelated worlds apply. The one is the world where I primarily *believe*. The other world is the one where I primarily find myself *belonging* due to my profession: "In Protestantism this meant, in practice, that religion was relegated to the private sector, to the world of values, where people are free to choose what they like. Thus, where religion did persist, it had to settle for a much reduced place in the sun" (Bosch 1995: 18). This research has as its aim to investigate missiological factors that can help to merge the above two unrelated worlds closer towards each other.

⁴ I wish to state clearly that I am using Fensham's interpretation of Niebuhr, not Niebuhr himself, as I find Fensham's contemporary interpretation very useful.

If one considers the above quadrant model it is important to grasp the fact that block 1 and block 4 oppose each other in regards to interpretation of text and culture. The same can also be said of blocks 2 and 3. If one accepts this view, then it is possible that blocks 1 and 2 can be seen as a unit and blocks 3 and 4 as another opposing unit. How is this possible? Fundamentalists and Evangelicals have a theological praxis that operates from the text of Scripture towards the current culture. The Emerging church movement and the Emergent/Liberal movement have an opposite theological praxis: from the current culture towards the text. Fundamentalists and Evangelicals are bound together by their absolute understanding of faith. Emerging and Emergent/Liberal followers of Christ are bound together by their relative understanding of faith. It is interesting that there is even a stronger bond between blocks 1 and 2 and blocks 3 and 4 establishing a stronger opposing force between these two groups of opposites.

Both Fundamentalists as well as traditional Evangelicals believe in what RS Smith (2005: 65) in, Truth and the new kind of Christian, calls the characteristic of: *Believe before belonging*. In the case of the Emerging and Emergent/Liberal movements it is rather an opposite axiom that is valued: *Belong before believing*. The dualism between *believe before belonging* and *belong before believing* was highlighted by McClaren (2001) as he discussed the important view that evangelism is not to be done from a superior position, but from a relational stance. He therefore understands the, *belong before believing* option as a non- superior position that enables friendship evangelism. Scholars like Murray (2004), Smith (2005) and Wells (2008) have stipulated the problems as well as possibilities of this current debate.

Looking at the quadrants one will find that blocks 1 and 2 (following the vertical column from the top to the bottom) are “high” in regard to believing first in Christ as saviour and redeemer before one may belong (in a dogmatic sense) to a faith community as such. A personal testimony of faith, in Christ as the Son of God, is the key issue here. The opposite is true of blocks 3 and 4 (following the horizontal line from left to right). These two in combination are “low” in regard to the aspect of believing before you can belong and are in opposition to this requirement. Their axiom is rather: *belonging before*

believing. The perspective that we find in these two post-Christendom models, is rather one of process evangelism than seeking confrontation:

Instead of emphasizing biblical truths presented as propositions to be rationally accepted, we need to invite students and others into our Christian communities, in which they will see believers living out the faith authentically (Smith 2005: 73).

In regards to all of the above my research hypothesis will be as follows:

Bosch (1991:368) indicated “the church-with-others” as the first element of the new ecumenical and postmodern mission paradigm. This calls us to rethink our missionary ecclesiology. By investigating and comparing the nature of the church in some post-Christendom models and in some parts of the New Testament we can assess on which of the two concepts, Believing before belonging, or Belonging before believing, a missionary ecclesiology (as a theological sub-discipline) should focus in future in order to help us be the “church-with-others”.

A few remarks about the hypothesis would be in order. The church as body of Christ can only practice true mission *in relationship* with others, especially if the “others” do not believe the Gospel and its implications in the manner that I do. There is no sense in being sent as a missionary for Christ among those who share our exact beliefs, as there will be no challenge to love and reach out to them as Christ did. To be involved in God’s *missio Dei* is to be willing to be sent to those who do not share my convictions, but nevertheless to love them and relate to them as Christ once did among us. If such relationships can be seriously questioned, the authenticity of the missionary church will be at stake. This implies, already prior to what follows, the importance of the *belong (to be in a relationship) before believe* axiom.

This criterion – *in relationship with others* – as a timeless missionary value, correlates with Bosch’s primary element of the new emerging ecumenical paradigm described as “a church-with-others” (Bosch 1991: 368-388). The *belong before believe* axiom opens up new possibilities for the institutional church to relate with those not sharing their historical convictions and not sharing their exact dogmatic position, without neglecting to

reach out to them. The *belong before believe* axiom supports the notion of a *church-with-others*. The *believe before belong* option supports the notion of a *church-above-others* (my own interpretation). Meaning, if one does not believe as I do and do not interact with God as the institution does, he or she is perceived as an outsider. *It is worth noting that the belong before you have to believe paradigm is not new in itself, but it has the potential of being interpreted as new if it transforms the historical understanding in the post-Christendom context.*

Apart from analysing the four identified post-Christendom models I shall investigate some New Testament ecclesiology, and more specifically the theology of the Gospels and the New Testament writings of Paul. Why incorporate the New Testament in this research? Why focus on Jesus' ministry and teachings, and the ecclesiology in the letters of Paul? Not only has the New Testament played a profound role in the developing thoughts on a post-Christendom *ecclesia*, but it is my contention that the institutionalised church is orientated more on Paul than on Jesus; and that followers of the emerging church movement do identify more with a *Jesus type* of *ecclesia*. Jesus' and Paul's theologies do dominate the pages of the New Testament more than any others. Wenham (1995: 1) confirms this by stating:

These two men were quite different from each other in many ways: Jesus was a charismatic prophetic figure from Galilee, Paul a Greek-speaking intellectual and letter writer. Both played a vital part in the establishment and early development of the Christian movement.

In D Wenham's (1995) significant research on Paul, Follower of Jesus or founder of Christianity?, he argues that Paul was a faithful follower of Jesus. However that assumption about Paul has not gone unchallenged. Many liberal scholars (between 1880 and 1920) argued that Christianity would be better off without the dogmas of Pauline teaching, especially in regards to his teachings on woman, sexual issues and the many "unhealthy" and "unpleasant" aspects of Christianity found in his teachings (cf. Wenham 1995: 2-3). Therefore we find that the Emerging (Block 3) and the Liberal (Block 4) church movements do find the above mentioned as liberating for Christian faith, since Paul is conceptualized as the agent who complicated and spoiled the simple religion of Jesus, to which the church now needs to return. Emerging church leadership

envisions a “Vintage Christianity” meaning “a refreshing return to an unapologetically sacred, raw, historical, and Jesus-focused missional ministry” (cf. Kimball 2003).

Structuring my research on the “Believe before belonging/Belong before believing” dualism will explain much of the current emotion and theological thought on new emerging church models in post-Christendom times. Furthermore one should recognise the important link between the praxis of being a church concerned with those *already saved*, linked to the axiom of *believe before belonging*, and on the other hand, one will find churches concerned with being *seeker-sensitive*, thus mainly concerned with those not yet members of the church, and thus applying the axiom: *belong before believing*.

My statement above that we should be working towards a seeker-sensitive church already indicates the missiological dimension of my study.

By using the expression *missiological* or *missiology* for that matter, I assume the following (cf. Bosch 1993: 493):

- That the church as an entity cannot be perceived primarily as being positioned over against the post-Christian world, but rather sent into the world.
- Missiology implies very strongly that mission as a ministry of the church cannot any longer be perceived as simply an activity of the church, but as an expression of the very being of the church.
- That the world can no longer be divided into *missionizing* and *missionary* territories, but rather that the whole world is a mission field and that Western theology also needs to be practised in a missionary context.

Hopefully this research will assist missiology in the post-Christian future to evangelize and plant churches true to the message of the New Testament and not necessarily true to the philosophy of postmodernism. My concern is not only with church planting, but also with the contextualisation and inculturation of the church in postmodern cultures. (The context that I will consider throughout this research shall be the mainly white

church in Western Europe and more specifically the context in Belgium, as a secularized state that has been influenced by postmodernism, which then would not immediately apply to the mainly white Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, as such). That is why Fensham's (1990) interpretation of Niebuhr's typology of church and culture is very relevant. It can also be argued that the relationship between church and mission, which should be incarnated in a missionary ecclesiology, has been an enduring problem for many decades. Missiology has indeed since the end of World War II, as discussed at the IMC conference at Tambaram in 1938, been struggling with the question of the relationship between church and mission. One of the contemporary missiologists who engaged with this question was Hoekendijk in his book, The church inside out (1964).

From the side of liberation theologians L Boff has made an important contribution with Ecclesiogenesis: The base communities reinvent the church (1986). At present the study group on *Christian mission and modern culture*, which is concerned more with Western culture (European and American), also engages with this question. This is reflected, for example, in Shenk's book, Write the vision: the church renewed (1995). The missiological emphasis and focus in my topic is therefore self-explanatory, as a missionary ecclesiology is an enduring item on the agenda of the church.

1.4 My proposal:

One way to go about this task is to analyse the contradictory axioms, *Believe before belonging/belong before believing*, by means of studying the New Testament *ecclesia* in the Gospels and in the writings of Paul. This is the only way by which I can find which of the abovementioned two criteria (and two groups – 1 and 2, or 3 and 4 of the quadrant model) are true to the ecclesiology of the New Testament and not only true with regard to the philosophy of postmodernism.

According to Crafford (2009) there are three distinct criteria whereby one can evaluate if a certain theological thought-system is compatible with the New Testament: “*Geloofsuitgangspunt*” (faith as foundation), “*Heilsuitgangspunt*” (salvation in Christ as foundation) and “*Historiese uitgangspunt*” (history as a point of reference). Crafford explains in regard to the aspect of “*Geloofsuitgangspunt*”, or faith as a starting point, that one needs to accept the New Testament written testimony as the revealed truth of God. If faith is not the basis from which the Bible or New Testament is studied then one is merely practising philosophy. *Heilsuitgangspunt* or salvation as a point of reference is the second important aspect for Crafford. According to him salvation history in the Bible is the essence of Jesus’ incarnation, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and future return. The core of God’s salvation plan is the person of Jesus Christ whereby all of creation can be saved and be regenerated. These *heilsmomente* (salvation events in history) cannot be understood to be merely relative truths if they want to be true to the message of the New Testament. The *Historiese uitgangspunt* or historical point of reference propagates the importance of practising theology in a close relationship to those historical confessions and articles of faith that have already served the church for centuries. If these historical truths are not taken into consideration, then New Testament theology is stripped of its historical roots and will lose its depth.

I shall therefore study the ecclesiology of the New Testament and consider scholars like Dunn (1998) and Marshall (2004). The theology of Paul and Jesus teaching, as mentioned above, are also important for this research.

Wenham’s research asks: “So was Paul a faithful follower of Jesus or the founder of a new religion? Or is the truth somewhere between those two positions? What evidence is there that will help us answer this question?” (Wenham 1995: 3)

Wenham’s research on the above will assist my efforts to find an answer to the argument stating that the church models represented by groups 1 and 2 of the quadrant model are more Pauline orientated while post-Christendom spiritualities are more in need of a *Jesus theology* as presented by groups 3 and 4 of the quadrant model.

However, in order to properly understand the concept of *church* one should start with the Old Testament in mind. The Hebrew word *qahal*, which means assembly or congregation, is difficult to explain fully in English. Perhaps the German word *Gemeinde* (*local church or community or fellowship*) expresses it more adequately. The word is generally rendered in the Septuagint by *ecclesia*, which is used in the New Testament to denote an organised community acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and meeting regularly to worship Him (Gehman 1984). One can clearly see a continuity between the New Testament church and the Covenant people of the Old Testament, but there was also discontinuity brought about by the Christian belief that Jesus was the expected Jewish Messiah. Thus a new set of terms to describe the church appeared, terms involving Christ, because the people of God were explicitly related to Christ (Achte-meier et al 1985).

The term *Gospel* is a translation of the Greek *euangelion* meaning glad tidings, especially the good news concerning Christ, the Kingdom of God and salvation. From the beginning of the post-apostolic age the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, were accepted by the church as authoritative documents containing the apostolic testimony to the life and teachings of Christ. An examination of the New Testament letters shows that the Gospels describe Jesus accordingly and therefore may be confidently accepted as trustworthy reports (Gehman 1984). Although the word *gospel* is commonly associated with the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, it is Paul who uses the noun more than any other writer of the New Testament and then he employs it without further qualification, thereby showing that his audience readily understood its content (Achte-meier et al 1985).

Paul's written theology consists of the notion of the human impossibility of saving oneself and therefore the dependence of the sinner on the sovereign grace of God, the completeness of the redeeming work of Jesus and thus salvation on the grounds of Christ's obedience. On this foundation Paul set forth the truth of Christ's whole work and person (Gehman 1984).

In choosing to follow this route I shall be better able to comprehend a general New Testament *ecclesia* to help me analyse the four post-Christendom models by means of the *Believe before belonging* and *Belong before believing* dualism. I shall limit the examination to this issue. Why do I propose an analytical and descriptive method in this research, in the mentioned dualism of *Belong over against Believe*? Because there are two distinct but opposing positions that scholars have concerning post-Christendom praxis that need to be more clearly understood. We find two general opposing positions in regard to the ideal post-Christendom model that is concerned with the relevance of the church for this age.

W Brueggemann in The Bible and postmodern imagination – Texts under negotiation, believes that the postmodern age has brought not only a new challenge to the local church to interpret the Bible, but has given the church a new environment in which the Living Word can be preached. He accepts the fact that the practice of theology in the post-Christendom world needs to be contextual, local and pluralistic; thus conforming to the pattern of relativism (The belief that all knowledge varies according to the individual or the situation and that absolute truth is therefore unattainable). He argues that orthodox theology's concern with relativism is unnecessary as in a dispute it boils down to a few competing claims on any given issue. For him the real concern is objectivism "which I believe to be a very large threat among us precisely because it is such a deception" (Brueggemann 1993: 10). Brueggemann believes that although groups 3 and 4 of the quadrant model have a theology praxis related to relativism, they are less of a threat to the praxis of theology than those in groups 1 and 2 of the quadrant model, as they seem to be so certain and clear cut on the issues of belief, that he refers to with the term *objectivism*.

RS Smith in, Truth and the new kind of Christian – the emerging effects of postmodernism in the church, is very much concerned about any form of *ecclesia* supporting a theological praxis of relativism. He argues that if any given local community of believers starts to believe that their gathering is only to voice local truth and that a proposal that it pertains elsewhere is untenable, they become idolatrous for they are serving God according to their own local interpretation: "Relativism also puts us

in the idolatrous position of being God. Indeed, Christian postmodernism does the same, in that we end up constructing God by our language, which is plainly idolatrous” (Smith 2005: 168). Smith would therefore identify with groups 1 and 2 from the quadrant model.

JB Arthur (2001: XVI) is a missionary of the Church of Scotland. In his book, The real Church, he confirms that the church as such finds itself in a problematic situation due to the fact that the church needs at least a part of itself to be incarnated in the culture of secularism without sacrificing its historical identity. According to his experience this is precisely the challenge of being relevant. Why? The church in every age seeks to re-define itself, which produces tension in the life of the church. For if it is always changing then logically it can change its essential nature for something else. Then again if the church does not change it will certainly fail in its effort to reach the people and will become irrelevant.

König (1998: 17) in, Vernuwe of verdwyn – gee ‘n plek aan verskeidenheid sonder om die kerk te verdeel (Renew or get lost – the church called to be a body of rich variety, without division), criticises the institutional churches (Groups 1 and 2 of the quadrant model) for not understanding New Testament theology on “new things to come.” He argues that if one reads the New Testament one will find that the New Testament testifies to new events that would come to pass:

- The New Testament calls Jesus the Son of David, therefore Jesus can be seen as the new King David (Jn 1: 49, 12: 13-15, 18: 37, 19: 21).
- Jesus also brings the new covenant that Jeremiah spoke of (Jer 31: 31).
- Paul stresses the fact that the nation of God will take on a new image and responsibility as the heathen nations will submit to His Lordship (Eph 3: 4-6).

From here König explains that it is inevitable that new ministries and spiritualities will come to the forefront and that the historical churches should be open and

understanding to new emerging churches and ministries taking on the challenge of being relevant.

Although König tries to promote a positive sentiment towards diversity, it is a flawed attempt, as the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament is not as such a special time of renewal for *new things to come*, but it is a characteristic of the church to be constantly renewed in the course of time.

Kimball (2003: 119) argues in, The Emerging church – Vintage Christianity for new generations, that among the many aspects that need to be kept in mind when studying post-Christendom church models, two are profound. Firstly, it is that historical churches, as those represented by groups 1 and 2 of the quadrant model, have bred a culture that has become spectator orientated. This is such a negative reality, that a new vintage Christianity is needed by establishing new emerging church movements that are socially relevant to their specific context. With *vintage* Christianity Kimball is referring to an ecclesiology that finds its foundation predominantly in the life and teaching of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels, rather than in the theological interpretation of Christianity as depicted by Paul.

Secondly, those worship forms presented by groups 1 and 2 of the quadrant model can only have meaning for some people and cannot influence everyone. It takes all kinds of post-Christendom churches to reach all kinds of postmodern people.

Bosch (1993) in, Transforming mission – paradigm shifts in theology of mission, states clearly that to be redeemed does not bear the meaning of being saved *out* of this world (*salus e mundo*), but rather has to be understood as salvation *of* this world (*salus mundi*). Why then is research important in regards to the dualism of *Believe before belonging / belong before believing*, according to Bosch? Because new paradigm shifts in theology make it necessary not to always return to the classical interpretation of salvation, which is *first to believe before one can belong*, even if that position upholds and defends elements which remain indispensable for a Christian understanding of

salvation. Why should we then consider the *Belong before one has to believe* option? According to Bosch there are two reasons:

- It is dangerous not to consider the second option of the dualism, because it narrows the meaning of salvation down to escaping the wrath of God or to understand redemption only as being saved for the hereafter.
- Secondly, one then tends to make an absolute distinction between creation and new creation.

1.5 Methodology:

The nature of the study dictates that it will mainly consist of a literature study, not an empirical study which is based on interviews and questionnaires.. Literature (also electronic databases, etc.) in the areas of New Testament, missiology, ecclesiology and postmodern studies will form the core of my study material.

1.6 Structure:

The following chapters will feature in my research:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Problem analysis

Chapter 3: Post-Christendom church models

Chapter 4: Belong before believe versus Believe before belong

Chapter 5: A New Testament pattern of ecclesiology

Chapter 6: Missiological implications

Chapter 7: A missionary vision

Bibliography

1.7 Definitions:

The following words or descriptions are of importance for this research and need to be defined:

1.7.1 Constantinianism/Christendom:

I understand these two terms as interchangeable, because Christendom was initiated by Constantine's actions in merging the church into an official partnership with the state. This understanding is based also on the supposition that "outside the (Roman Catholic) Church there is no salvation". Emperor/kingdom and Pope therefore existed in a symbiotic relationship to extend imperial citizenship and salvation over all the known world, if needs be, by force. According to this understanding every baptised citizen of the state was automatically a Christian. This understanding of citizenship, church membership, and salvation survived the Reformation and inspired the entanglement of colonialism and mission (cf. Bosch 1993:214-238). This merger between church and state has dominated our mind-set for many generations, also in the era of decolonialism (cf. Hirsch 2007).

1.7.2 Pre-Christendom:

The pre-Christendom phase (approximately AD 33 – AD 313), also known as the "early Church", had a strong sentiment in favour of *believing before belonging*, as to believe in the risen Lord could come at a high cost due to persecution (cf. Murray 2004). The confession that Christ is Lord could imply a death sentence in a context where the Roman state required the confession that "Caesar is lord" from its citizens. This term refers to a time when the Christian communities existed often outside of instituted churches as we know them since Constantinism.

1.7.3 Post-Christendom

With post-Christendom I refer basically to the period which started in the wake of the Second World War (1939-1945). Disillusionment had set in already after the end of the First World War (1918), when the leading colonial and Christian countries had plunged the world into a cataclysm which claimed the lives of millions of especially young men. When a similar cataclysm was unleashed basically by the same countries a bare 20 years later, many church members became totally disillusioned with their faith. The end of the Second World War also directly led to the process of Afro-Asian decolonisation (starting with Indian independence in 1947) which also led to further disillusionment in the countries of the younger churches. The old stereotypical link between church and state was permanently slashed, numbers of church members in the Western countries of Europe and North America fell dramatically, and the church had to find new ways of being church.

1.7.4 Missionary ecclesiology:

A missionary ecclesiology explores the nature of Christian spiritualities, as it is incarnated in the church, as it is shaped by its mission in the world. It does not pretend to explain or describe the whole spectrum of Christian ecclesiology, but focuses on a specific dimension. The attention is mainly on how the church organises and interacts with the world when mission is the central focus (cf. Murray 2004). Following Boff, as interpreted by Saayman, I would argue that the New Testament does not prescribe “only one institutional form for the church” (Saayman 2009:293). Ecclesiology can therefore assume many forms, but I would agree with Saayman (:295-297) that a new metaphor for missionary ecclesiology is presented where disenfranchised people organise for liberation (Boff 1986). I consider many groups of postmodern people who do not feel at home in the existing remnants of “Christendom” as such groups of disenfranchised people. They need a new incarnation of the church, therefore a new missionary ecclesiology.

1.7.5 Mission:

The term *mission* was not used in the New Testament itself and was established primarily in regards to the colonial expansion of the Western world into the Third world. The term *mission* therefore is emotionally tied to the Constantinian model of West European Christendom, which was a construct of civil religion (cf. Saayman 2010). This understanding is in need of *transformation*, as implied by Bosch (1993). One of the ways in which the concept is being transformed today is through the concept of a “missional church” (Saayman 2010). In this thesis I use both concepts, namely *missionary* as well as *missional*, and I use them interchangeably, as indicated by Saayman (ibid.).

1.7.6 Missional:

Missional applies to emerging churches operating in a new post-Colonial timeframe to free the church from its Constantinian captivity to the state. This terminology originated primarily as a result of the work of Lesslie Newbigin and David Bosch as an attempt to mobilise the North Atlantic church for its social relevance in a postmodern context, and therefore aiming specifically at incarnating the Gospel in Western societies which have lost their previous Christian heritage (cf. Saayman 2010).

1.7.7 Missiology:

Missiology is the structured, academic study of missions. Therefore it implies the engagement with the Scriptures to seek those impulses that compel the *ecclesia* to engage with the world. Such impulses involve issues such as the *missio Dei*, the incarnation, and the kingdom of God. This engagement also seeks a commitment towards social justice and righteousness. As such, missiology seeks to define the church’s purposes in light of God’s will and to find the methods of achieving these ends from Scripture and history (cf. Hirsch 2007; Bosch 1993).

1.7.8 Epistemology:

Traditionally there are at least two approaches to epistemology which are relevant to my thesis: *rationalism* and *empiricism*. Rationalism indicates that one gains knowledge through reasoning, and that there is a clear difference between *facts* and *values/beliefs*. Rationalism valued facts much higher than beliefs or values (cf Bosch 1993:352-356). Empiricism indicates that one gains knowledge through the full range of sensory experience. Rationalists focus on self-evident truths, but often, what is self-evident to one person is not necessarily self-evident to another. This is very much the point of departure in the post-Christendom context and the concept of *believing before belonging* is very much associated with modernist thinking. In my approach I choose for an empiricist approach which implies that we gain knowledge through our senses and thus through our life experiences. I shall argue in this thesis that *belonging before believing* allows for experiencing and gaining religious knowledge on a sensory level that allows for a more genuine personal faith attachment (cf. C.G Boeree 1999; Bosch 1993:358-361).

1.7.9 Belief:

In this research, *belief* will imply confessing to believing in certain truths about Jesus, specifically with regards to the witness of the Gospels in confessing to Jesus's birth, ministry, death as atonement, resurrection, parousia, etc. At most it will imply agreeing with doctrines about God as expressed in creeds or confessions of faith. In the least it will confess that "Jesus is Lord" (cf. Deyoung & Kluck 2009), the simple confession of faith accepted widely as the first confessional statement by early Christians.

1.7.10 Truth:

In this reasearch, *truth* will not be understood as adherence to an ethical lifestyle or rules, but rather in an evangelical sense of recognising Jesus Christ to be the Biblical answer for those in search of meaning (cf. Wells 2008). In terms of such an

understanding, it is impossible to argue that “truth” can be captured in a time-bound expression in a creed or confession of faith.

1.7.11 Deconstruction:

Deconstruction is a specific philosophical construct. It does not necessarily develop arguments against the truth claims of any specific theology or religion, but rather against the viability of a meta-narrative (or metaphysics), understood as the explanation of the total created universe. Derrida indicates the way to elaborate a non-metaphysical theology. This means that Derrida’s deconstruction theory helps us to free God from the conception, especially in Christendom, as a remote and timeless being, the ground of all being or the being of beings. Derrida’s deconstruction, as it will be applied in this thesis, indicates how a discourse has been put together from various earlier discourses and exposes any and all forced links to “truth” (cf. Hart 2006).

1.7.12 Biblical belief:

In this thesis the expression *biblical belief* and *doctrinal issues* are used in a related manner. These terms can sometimes be seen as two sides of the same coin. One’s biblical belief in regards to understanding of scripture will eventually find its way in how one gives expression to this on a theological or doctrinal level. Biblical belief therefore informs doctrinal convictions, and eventually (as in Christendom) doctrinal convictions take the place of biblical belief. Such doctrinal issues have to be deconstructed in order for human beings to recover biblical belief.

1.8 A Personal note:

Why would I spend time doing research on this topic? In the ministry in the church I find myself in two very different positions. The one is that of leadership in a Dutch Reformed congregation in South Africa, which is 155 years old and well established in modernity.

As the Reformation spread throughout Europe, a number of denominations developed. The Dutch Reformed Church grew in the sixteenth century from the Calvinist branch of the Dutch and Swiss Reformation. In 1571 a synod at Emden adopted a Presbyterian organization. Its primary doctrine was presented in the *Belgic Confession of Faith* (1561) and the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563) (cf. Smith 2001: 356).

The other position I find myself in is assisting in planting new churches in postmodern Europe (Belgium) where Christianity cannot dare to function as it did for the last 150 years. Due to the Constantinian dispensation, the Gospel had been strategically domesticated in European culture to such an extent that a completely new approach would be necessary in order to bring “Gospel-inspired change” in the Western world (cf. Saayman 2009: 6). In the context of pastoring a Dutch Reformed congregation in South Africa I find a missionary ecclesiology which understands that no-one can fully belong unless a Christian confirmation of some sort has been officially undergone. Then again in Europe I find a “spiritual” context that no longer appreciates definite religious borders and areas or confines. *To belong* is no longer a cerebral decision on the part of the institution, but rather a privilege that belongs to the individual. A different missionary ecclesiology is needed. But how should we engage in this challenge and yet stay true to the *ecclesia* of the New Testament?

I found a possible way forward in the writings of the great Evangelical Latin American missiologist, Orlando Costas. In his article *Conversion as a complex experience* (1980), he mentions three different conversion experiences that he has undergone in his lifetime. On reading his article I realized that three of my own conversions compare rather well with his story. Costas mentions his *conversion to Christ* on June 8, 1957 when he attended a crusade of Billy Graham in New York. My conversion to Christ was on April 19, 1986 when I attended a leadership conference as a teenager.

Costas mentions his second conversion as a *conversion to Culture*. Being educated in the United States of America, Costas recognised that some aspects of their evangelical religion left him uncomfortable and dismayed. On searching for answers he realized that he needed to accept the fact that he was originally Puerto Rican and needed to serve

God not as an American, but as a Puerto Rican, true to his own cultural and religious heritage. I too had wrestled with following the, so it seemed at the time, successful charismatic movement and “new” emerging movements – ever experiencing “new” revelations from God. Finally I had to accept the fact that my ancient family history is linked to Protestants living in Groningen in the Netherlands, who through many hardships they experienced, and real commitment brought the Gospel of Christ packaged by their reformed spirituality to South Africa. I was therefore raised as a white evangelical-reformed South African. I had to accept the fact that my understanding of the Gospel and the world will forever be perceived through the lenses of reformed religion.

Finally Costas mentions his *conversion to the World*. He realized that being a spiritual leader did not allow him to disregard the social, economic and political challenges of his time. He came to realize that the Christian mission had not only spiritual and cultural dimensions, but indeed social, economic and political dimensions. I too had a conversion to the world. As I finally reached the end of my theological training I envisioned a comfortable pastoral ministry in a well-established, neighbourhood. As I was introduced to the ministry in well-established congregations, I soon felt unmotivated and out of place. Following these experiences I discovered God’s love for the unbelieving world and Jesus’ passion for the lost. This was my conversion to the world.

As Costas (1980: 181-182) was sharing his threefold conversion experiences with an African friend, he commented: “So you think those will be your only conversions? If they are, then their validity will have been denied. For if you are to continue to grow as a person and as a Christian, you will have to experience one turn after another.” In order to constitute a truly missionary ecclesiology in the post-Christendom era, we can therefore expect to believe many “conversions”.

How much should we stand apart from our culture, and how much should we integrate into it? How do we best communicate the message of Christ’s invitation to come and join His Kingdom? What kind of structure should we take on to help outsiders to join the church? How do we stay true to the holiness that God’s word requires and yet remain

accessible to a culture that holds different standards? For me the complexity boils down to one complex dualism: *Believe before you can belong versus Belong before you have to believe.*

Finally a last word on the dualism between *believe* and *belong*. The words *believe* and *belong*, as they will be used often in relation with the historical church model and the emerging/emergent church model is a generalization to simplify my field of research. In using these dualistic expressions I do not imply a caricature of the different ecclesiologies, as there are indeed many more possible incarnations of Christian ecclesiologies.

CHAPTER 2

2. Problem analysis:

Participating in the activities of a congregation true to the message of the New Testament and yet being relevant in the context of secular society is the challenge of this research. How much should we stand apart from our culture, and how much should we integrate into it? How do we best communicate the message of Christ? What kind of structure should we take on as a community of believers? What kind of authority should we give our leaders? How do we stay true to the kind of holiness that God requires and yet remain accessible to a culture that holds different standards? In attempting to answer questions such as these it is important to concede that the church or Christian community is a religious community as well as a sociological one. It is impossible to make any kind of complete separation between the religious and the sociological domains of human culture. We read and understand the Bible as human beings living in specific communities with common presuppositions. Although I consider it important to try and give the Biblical text and Christian tradition priority in understanding how to live as Christians, we have to concede that our sociological perspectives have an important influence on our Christian and missiological perspectives. I attempt this study while recognising this human reality.

Cilliers (2001: 44) in, Wat is die storie met die kerk? (What is wrong with the church?), asks a very relevant question: is it possible for institutional churches to lose their sense of direction due to the pressure of secular society with its growing interest in materialism? His answer to his own question is yes. He pictures the church in the current post-Christendom context being lost and not certain how to regain its respect in a new cultural setting. In his experience the church has become so irrelevant in its Christendom mindset that it seems to have “disappeared” from the current postmodern scene (cf. Cilliers 2001: 46-50). In my opinion this statement is too strong and too critical. The institutional church and its ministry still serve the needs of many believers although it needs to focus anew on the current postmodern context.

This evaluation of the church's transition from the Christendom phase into the post-Christendom phase is rather harsh as paradigm shifts in the history of Christian mission have never been an easy task or a smooth transition without casualties:

In each of these eras Christians, from within their own contexts wrestled with the question of what the Christian faith and, by implication, the Christian mission, meant for them. Needless to say, that all of them believed and argued that their understanding of the faith and of the church's mission was faithful to God's intent. This did not, however mean, that they all thought alike and came to the same conclusions. There have of course, always been Christians who believed that their understanding of the faith was "objective," accurate and, in effect, the only authentic rendering of Christianity. Such an attitude however, rests on a dangerous illusion (Bosch 1993: 182).

Nel (2003) in, Op soek na God buite die kerk (In search of God outside of church), pictures a scene very much the same as that of Andries Cilliers, but from a different angle. According to Nel, many postmodern people are in search of God, without considering the solution of searching for true spirituality from within a long term relationship with a local congregation, as they do not find God in the traditional liturgy, church gatherings and institutional leadership of the clergy. The problem therefore seems binary. Not only do we need to consider that the institutional church has lost its sense of direction in its difficult transition from Christendom to post-Christendom culture, but also that many people in a post-Christendom context have lost the ability to experience God in the gathering of a traditional congregation.

Arthur explains in regards to the above that the body of Christ is in a mess: "Taking a global perspective, it seems to us that the church in the West is in a crisis. No one seems to be clever enough to know precisely what is going on now" (Arthur 2001: 2). He states that the "mess" that the church finds itself in is not an "*ultimate mess*," but a "*transformation mess*". According to Arthur the mess that the church finds itself in is not the same as the mess the world is in. The world is not in a state of transformation, but the church is. The world has refused and continually refuses to be transformed to the likeness of Christ. According to Arthur it is too radical to consider the church to be lost, or that post-Christendom communities have given up the notion of experiencing vintage

Christianity in church. He simply believes that the church as body of Christ is in a process of transformation (Arthur 2001: 3).

Bosch (1993: 188-189) agrees with Arthur in so far as the church and its mission are always on a path of transformation. Bosch speaks of different transformation periods in the history of the church by relating to what is known as paradigm shifts. He argues that the church has no option but to transform or to shift from its current position of paradigm due to the following seven challenges:

- The West with its Christian history has lost its dominant position in society (especially in Western Europe and the Americas) as people are positioned to be liberated from the “stranglehold of the West”.
- Unjust structures are challenged today as never before in human history.
- Western technology is perceived as the false god of progress.
- Global pressures on a shrinking globe with finite resources are a given reality and call for an ecological response.
- The global threat of nuclear war also challenges the church to work towards peace and justice (cf. North Korea, not heeding the warning of the United Nations Security Commission).
- Theologies designed and developed in Europe can no longer claim superiority over theologies in other parts of the world.
- Freedom of religion is a basic human right and challenges the church to re-evaluate its attitude towards other faiths.

König (1998) is clear about the fact that church movements cannot face the abovementioned challenges without an internal shift or transformation. If the church does not re-position itself for these future challenges, it might as well collapse and die.

Brueggemann reveals a positive sentiment on behalf of the church and the challenges facing the Christian ministry. He is convinced that the position of the traditional church in regards to the abovementioned challenges will either build or break the future for Christian congregations and their ministries. His conviction is that the church should not only submit to internal transformation, but be an agent of transformation: "The purpose of preaching and worship is transformation. We undertake theatre that is potentially life-changing. This is the meeting. This is where the transformative action takes place" (Brueggemann 1993: 24). Brueggemann warns that a "no" to this calling of transformation consigns the church to disappear with the rest of modernity.

D van Vuuren (in Botha 2001: 96) in, Ja vir Jesus, nee vir die kerk (Yes for Jesus, but not for the church), envisions the church in future and in the time to come to be much more elevated and exalted (transcendental) than simply immanent and accessible to assist people in finding God. This will have the possibility of bringing seekers into contact with the otherness of God's character. Van Vuuren (2001) is referring to a deeper spirituality challenging communities to live their life as the extension of Jesus in the world and thus to become role players in the Kingdom of God. True spirituality releases the human spirit to participate in God's redemptive action in history, which is constantly moving forward towards God's ultimate victory over the evil effects of poverty and injustice: "It is not so much a knowing but a being – a true embodiment of God's mission" (Webber 2003: 242).

Kimball (2003: 119) in his ministry has followed the route of the transformational process mentioned earlier. He has taken his congregation (back) to a vintage Christianity where the "unapologetically sacred, raw, historical, and Jesus-focused missional ministry" like in the Gospels, is practised. Accordingly he has also moved into the future transforming his Seeker-sensitive service to a Post-seeker worship gathering, thus designing a more organic worship gathering.

McLaren (in Smith 2005: 51) explains that in reality congregations consist of veterans in the school of belief and can be considered *saved* in evangelical terms. But we should also understand the needs of those who do not yet belong with those insiders and are seekers, visiting our Christian communities in search of a true God and an authentic

gathering. Even among these groups of seekers, Kimball (2003: 31) explains, one will find those who have given up on the noble idea of finding God and are simply looking for a community where they can belong in order to satisfy their need for spiritual experience. These people are referred to as post-seekers. Post-seekers have come to believe that Christianity is a human-organized religion (referring probably to the Christendom model of ecclesiology with its strong roots in the *Corpus Christianum*), they are in favour of Pluralism and often find Christianity to be arrogant in its dogma.

Both McLaren and Kimball (2003: 34) are also propagating a Christian praxis that is stripped of high-tech innovations such as flashy video clips, fancy PowerPoint presentations and well-rehearsed dramas. According to them it might well be those human components that hinder post-seekers from finding God. Post-seekers have outgrown the need of searching for a high-tech type of god, as is commonly found among postmodern youth. Post-seekers have therefore no need to search for God in high performance thrills and have reached a stage where they are simply longing for an authentic and genuine Godly encounter. Kimball (2003: 34) therefore encourages an “organic” worship style which simply entails: silence, candles, acoustic background music and any authentic medium that assists post-seekers to experience God.

Smith (2005: 44-45) does understand that traditional Christian praxis is challenged to transform to new cultural needs. He argues that this transformation cannot be binary for either one will transform more to foundationalism or more towards relativism. He argues that it is difficult to be Scripture-specific and at the same time focus on being culturally relativistic. For Smith the transformation that is needed in the church is one that leads members back to the positive realization of Scriptural foundations whereby our biblical belief can explain our spiritual life and existence. Smith therefore does not agree with the postmodern view that it is a dead position to build one’s beliefs on a set of biblical foundations that give us a connection with our reality.

It thus seems that theologians do agree that the traditional *ecclesia* is challenged in this post-Christendom age to transform into a new praxis of ministry in order to relate effectively to all the facets of a new society. For some this is a positive challenge

whereby the *ecclesia* can re-establish its relevance in the ministry towards post-seekers. In doing so these theologians believe that the transformation should be binary – meaning that the leadership of Christian communities needs to have a biblical foundation from where they can move beyond the matrix of modernity and thus secondly have enough confidence in the biblical text to relate positively to all the cultural needs in society. Therefore to welcome all types of cultural phenomena into God's presence without, ahead of time, insisting on a primary belief in the Gospel of Christ:

Instead of being fixated on whether people are saved or not ... we should see conversion as a process, and our part in evangelism is to help encourage people in that process. When we try to pin people down into exact categories...we actually buy into modernity's emphasis to try to have everything understood and spelled out (McLaren in Smith 2005: 58).

Postmodern theologians like McLaren, according to Smith (2005: 47), propagate a resistance towards apologetical arguments in evangelizing non-Christians. The subject of conversion can be introduced and forced on individuals too early into the missionary process, not allowing the necessary time to pass in which outsiders can find proof of the power of the Gospel in the lives of those claiming to follow Christ. OE Costas (in RT Coote and J Stott) expresses conversion rather as an ongoing experience that is not completed once off:

For the complexity of conversion does not lie in a fixed number of experiences but in the fact that it is a plunge into an ongoing adventure. Christian conversion is a journey into the mystery of the Kingdom of God which leads from one experience to another. Initiation in the journey of the Kingdom implies a plunge into an eschatological adventure where one is confronted with ever new decisions, turning points, fulfilments, and promises which will continue until the ultimate fulfilment of the Kingdom (1980:182)

Saayman (2005) agrees with the above assessment and specifically on the subject of introducing the issue of conversion into the process of evangelism prematurely, thus leaving a wrong impression that in converting seekers from merely belonging to believing, the church only seems interested in numbers. Saayman stated previously, in his inaugural lecture delivered at Unisa (1992: 159-173), that although conversion as

primary motive for mission is as old as the Christian church itself, missionary encounters need to be directed at the totality of human life.

Hesselgrave (in Saayman 1992: 164) introduced a three-culture model of missionary communication. The three cultures involved are the *Bible culture*, the *missionary culture* and the *respondent culture*. Hesselgrave explains that the *Bible culture* provides the message that has to be communicated. This message of salvation has been “translated” into the *missionary culture* that simply needs to persuade men and woman from the *respondent culture* to be converted. Because that is the supreme aim of mission for him missionaries need only to study the respondent’s culture to facilitate the necessary conversion. This communication is merely one-way traffic and not dialogical in character. It is not possible to refer to intercultural communication, only to cross-cultural communication (cf Saayman 1992: 165). For McLaren and other emergents it is improper to practice evangelization from a cross-cultural position, neglecting the important call to follow through with intercultural communication, and in so doing allowing the respondents to contribute to the dialogue.

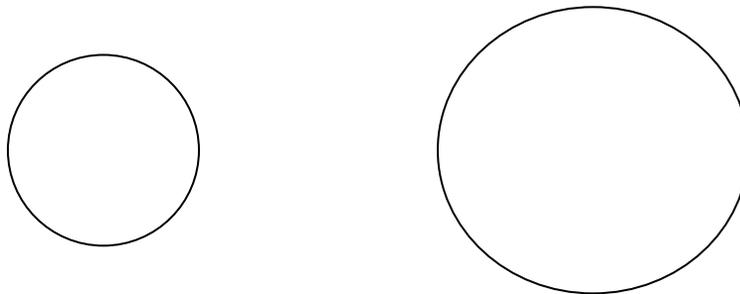
2.1 Church isolated from the world / church integrating with the world:

For some the category *believing before one can belong* is rather important when foundation of faith is seen as entering and being accountable to the *ecclesia*. The following diagrams will help to distinguish between the suppositions surrounding the two dualistic premises.

CHURCH ISOLATED FROM THE WORLD

CHURCH

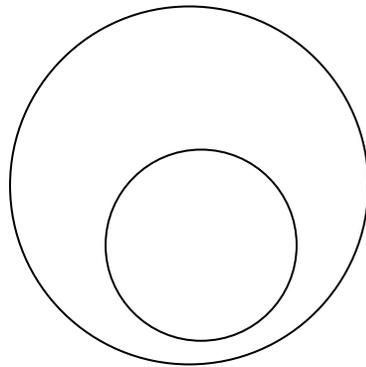
WORLD



McClung (2008: 30) in, You see bones, I see an Army, is very much aware of the dualistic powers controlling the current theological debate on the future of the church. He understands the *status quo* to be a dualistic view of the world, sustaining the *believing before you can belong* premise that sees the church as one sphere of life and the world as another sphere. This paradigm envisions the church staying separate from the world. *To have faith* or *to believe* becomes the transformational aim of the church towards the world before the world can truly belong to the *ecclesia* as body of Christ. In this respect it will be necessary for someone who is alien to the Gospel and the church to convince the church community that he or she has broken ties with the world on entering the sphere of Christian religion: “*God en de christen houden zich bezig met de kerk maar die kerk heft weinig of geen relatie meer met de wereld*” (According to the dualistic model, God and believers are focused on the interior lifestyle of the church and

the church has no agenda with the outside world but is focused only on its own needs) (Lukasse 2009: 95).

CHURCH INTEGRATING WITH THE WORLD



McClung (2008: 30) accepts an incarnational paradigm (cf Lukasse 2009: 96), such as the abovementioned integrating paradigm, rather than the dualistic paradigm. When we understand this shift from a dualistic to an incarnational paradigm of spirituality we do not only integrate our Christian lives with our secularized surroundings, but can also manage the premise which argues for a *belong before belief* philosophy. An incarnational motive then has the transformational aim of loving all of God's creation and giving oneself regardless towards that mission, as Christ loved the world and gave His life accordingly. For the church to enter and to influence the postmodern world it needs to engage with it and then again to allow outsiders to engage with the church from the inside.

The challenge facing the future of the church is thus an incarnational (*belonging before you have to believe*) versus a dualistic (*believing versus belonging*) spirituality. This means that the true test for the church in a postmodern context will be to minister the Gospel of reconciliation and to see to it that the church will not separate itself as a community of believers from the secularized world.

2.2 Jesus or Paul?

From this problem another challenge arises in regards to Wenham's research. It seems as if those supporting the *believing before you can belong* premise are generally followers of traditionally minded congregations with evangelistic sentiment. Those encouraging the *belong before believe model* are generally followers of the Emerging and Liberal church model. Thus another dualistic problem surfaces: Some scholars regard the *believe before you can belong* premise as following Pauline theological principles. Others would argue that those encouraging the *belong before you believe* premise are more attracted to the synoptic Gospels and specifically the teaching of Jesus (cf. Wenham 1995: 1).

How is this possible? Emerging church model followers find in the Gospels that Jesus welcomed sinners, that He had time to spend with outsiders and that He challenged people's critical attitudes towards "others". According to the Gospels Jesus' freedom in the company of bad characters such as prostitutes and tax collectors caused particular offence among religious critics. Jesus' defence of His conduct is found in Mark 2: 17, Matthew 9: 12-13, Luke 5: 31-32: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners". Jesus' ministry is therefore seen as finding the lost and gathering those who are broken (Mt. 18: 10, Lk. 15: 3-7).

When Jesus preached he also announced the new day when people would be gathered into God's family and when prejudices would be overcome. Luke's Gospel pays the most attention to this aspect of Jesus' ministry: "with more about Jesus and tax collectors and Samaritans – and women, than the other Gospels" (Wenham 1995: 45).

Therefore it can be said that Jesus saw His ministry as the expression of divine mercy for those outside the religious establishment.

The following is interesting. In John Chapter 1 it is documented that the disciples followed Jesus because they understood Jesus to be a Rabbi (teacher) of a special kind and wanted to be students of his school. Andrew, Simon, Philip and Nathanael decided to “enrol for classes in Jesus’ school of wisdom”. They *belonged* before they actually encountered Jesus as the Messiah. Only in Chapter 2 after they experienced the wedding in the town of Cana is the following statement made: “Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples *believed* in him” (Jn. 2:11). The argument is clear: *In Chapter 1 the disciples first belonged to the school of Jesus before they believed (2: 11) in Him as Son of God.*

Where does that leave those following the Fundamental and Evangelical models of church? For those followers it is important to first minister salvation to those outsiders before they can truly belong and be finally accepted as genuinely part of the *ecclesia* of God. For them the saying is important, “You cannot have the fruit if you do not have the root.”

For it is by our faith that we are put right with God; it is by our confession that we are saved. The scripture says: Whoever believes in him will not be disappointed. This includes everyone, because there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles; God is the same Lord of all and richly blesses all who call to him. As the scripture says, everyone who calls out to the Lord for help will be saved. But how can they call to him for help if they have not believed? And how can they believe if they have not heard the message? And how can they hear if the message is not proclaimed? And how can the message be proclaimed if the messengers are not sent out? As the scripture says, how wonderful is the coming of messengers who bring good news! (Rm.10: 10-5).

For the Fundamentalist and foundationally minded Evangelicals *to believe* is the passport to *belonging*. Therefore it is necessary to first proclaim the salvation message to outsiders and baptise new believers before they can become *spiritually* part of the family of God. To physically be part of a church meeting or evangelistic gathering is one aspect, but to be truly counted one needs to have a testimony of being spiritually saved.

This dualistic spirituality is not what it seems, though. According to Wenham (1995: 377) there is a “massive overlap” between the teaching of Jesus and Paul. At the centre of Jesus’ teaching as well as that of Pauline theology is the conviction that God has intervened in Christ to save the world. This salvation is not just for the religious, but for sinners and outsiders. Paul moulded the church’s thinking about how the stories and sayings of Jesus should be interpreted in his specific context of that time. Naturally we will find differences in spite of the great overlap, but those differences turn out to be one of terminology and not of substance. Therefore it is problematic to refer to a dualistic relation between Jesus and Paul. The reason for this dualistic perspective is that Paul was human, giving us as fellow human beings a better chance of emulating him than Jesus did, at least then in people’s minds. Thus making Christianity attainable, by “humanizing” Paul as a role model (cf. Moore 2009: 127).

It is helpful to pay attention to the remarks of Johannes Warneck (1867-1944) and Julius Richter (1862-1940) in (Stenschke 2005: 223-225). Warneck argued that it was indeed Paul’s missionary practice that became a catalyst for his theology. Warneck believed that it was Paul’s missionary calling and his commitment to that calling that helped him discover the full implication of God’s salvation.

The missiologist Richter propagated the idea not to view the letters of Paul as a mountain from which to scrape off chunks and pieces of Pauline dogma or theology, but rather to understand his New Testament writings as missionary endeavours by which Paul wanted to guide congregations through difficult times of transition.

As for Jesus, His ministry was salvation minded as He was sent by the Father (*missio Dei*) to proclaim and reclaim the Kingdom of God. As for Paul, he was also a missionary sent by Jesus (Acts 9: 15-16, 19-20) to help the New Testament churches understand the stories and sayings of Jesus in their specific context, thus enabling the church to live and proclaim the good news of God’s Kingdom through the presence and power of the Son. Although Paul was well educated, he was not primarily a systematic theologian, but very much mission minded with a clear focus on God’s missional calling on his life. Therefore he gave missional substance to the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels.

This missionary aspect of Paul's calling and ministry is well demonstrated in Paul's letter to the Romans, as illustrated by Haacker (2005: 249-262). He directs our attention to four important themes in Paul's letter to the Romans that proves Paul's attention to the missiological issues of his time. These themes are: Peace, righteousness, law and sin.

In regards to the *Roman peace*, established and guarded by the Caesars as an important topic in Roman sources, Paul uses this term for the centre of the Gospel presentation. He draws a line towards the important question of peace with God and in so doing answers to a deep concern for traditional Roman religion. On the topic of *righteousness* in the letter to the Romans the tradition of associating Roman culture with righteousness dates back to the times of the Roman Republic. Paul questioned the pride of Roman society in the light of the ethical and moralistic issues facing the Roman Empire, as only God can be the true personification of righteousness. Paul's exposition in Romans 7: 7-11 with regard to the *power of the law* finds parallels in Roman literature exposing the limited power of the law as a medium that can only reveal human nature and not rehabilitate it. With regard to human *sin and error* Paul acknowledges the important role that conscience played among Roman society, a religious dimension by linking conscience to the voice of God calling us away from sin and into His presence.

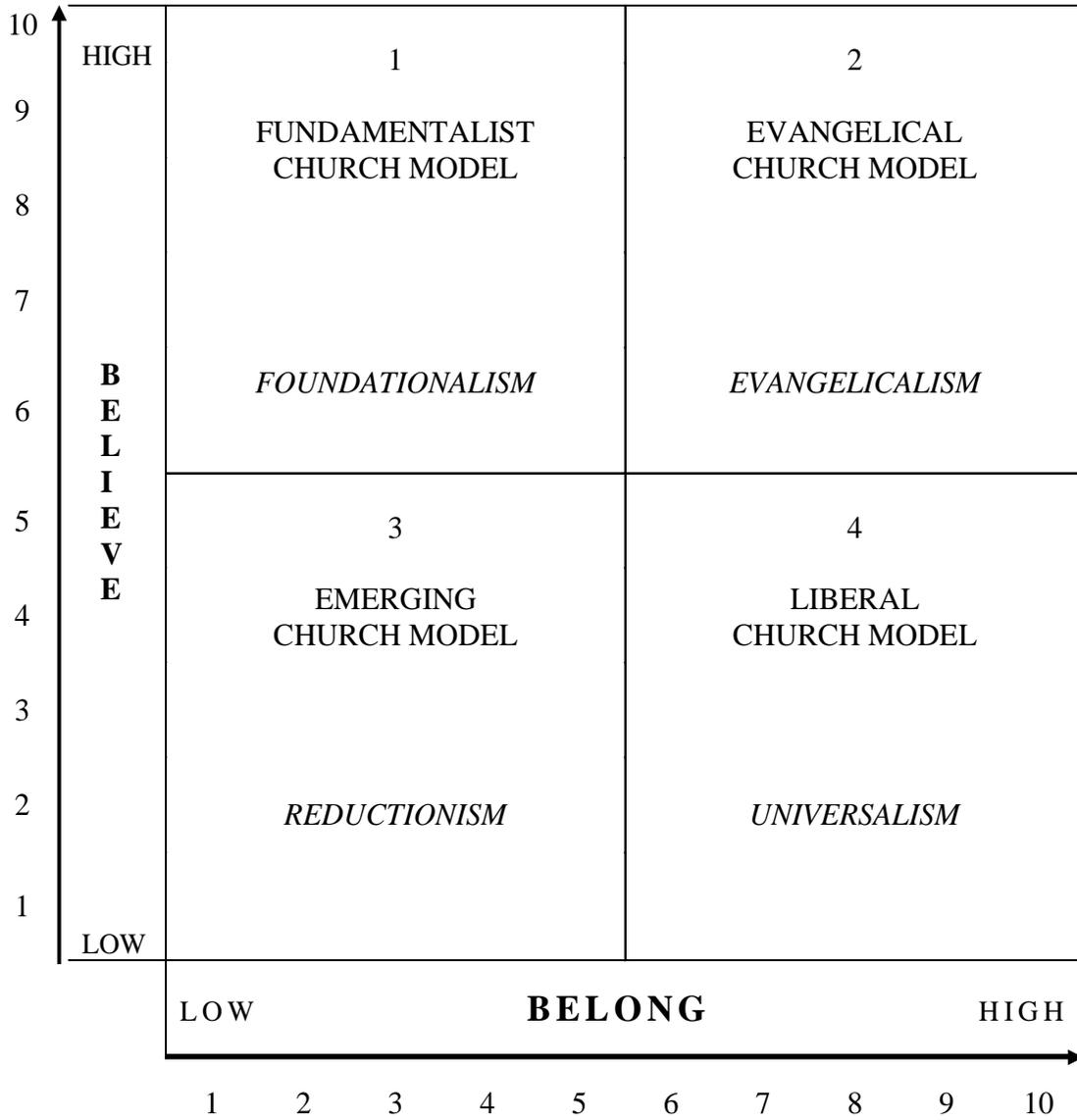
These four features can be described as contextualization or inculturation and are presented by Paul in such a missiological way that they not only interact with Roman society and culture, but establish Paul as a missionary caring deeply for people finding themselves lost without God. Again this proves that even Paul's most doctrinal letter in the New Testament had its origin in mission.

Taking all the above into account, this proves that it is not viable to make a distinct differentiation between Jesus' and Paul's missional motivations, at least in differentiating between Fundamentalists/Evangelicals as Pauline followers and Emerging/Liberal believers as Jesus followers. Nevertheless the important question still remains: Which of the two premises: "*Belong before believe*" or "*believe before belonging*" is more suited for a ministry in a postmodern context as well as being compatible with the message of the New Testament? To find an answer to the above

one needs to further investigate the characteristics of the four post-Christendom church models

Chapter 3

3. Post-Christendom church models:



In this chapter I shall investigate those post-Christendom models described as the Fundamentalist model and the Evangelical church model as both prescribe to the general dogma of “*believing before you can belong*”. Following these two models will be the Emerging and Liberal church models, which subscribe to the general dogma of “*belonging before you have to believe*”. In the next two chapters I shall investigate the impact of this difference in dogma and then search New Testament ecclesiology in order to find criteria whereby one can either dissolve the tension or have a better understanding of the conflict about the opposing views on legitimate membership in the body of Christ.

In regards to tension and opposing views on the quadrant model and its contents one needs to acknowledge the following: The fundamentalist model in quadrant 1 is in regards to the numerical vertical scale, *high* in supporting *believing before belonging* and *low* in supporting *belonging before believing*. In direct opposition to this is the Liberal church model in quadrant 4 (see numerical horizontal scale) which is *high* in regards to supporting *belonging before believing* and *low* on supporting *believing before belonging*. Fundamentalist is focusing on beliefs and liberals on people and their context.

The Evangelical model in quadrant 2 is in regards to the numerical vertical scale, *high* in regards to supporting *believing before belonging* as well as *high* in supporting *belonging before believing* (see numerical horizontal scale). The evangelical spirituality is keen on running evangelistic outreaches and planting churches to assist people on belonging to a community of believers, but understands that only by means of a public baptism, as proof of faith, is one fully accepted. In direct opposition to this is the Emerging church model in quadrant 3 (see numerical horizontal scale) which is *low* in regards to supporting *believing before belonging* as well as *low* in supporting *belonging before believing*. Although the Emerging church movement is currently in an initial phase it is becoming clear that this movement is not focusing on specific beliefs or affiliation of some kind, but rather releasing their energy to sustain gatherings which is experimental, open and not specifically aimed at a single spirituality.

3.1 The Fundamentalist model:

Fundamentalism is strict adherence to a specific set of theological doctrines that were used against the theological perspectives of a generation influenced by modernism. This term was therefore coined to describe a fixed set of theological beliefs that developed into a substantial movement within the Protestant community in the early twentieth century (Brom 2004).

Fundamentalists therefore have a high regard for an intellectual understanding of faith (*fides quarens intelligens*) that can be seen in their theological doctrines and intellectual capacity to express their beliefs. Their spirituality is focused on an intellectual interpretation of the Word and the Spirit and not so much focused on meditation or emotional input.

Fundamentalists are fixed in their convictions on *central evangelical values* and will not settle for a liberal perspective on any evangelical belief. Therefore fundamentalism is not simply adherence to the Scripture, but implies a specific reading and preaching of Scripture, namely a selective, literal and modernist one. Fundamentalism introduced many debatable issues like: creationism, abortion, homosexuality, etc. Religious sociologist, P Berger (1979:60) describes in, The Heretical Imperative that those that choose for a fundamentalist position in regards to spirituality as making a “deductive choice”. What does he mean? Simply that Fundamentalists have the ability to take general descriptions and apply them prescriptively to the practice of Christianity today. According to Berger (1979:92) this *deductive choice* can happen in a context where the so-called *spiritual people* feel threatened by the postmodern and secularized challenges facing their environment. This leads to a further and even bigger challenge: Those of strong fundamentalist conviction are often not available for an in-depth conversation with those opposing the deductive choice and in their following can even become sectarian. The followers of the Fundamentalist church model apply their religious convictions ignorant of major changes and tend to absolutize historical confessions of the traditional church and consider them the best criteria for the true *ecclesia*, thus establishing an *ipso facto* sentiment about postmodern needs. For Jonker (2008: 32)

this is when *orthodoxy* becomes *orthodoxism*, meaning that the church becomes totally irrelevant in its existing postmodern context.

Jonker (2008: 31) explains in, Die relevansie van die kerk (The relevance of the church), that being orthodox in itself also had positive contributions to theology and its praxis. Fundamentalists have generally contributed to the debate on difficult theological questions with insight and meaningful perspectives. He confirms that in the light of the Enlightenment and secularisation, when the upcoming culture was ready to disregard the Gospel and its prescriptive teachings, it was the Fundamentalists who held on to the essential belief of the Gospel and saved its message for an upcoming generation to return to (*Entdeckerfreude*). Jonker (2008: 33) mentions the names of Kohlbrugge (1803-1875), Kuyper (1837-1920) and Bavinck (1854-1921) in this regard.

Although these men did hold to a traditional Reformed position, they should not be simply labelled as “fundamentalist.” Fundamentalist can be labelled as being short sighted and following a selective reading of Scripture. Being considered Orthodox gives more credit to the above theologians as they were focused on being traditionally correct in matters of religious doctrine and practice.

The theology of Herman Friedrich Kohlbrugge (1932) was essentially *Christocentric* in the context of the rising Liberal theology. Kohlbrugge preached that one needs to have certainty of faith and that this conviction and certainty cannot be grounded in a specific human time or setting (which is our own conversion history), but only in the redemption that took place on that day of Jesus’ crucifixion on Golgotha and His resurrection thereafter. Only through Christ are we saved and can we truly belong to His *ecclesia*.

Abraham Kuyper (1898) confronted the liberal theology movement for positioning humankind at the centre of the universe and proclaiming creation to be the subject of concern. His theology was strictly classical reformed, believing that the *Bible* can be the sole agent of change in modern culture.

Herman Bavinck (1895) introduced the theological concept of the *organic inspiration of Scripture*. This indicates that Scripture can be relevant to culture, as the authors of the Bible were also part of a specific cultural environment, writing from a specific context.

This concept disregards the so-called *mechanistic* inspiration of Scripture. According to the mechanistic perspective it was believed that the message of the Bible was given to the authors in such a mechanical way that its message does not relate to the human context of the authors, as it was *directly* given. According to Bavinck, the organic inspiration of Scripture implies that God supernaturally moved with and upon the biblical writers so that their words became at the same time the words of God. In so doing, Bavinck tried to re-orientate his culture to return to the Bible as God's word, also for their time. Bavinck was therefore convinced that the core of the Bible, as God's good news to mankind, was not the message of mere scribes listening to spiritual dictation, but authors responding to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit from within their specific socio-cultural and historical context.

These theologians, like most traditionalists today, were not comfortable with the rising spirit of humanism and secularization as it was challenging Christ's unique salvific action and the authority of the Bible as His Word.

Jonker (2008: 173) concludes that in general the Fundamentalist church model reveals a reserved position and spirituality in regards to new spiritual claims and thus can easily exclude others. Jonker believes that the only route to be taken is one of renewing its theology even if it is only from within its own stance in the conservative tradition.

In fundamentalist circles newcomers need to express an intellectual understanding of belief and publicly proclaim those beliefs in order to belong to a fundamentalistic congregation.

3.2 The Evangelical church model:

The Evangelical church model is quite similar to the fundamentalist church model as many Protestant evangelical Christians are outspokenly Calvinist in regards to strong systems of belief and certainties based on their interpretation of Scripture. Evangelicals do have a high regard for the following:

- The need for personal conversion

- Actively sharing the Gospel
- Biblical authority
- Teaching that proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus.

According to A König (1998: 39) Evangelicals, like Fundamentalists, refer to themselves as *Bible believers*, implying the primary role of the Bible in their daily lives. They also keep to the belief that faith in Christ is the only way to salvation and authentic membership in the body of Christ. But we do find differences in the evangelical church model which defines its own spirituality.

According to König (1998: 40) the best terminology to describe the Evangelical spirituality is “personal and subjective”. One needs to have a personal experience of the saving power of Christ in order to authentically belong to an Evangelical congregation. A subjective knowledge of the saving character of Christ is therefore held in high regard. Where the testimony: *Christ for me* is accepted in Fundamentalist circles to allow membership, the more personal and emotional description of: *Christ in me* is accepted in Evangelical communities to belong to the body of Christ. A personal relationship with Christ as Saviour is considered necessary to truly belong to the Evangelical community and its witness. If one does not have a definite calling from God or a personal ministry one could find it difficult to be at home in the Evangelical community.

Pietism, as it is referred to by Jonker (2008: 35), is regarded as a fierce force against the spirit of the Enlightenment and has been a positive contribution in Evangelical circles against the Liberal movement from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. Ironically this spirit of Pietism with a strong sentiment for subjectivism and individualism is at the same time a product of the Enlightenment. In the Evangelical church model one finds that the pietistic sentiment of a personal appropriation of salvation in Christ is highly regarded, thus making an important claim that faith is not only an issue of simply knowing, but also to be experienced and to be practiced from within the church towards the outside world.

Pietism not only recognised the shortcomings of the church in this case, but advocated a renewal of practical and devout Christianity. The originator of the movement was Philipp Jakob Spener. In *Pia Desideria* he made six proposals to restore the life of the church (1675:12):

- Meetings of small groups of devoted members in the church (*ecclesiolae in ecclesia*)
- The laity should share in spiritual government of the church.
- Knowledge of Christianity needs to be supplemented by the practice of its spirituality.
- Instead of attacks on unbelievers, a sympathetic treatment of them was needed.
- Clergy needed a new devotional life of service to Christ.
- Preaching that focused on the renewal of the inner man.

One can sense the focus point in these six proposals to be highly subjective and personal as Spener was searching for a new devotion to Christ from within the church. Nevertheless the evangelical church model with its pietistic sentiment is critically described by Jonker (2008: 36) as a postmodern church model which has a distinct “internal discrepancy”. Why? Because it can highly regard and relate closely to the spirit of postmodernism in keeping people to their individuality and experiences and yet have the ability of keeping to fixed evangelical values that are not necessarily supported by the postmodern mindset.

In Evangelical circles newcomers will need to commit to Christ, find their personal calling or ministry and then will be able to truly join in the Evangelical community.

Although Jonker (2008: 37) finds it necessary to relate the Gospel to personal salvation and personal knowledge, he does not have a positive sentiment towards the Evangelical church movement’s high regard of personal salvation and godliness,

despite the church calling to engage with the challenge of postmodernism in a socially messy and often corrupted world.

3.3 The Emerging church model:

The Emerging church movement shares a postmodern disillusionment with the hierarchy of the institutional church as it has existed through the ages (cf. Kimball 2003). Those in the Emerging church movement do not engage with apologetics, as is often the case with some belonging to the Fundamentalist church model; or follow the path of confrontational evangelism, as some members belonging to the Evangelical church tend to do. Their praxis is more concerned with allowing individuals the freedom to discover truth through conversation and in relationships within Christian communities. What exactly does this entail? Many of the Emerging church movement have adopted the approach to evangelism, which stresses peer-to-peer dialogue rather than traditional witnessing.

Involvement in this movement therefore has many forms including social activism and hospitality. This beneficent involvement in culture is part of what is called *missional living*. It simply means to focus more energy on social issues, as opposed to a primary evangelical overemphasis on eternal salvation. Emerging churches commit themselves to social and community activities that seek God's presence, especially in regard to social upliftment and caring for the environment. Saayman (2010: 9) is convinced that it is exactly this characteristic of the Emerging church, to be so completely taken up by the social demands and conditions of the present and postmodern phenomena, that it reveals no real interest in the future: "The whole debate is taken up by what the present, emerging postmodern church must look and be like to satisfy the present community of Western postmodern people." The Emerging church movement is therefore focused on social and environmental responsibility and less occupied with traditional evangelism that is mostly concerned with the saving of souls.

The strengths of the Emerging movement therefore lie in its creativity and highly relational and social involvement. Then again it seems at times somewhat disorganised

in its theological ideas, because the postmodern belief system itself encourages diversity of belief, which makes it difficult to track. In the Emerging church, to fully belong, one needs to commit to the congregation's social conscience and sense of responsibility towards social issues. What one believes is less important than social engagement, from the body of Christ, which is already a confession of faith.

Brian McLaren (2001:108-110), as a leader in the Emerging movement, has seven points which are distinctly critical of the "*believe before you can belong*" dogma as represented by the Fundamental and Evangelical church models.

Firstly, he believes that the *Evangelical* grouping (Blocks 1 and 2 of the quadrant model) desires to control and manipulate the Gospel by insisting that all members have to be aware of their salvation in Christ. For McLaren this is to be out of touch with the mystery of God.

Secondly, McLaren observes that the modern era can be characterized as the age of the machine. In this worldview, the institutional church perceives the world and people as mechanisms which can be programmed and controlled. Just find the people's "believe button" and you can enrol them as new recruits into the congregation's programme for newcomers.

Thirdly, McLaren has difficulty with the *age of analysis* that Evangelicalism still finds itself in, meaning that the way of thinking analytically has led the church to try and find neat, systematic categories into which people can fit – *believers and seekers* – *those who belong and those who don't*.

Fourthly, McLaren finds difficulty in the church's quest for certainty and (absolute) knowledge. He refers to Evangelicalism's issue with *believe before you can belong* as *Foundationalism*. That is how he believes the institutional church theology is constructed: "It is the quest to find certain knowledge, based on indubitable foundations" (cf. Smith 2005: 53). According to McLaren's understanding of *Evangelicalism* it tends to function as a building which must rest upon a solid, secure foundation; and in terms of our knowledge, that foundation must be certain, so that we cannot doubt it.

Fifthly, Evangelicalism is very decisive. This implies that if you know truth with certainty, you need to evangelise others who do not have this certainty or background.

In the sixth critique, McLaren refers to what he calls the *modern nation state* philosophy that still seems to be the sentiment of Evangelicalism. What does he mean by this? That in trying to evangelise the whole world with the Gospel of Christ by the dogma of *believe before you can belong*, there is a clear sentiment to return to the so-called *Corpus Christianum* era (meaning the age when every citizen of a specific nation-state was considered to be a member of the church).

Seventh, McLaren finds that in the dogma of *believe before you can belong* the influence of individuality is powerful, whether it is in terms of salvation, morality or worship.

In summary, these are McLaren's main observations about Evangelicalism's general traits and effects upon our broader culture. It is here that McLaren poses questions and concerns that the church must ponder and carefully assess, so much more as we live in a culture that has been shaped by modern thoughts and values and that is now influenced by postmodern philosophy.

Jonker (2008: 42) refers to the above Emerging movement as the *new orthodox* movement. The so-called new orthodox movement is considered a theological movement which is concerned with the issues of Christianity from a historical-critical perspective, not conforming to Fundamental theology and totally involved in the social and political issues of the day. Jonker (2008) senses that to be labelled as a new orthodox Christian does mean that one's agenda is to re-establish the classic beliefs of the institutional church, but from a totally new perspective and position which keeps in mind that cultures do evolve and can grow out of one theological conviction to reach a new base from where religion is practised.

Jonker (2008: 44) considers Karl Barth (1886-1968) as a new orthodox theologian, especially in his later years of practising theology. Why? Barth considered it unnecessary to evangelise modern society by making use of apologetics and evangelical outreach. He therefore did not believe in *Evangelicalism*, rather he believed

in *Universalism*, which proclaimed that in the death of Christ the *whole* world was saved. Therefore evangelism, according to Barth's conclusion, is unnecessary and the dogma of *believe before belong* is irrelevant. According to this theory of *universalism*, Christ's salvation is already bestowed on all individuals. Those that are part of the body of Christ and do belong to a church do have a slight advantage as they are aware of their salvation in Christ. Those who are not yet joined to a following of believers and not yet belonging to a church community are also saved the only difference is that they are not yet aware of it. Through dialogue and the church's social calling, will communities of seekers eventually come to understand their universal salvation? Jonker (2008: 61) explains that not only had Barth's *universalism* led to specific secularised thinking in theology after World War II, but it had also minimized the role of the *ecclesia* in God's plan of salvation. The church as body of Christ is therefore only a sign of God's continued salvific operation in the *world*. If then I have to place Karl Barth in the quadrant model, as to where his theological sentiments would best be representative today, I would consider the camp of the Emergent/Liberal theologians and not in the so-called Emerging theological camp.⁵

3.4 The Liberal church model:

The Liberal church model (Jonker 2008: 37) is distinguished by its aim of uniting the general message of the Gospel with the convictions of a post-Christian society. Its objective is to unite the idea of the Christian message with the current realities of a post-Christendom culture. Needless to say that such a delicate balance between *believing* the message of God's salvation in Christ, and incorporating all the core values of today's culture, so that everyone can *belong*, is a profound challenge. Keeping the

⁵ For further analysis of Barth's understanding of the relationship between church and world in a missiological perspective, see also the excellent exposition of Bosch (1991:376-378). Bosch emphasises Barth's view that the coming of Christ means the end of an understanding of the church "as an institution of salvation for those who *belong* to it" (my italics). The church is, rather, the "community for the world" (:378). It is also important to point out that Barth is understood differently in SA from the way he is perhaps understood in Europe. In SA he is especially the Barth of the Barmen Declaration, which is why the founding document of the Uniting Reformed Church in SA is, according to Botman (2004:127-133), strongly Barthian in concept. It is for these reasons that I place Barth here.

church as functional and relevant as possible is what drives the Liberal church movement to some extremes.

If one's focus in ministry is to preach a liberal gospel to a postmodern culture, it is presumably difficult to decide what section of the New Testament (or the Bible) should be prescriptive for post-Christendom culture and what not. Pauline theology or Jesus' teachings in the Gospels (cf. Wenham 1995)? Liberalism too easily reduces the spiritual meaning of the Cross and the resurrection of Christ to be enabled to incorporate the liberal worldview, and therefore the philosophy of the day. The Liberal church model represents a praxis which does not as such recall the Christian message, but rather a selective spirituality that only has a slight Christian flavour.

Schleiermacher (1768 -1834) (undated: 99-105), is perceived as the father of modern Protestant theology as he envisioned a new upcoming Protestant culture and whose theology is used today to accomplish a synthesis between the Christian faith and post-Christian culture. This implies that the Christian message needs to conform to the subjectivism of the Enlightenment and to the anthropocentric practice of theology. Schleiermacher did not focus on reinterpreting the Christian message as such, but recognised a general humane spirituality that could assist a modernised community to experience a relationship with the "*Universum*" (cf. Jonker 2008: 39). In so doing Schleiermacher created a safe environment for religion as it thus conforms to all forms of conflict with the world and its demands. This "*kultuurprotestantisme,*" or *culture Protestantism*, (Jonker 2008: 53) is what is commonly regarded as a closely sought relation between Christendom and culture. *Culture Christianity* considers that the post-Christian culture does not understand the church, Bible or theology as previous generations did. Therefore it needs to be reached through a reduced Gospel that conforms to human wisdom and philosophy.

Thus it is clear that the Liberal church model is comfortable with rationalism and positivism that tends to lead to the minimizing of the message of the Gospel. Why? Because its aim is always to apply the message of Scripture to post-Christendom society along hermeneutical and historical critical methods that are acceptable to the upcoming culture. Nevertheless, Jonker (2008: 41) also mentions the positive aspects

of the Liberal church movement as it has encouraged the church to engage in post-Christendom culture and not to withdraw from it. It has also enabled society to be free from superstition and its fears of the previously unknown.

The Liberal church model asks for one's commitment to this world, here and now. Any referral to a relationship with God or Christian belief is secondary to one's involvement in this world and reality.

3.5 The Quadrant opposites:

The Fundamentalist church model is very well represented by what is called *foundationalism* (cf. Smith 2005: 53). This implies that if you want to belong to this movement you have to first believe in the Scriptural creeds and ordinations (as religious foundations for society), as many past generations did, in order to belong. The institutional church as a solid "invention" and unchangeable establishment is what is intended by its followers, also for the time to come.

Directly opposing the issue of foundationalism is *universalism* as represented by the Liberal church movement. Central to their belief is that all of humanity is saved by the intervention of Christ in history and His death on the Cross. Therefore having to be baptized and to partake of Holy Communion in order to belong to the church, is incomprehensible as everyone already partakes in Christ's universal salvation and therefore already belongs ... if not to the church, at least to Christ.

For Liberal believers, all phenomena of life, including consciousness and behaviour, can be explained by, and reduced, to science (cf. Gatherer 1979). Therefore Scripture should be read and interpreted from an exclusive historical-critical perspective thus reducing the element of God's supernatural intervention in our world. In accepting that there cannot be any fixed spiritual laws to believe in, but only natural causes, the church as such is only a social agent in society and therefore truly belongs to the world and its agenda.

The Evangelical movement is represented by what is called *Evangelicalism* (cf. König 1998). This implies that to belong to this church movement, one has to believe the message of salvation in Christ, believe in the organic inspiration of Scripture and testify to the experience of the Holy Spirit. A personal testimony to the above is required to fully belong.

Directly in opposition to this mode of belief is what is referred to as *reductionism* by the Emerging church movement (cf. Jonker 2008). This movement is accommodating of the prevailing postmodern culture as it adopts methods in its message which at times seem to depart from the pattern and content of the Gospel. The Emerging movement has developed a tendency to say what postmodern culture wants to hear, rather than what Scripture teaches. The Emerging church movement values experiences, stories, relationships and feelings, but devalues absolute truth and questions our human ability to know with certainty. It encourages mixing of different ideas and methods without trying to logically fit them together as they re-interpret the Bible through a postmodern lens. It allows reductionism in its theology in regard to God's judgment and the existence of hell, which leads to discarding of the doctrine of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

To simplify the quadrant model's information it is possible to come to the conclusion that for the Fundamentalist and Evangelical movements *one has to believe ... to be perceived as fully belonging to Christ and his church*. For the Emerging and Liberal movement *one already participates in the universal salvation established by Christ and only needs to be reached and gathered through the church's social and political involvement in the world*.

All of the above now makes it possible to investigate these two profoundly opposing premises: "Believe before you can belong" or "Belong before you have to believe."

Chapter 4

4. Belong before you have to believe versus Believe before you can belong

I am convinced that the *believe before you can belong* axiom needs to be deconstructed for the purpose of practising a sustainable missionary ecclesiology in a postmodern context. Therefore the purpose of this chapter is to deconstruct the perception and significance of the *believe before you may belong* axiom.

For the purpose of testing the abovementioned axiom it is simplistic, though helpful, to understand quadrants 1 and 2 as presenting the institutional church and quadrants 3 and 4 as representing the emerging movement. Therefore it is also possible to not only refer to the dualism between the axioms *believe before belong* and *belong before believe*, but also to understand the field of investigation as *the upcoming emerging church movement versus areas of classical Christian ecclesiology*.

I shall concentrate on the following topics to further my investigation on a missionary ecclesiology by referring to Barry A. Harvey's (1999) research on an ecclesiological primer for a post-Christian world in *Another city*, the writing of Wilbert R. Shenk (1995) in Write the vision - the church renewed, the classic by Hoekendijk (1964), The church inside out, L.Boff's (1986) The base communities reinvent the church and Yves Congar's theology by Gabriel Flynn (2004) in Yves Congar's vision of the church in a world of unbelief. I shall also look into the "Anonymous Christian" by Karl Rahner, especially as interpreted missiologically by Bosch (1991:486).

Hoekendijk's (1964) thoughts on a missionary ecclesiology are still relevant as he warned us that the clergy would have to deal with a completely new challenge in ministry, as a new kind of society emerged after World War II. Congar (2004) also warned us that all pre-war ecclesiologies were completely outdated, especially in Western Europe that has since become a mission field in itself.

I shall further examine the ministry of Jesus and Paul, the contribution of the Holy Spirit and the function of the Synagogue in regard to the so-called *God-fearers*. Finally I shall investigate the Vatican II document, *Lumen Gentium* (cf. Harvey 2009), which is

officially referred to in English as “light of the nations”. I shall investigate this document to understand if the Emerging church movement is a mere continuation of an enterprise already envisioned by the Second Vatican Council and if one can therefore find a link between *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican II and the Emerging church movement.

Harvey (1999: 15) is concerned about the identity of the *ecclesia* in the post-Christian world. He makes use of the philosophical method, developed by Hegel, to find a solution by following the well-known ideal of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. Harvey supports the general notion that it is problematic when institutional churches identify themselves as an *ecclesia (called out of the world)* for then they easily disappear into a separate community minding mostly their own agendas (thesis). He is also not in favour of understanding the church to be a mere spiritual form of an already existing social agenda (antithesis). He believes that it is an almost impossible task of finding ways to translate the Christian message of salvation into secular themes that are acceptable to a post-Christian culture. Rather he supports the notion of the church as being an *altera civitas (another city)* where the synthesis supports the idea of *ecclesia*, to be understood as a people called out of the world so that they might be sent back into it (1999: 59). This way of describing the people of God as an *ecclesia* is a classical sentiment that has been seriously questioned by linguists and does not correspond with its meaning in the first century when it simply meant *assembly*. Though some might wish to translate the more literal meaning as *called out ones*, this option does not relate well either with the meaning of *ecclesia* in New Testament times, or its earlier common usage referring to “*an assembly of persons constituted by well-defined membership*” (Louw and Nida 1989: 126). When the word *church* is found in the English Bible it pertains to the work of God in saving and gathering the lost. Nevertheless what follows from the above ideal needs at least to be mentioned for the purpose of this research.

Harvey understands that for any person to be initiated into the “peoplehood” of God is an “*ongoing drama that does not necessarily condemn anyone to a fixed place or role within the story*” (Harvey 1999: 40). He demonstrates the above statement by recalling the story of Jacob who wrestled with a mysterious figure bearing a blessing from God

and from whom Jacob refused to let go without first receiving that blessing. The stranger then bestowed on Jacob a new name *Israel*.

Harvey seems convinced that it is through such an interpolative of conflict and confusion that human beings develop innovative ways of constructing in due time who they are in Christ and how they fit into the *ecclesia* as a gathering of His blessing. He is convinced that it is in the synthesis of the church – allowing those on the outside to enter and to belong – that people are constantly formed and transformed by the truth before they can even identify the truth (Harvey 1999: 140).

Shenk (1995) is very concerned about the need for an ecclesiological model that senses the need for a missional responsibility to culture. As in the case with Harvey, Shenk does not find a solution to provide a sustainable answer in the modernist drive to adapt faith to culture, nor in the early fundamentalist escapist message. Shenk's (1995: 7-8) understanding of ecclesiologies is that they were cast in institutional terms in order to defend tradition instead of functioning from a biblical basis:

In Scripture the church is interpreted in terms of its purpose in relation to the *missio Dei*, whereas in classical Christendom ecclesiologies emphasized its institutional character (Shenk 1995: 8).

Christendom meant that Christianity became recognized as the state religion and that to be part of the church meant to be the religious guardian of society. Thereby the church became indistinguishable from society and citizenship in society became synonymous with membership in the church. Shenk describes this affair between church and culture in the words of Hutchinson (in Shenk 1995: 44):

This tradition held firmly to the ideal whereby the church collaborated as closely as possible with culture in its goal of realizing the kingdom of God on earth. The liberal mission was IN rather than TO culture.

The message is clear: any peace settlement between the church and culture would be on criteria set by the secular culture.

On the other hand one needs only to study the historical (or "*Constantinian*" as Shenk calls it) church to find that it was very much controlled by the past mechanical routine of

church religion and its secure form, rather than being poised to follow the Holy Spirit in responding to emerging new challenges. According to Shenk (1995: 45-46) this response towards postmodern culture does not afford us a satisfactory answer for neither has a sense of missional responsibility to culture.

Shenk (1995: 43) believes it is possible to find the answer to a reliable missionary ecclesiology in the pages of the New Testament and for the following reasons:

- That on reading the New Testament one finds that the theological work (the letters of Paul for instance) presupposes missionary engagement.
- That New Testament theology is developed in response to the *Sitz im Leben* (life setting) of the plurality of cultures and religions of the Mediterranean world of that time.
- That New Testament theology is therefore essentially the working out of an ecclesial solution in the reality of an interface between church and world.

Shenk (1995: 41) finds it necessary for the church to work out its identity within a culture and thus coming to terms with the plausibility structure of that culture. Will the church be pressured to be moulded to fit this structure or to rather discern how to live in redemptive tension with it and live in missional responsibility to its culture? How does one live in missional responsibility towards the culture one finds oneself in? Shenk (1995: 46) is of the understanding that Jesus modelled for us what it means to be in a missionary encounter with one's culture. According to Shenk's (1995: 47) observation, Jesus approached the culture of His day with compassion. The stance of Jesus' ministry was to meet people where they were and to help them find new spiritual life. In His incarnation He held firmly onto His identification with the human situation without neglecting His commitment to the Father's kingdom.

Based on the above, Shenk (1995: 47) makes one very important observation. He calls on us to reject the Christendom notion whereby we claim any given culture as being totally Christian. It means that we should reject the notion that we can so fully believe

that our privilege to belong is never at stake. “Every culture is incomplete without the Gospel, but no culture is ever completely evangelized. That is to say, no culture is wholly submitted to the reign of God.”

This observation is important for our quest. Shenk (1995:47) states that not everyone in a particular cultural setting, who belongs to the local church, necessarily believes and that not everyone who believes, in order to fully belong, is ever completely evangelized. Therefore any missionary ecclesiology needs to comprehend that membership in the body of Christ is never a finalized process of belief, but an ongoing engagement to be ever evangelized. How do we determine the full criteria of what it means *to believe*? How do we comprehend that dangerous area of being *fully evangelized* and no longer in need of a vibrant relationship with Christ and the Gospel story?

In this regard – if *believe* means to have *arrived* and *belong* to be *available* to be more fully evangelized – it seems that we should focus, in the near future, on those who want to belong even though they do not yet believe, because no culture is ever completely evangelized.

Hoekendijk (1964: 13) finds the restoration of the Christendom is not a worthy cause for the church, as it tries to bring the *Corpus Christianum* back to life and settles for a museum curator mentality. He finds that a call to church evangelism is merely a “flurried activity to save the remnants of a time now irrevocably past”.

Hoekendijk (1964:13) was concerned, for the church still finds it difficult to accept the fact that it needs to move forward from an era of comfortable change and that it did not engage strongly enough with the question of how to react to an ever changing world. He believed that the church by nature is an agent of change and was therefore certainly not called to remain a bastion of the past, related to outworn social structures.

One has to agree to the fact that the church needs to be very sensitive to the challenges presented by those who are in need of belonging, although they do not yet believe as those who already fully belong do. The church community has to be particularly aware of the context in which it finds itself and that contextualizing is equally important in faith traditions valuing the concept of *Semper Reformanda*. This concept originated with the

establishment of the Reformation in the sixteenth century and implies that Christian communities have to transform their institutional practice in accordance with the continuous working of the Holy Spirit to be truly in harmony with God's *Missio Dei*.

Hoekendijk (1964: 38) believed strongly in the sequence of *kingdom-apostolate-world*. He believed that the church is of lesser importance when it comes to a missionary ecclesiology. According to this sequence, the Kingdom of God breaks through into the human condition where believers engage with the world outside the walls of the church. In this context there is barely room for the church. Ecclesiology is not necessary and does not fit in. When one desires to speak about God's dealings with the church, Hoekendijk prefers to mention it only in passing and without strong emphasis. Hoekendijk (1964: 41) understood the church to be true to its calling only to the extent that it lets itself be used as a part of God's dealings with the world. A.A van Ruler mentions in Het apostolaat der kerk en het ontwerp-kerkorde (The apostolic calling of the church and the new church order) that God's dealings with His creation surpass the church as God's will is to establish His name on this earth and to see His Kingdom being established in His earthly creation (1948: 19). Nevertheless to accomplish this God chose to use His church as instrument to communicate the good news of the Gospel to the world. Not to rule over the world but to serve the will of God in establishing his will here and now (1948: 20). Therefore when one speaks of the office of the apostle it is not directed at the church, but applicable to a kingdom vision and kingdom calling and thus focused on establishing God's kingdom on earth and not to promote the church (1948: 52).

Hoekendijk does not emphasize the issue of *belonging* to the local church, because for him *to belong* is a synonym for a "splendid isolation" from the world and to be "well protected from it" (Hoekendijk 1964: 17). He focuses rather on the issue of belief (1964: 54-55) and then importantly, not belief as we would expect to find it in the church, but rather unexpected belief in the world.

Hoekendijk's (1964) critique of the church is not new, but confronts this research with the question of *why one would deconstruct the notion of prescribed Christian faith, as a primary condition to be able to authentically belong to the church, in favour of belonging*

before one is fully evangelized; if to belong to the church is to be labelled as passive and isolated? To identify with and to belong to the church was for Hoekendijk an embarrassment due to the church's inability to influence the world's agenda and was also perceived by others (Aring and Rutti) as expendable. For Hoekendijk the parish system was an invention of the "Middle Ages" and the church, in the words of Bosch, nothing more than an "intermezzo" between God and the world (Bosch 1993: 385).

Boff (1986: 50) asked the following question: "If Jesus' preaching concentrated on the idea of the Kingdom of God, and if the Kingdom of God had a universal, cosmic connotation, then how do we get a church as a reduced realization of the Kingdom of God?"

Boff (1986: 50-56) helps us to understand the following important factors:

- The twelve disciples symbolize the eschatological gathering and reconstitution of the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk. 22: 30), not a church blueprint.
- The importance of the twelve disciples resides then in being twelve and not in being apostles (Mark never speaks of the twelve apostles – only of the "twelve": Mk.3: 14, 16, 4: 10, 6: 7-35, 9: 35, 10: 32, 11: 11, 14: 10-17).
- After the resurrection the twelve stand in relation to all of Israel and not with a group, constituting a community we call a church. Although the twelve share in Christ's task of preaching the Kingdom their function is that of "multipliers" to assist the message of salvation reach more parts of Israel and the world.
- Only Matthew speaks of a "church" (Mt.16: 18, 18: 17). Luke never uses the word *ecclesia* in his Gospel, but he uses it eighteen times in the Acts of the Apostles. It seems possible that the church is not an invention from the time of the historical Jesus, but a creation from the time after Pentecost. These are two different salvation historical situations. The church then is not to be understood as a creation of the time of Jesus, but rather a creation of the time of the Spirit. With the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts Chapter 2 we not only find the fulfilment of the

prophecy of Joel 2: 28-29, but also the continuity between Israel and the post-Pentecost Church.

- Therefore it is not the church as such, but the Kingdom of God which is the “ultimate goal of the divine economy of salvation.”

Finally once again the question is posed that lurks behind all these reflections of Boff: Why was the restoration of Israel and the coming Kingdom proclaimed if all along the church would appear? Alfred Loisy (in Boff 1986: 50) stated the problem when he wrote: “Christ preached the Kingdom of God and the church appeared instead”. *It seems that God decided to delay the Parousia and to establish a renewed and alternative (“intermezzo”) community that would assist outsiders, labelled as such by their society, to belong to His body without them even understanding or believing in the ancient Jewish covenant.* That the church is also a church for the Gentiles (Acts 10 and 15) today is a fact, not just because of its enormous hermeneutical relevance but because of its clear sentiment towards a missionary ecclesiology.

With the above I do not indicate that the church is a manifestation of the kingdom of God. The Protestant narrative teaches us that authority derives only from faith in Christ, without the mediation of the Church. Its grand narrative focuses on the Kingdom rather than the Church (cf. Hart 1991).

If one only focuses on the missionary part of a **missionary ecclesiology** one tends to only focus on the issue of belief, in order to be saved, and not on the issue of belonging to a community of believers. This is often true in the case of evangelical churches. The following evangelization illustration by McKnight (2009) at a conference held in Stellenbosch (South Africa) demonstrates this rather well:

“God loves you!”

“But you have sin in your life that separates you from a living relationship with God.”

“Jesus died for your sins.”

“It is therefore possible to be sanctified and justified through Christ’s redemption.”

“If you accept this salvation through faith in Christ, then you are saved.”

“When you are saved you are welcomed into God’s kingdom!”

In this realistic scenario there is only a “God-you” relationship. This kind of gospel has no need for (belonging to) the church and deconstructs it. The same is true for those following some Christian liberal movements. In their quest for social justice the emphasis is on establishing a new social order in the world whereby oppression, hunger and injustice are targeted without necessarily focusing on helping those outsiders to belong to the *ecclesia*.

McKnight is clear on the important issue of *belonging* and explains this through the Luke-Acts encounters. He states that the Holy Spirit assists and helps outsiders to enter into the local *ecclesia* (Acts 2: 17-18). Why? The Holy Spirit uses the formation of those who enter into Christ’s community as a *life-changing society*. He explains the above as follows:

In the *Magnificat* of Luke 1: 46-56 Mary was longing for a new reality to come into being in the coming and reign of Christ that would satisfy the hungry and that would form a *koinonia* where people would be concerned with the needs of each other:

(Lk. 1: 53) He has filled the hungry with good things, and He has sent the rich away empty.

(Lk. 1: 54) He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy,

(Lk. 1: 55) as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed forever.

This becomes a reality in the assembly mentioned in Acts 2: 44-46:

(Acts 2: 44) And all who believed were together and had all things common.

(Acts 2: 45) And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need.

(Acts 2:46) And continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they shared food with gladness and simplicity of heart.

In the song of Zechariah in Luke 1: 67-79 it is his longing that in the coming and reign of Christ a new reality would surface that would enable Israel to worship God without fear of man (the restoration of Israel):

(Lk. 1: 74) That He would grant to us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear,

(Lk. 1: 75) in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.

This becomes a reality in the first missionary *ecclesia* mentioned in Acts 2: 42:

(Acts 2: 42) And they were continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship and in the breaking of the loaves, and in prayers.

Finally it is clear in the ministry of John the Baptist (Luke 3: 1-19) that we find his longing for a new spiritual season that would bring Israel into repentance and a closer relationship with God. See Luke 3: 8-11.

(Lk. 3: 8) Therefore bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say within yourselves, we have Abraham for our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

(Lk. 3: 9) And now also the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire.

(Lk. 3: 10) And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

(Lk. 3: 11) He answered and said to them, He who has two coats, let him give to him who has none. And he who has food, let him do likewise.

This becomes a reality in the first missionary *ecclesia* in Acts 2: 37-39:

(Acts 2: 37) And hearing this, they were stabbed in the heart, and said to Peter and to the other apostles, Men, brothers, what shall we do?

(Acts 2: 38) Then Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 2: 39) For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call.

McKnight is relating the Luke-Acts testimony to the reality that when outsiders or “those of Israel whom He wants to gather to Himself” (Is. 49: 5a) enter the community of believers by the grace of the Holy Spirit and are given the opportunity to partake of the salvation that is available in God, they join a life changing society. This is the means by which the Holy Spirit accomplishes its task by helping outsiders to *belong to the Christian community, as a missionary ecclesia, although they are not fully sanctified yet (cf. Acts 5: 1-11)*.

To return to the sentiment of Hoekendijk that the church is of lesser importance in God’s salvific action in the world, it is noteworthy to mention that the church as a potentially life changing society or institution must not be belittled and totally discharged as it not only has the potential to help outsiders belong, but to see newcomers change from within by the power of God. Therefore I agree with McKnight that the church, as a people *belonging* to its communities, is of the essence of a true missionary ecclesiology.

Boff’s (1986: 4) research on the reinvention of the church also applies to my investigation. Base ecclesial communities emerged in the late 1960’s in mostly poor communities in Latin America. They were mostly responses to a shortage of priests and in a context of oppression where local communities studied the Bible, prayed together and also engaged in social and economic challenges. For an ecclesiology to be truly missional it has to function from a base or from the bottom and cannot derive from rigid hierarchies or prescribed relationships. For an *ecclesia* that is driven from a top-model downwards, potential church members need to first testify to having personal knowledge of God, before they may fully belong to the community of believers and partake of the Eucharist. In Roman Catholic as well as Protestant denominations baptized children are welcomed into the church community long before they believe. Nevertheless one should not forget that clergy baptise children according to the testimony or belief of their parents. If the parents are considered to be members with a proven practice of partaking and believing in the same way as the rest of the congregational members, then their children may join the community of believers.

When one considers a Christian community that is functioning from a basic Christian praxis where there is an absence of alienating structures, deep communion, mutual assistance and equality; seekers can experience and finally find God through acceptance by first belonging to a community “that must be understood as a spirit to be created” (Boff 1986: 5). A more missional focus is needed and not necessarily a more ecclesiastical one.

In the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa there is still a theological distinction between children being baptized and referred to as *doop lidmate* (second-rate members) and so-called *volwasse lidmate* (adult members). Although the children are baptized, they are still considered in practice to be inferior members, not fully belonging like those who have already been confirmed. So we find that although small children are baptized into the local Christian community, they are not perceived as fully belonging to such a community and may only partake of the Lord’s Supper at the age of seven under adult supervision. In more extreme cases this is only approved of at the age of eighteen and after the ceremony of Confirmation. Children and teenagers as potential adult church members need to first testify to having personal knowledge of God, before they may fully belong to the community of believers and partake of the Eucharist.

This tradition controls one’s freedom to fully belong to the body of Christ and makes a definite distinction as to who may fully belong and who may not. The attraction of true Christian fellowship is to belong to Christ and also the body of believers, without having to first prove oneself worthy to a church hierarchy:

There is no mention here of the elements of bishop and Eucharist .The church is not being thought of from the top down, but from the bottom up, from the grassroots, from the “base”. The church – “God’s family” – takes form by means of a nucleus which creates a community of faith, hope and charity (Boff 1986: 15).

Yves Congar’s (2004) ecclesiology is unconventional, particularly on key issues such as mission, ministry, reform and salvation outside the church (to mention only a few). Flynn would like to remember Congar as the greatest ecclesologist in the Catholic Church, as

well as for his contribution in propagating the human personality of Christ as catalyst for those who may belong although they do not yet believe.

Flynn (2004: 21) describes Congar's view that the Church is a cause of unbelief in the world because in its pastoral mission in society, it points to a poor presentation of the humanity of Christ and his grace. This was due to the defensive and prescriptive nature of the Roman Catholic Church:

In essence, Congar was concerned that for many the Roman Catholic Church could be a cause of unbelief because the Church was often perceived as a harsh and condemning judge – an image that was inevitably damaging for the church (Flynn 2004: 25).

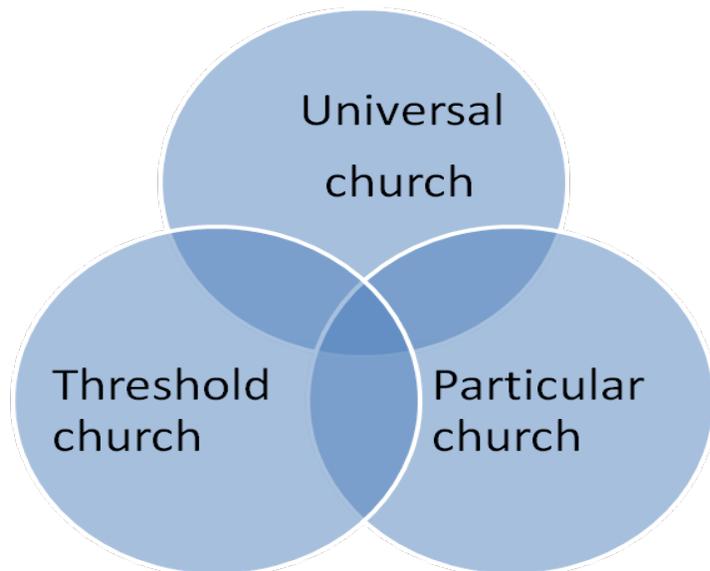
Congar's theology (Flynn 2004: 47) was more Christ-centred and propagated a church ecclesiology that is more in the image of the human Christ. Congar believed that the Church would bear a more credible witness in this day and age if it was defined by its founder's humility. A defining feature of Congar's theology is thus his constant orientation towards the world that needs to be embraced by the church. A cursory reading of his works shows that Congar was not prepared to ignore the world or its history.

Congar refused to accept that the church follows a "ghetto lifestyle" and not influencing the world, or running a status quo spirituality based on strict religious observance, with little emphasis on personal influence (cf. Flynn 2004:118). Congar contends that the Church is forced towards a third solution, which in his view, is the only viable option in regards to the question of belonging – namely, a Church that can support those who are outside the sacramental life of the Church for whatever reason. Congar introduced a transitional strategy:

To accept and even encourage the existence of two regimes [a threshold church and the church as sacrament]...In any case, to provide areas which would represent a kind of threshold church, a church for catechumens, in order to support the spiritual life of those whose faith is unsure and above all of those who are unable to participate fully in the sacramental life (Flynn 2004: 118).

Congar makes a clear distinction between the proposed threshold structures and the church in its full functioning capacity. For him the legitimacy of the former cannot be determined except by reference to the latter. This states the fact that Congar's proposed church for *those who do not fully believe* (catechumens) is essentially transitional. Therefore the threshold church is, for Congar, the gathering of catechumens before being a sacramental assembly in the full sense of the word. His understanding is therefore clear: first the Church supports those on the outside *to belong* and then by means of the catechumens, *to believe*.

When one, being an outsider, makes a transition into the body of Christ and eventually believes in the Gospel of Christ, one is considered fully functional inside the sacramental life of the church. Congar's vision could be pictured as follows:



Congar's understanding of helping and assisting those who are in need of belonging, but not so much of believing, implies the need not to be left outside the official ministry of the institutional church. He suggests that an alternative ministry, the so-called *threshold church ministry* should help build relationships towards those who are seekers. To help these seekers come to faith a form of catechesis (faith can be understood as knowledge and trust) as ministry can help these seekers to move beyond belonging onto believing. In so doing these outsiders need to eventually be welcomed into a particular local church (*Particular church*). In so doing do new converts become part of the body of Christ (Universal church).

The church nevertheless cannot accept a *relative universality* (Flynn 2004: 45), because the church is missionary by its very nature. If it were otherwise it would cease to be the church and merely have a social calling being alienated from the mission entrusted to it by Christ. Congar believed that in order to be faithful to that mission, the church must seek to lead all men and women into the fullness of salvation.

When considering the axiom, *belong before you have to believe*, in opposition to the *believe before you may belong* notion, it is also helpful to study the work of Karl Rahner (cf. Sau 2001), especially its missiological interpretation by Bosch (1991:486).

Rahner (1966) introduced the concept of the "anonymous Christian" in his *Theological investigations*. His own definition of the term "Anonymous Christian" applies to someone who on the one hand has objectively accepted the gracious self-offering of Christ, while on the other hand is not yet a Christian at the social level in regards to baptism and membership of the church. This seems to correspond rather well with some postmodern people who are committed to Christ, but are not in the least interested in the church. Or even more realistic to refer to those communities, after the so-called *Corpus Christianum*, who live in a conscious state of Christ's grace, but have no personal knowledge of God's salvation in Christ. This theory of the "Anonymous Christian" could be interpreted that some who only belong to a Christian church, but do not yet believe in Christ's salvation, must have received the grace of Christ without them realising it.

This definition implies two facts: first the possibility of supernatural salvation initiated by God for those who belong but do not yet believe, and secondly, that salvation for those who do not yet believe can only be gained with reference to God and Christ as it can only be a theistic and Christian salvation:

One can only escape this conclusion if one adopts the pessimistic outlook common in the past and disputes the possibility of supernatural salvation for such people, thereby consigning them to hell or if one grants salvation merely on the basis of human respectability without reference to God and Christ (Sau 2001: 24).

For Rahner it is theologically and systematically unthinkable that those who merely belong to a Christian gathering, but do not as yet believe in Christ, are unquestionably and in principle excluded from eternity, for the Scripture tells us that God wants everyone to be saved (1 Tim. 2: 4). Rahner is truly bound by the terms of his own Catholic belief and background to hold fast to the belief that God wills all men to be saved (cf. Bosch 1991:486). He cannot hold to the other opinion that God Himself denies the grace of salvation to those who only belong, but do not (yet) believe as those who are saved by Christ's atonement. In the Constitution of the Church of Vatican II (Lumen Gentium), those who have not yet received the Gospel without any fault of their own, are given the possibility of eternal salvation (Sau 2001: 26). And yet according to Scripture (Jn.14: 6) it is only in Christ that this salvation is conferred.

Will God seriously refuse people entry into heaven if they are sincere and try to be good? Would it not be unjust? And what happens to people who have never heard the Gospel? In Romans Chapters 1, 2 and 3 we find three criteria that justify God's righteousness in this matter and that do not merely prove the innocence of the so-called "anonymous Christian". Romans 1: 18-23 mentions the criteria of *creation and nature*. According to this revelation it is possible to recognise God as the Creator who cares for His creation and that we humans, as the crown of His creation, need to seek His presence and acknowledge His Lordship of all of creation – also our lives. In Romans 2: 12-16 we are told that we are created with a *conscience*. Therefore we as humans have a guiding mechanism that either proves God's presence in our lives or the presence of our own wicked nature. In Romans 3: 21-26 it is mentioned that Jesus was

given by the Father to us, to His creation, as a gift. The salvation in Christ therefore demands an active response of faith and not simply a gesture of hoping for the best. These three criteria, the evidence of God's will to be involved in all of his creation (Rm. 1: 18-23), the nature of our conscience to show us our own shortcomings to be righteous in our own capacity (Rm. 2: 12-16) and the need for the salvation of all of creation through Christ's death and atonement (Rm. 3: 21-26) in the letter to the Romans, makes it therefore troublesome to accept the concept of the "anonymous Christian."

Rahner has a very positive view of the creation whereby we humans are perceived as being created in the image of God. He argues that because we are created in God's image we must by definition be able to receive God's grace. Rahner describes this intrinsic ability of humans to respond to God's grace as a seed with growing potential. The salvation which God offers His creation and which is bestowed on us as humans as a seed, is still undeveloped and in the fullness of time will bring eternal life. This sequence can only be disturbed if we as humans, by means of our free will, sinfully reject salvation. If we reject this possibility, then we are deliberately denying God's grace-filled transcendence and it is by implication not possible to speak of "anonymous faith" (cf. Sau 2001: 32-33).

Rahner's position on the above is that all humans have already been included in God's plan of salvation and that no man is excluded from it on account of original sin. Man can only lose his salvation through serious personal sin of his own following his birth as a perfect start being created in the image of God. According to Rahner we as humans were created to be initially saved by God's grace as we reflect His glory and that this possibility must be given to all. This brings Rahner's point of view in conflict with Reformed systematic theological thought. Where Rahner's point of departure is a positive view on humanity, but with the possibility that creation can opt out of God's salvific plan and lose its seed of salvation, reformers understand creation (humans) to be already, from the point of birth, at a loss in regard to salvation and in need of a Saviour (cf. Ps. 51: 7). Nevertheless Rahner's serious thinking on the "anonymous

Christian” has helped theologians to understand the importance of *patiently allowing implicit acceptance of grace to eventually grow into explicit knowledge of Christ*.

Although a person can have implicit faith without the explicit knowledge of the Gospel, the Church must make every effort to preach the Gospel. Rahner is clear on the fact that the mission of the church is to bring everyone to explicit knowledge of the salvation in Christ. Rahner’s theory of the “anonymous Christian” implies therefore the importance of the mission of the church to evangelize the nations (cf. Sau 2001: 36).

In conclusion, the strength of Rahner’s presentation lies in the way in which he explains how it is possible for Christ to save the non-Christian and how his theory is consistent with the other main tenets of Christianity. Unfortunately his view of the nature of man is way too optimistic. He does not reckon sufficiently with man’s sinful nature and focuses only on the positive aspects of humanity.

Having briefly looked at some theological views on the concept of *believing before belonging*, I now turn to an analysis of some New Testament material relevant to the concept.

4.1 The ministry and context of Jesus:

In the incarnation of Jesus He held together his full identification with the human situation, but at the same time did not compromise His commitment to God’s standards. This was the source from which His extraordinary mission emanated and was the authoritative model for His disciples. The teaching of Jesus is the real core of Christianity, as the simple teaching of Jesus was not a dogmatic system, but comprises basic convictions, principles and injunctions as expressions of religious consciousness.

Jesus had different levels of following and support during His earthly ministry. There were the twelve disciples who could be recognised as *insiders* (Mk. 3: 13-19), who took part in Jesus’ ministry and were strongly associated with Him. Peter, James and John (Mk. 3: 16-17, Lk. 9: 51-55) could be seen as *VIP (Very Important Persons) insiders* having closer encounters with Jesus than the other nine and becoming the pillars of the

newly founded Christian community in Jerusalem (Gal. 2: 9). Apart from them the New Testament also mentions the seventy who were sent out by Jesus, the women of Luke 8: 1-3 supporting Jesus on the road and the 120 mentioned by Luke in Acts 1: 14-15. But then there were many who could be labelled as *outsiders*. They followed Jesus' ministry and were constantly trying to be involved in His *modus operandi* without being identified as being completely convinced of His teaching and demands (Mt. 4:25). *It seems that Jesus had no problem carrying out His ministry among those who did not yet believe in Him as Messiah, but belonged to the crowds that followed Him from a distance* (Mt. 7: 28).

This seems to be the case to a certain extent, as we find in John 6: 60, 66-67 where Jesus is explaining His mission to outsiders, following not from within but from a distance, and challenging and disciplining them for not also applying belief to their following of Him. This is the case with Nicodemus in John 3: 1-15 (see also Jn. 7:50-52, 19: 39) and with Joseph of Arimathea in John 19: 38. Apparently Jesus' ministry is inclusive of outsiders, not minding if they follow from within the safety of the crowds; but tends to become more significant for those who would follow Him from a faith encounter after the Easter resurrection.

The testimony of Peter in Matthew 16: 16 is appealing (Mt. 16: 16). Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mt 16: 17):

Jesus answered and said to him, you are blessed, Simon, son of Jonah, for flesh and blood did not reveal it to you, but My Father in Heaven (Mt 16: 18).

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

Only after Peter received a revelation from the Father that Jesus is indeed sent by God and proclaimed his faith in Jesus, did Jesus Himself declare that Peter's testimony would function as a foundation for the future in the establishment of the New Testament Church (this outline is disputed by Roman Catholics for whom the person of Peter is himself the foundation). It seems possible then to differentiate between *insiders* as those who *belong* to Jesus from an internal faith conviction (as demonstrated above by

the testimony of Peter) and those following Jesus *from the outside* – *belonging* from a distance.

In general one can observe that the disciples' faith in Jesus was far from perfect. Often when it seems that the disciples were at last following from the inside, the Gospels reveals the opposite. Peter who pledged that he would follow Christ from the *inside* and not forsake Him even in the face of death and persecution, denied knowing Jesus – not once but three times, thus revealing the personality and role of a *total outsider* (Jn 13: 31-38, 18: 25-27). Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples when Jesus first revealed Himself as the risen and glorified Christ to the twelve. When he was informed that Jesus had appeared to them, he was not convinced and needed proof (Jn 20: 24-29). On many occasions we find that the disciples who followed Jesus from the *inside* prior to His death, reacted to His resurrection appearances as total strangers. This we find in the story of the two men on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24: 13-35) not recognizing Jesus Himself as their companion. Filled with despair they left Jerusalem, as their hope for a Jewish redeemer who would redeem Israel (Lk 24: 19-21) seemed lost. Then in verses 25 and 26 we find Jesus reacting strongly to their unbelief and helping them to identify anew with Him as the risen Lord.

4.2 The ministry and context of Paul:

The view that Paul was the greatest missionary among Gentiles in the first century is a notion based on the fact that writings of Paul survived through the ages and thus allow us to describe his theological input and content. Luke likewise devotes the entire second part of his account of the early Christian mission to the work of Paul. So it is necessary to pay attention to Paul's understanding of belonging to the Body of Christ.

In the minds of many Greeks, Romans and Jews one would find a dream of a universal commonwealth in which the basic divisions of mankind were to be resolved (cf. Banks 1980: 16). However for some these expectations seemed to be too abstract and futuristic. In great numbers such people began to find their desires fulfilled in voluntary associations that multiplied in cities all over the ancient world (cf. Banks 1980: 16).

People gathered in these associations on a basis other than the principles of *politeia* or *oikonomia*. Their principle was *koinonia*, which is voluntary sharing or partnership:

Although only some were purely religious in character, the bulk was primarily designed to meet the social, charitable and funerary needs of their members. It was in such voluntary fraternities, which could number anything between ten and one hundred members, that many people in the Hellenistic world began to find their personal point of reference and to experience a level of community that was denied to them elsewhere (Banks 1980: 17).

Sampley (1980) has investigated some of the ways Paul has drawn on social and legal practice of his day to depict Christian communities and to order Christian communities for their common life and ministry. Central for Paul is *koinonia*, or the Latin equivalent, *societas*. This social and communal need among the Hellenists was a consequence of a deeply rooted social pattern in Roman society that motivated participants to contribute anything from “property, labour, skill, or status: all shared in obligations and benefits through mutual trust and reciprocity” (Sampley 1980: 144).

According to Banks (1980: 17) although their principle was voluntary sharing and partnership, not every such association was open to all who wished to belong to it. Many restricted entry to certain criteria and therefore excluded some who wanted to belong to the association. These restrictions were based on nationality, family, class or sex. Only a few appear to have opened their doors, in some respects at least, to all. It was in such fraternities that many in the Hellenistic world began to find their level of community.

As these social clubs had social rules and regulations for outsiders to *belong*, the question arises if Paul modelled the New Testament *ecclesia* on these associations and their sentiments. When searching the Pauline letters in the New Testament it is highly disputed that Paul has modelled his ministry on the above philosophy. Rather we find his theology to be inclusive and not set in terms of nationality, class or sex. Meeks (in Bosch 1993: 165-166) offers a careful comparison between the Pauline *ecclesia* and four contemporary models: the Roman or Greek household; the voluntary association; the Jewish synagogue; and the philosophical or rhetorical school. After careful consideration Meeks came to the conclusion that the *ecclesia* was a community *sui*

generis. Ephesians 2: 13-18 depicts this in no uncertain terms. No longer need newcomers to the Kingdom of God be depicted as aliens or strangers. Peace between Jew and Gentile is a given reality, through Christ's sacrifice and His building of all believers into the Lord's Holy Temple. The letter written to Philemon by Paul was addressed to a well-respected Christian in Colosse. Onesimus, a slave of Philemon, had walked out on his responsibilities to Philemon's household, but was evangelized under Paul's ministry. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter addressed to him to not only accept Onesimus back into his *oikos* (household), but also to share with Onesimus the *koinonia* (fellowship) that is to be found in sharing Christ as Saviour.

The New Testament *ecclesia*, to live as a family, would impact the way we view both the new Christian and the non-Christian. A young family, whether it is newlyweds or parents, is genetically and biologically always looking to grow in numbers, because this keeps families strong and ensures survival. The church must seek out the lost, not simply because they need salvation and restoration, but because congregations as spiritual families need them to enter into our families and help our families to grow stronger. Those newcomers to the congregation, as new family members, should not be seen as a liability, but as a weaker sibling who needs our love and wisdom to help them eventually grow into fully functioning contributors to our household (cf. Miller 2008: 1).

For Paul's understanding, to be able to fully belong to the body of Christ, one needed to finally reach a stage where faith itself is a manifestation of the grace of God, where exertion of one's willpower or involvement in religious rituals cannot achieve this. According to Paul faith comes through hearing, and hearing comes through the presentation of the message about Christ (cf. Rm. 10: 17; Gal 3: 5). This involves "persuading men" and "commending the truth to every man's conscience" (2 Cor 5: 11; 4: 2). When this persuasion is effective – when a true reception of the Gospel message takes place – faith is born.

Therefore it is through faith (to believe) that the process of salvation begins and it is knowledge about Christ that makes it a reality. The crucial role played by knowledge comes through in Paul's apostolic work – declaring the truth wherever he went. Paul's

ministry was not simply preaching, informing and convincing, but as much embodied in his actions as formulated in his words (Eph. 4: 1-2).

Although Paul understood that faith in the risen Christ was essential for membership in the body of Christ, he equally understood the importance of a missionary ecclesiology that not only guarded against intruders who might undermine the truth of the Gospel (1 Tim. 3: 14-15) and protecting ecclesiastical norms for those who belong, but reaching the Gentiles and focusing on their needs. Reaching those who did not yet belong to the *ecclesia* was equally as important to Paul as it was for the leadership in Jerusalem to protect the Jerusalem congregation against pagans and Gentiles silently slipping into the circle of those who already believed and violated religious norms (Acts 15: 1-5).

Paul describes in Galatians 1: 16 his calling at the time of his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, as a commission to missionary outreach among Gentiles. The phrase *en tois ethnesin* in Galatians 1: 16 should be interpreted in ethnic terms – that is that Paul was commissioned to reach non-Jews, Polytheists, including proselytes and God-fearers whom he would encounter and evangelize so that these ethnic outsiders could come to belong to Christ from the inside of a Christian community (cf. Schnabel 2004: 935).

Paul asserts in Galatians 2: 7 that he received the approval of the Jerusalem apostles for his conviction that the risen Lord called him to preach the Gospel to Gentiles, when he discussed his proclamation of Jesus Christ with the apostles in Jerusalem, stating that he felt compelled to minister to those who *culturally do not share in the covenant and have no spiritual prestige allowing them to belong, as Israel was privileged to do*. The commission to preach the Gospel to “*the uncircumcised*” that Peter, John and James acknowledged in the Jerusalem conference, took place in connection with his conversion to Jesus Christ (cf. Schnabel 2004: 935).

In 1 Corinthians 9: 1-2 Paul provokes rhetorical questions to explain his concept of apostleship: he has been sent by the Lord to establish churches in areas that had not been reached with the message of Jesus Christ *so that those outside the covenant could be called to belong to the inside of the church*. The existence of the church in

Corinth is the seal of his apostleship (cf. Schnabel 2004: 935). Paul not only encountered the ideas and practices of his time and age, but adopted a deliberate policy of accommodation towards them. This becomes clear in the statement made by Paul in 1Corinthians 9: 22: "I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some". This does not mean that Paul compromised his beliefs by conforming them to the trends of his surroundings, but rather that he was always taking such beliefs and practices into serious consideration and making them his starting point for his evangelization. Wherever he could, he kept an open mind to acknowledge the validity of other approaches and incorporated them into his own when addressing those who neither believed nor belonged (Acts 17: 22-39) (cf. Banks 1980: 14).

4.3 The ministry of the Holy Spirit:

We find in the New Testament that there is a profound change in the character of the disciples from a pre-Easter experience to a post-Easter experience. In the pre-Easter timeframe it becomes clear that the disciples *belonged* to Jesus' ministry much more than they fully understood and supported His mission as the saving Son of God. Only after the resurrection of Christ from the grave and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, do we find that the disciples have grown from not only belonging to a messianic movement, but *believing* in its founder as the promised Messiah.

In Matthew 16: 21-23 we find that Peter is horrified at Jesus' explanation of His coming messianic suffering and by its implications for the fate of his master. Peter cannot grasp that such a tragedy could be God's purpose. Jesus turned to face not only Peter, but the other disciples behind him as they too needed to learn from Peter's mistake. In Matthew 17: 1-8 we find a similar story told by Matthew. The transfiguration story is revealing Christ as the one who is to suffer as God's chosen Messiah. A subsidiary theme is that of the revelation of Jesus as the new Moses, suggested by several echoes of the account of Moses' meeting with God on the mountain in Exodus 24 and 34 and by the allusion to Deuteronomy 18: 15. Peter's proposal to build shelters for Jesus and his august visitors is once again a misunderstanding of Jesus' mission, which is not to stay on the holy mountain but to go down to the Cross (cf. France 1990: 260-263). But

in Acts 2:14-36, just after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we find Peter, with the other eleven, explaining that Jesus' death was a deliberate salvific plan of God and that the Cross confirms Jesus' messianic calling.

Interestingly enough we find that Peter in Acts 2: 14-36 is preaching a sermon on *believing in Christ* to more than three thousand people, where he previously before the Easter encounter, denied even *knowing Christ* (Jn. 18: 25-27). What made the difference in his character? The outpouring and assistance of the Holy Spirit after the resurrection of Christ.

In Luke 9: 51-55 we read that James and John wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy a Samaritan village through which they and Jesus were passing to reach Jerusalem. They were searching for an overnight facility in the village for Jesus before continuing on their journey, but were unable to find any hospitality among the Samaritans. We read that Jesus rebuked James and John for turning to violence and they moved on to Jerusalem without stopping among the Samaritans. These two followers of Jesus did not fully understand that Jesus' kingdom was not of this world and that He came not to rebuke those not being of a true Jewish background, but to seek and save those who are lost (cf. Nel 2010: 5) One needs to keep in mind that for nationalistic Jews, Samaritans were considered to be worse than Gentiles due to the Samaritan defilement of the Jewish temple:

The Jewish reader of Luke's gospel would therefore fully understand the attitude of James and John, not however the reaction of Jesus. It is clear from the context that Jesus' conduct reflects an explicit and active denial of the law of retaliation and is, precisely as such, also a pointer toward a mission beyond Israel (Bosch 1993: 90).

In the post-Easter encounter of Peter and John in Samaria (Acts 8: 14-17) we find the powerful intervention of the Holy Spirit. Previously where the disciples wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans, we find in Acts that the apostles pray for the Spirit to come down on the Samaritans to bless and empower them. The apostles laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit.

In the pre-Easter context the disciples belonged to the Christ-following without convincingly grasping what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. They had different expectations of Jesus as Messiah, but did not fully comprehend what kind of Messiah Jesus would be. In the post-Easter encounter we find that because the disciples had encountered the risen Christ and had seen His glory they now finally not only believed, but wanted others (outsiders) to also come to faith. The Holy Spirit assisted in a dramatic church growth adventure. First, the disciples *discovered* Jesus. Then they experienced *curiosity* as they engaged in following Him. Their sense of *belonging* strengthened as they *committed* to follow Jesus, in spite of His teaching on the Cross and death that they could not fully comprehend at the time. With the death of Jesus followed *dissonance and insecurity* in the disciples' commitment to Christ. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came *believing in Jesus* as the Son of God (Acts 2: 41, 47, 4: 4, 6: 7).

Let us now turn to some of the descriptive terms used in the New Testament to describe those around Jesus.

4.4 The people of God:

The phrase "people of God" has been at the centre of transformation in the Roman Catholic Church, especially in the Latin American Church, since the mid 1960's. First popularized during Vatican II, the phrase has become a shorthand way to describe the progressive aims of increasing participation and power for lay people, reducing demands for conformity by the church as institution. The same process can be found among Protestant and Evangelical institutions where the image of the *shepherd caring for the sheep* (Lk 15: 3-6) symbol has been replaced by the *church as the body of Christ* (1 Cor 12: 12-27) where each member has a divine calling to serve the other. *The primary focus is on participation and not representation.*

John Courtney Murray (1963) reports on the Vatican II sessions on "the nature of the Church", as an effort to explain and declare to the world what the church in its innermost consciousness understands itself to be. The images are many as the *ecclesia* represents the fullness of Christ Himself and can refer to *the house of God, the temple*

as the dwelling place of God, His rock, His vine, the bride of Christ and His mystical body (cf. Murray 1963). The most significant expression is the *church as the people of God*.

Murray (1963) understands that the leading image of the *ecclesia* in contemporary theology is the expression and symbol of Paul's idea of the church as the *Body of Christ*. Murray recognises the value of Paul's image as it conveys the intimacy of Christ with His church and those who belong to it. It further expresses the unity of Christ as the Head with its members. However he is not satisfied that this symbol brings out the true image of the *ecclesia* that would appeal to *outsiders* today. Murray claims that the image of the *church as the people of God the Father OR the church as the family of God* in which all humans (also those only belonging and not yet believing) are welcomed, needs to be more strongly emphasized. Murray believes that although weak in certain contexts, the structural unity of society is still the family and that the family is still held in veneration. When therefore, the church speaks of itself as the family of God the Father, this resonates in the souls of believers to not only care for each other, but also to express love and acceptance to those who only visit occasionally with the social need to belong, but are not yet ready for an inauguration and to be baptized and taken up in the family of believers. Murray argues for the *notion of the Church as the People of God the Father and His (extended) family* as a renewed symbol as it constitutes an invitation for those who are in need of belonging to the church as a family.

José Comblin (2004), a liberation theologian born in Belgium who has spent most of his life in Latin America, calls for a return to the abovementioned principles of Vatican II, as also interpreted by Murray (1963). More specifically, he calls for a return to *the people of God* image that was the council's greatest theological contribution, affecting all the documents and the best expression of the "spirit" of Vatican II. Comblin argues *the people of God*, ecclesiology has been virtually suppressed and an ecclesiology of "communion" has been substituted.

Comblin (2004) explains that Vatican II intended to bring about a profound change in ecclesiology, leaving behind an age-old ecclesiology based on the notion of a "hierarchology" (to use Congar's term). This earlier ecclesiology so concentrated on the

hierarchy that lay people became passive objects instead of instrumental in obedience to the Holy Spirit. Linked to the hierarchy was the Eucharist, which only the priest and the clergy could administer. Because of this so-called *societas perfecta*, to see to it that the church functions as a bureaucracy and that its institutional power is not lost, many outsiders have not been assisted and encouraged to participate and eventually to belong to the church. He mentions the following consequences:

- Where *the people of God* ecclesiology is abandoned, it leads to a decline in ecumenism.
- Where *the people of God* ecclesiology is abandoned, it leads away from mission in and for the world.
- Where *the people of God* ecclesiology is abandoned, it fails outsiders who are longing to belong to God's *ecclesia*.
- Where *the people of God* ecclesiology is abandoned, there is a loss of true inculturation.

He finds this failure exemplified today in Latin America where parishes have ceased to have an impact on urban life and where the church is no longer “a people, but only a parish”. Comblin finds it problematic that the creativity in regards to *the people of God ecclesiology*, to find creative ways with the help of the Spirit to engage with those who do not yet believe but are seeking to belong – has declined, and that the church overly concerned with believers, has become a museum. He states that today Christians produce very little testimony to outsiders (influencing outsiders to become part of the *people of God*) – they only manage the museum (caring mainly for those who believe and not for those who are in search of God). Part of the problem in Latin America was that all South American newborns were through infant baptism members of the *Body of Christ*. Conveniently nobody was considered outsiders needing to be won. This led to the church wrongly concentrating on other issues.

While Comblin's experience may sound pessimistic, we have to agree that to a certain extent it is true for places in Western Europe, Latin America and South Africa.

Although these may be deplorable conditions in the contemporary church, there may be a number of other non-theological factors also involved that fall outside the scope of this research.

4.5 God- fearers:

"God-fearers" were Gentiles who attached themselves in varying degrees to the Jewish way of worship and lifestyle without as yet becoming full proselytes (cf. Tucker 2005). It seems that there were a significant number of these individuals in the early church (Acts 2: 10; 6: 5; 8: 27-39). A more beneficial definition for this present study is from Louis Feldman (in Tucker 2005) who writes that a "God-fearer" or sympathizer:

Refers to an umbrella group embracing many different levels of interest and commitment to Judaism, ranging from people who supported synagogues financially, to people who accepted the Jewish view of God in pure or modified form, to people who observed certain distinctively Jewish practices, notably the Sabbath. For some this was an end in itself; for others it was a step leading ultimately to full conversion to Judaism.

Tucker (2005) helps us in a short inventory of the usage of the term: "God-fearer" in Acts:

In Acts 10: 2 we read, *εὐσεβῆς καὶ Φοβούμενος τον θεόν* "a devout man and one who feared God." In Acts 10: 22 Cornelius is referred to as, *άνήρ δίκάιος Φοβούμενος τον θεον* "a righteous and God-fearing man." In Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch he addresses the people in Acts 13: 16 as follows: *οί Φοβούμενοί τον θεον*, "those of you fearing God." The same variation occurs in Acts 13: 26. Tucker remarks that in his opinion, Luke changes this former word he uses to describe "God-fearers" to the latter word: *σεβομένων* (13: 43, 13: 50, 16: 14) meaning "devout" and mostly followed by the word: *προσηλύτων*. He understands this to be due to stylistic reasons because of the lack of a technical use for the term throughout. He concludes that the word: *Φοβούμενοί* and *σεβομένων* are overlapping terms and that there is no consistent

contextual usage (cf. Tucker 2005). Some of this will give them too vague a description; others would go to the other extreme and over-institutionalise them.

However, there is a profound contextual difference in the abovementioned Greek expressions. This difference is of extreme importance in this research. The expression of οί Φοβούμενοί τον θεον is an umbrella term for Gentiles with varied interest in Judaism referring therefore to those who only *belonged to the synagogue as outsiders, but not as devout and believing Jews*. A “God-fearer”, being from Gentile origin, was allowed to worship in the synagogue and could belong to the establishment as an outsider – forever. The expression σεβομένων προσηλύτων is directed at those who are no longer regarded as outsiders, but by means of initiation, ritual cleansing, circumcision and taking up the yoke of the Law, become believers of Judaism.

The expression σεβομένων προσηλύτων refers to a convert, converting from one religious faith or group to another. In biblical studies this term refers to Gentiles who chose to become Jews. In the Old Testament we do find laws recognizing the rights and place of non-Israelites living permanently in Israel. They had to observe certain laws, could offer sacrifices and if circumcised, could take part in the Passover as only devoted Jews could do. Throughout the Old Testament we find God-fearing types of strangers who dwelt with the Israelites and were given some basic laws to follow. Such laws are found in Leviticus 17: 12-13.

In New Testament times proselytes to Judaism were required to accept one God, Jewish ethical and religious observances, and males had to be circumcised. A very important fact is that according to later Rabbinic sources (cf. Achtemeier 1985: 830) an initiation was required (sources also speak of a proselyte baptism) and a sacrifice at the Temple as part of the conversion rite to Judaism.

The usage of the expression Φοβούμενοί in Acts 13: 16 and 13: 26 does suggest that the Jewish community recognized a class of people who did not fully embrace the exclusive belief system of Judaism, especially by means of circumcision, but who kept some of the fundamentals of the Law in visiting and joining into the synagogue worship.

The *Aphrodisias Inscription* contains lists of synagogue people. What is interesting is the “God-fearers” are named separately, making them different from the Jews, yet still regarded as members of the synagogue. Many God-fearers would have shared the faith of Israel, but feared the far-reaching consequences of full conversion to Judaism.

It seems then that these “God-fearers” were attracted to Judaism mainly for its morality and monotheism, and therefore even *belonged* to the local synagogue, but were not willing to become full proselytes and did not want to submit to circumcision as a rite of conversion to Judaism. Having to join Judaism and having to observe the Law in a Gentile context had tremendous implications for “God-fearers” in all areas of life.

By the time Paul and other Christians came on the scene, as described in the Book of Acts, they found a great opportunity with such “God-fearing” communities in the Roman East, already prepared by the Jewish Diaspora over a profound length of time, and ready for the harvest. Especially attractive to the “God-fearers” was the idea that they could become members of the people of God and gain salvation merely by confessing their sins and submitting to baptism without being circumcised. Therefore as the grace and freedom in Christ was preached, hundreds of Gentiles joined Antioch’s church (Acts 11: 19-26).

Gough (2007: 3) explains that the “God-fearers” were ideally suited for the Gospel, as they were already attracted by the Jewish monotheism but not in favour of the Law. The Gospel Paul preached was justification by faith alone, and not by the Law: “It was as natural for God-fearing Gentiles to embrace the blessings of the Gospel as it was for the Jews to decline them.”

Gough (2007: 5) made a profound comment on the internet blog (<http://timothygough.blogspot.com/search/label/God%20Fearers>) on 14 March 2007, expressing his conviction that “God-fearers” exist today:

... we may call them sensitive agnostics, and they may be in our churches as “fringe believers.” This again may be one of the reasons that the Church appears nuanced. God-Fearers form a lens and dilute the true essence of the Church. We must seek to have their hearts convicted from being on the edge to into the fold. [From belonging to also believing].

Today we need to acknowledge that we have among us those who find it difficult to make a faithful commitment among many institutional rites and creeds and are playing it safe by only belonging to those crowds that flock to our Sunday church services. We need to acknowledge that many no longer follow the institutional path of baptism, catechesis, publically proclaiming their personal faith and finding their spiritual home in this specific sequence and order. Others at first only belong as from the outside, as the “God-fearers” once did, only to be challenged to faith by a generous missionary ecclesiology.

4.6 Lumen Gentium:

Lumen Gentium is one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council. The Constitution was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964, following approval by the assembled bishops by a vote of 2151 to 5. As is common with significant Roman Catholic Church documents, it is known by its first words, *Lumen Gentium*, Latin for “*Light of the Nations.*”

Hanvey (2009) states that few documents have shaped contemporary Catholicism in the way that *Lumen Gentium* has done. He is of the conviction that the Second Vatican Council was not as is sometimes claimed, a product of the optimism of the Sixties. For those participating, the experience of two global wars was still fresh and peace precarious at the time. He claims that by choosing to speak on the essence of the Church – its life and mission, the Council was indeed witnessing to the miracle of God’s intervention in the midst of a dark history.

Lumen Gentium envisioned life as a sacrament, rooted in a “Christ-centred humanism” (Hanvey 2009: 1) and was a brave response to the ideologies of secularised modernity that marginalised religion and deconstructed God. Therefore it was a reminder to communities of faith to be inserted more deeply within the drama of history and not to refrain from it. It was a call to Christian communities to engage in a missionary ecclesiology, and to acknowledge the work of the Holy Spirit

in the confines of those only belonging from the outside and not yet believing as those on the inside. Thus the Council Fathers meant to say that the being of the Church as such is a broader entity than the Roman Catholic Church itself (*Lumen Gentium* 8). It does this by pointing to the true nature of the Church, understanding the Church to be brought into existence and sustained by the salvific mystery of the Triune God – the life of the Father opened for us in Christ and the Spirit. How does the above relate to those not yet believing, but playing the part and thus belonging to the church as is perceived from the outside?

- According to *Lumen Gentium* it is to be understood that a shift in understanding the relationship between nature and grace is of importance here. Grace should not be perceived as outside human nature, but is constitutive of our nature's active openness to God's self-gift. Thus implying that communities of faith need to welcome one who does not yet believe as one who may already belong; because of the generous and miraculous working of God's futuristic grace. The sacrament of infant baptism is an example of the above where a child who cannot share its faith verbally is welcomed into the congregation because of the miraculous working of God's futuristic grace.

Intimately related to the first, is the understanding of the Trinity as the mystery of salvation that is always present in our meetings and available to us and to those seekers who only belong and do not yet believe. Both these shifts allow us to see grace as the salvific unfolding of the Triune life within the structures of our historical existence. Grace is seen as immanent and active in these structures. This opens up a deeper understanding of the sacrament of life and its relation to the sacrament of the Church:

These two dimensions allow the Church to be contemplated as a salvific dynamic within history and central to its fulfilment. They also underpin a vision

of the Church in which the needed juridical ordering of its life is never allowed to usurp the economy of grace grounded in the mystery of the Trinity (Hanvey 2009: 1).

The above two dimensions not only enrich a missionary ecclesiology, but also our ways of imagining the Church. Our capacity to live, experience and interpret our ecclesial vocation is deepened. We come to understand that all human beings are called to belong to the Church, although not all are fully incorporated into the body of Christ:

The church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honoured by the name of Christ, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion and even with those who have not yet received the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium* 15).

Do the above two perspectives on the *Lumen Gentium* ask of us to be a new type of church? No, but they do require considerable gifts of leadership and a willingness to let that leadership emerge. They require reflection upon the nature – the use and abuse – of power within the community. When power is well ordered it is a blessing to outsiders and shows itself in a ministry of loving service to those who do not yet believe: “At all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right” (Acts 10: 34-35). Therefore at a time when to live in the Western Church can be a disillusioning experience, the *Lumen Gentium* document calls us to a deeper missionary ecclesiology.

Finally one important question remains when considering *Lumen Gentium*: Is the so-called Emerging church movement a more profound expression of the expectations of the *Lumen Gentium* and therefore a continuation of the outcome of the Second Vatican Council? Could it be that the Emerging church movement is not a “new” invention, but a notion, since Vatican II, coming full circle?

Robert Webber (2003) in The Younger Evangelicals – facing the Challenges of the New World, found a concordat between Vatican II and the upcoming emergent church movements’ aspirations. Webber is convinced that, among other factors, the

impact of Vatican II did play a significant role in motivating the emergence of a new generation of church leaders. He mentions the *notion of the people of God* as an important emphasis of the Council to recognise that the primary image of the church does not need to involve hierarchy, but rather assist all of creation to exist and live in honour of God's name. Also the new Catholic-Protestant rapport of a resolve to work together is seen as a blessing to younger emergent church leaders, who understand the notion of belonging together in spite of different theological sentiments (cf. Webber 2003: 110). He writes:

Significant theological factors have moved the younger evangelical towards the visible church. They include the impact of Vatican II, the primary image of the church involve the emphasis of the church as the "people of God."

Brian McLaren (2004), in *A Generous Orthodoxy*, shares important notions of being an emergent church leader and in doing so we find a strong bond with the declarations in the second Vatican council. McLaren speaks of a stronger ecumenical interest, a desire to move beyond cultural divides, a willingness to engage old questions in new ways that foster the pursuit of truth and not human wisdom and a search for greater unity of the Church (2004: 15).

An example of this is a prayer station which was created for use during the Emerging Church service at Capo Beach Calvary, resembling a Catholic context. This prayer station was on display during the month of April, 2005. The prayer station was complete with candles, incense and icons and featured an instruction sheet to assist church attendees in how to pray with an icon. The instructions stated:

Praying With Icons

- Draw in a slow deep breath. As you do pray, Holy Spirit surround me, fill me, breathe life into me.
- Empty your mind of all anxiety.
- Empty your heart full of desire except for God.

- Focus on one icon and imagine what that person might say to you about God, yourself, and others
- Read the icons as if the person who painted it wanted to send a message to you. Notice the details.
- The icon is there to remind you of God: to make you conscious of His presence, all around you.
- Pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
(option) *Cross yourself as you say these words.*

There are numerous experiential attractions being promoted by the Emerging Church (candles, icons, statues, prayer stations, incense, liturgy, the sacraments, particularly the Sacrament of the eucharist) identifying strongly with a catholic sentiment (cf. Oakland 2009).

It does seem therefore that the “spirituality movement” in the so-called Emerging church is largely a return to a Catholic practice. On the rise are spiritual retreats based on the *Lectio Divinia*, Celtic Christianity and the reading of contemporary Catholics such as Thomas Merton and Henri Nouwen (cf. Webber 2003: 110). It is therefore not surprising to find that the expectations of the *Lumen Gentium* are now being recognised in the emerging spirituality and leadership of younger church leaders.

As we have considered some theological factors in regards to the question of *belonging before believing*, we shall enter the following chapter in attempting to find ecclesiological patterns or criteria whereby we can investigate if the New Testament favours a “*belong before believe*” notion and thus calls for a consistent missionary ecclesiology.

Chapter 5

5. New Testament patterns of missionary ecclesiology

It is not my intention in this chapter to present a full-blown discussion of ecclesiological patterns or models to be found in the New Testament. I follow Howard Marshall (2004: 34), who acknowledges that the New Testament writings are documents of mission as the subject matter is not concerned with the life story of Jesus Himself, but with Jesus in His role as the Saviour of the world. He therefore refers to the New Testament theology as essentially missionary theology. He understands this to be the result of a “two-part mission” (Marshall 2004: 35). First the mission of Jesus as described directly in the first four Gospels and then later the mission of His followers called and commissioned to proclaim Him as Lord, as it is primarily interpreted in the writings of the apostle Paul. According to Raisanen (2000: 19), “New Testament theology is largely an interpretation of the mystery of the great personalities in the New Testament, above all the religious genius of Jesus, but also of Paul”.

With regard to Marshall (2004), I understand the New Testament to be a collection of books expressing the Gospel in a missionary context and which therefore was proclaimed by the church in its mission. Accepting the above general notion, I perceive the theology of the New Testament to alert us to a greater understanding of the church as the “agent of mission” (Marshall 2004: 36), thus implying that the New Testament theology is also a document that motivates and teaches communities of believers to help outsiders to belong and not exclusively create bigger interest (believers) in the church and its life and structures.

5.1 The Gospels:

The theological as well as the narrative similarities in the Synoptic Gospels are due to interrelationships and use of common materials. It is generally assumed that

Matthew and Luke each made use of Mark, cutting and pasting the major portion of its contents, somewhat more in the case of Matthew and somewhat less in regards to the Gospel of Luke. It is further assumed that Matthew and Luke both had access to sayings of Jesus together with some narratives generally indicated by the symbol Q. It is also evident that each evangelist used materials that were not used by the others (Kruger 1981). Consequently I shall start in the following presentation with the Gospel of Mark, assuming it to be the first written Gospel and then proceeding to the Gospels of Matthew, Luke and John. Modelled on the contents of Bosch's book, Transforming Mission (1993), I shall include the Gospel of Luke in combination with the writings in the Book of Acts, before closing with some reference to some of the letters of Paul.

In the following paragraphs I shall present just one perspective on the New Testament witness. It is important, though, to keep in mind that I have not attempted to force the text of the New Testament to fit artificially into the field of my research. I do not present a complete analysis of all New Testament writings, but rather followed a path discovering the "spirit" of the New Testament in some New Testament writings, and investigate whether it presents a trend which confirms the approach of *belonging before believing*. The question that needs to be discussed is whether the various writings of the New Testament I analyse support the above notion and if this can be demonstrated from the context of the New Testament.

5.1.1 The Gospel of Mark:

In Mark's Gospel the identity of Jesus as Messiah is only gradually recognized by His followers and Mark perceives Jesus as giving only such instruction on the Kingdom to the people as they could comprehend at a specific time (Mk. 4: 33). The story of Jesus' followers is also one of "gradual, fuller recognition" about Jesus and his Kingdom message (Marshall 2004: 81). This implies that the Kingdom of God constitutes a *generous space* where to "follow" Jesus is not necessarily the same as

having immediate faith in Him and His kingdom message, but opens up enough *space or room* for such travelling companions to investigate with varying degrees of commitment their belonging to Christ and his Kingdom (Mk. 3: 7-8; 5: 24). Though the disciples' understanding of the Kingdom of God was limited, at least until after the resurrection and Pentecost, they nevertheless followed Jesus and experienced His companionship.

Does my so-called *generous space* theory undercut the cost of those belonging to Christ as committed disciples? Does my theory imply a new kind of universalism with the notion that seekers can stay seekers and never commit to the Gospel of Christ, because we need to respect that outsiders at first need enough space to investigate the Christian message? Am I implying a new gospel where to belong in a *generous space* among generous believers is enough to comply with the principles of the Kingdom of God? My answer to the above is a definite "no".

Why? Because the language used for discipleship in the Gospel of Mark tends to suggest that only the disciples could understand what Jesus taught and that they could do so because it had been appointed or given to them (Mk. 4: 11). This suggestion could wrongly imply that there is a cruel predestined distinction between those who believe and those who for now only belong to the crowds of followers. Nevertheless Marshall (2004: 90) understands: "that those who eventually respond to the Gospel go on to advance in knowledge of the Kingdom of God in a way that is not possible for those who remain outside."

According to Stephen Moore in Mark and method (1992), one finds in the Gospel of Mark the so-called *parable theory* (cf. Moore 1992: 87). Jesus' listeners question Him concerning the parables (Mk 4: 3-9), to which He responds in Mk 4:11

To you have been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables; so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand.

Jesus' disciples are expected to be insiders (cf. 3: 31-35) and whereas outsiders are expected to see but not perceive, hear but not understand, insiders are by implication expected both to see and perceive and understand the teachings of the Kingdom. But according to Mark's description, this is not the case with the disciples. In the calming of the storm the disciples are rebuked for their lack of faith; following the first feeding miracle, we find that the disciples did not understand the multiplication of the loaves. Corresponding to this are the three misunderstandings that follow Jesus' three predictions of His suffering and death (8: 32-33, 9: 32, 9: 34, 10: 35-40). What Moore is getting at with his so-called *parable theory* is that right to the end of the Gospel of Mark the disciples function from an insiders' position, but then an insider's position understood as looking inside from the inside, as though they were in fact outside:

The secret of the kingdom has indeed been presented to them (4: 11), but although they are poised before it they cannot penetrate it. What distinguishes disciples from outsiders is that disciples long to be inside (at least) to be the insiders they are said to be (Moore 1992: 88).

I agree with the notion that in the Gospel of Mark the teaching of the Kingdom of God appears to those getting stuck in this so-called *generous space* as parables or riddles, which they hear but do not understand. It seems that in the Gospel of Mark it is recognized that those not moving ahead to believing and discipleship, but only belonging for the sake of persistent refusal, means that people are not responding to the opportunity to believe. This sentiment is characteristic of the opposition to Jesus (Mk.3: 5). Nonetheless Jesus does not send the people who are not fully committed to Him away. In addition to the disciples, there always seem to be some crowds around Him listening and observing His miracles. Only on limited occasions does Jesus withdraw from the crowds together with His disciples. Many more seemed to have followed Him without becoming disciples.

Nonetheless I am not encouraging a theology of belonging for the sake of safety and comfort, but pleading for a theology of *generous space* (on account of the title of the book written by Brian McLaren, *A generous orthodoxy*, 2004) to assist seekers with the necessary time they need in finding Christ among us.

5.1.2 The Gospel of Matthew:

Marshall (2004: 98) explains the phenomenon that the Gospel of Matthew consists of material which is addressed to a group that comprises the *crowds* – *ochlos* (those only belonging to the movement of Christ from a distance, cf. Mt. 8: 1,18) and the *disciples* (Mt. 5: 1b) *of Jesus* – *mathetes* (those gradually believing in Jesus as the promised Messiah): “the former term *crowds (ochlos)*, is indicating those as yet uncommitted to Him and His message, while the latter *disciples (mathetes)* are those who have some kind of commitment, including some whose commitment may vary from partial to nominal.”

Thus we find that the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5-7) is teaching material for disciples, which at the same time is a summons to the crowds (*ochlous*) who are not yet committed to believing in Jesus and therefore the Sermon functions as a glimpse of what they are letting themselves in for (Mt. 5: 1a). Marshall (2004: 99) is convinced that in this way, Matthew is focusing primarily on the correct type of *behaviour* as the result of committed discipleship. He stresses the fact that through the interpretation of Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is concerned with *behaviour*, and only tangentially with my current discussion on *believing* and *belonging*. When we consider at this point yet another section, the parable of the wedding banquet (Mt. 22: 1-14), we find that this section is concerned with the *behaviour* of the people who are invited into the Kingdom of heaven. Those originally invited and called to belong to the Kingdom do not take the invitation seriously enough and therefore produce the wrong behaviour by making light of the invitation. Eventually new invitations are made to other people, good and bad, who

respond without any excuses and are brought into the Kingdom and the banquet. It therefore remains possible for people who believe, to behave inappropriately and fail to show appreciation for their privilege to belong. Clearly these references to the weakness of believers (disciples) have a meaning for Matthew's readers. Being a believer in Jesus does not signify that one has, as it were, arrived:

Matthew's gospel records several parables about the need for remaining vigilant to the last moment. Even the brother or the servant in God's household may turn out to be a "hypocrite" (7: 5; 24: 51). The separation between the saved (*believers*) and the lost (*those only belonging, but not believing*) is reserved for the day of judgement, as the parables of the wheat and the tares and of the fish net (13: 24-30; 13: 47-50) make clear (Bosch 1993: 76; my italics).

In Matthew 25: 31-46 the dominant note is one of *surprise* (25: 37, 25: 44). Jesus' way of assessing who will follow Him into the kingdom of His father and who would be considered outsiders, is very much a matter of surprise. His teachings here turn the world (and even the church) standards upside down.

The message ought to be that as much as we need a mission to those who do have a foundational understanding of God and were raised to believe its teachings, but are nonetheless not fully committed, we also need a mission to those who would consider belonging, but are not yet comfortable with all of the Christian teachings and praxis. The Gospel according to Matthew does not simply play off one group against the other, but rather emphasizes a concern for both realities. This becomes clear when we find that Matthew emphasizes Jesus' activities among Gentiles and still in the central section of his Gospel pictures Jesus in conversation using some particularistic sayings, which had to offend Gentile readers (cf. Bosch 1993: 61).

In the Gospel of Matthew we thus find that the mission to the Gentiles (those not allowed to simply belong to the Jewish synagogue as they did not share as such in the blessings of the Covenant) gradually becomes the all-embracing activity (cf. Bosch 1993:60-61). Matthew achieves this by having Gentiles play a significant role from the beginning of the Gospel to the end. He mentions the four non-Israelite women in Jesus'

genealogy (Mt. 1: 1-17), the visit of the magi (Mt. 2: 1-12), the centurion of Capernaum, who prompts Jesus to proclaim that many Gentiles will belong to the Kingdom of heaven (Mt. 8: 5-13), the Canaanite woman (Mt. 15: 21-28) and the preaching of the Gospel to all the nations (Mt. 24: 14). In this way Matthew nourishes universalism and very skilfully helps his readers to seriously consider a mission to those regarded as outsiders. Even particularistic expressions such as in Matthew 15: 24 and 26 do not allow Jewish favouritism since Jesus immediately praises the Canaanite woman's faith in Matthew 15: 28 (cf Bosch 1993: 61).

The same Gospel which records an initial limitation of the Christian mission to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel", finishes with Jesus sending the eleven out into the known world to make disciples of all nations. Thus the ministry of Jesus, for all its clearly Jewish roots, has broken out of the confines of Judaism and in so doing has brought to an end the exclusive privilege of the Jews as the people of God.

5.1.3 The Gospel of Luke:

In the Gospel of Luke it is apparent that Jesus' concern was for the outcasts (the poor and the weak) and thus for those not belonging with others on the *inside* of the Covenant. His concern was towards those not yet sharing in the centre of community life, as the primary focus of the church's mission is to establish a new household-based community in which all are welcome. The sermon on the Mount is an example of Jesus' sentiment towards inclusivity and compassion. Whereas in Matthew's version of the Sermon on the Mount the emphasis reads in regards to behaviour, "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5: 48), in the Lucan version it reads in regards to compassion, "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (cf. Duplessis 2010: 5).

On reading Luke 4: 16-30 we find that Jesus "challenged the congregation's ethics of election" on who may belong and who could not (Bosch 1993: 89). Jesus communicated to the Jews that God was not only the God of Israel but also, and equally, the God of those outside the Jewish culture. He reminded them of the fact that the prophet Elijah

had bestowed God's favour upon a Gentile woman in Sidon and that Elisha had healed Naaman, a Syrian. God's work of salvation was not restricted to those on the inside of the Jewish borders, but also to outsiders:

From the Nazareth episode onward, Luke has his eye on the Christian church, where there is room for rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, even oppressor and oppressed – which does not of course, suggest that conditions should remain what they are (Bosch 1993: 112).

In the Gospel of Luke there is an overall disregard for established boundaries. Jesus associates with those individuals and groups who existed on the periphery of society (tax collectors, sinners and lepers).

With regard to Luke 10: 1-16, Nel (2010) discusses the inclusive mission of the church. He states that the purpose of the seventy-two's mission was not primarily to convert households to Christ, but rather to establish a new inclusive Christ-like community by means of sharing meals together. This makes more sense if one understood the background about Jewish religious rules, especially where meals were concerned. Jews did not eat with Gentiles, as Gentiles' homes and their food were religiously unclean. Thus we find in Acts 11 that the Christian Jews were upset with Peter – not for sharing the Gospel with Gentiles, but because he ate with them and in so doing was bringing the blessing of God into that specific Gentile household. In some rare cases Jews did eat with Gentiles, but then they brought their own food and also ate it separately from the Gentiles (cf. Esler in Nel 2010: 4). This feature is addressed in Luke 10: 4 where the seventy-two were not allowed to take money with them on their journey, as this could have made them buy their own religious food and eat it apart from the Gentiles, whom they had to reach with the Gospel.

In the ministry of the seventy-two towards Gentiles we find that meals that were previously understood and used as a religious ceremony that excluded others, had now become a ministry to include outsiders into the Kingdom of God. One of the most powerful instruments realising inclusivity in Luke is table-fellowship: "At these meals

disciples are taught, women are elevated, outsiders are included and the opportunity for it often is a meal” (Duplessis 2010: 5).

In the Gospel of Luke one also finds strong sentiments concerning salvation history. Marshall (2004: 173) observes that Luke had developed this understanding as a response to the delay of the *Parousia*. The earliest Christians expected the return of the Son of Man (Jesus) almost immediately. In reality time went by and the expectation did not materialize:

The church needed to revise its theology of two ages with the Christ event as the dividing line, and what we see in the work of Luke is an interpretation in which salvation history continues into the future until the distant *Parousia*. The time of the church and its mission fills the gap that has opened up between the coming of Christ and the end of time, and the presence of the Spirit and its activity functions theologically as a kind of replacement of the *Parousia*.

What is the importance of salvation history in the Lucan theology as well as in the parable of the younger lost son? *The importance of affirming the faith journeys of those whose conversion is gradual and time consuming.* It seems that the *Parousia* has been extended so that the church and its many missions will come to learn and understand the importance of patience. Believers had to learn patience with those only belonging from the outside and not yet committed to follow Christ from a committed centre of fellowship.

5.1.4 The Gospel of John:

The author of John was a Christian of the first, or early second century who knew some or all of the three synoptic gospels, but decided that what was needed was a new and very different presentation of the Christian faith. He intended his book to provide the way to faith in Jesus, and in so doing to be the means by which the readers could receive the gift of eternal life (Jn 20:31).

The specific context of the Gospel (cf. Durand 1991:54) of John has to do with a Christian community in conflict with the Jews and because of this conflict with the Jews were not allowed to attend the synagogue (Jn 9:22; 12:42; 16:2). The loss of “membership” in regards to their attending of the synagogue was intensified as the Jews were constantly guarding their religious heritage against the growing Christian movement.

In chapter 4 John chooses a woman for his scene and not just any woman, but a Samaritan woman; he could hardly have made a more unexpected choice, because Samaritans were hated and despised by the Jews. Samaritans were not considered, by the Jews, to belong to a covenant people like themselves and therefore could not have favour with God. In chapter 4:1- 42 Jesus teaches that it is not tradition or a specific religious background that will determine the correct relationship (belonging) with God, but in the new order true worship will be internal, invisible and spiritual. Jesus teaches that although one may not belong to the correct religious class in society or be part of a privileged religious covenant movement, true belonging to God will finally be “credited” in terms of the internal, invisible and the spiritual. This is why Jesus ordered the removal of the sacrificial animals and the money-changers from the temple – to protest against the overrating of visible covenant practice:

Thus by his use of the figure of the Samaritan woman, John is returning to a very early insight in the gospel tradition that was always in danger of being obscured, that Jesus came to invite sinners, not the righteous; the gospel is biased in favour of the outsider and the wicked, because it is good news of God’s love, and those who apparently have least claim to it will therefore see it more clearly (Fenton1995:30).

Fenton (1995) does not make much of the contextual description as expressed by Durand (1991). Not so much does he consider the primary context one where first or second century Christians needed to defend their belief against proud Jews; but he is of the opinion (1995) that in the Gospel of John, the author is protesting against the way the Judeo-Christian belief was developing into a institutional system that favoured only those who believed and were considered insiders. The author of this gospel does not mention any church practice that is familiar with ecclesiology in regards to baptism or

the eucharist – as these sacraments were only meaningful to those who believed and not to outsiders or skeptics not familiar with the “new” Christian movement.

The author avoided saying that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist (Jn 1:29-34); and that he ascribed rebirth more to the Spirit than to a sacrament (Jn 3:1-8). The author does not include any account of the institution of the eucharist on the night of the betrayal, and in this differs not only from Mark, Matthew and Luke , but also from an earlier tradition quoted by Paul when he was writing to the Corinthians. The author does not understand the Christian faith as a means to establish a system of belief. Rather he avoids technical terms such as *ransom*, *sacrifice*, *atonement* and *forgiveness*. Instead he uses expressions that can be understood by those not participating and not sharing in the system of Christian belief. He expresses the Gospel in a straightforward manner: *Jesus death is his going away and his resurrection is his return; first they will not see him and then they will. The gift of the Spirit is the arrival of the one who will teach them, in an ongoing way, about this man called Jesus* (Jn 16). The Johannine language is meant for outsiders not yet believing, and therefore describing in simple terms that Jesus brings us into a relationship of belonging to him and the Father by his going and his coming.

In regards to my field of investigation I find the contextual analysis of Fenton (1995) more appealing than that of Durand (1991) or even the work of Van der Watt (199:108-116) explaining “die *gesantskapsverhouding van Jesus tot die Vader*” (the legation of Jesus by the Father in regards to his mission) as the motive for writing the gospel.

Fenton (1995:90) does go to some extremes. He is of the opinion that the author of the Gospel of John replaces the institution of the eucharist with the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples (Jn 13) and that this practice of washing each others feet (Jn 13:15-17) needs to replace the eucharist in church meetings. He finds this to be not only necessary to assist outsiders joining in church meetings and not understanding the practise of the eucharist, but also in regards to the Johannine text describing that the one who ate of the bread was Judas, the actual disciple that would betray Jesus. Will the washing of feet be more helpful to those who only belong, to fully appreciate the

salvation and love that is available in Christ for them, or does the eucharist assist new believers to keep courage and not to lose faith? I do find Fenton's suggestion of replacing the eucharist with the washing of feet too extreme. Nevertheless one should keep in mind that for a missionary ecclesiology that wants to minister to those who for now only belong, but do not yet believe, washing of feet might have a deeper impact than helping them to experience the eucharist. Once people move from belonging to believing they are welcomed in the church as institution of Christ and then will they fully embrace the meaning of the bread and wine as symbols of Christ's atonement.

5.2 The theology of Acts⁶:

Luke did not only write with a living hope of the return of Christ, but he was also aware of the calling of the Church to be a witness to the ends of the earth (Acts 1: 8). Luke was demonstrating that the purpose of God included not only salvation history of the coming of the Messiah (The Gospel of Luke), but also the establishment of the early church witness to the ends of the earth (The Book of Act). Therefore we find in the Book of Acts that Luke is explaining to believers how the Christian way started by telling them the story of the Church beginnings.

The question arises whether the theological position in the Gospel is the same as that in Acts. Although this question outweighs the scope of this research I shall very briefly mention five foundations (Kruger 1981: 18) that I believe are considerable proof that the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts are indeed a unit:

- Both the Gospel and the Book of Acts are written in the same style.
- Both the Gospel and the Book of Acts have a prominent interest in the heathens.
- Both the Gospel and the Book of Acts propagate the unity of the Church.

⁶ Together with most commentators, I consider the two books, Luke and Acts, as a unit (Luke-Acts). I treat them separately in this chapter basically for chronological reasons, with the Gospel telling the story of Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection, and the Acts telling the post-resurrection story around the founding of the early churches.

- Both the Gospel and the Book of Acts have an apologetic stance in regards to the Jews as well as the Romans.
- Both the Gospel and the Book of Acts maintain a high regard towards women.

With the miraculous birth of the first apostolic congregation in Jerusalem, as described in the Book of Acts, it seems unlikely that the apostles interviewed or examined each of the 3,000 converts mentioned in Acts 2: 41 individually. Rather, it seems that, on the basis of what Peter and the other apostles preached, the 3,000 converts were admitted into the fellowship, and subsequently sat under the apostles' teaching (Acts 2: 42a) to learn the important contents of the Gospel. It follows then from here that the Spirit is not only the agent of mission, but also the mark of those who eventually truly behave accordingly (Acts 2: 44-46).

The above can be divided as follows:

*(i) Admission to seekers (Acts 2: 37 and 41) to **belong** to the Jesus movement:*

(Acts2: 41) Then those who gladly received his word were baptized. And the same day there were added about three thousand souls.

*(ii) Instruction on what followers of Jesus **believe**:*

(Acts2: 42) And they were continuing steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship and in the breaking of the loaves, and in prayers.

*(iii) Proof of the fruit of the Spirit as a new **behaviour** sets in:*

(Acts2: 44) And all who believed were together and had all things common.

(Acts2: 45) And they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, according as anyone had need.

(Acts2: 46) And continuing with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they shared food with gladness and simplicity of heart,

Of course there is one important factor to keep in mind in the above argument. In the Book of Acts the Church in Jerusalem had just started out and did not as yet have a fixed set of ecclesiological rules as to who may belong and who could upset its growing momentum. With the birth of the church in Jerusalem on Pentecost, it was merely a Jesus movement that would only much later develop into an ecclesiological institution. Therefore the above argument that the 3,000 converts were simply welcomed into the circle of believers without any set of rules to verify their commitment must be understood against the background of the church in its initial birthing stage and not in its official ecclesiological role. Acts 2: 41 can therefore not simply be used to argue for *belong before believe*, as the church evolved from a missionary ecclesiology to an institutional ecclesiology.

Many of the Gentiles who eventually became Christians had previously been proselytes or God-fearers, that is, people who initially were related to Israel; it is Gentiles of the synagogue who accepted the Gospel. In Luke 7: 1-10 the centurion is a God-fearer who sends Jewish elders to speak to Jesus on his behalf and their testimony of the centurion is in order to gain a favour from Christ.

In Acts the term “Gentiles” replaces the characteristic Gospel terms so frequently used for the poor and the outsider. Simply put, the outsiders in Acts become the Gentiles and it is significant to notice that Luke mentions Gentiles forty-three times in Acts and builds his mission story with them in view (cf. Bosch 1993: 104). Luke’s description of the church in Acts has therefore a bipolar orientation referred to as “inward” and “outward” (cf. Bosch 1993: 119). First it is a community which devotes itself to the formation of a basic inward ecclesiology which entails the teaching of the apostles, fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers. Secondly the community also has an outward missionary ecclesiology whereby it refuses to understand itself as a sectarian group. It is actively engaged in a mission to those not yet belonging to Christ and his church.

In his encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10: 43 Peter makes the astonishing discovery that the Holy Spirit’s vision is focused on a much broader Covenant community than only those who come from a Jewish background. The Lucan Jesus turns His back on the “in-group” (Bosch 1993: 112) mentality of His day by challenging their “ethic of

election” and thus we find a Lucan narrative where there is room in the Christian church for rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, oppressor and oppressed. Apart from telling the story of outsiders becoming followers of Jesus, Acts also relates the process of the faith community’s journey to becoming inclusive and cross-cultural.

5.3 The Pauline Pastorals:

Dunn (1998: 2) recognizes Paul as the first Christian theologian who, more than any other single person, ensured that the new movement stemming from Jesus would become a truly “international and intellectually coherent religion.” For some, Paul has even become the “second founder of Christianity” (Wrede in Dunn 1998: 3). This is rather a bold statement, as Paul was not the agent who turned the religion of Jesus into the religion about Christ. He did not invent the Gospel about Jesus Christ as he only inherited it (cf. Bosch 1993: 128). Paul was rather a missionary in his own capacity longing to see the world as known to him to be converted to Jesus Christ.

The missionary character of Paul’s theology has not always been recognised and Paul was for many years perceived as the creator of a dogmatic system: “Only very gradually did biblical scholars discover that Paul was first and foremost to be understood, also in his letters, as apostolic missionary” (Bosch 1993: 124). It is therefore widely acknowledged that Paul was the first Christian theologian because he was the first Christian missionary.

If theology is measured in terms of articulation of Christian belief, it is considered that the letters of Paul laid a foundation for Christian thinking which as yet has not been rivalled or superseded. As in the case with other New Testament authors, the framework of Paul’s theology is constituted by the influence of Early Judaism. Marshall (2004: 421) underlines three elements in this regard:

- Apart from formal Old Testament citations found in Paul's letters addressed to believers in Rome, Corinth and Galatia, there are allusions throughout Paul's work showing that his theology was decisively shaped by the Old Testament.
- The second element is the manner in which Paul used Scripture. Paul's work reveals similarities to the kind of exegesis found in the Judaism of his time.
- In Paul's theological outlook we find that he is less concerned with the exposition of the law and is much more involved in his theology on the intervention of God in history through the expected Messiah and how this salvation history would shape the future of the Jews and the Hellenistically minded.

From the letter to the Galatians it is apparent that the members in the congregations in the Galatia region were mainly Gentiles. Some of them were considered to be former attenders or seekers at Jewish synagogues without having become full members to Judaism through taking the step of being circumcised. But now they were being powerfully encouraged by some groups of people to be circumcised and to keep to strict religious regulations. Thus the letter to the Galatians was an effort to argue them out of considering the above and it did so by reminding them of the divine grace of God (Marshall 2004: 210).

Ed Sanders (in Dunn 1998: 338) in Paul and Palestinian Judaism drew attention to the nature of Palestinian Judaism as solidly anchored in the divine grace of God. Accordingly "the Covenant had been given by divine initiative and the law provided the framework for life within the covenant."

We now need to consider this so-called "old perspective" (Marshall 2004: 445) on Judaism and Paul's view of it. Apparently the Jewish sentiment towards religious laws was motivated by acceptance by God based on merit and the worthiness of the person in His sight. The Jewish religion was understood to be legalistic, as acceptance by God to enter into the Covenant depended upon human performance of legal requirements. It could then be suggested that this understanding of religion depended upon human works rather than divine grace and it could be contrasted unfavourably with Christianity.

A newfound perspective described by Dunn (1998) as propagated by Sanders (in Dunn 1998:38) and other contemporary scholars suggests a new understanding of Judaism. According to literature of Judaism the Jews believed that they were accepted as the people of God "...on the basis of His gracious initiative in setting up His covenant with them and that the keeping of the laws was the response to grace and not the meritorious grounds for initial acceptance" (Marshall 2004: 445). They therefore fulfilled the Law as a sign of their already newfound Godly grace and their belonging to the Covenant and not as a condition to enter into the Covenant of God. The works of the Law were not a way of gaining merit and so being accepted by God.

To enter into the Covenant had therefore nothing to do with keeping to strict religious laws beforehand, only as a means of staying in the Covenant. Howard Marshall (2004: 212) confirms that on the basis of God's grace outsiders were not required to keep religious laws in order to enter; only once they had entered and found themselves becoming attached to the community of believers, they kept the Law to stay in. One could now say that the prior ungracious space allocated to the "works of the Law" had been refined to mean, according to the new perspective, that those who entered, belonged and eventually believed were required to "wear the badges of belonging to God's people" (Marshall 2004: 212), which did not imply that Gentiles had to keep the Law to enter into the gathering among the people of God. "As Deuteronomy repeatedly points out, it was nothing that Israel was or had done which caused God to choose them ... it was only His love for them and His loyalty to the oath which He had promised to the fathers" (Dunn 1998: 342).

Sanders may have overstated his case. For one thing, first-century Judaism was not as unified in its understanding of religion as Sanders would like his readers to believe. Even if scholars such as Sanders and Raisanen put an end to some of the extreme legalistic impressions about Judaism, many scholars still contend that Paul and the Jewish establishment of his time looked materially differently at the issue of grace and works. It cannot be denied that Paul experienced a fundamental problem with the understanding and interpretation of the Jewish Law of his time and that exactly this fact had an important consequence for his understanding of mission (cf. Bosch 1993: 156).

Paul's understanding of entering into a community of believers and eventually belonging to a congregation can be described as a "process phase" (Dunn 1998: 462). Fundamental to Paul's understanding of salvation is the concept of a process and therefore the conviction that we are constantly in a process of transit: "It is this view which determines the experience of 'being saved' as a process of 'eschatological tension' – the tension between a work begun but not complete ... between a decisive 'already' and a still to be worked out 'not yet'" (Dunn 1998: 465).

It is thus important to notice that salvation does not happen all in one moment, but is a continuing process. This becomes clear when we consider the two tenses of Paul's Greek – the aorist – denoting a definite event that occurred in the past, and the present denoting an ongoing process. An important remark by Dunn (1998: 319) is when he reveals that the theological notion of expressing a distinction between justification (once for all) and sanctification (an ongoing process) is very misleading. Language more representative of Paul's theology would be his description of seekers and outsiders as: "...those who are in process of being saved ... of believers (constantly) being transformed." Stendahl (in Bosch 1993: 125) argued that conversion understood as a "penetrating self-examination coupled with a yearning to acquire certainty of salvation, is a typically Western one." Stendahl explains that such religious introspection began with Augustine (his *Confessions*) and was reinforced during the Middle Ages. This sentiment was canonized in the practice of Protestantism in the conversion of Martin Luther. With this perspective it has become customary to read Paul through the eyes of Luther and in so doing to universalize the typical Western conversion by declaring it mandatory for all new converts to the Christian faith (cf. Bosch 1993: 125).

Howard Marshall (2004: 225) rather makes his readers attentive to an important contemporary interpretation of Paul's words. Accordingly the expression of Paul "faith in Jesus Christ" can also be interpreted in a more literal fashion and can read: "the faithfulness displayed by Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2: 16, 20, 3: 22). According to this view people who belong are then justified by appropriating the fullness of Christ's mediation rather than by fulfilling the works of the Law.

How would this notion function in regards to the question of how Christ put His faith in God in a way that would be relevant to the above? A possible clue is given by Marshall (2004: 337) according to Romans 5: 19, where the obedience of Christ is the means of justification in contrast to the disobedience of Adam that led to condemnation. We find that there is a connection between obedience and faith in Romans 1: 5 and 16: 26. In Romans 3: 21-26 we find a testimony on the faithfulness shown by Jesus. Faith is therefore essentially trust in God's promises and therefore reliance on him to enter and belong, rather than on oneself or one's own deeds. It thus seems clear that as important as a "gracious space" is for evangelizing those who at first only belong, the aspect of a "process phase" for "belongers" to become believers is just as important.

I come to understand that the two most important phases of a missionary ecclesiology is the context of a "gracious space" for those who are not yet ready to believe, but are in need to belong and a praxis of a "process phase" – which will not be hasty in wanting outsiders to first fully believe before they may belong, as those do who are already on the inside. Therefore we need to take seriously a process for outsiders of hearing and understanding the Gospel, of seeking it lived out in the life of individuals and the church before making a personal commitment to it. The importance here is the need of such a phase of getting acquainted with the Gospel and its implications. Jesus encouraged would-be followers to first "count the cost" of discipleship (Mk 8: 34).

Paul describes the movement from belonging to believing as a process in which the Holy Spirit is the primary agent, in the proclamation of the message as well as in assisting us in the reception of it. This process is ongoing as those who enter are encouraged to eventually trust and commit to Christ on the conviction of his death and resurrection. Marshall (2004: 241) correlates the conviction to believe in the Gospel of Christ with the theological term used by Paul as election or choice (1 Th.1: 4). It is customary to regard election as signifying the divine choice in God's calling to salvation as a predestined issue that has nothing to do with first belonging and then believing, as if a process phase is not applicable. However, when Paul uses the theological expression elect, he is not focusing on the predestination of God as overriding the local church as instrument to assist those who at first only belong to come to faith, but is

referring to those who have actually become members of God's people and that this is recognized in the way in which they have accepted the Gospel along a path of being assisted to belong to the church or local congregation (Marshall 2004: 241).

So we find in 1 Corinthians 14: 22-25 that Paul was concerned that believers were striving for the gifts of God, notably tongues, which may have helped in their personal spirituality, but brought no help to outsiders longing to belong on the inside, because they could not understand what was being said and could offend people attending all or a part of a meeting to think that the Christians were out of their minds. Why did Paul express such a strong sentiment on behalf of those joining the service from the outside in? Paul understood that the local congregations in Corinth had an obligation to assist seekers to find it possible to join them and in due course to belong with them and therefore not to be scared away, falling short of the grace of God to finally come to faith.

It might be helpful to turn, at this point, to what Paul has to say about the believers' attitude and conduct toward the so-called outsider as this may throw additional light on his understanding of Christian responsibility towards those who do not yet belong. Believers constitute a community with boundaries which finds expression in Paul's use of the "language of belonging" (Bosch 1993: 136) and the "language of separation" to distinguish them from those who do not yet belong (Bosch 1993: 136). Believers have to behave in an exemplary way, as they are "saints", God's "elect", "called", and "known" by God (Bosch 1993: 136). The reason why Paul says that an exemplary demeanour is required is for the sake of the Christian witness toward outsiders.

There are two technical terms in the Pauline letters, *hoi loipoi* (the others) and *hoi exo* (outsiders). Both of these carry a connotation that is remarkably free from condemnation. Paul, it would seem, would rather criticize those who profess to be believers, but who jeopardize relationships with outsiders by irresponsible actions (cf. Bosch 1993: 137).

In the Pauline letters one finds that the Christian lifestyle should not only be exemplary, but also winsome. Christianity, true to its founder, should attract outsiders and invite them to join the Christian community. Believers need to practice a missionary lifestyle.

According to Meeks (in Bosch 1993:137) the Christian community needs to have definite boundaries, but there have to be “gates in the boundaries”. Meeks points to the following:

A sect which claims to have a monopoly on salvation usually does not welcome free interchange with outsiders. A case in point is the Essene communities of Qumran. The Pauline churches, however, are manifestly different. They are characterized by a missionary drive which sees in the outsider a potential insider.

It thus seems as if the “spirit” of the New Testament is encouraging its readers to show hospitality to outsiders longing for the Gospel. It seems that the New Testament does not comprehend that theological expressions such as “grace”, “election” and the “faithfulness displayed by Jesus” are exclusively directed to believers, but are very much related to those who are not yet believers, but hoping for a gracious space amongst believers while experiencing a new process of being drawn closer to Christ.

Paul’s argument is that the attractive lifestyle of the Christian communities gives credibility to a missionary ecclesiology and that ecclesiological “boundaries with gates” makes outsiders feel welcome in their midst (cf. also 1Pt 3: 15).

Dunn (1998: 535) has a high regard for the research done by C.F. Bauer, depicting Paul as the one who delivered Christianity from the status of a mere Jewish sect and liberating “the all commanding universalism of its spirit and aims”. According to Bauer (in Dunn 1998: 535) Paul must be credited for the development in early Christianity from a Jewish particularism to a Christian universalism which invites people from all sectors of life to enter and belong to the body of Christ. But such a formulation seems to be unsatisfactory for Israel’s faith was equally universal in nature as God is pictured as the God of the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Israel had always been welcoming of the resident alien, the proselyte and the God-fearer.

Nevertheless we can see evidence of the Jewish frame of mind influencing Paul and his New Testament theology when the familiar theme in Jewish thought of participation in worship of the Lord is depicted in Galatians 3: 26-29 and Ephesians 2: 13-18, showing clearly the sentiment to those previously excluded who may enter and belong. Bosch (1993: 168-169) denotes the following three crucial factors that Pauline mission has set

out to accomplish. First, the New Testament church sense of uniqueness, had to encourage its founders to share it with outsiders. There is a creative tension between being exclusive and practicing solidarity with outsiders. Second, a believer's lifestyle is either attractive or offensive. People are drawn to the church even if it is not actively evangelizing (1 Th 1: 8). Third, the church is the church in the world and therefore for the world, which means that its vocation and mission are towards the created order and its institutions.

5.4 Conclusion

I believe therefore that the New Testament does allow a generous space to those who first need to belong before they are ready to fully believe and for the following four reasons:

- Among post-Christian communities there is a growing persistence to first belong before they believe. This is necessary for postmodernists for whom it is important to at first have an opportunity to test whether the Christian community to whom they want to belong actually does practice what they proclaim to believe.
- Knowledge of Christianity and Christ's salvific mediation is rather limited among post-Christian communities which do not have a historic bond with the Christendom era. Post-Christian seekers need more time to get to know the Gospel and its implications before they want to react to it.
- Christian culture seems strange to post-Christian communities due to the fact that people are becoming more ritually incompetent and are in need of experimental participation, which is a safer stance to take than immediate surrender to the Christian way of belief.
- This is why it is important to provide space and room for questioning theology as true beliefs are formed in the cauldron of wrestling with Scripture in community: "One of the past abuses of Scripture is the inability to allow people space and time to process beliefs" (Webber 2007: 36).

If we understand the New Testament to appreciate the so-called “process phase” of those longing to belong, but who are not yet ready to accept all of the biblical teaching on Christ and salvation, the original question on a possible missionary ecclesiology still needs to be addressed.

Chapter 6

6. Missiological implications:

In Stuart Murray's (2004) book, Church after Christendom, he probes the need to sustain healthy churches after the collapse of Christendom. In his research he identifies "Christendom toxins" that need to be removed from the ecclesiological system to obtain this sustainability.

Murray (2004:35) is of the opinion that post-Christendom churches will be "messy communities" where the important issues of belonging, believing and behaving are to be seen as a *process* rather than a neatly integrated system as found in the Christendom age. The question that he is investigating complies well with this chapter as he is interested in what level of belonging is needed to sustain incarnational discipleship in an alien culture. In other words, what are the missiological implications to be considered when we recognize that belonging influences what we believe and how we behave?

We know that two common positions are alive and well in the post-Christendom context. The one is that some people do not belong to a church, but identify themselves as Christians and hold dear to their hearts those ecclesiological beliefs that are more or less consistent with those who do belong to a local congregation. The other is the one that is investigated in this research where some participate in church liturgy and worship before they identify themselves as Christians or evangelical believers. It should be normal for local congregations to allow non-believers to interact with the life of the church (cf. 1Cor 14: 23, Col 4: 5) and Christians should be warm, loving and welcoming to those who are not yet committed.

Murray (2004: 13) is concerned with the second, as mentioned above, missiological reality as described in this paper as *belonging before believing*. He recognized that a new paradigm in evangelism has emerged since the 1990's whereby people are coming to faith by means of a journey rather than "through a once off event". Process conversions should be seen as equally valid for those who first belong and then believe.

This new understanding needs to encourage churches to become more welcoming, hospitable, inclusive and patient.

The New Testament also mentions *outsiders becoming and staying secret insiders*. We read this in John 19: 38-40. Here we find the names of Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. From time to time in his Gospel John (Fenton 2005: 129) has referred to characters who had an imperfect and inadequate faith, but nevertheless were given, at a specific moment (Jesus' burial), the opportunity of an *insider's* role. Joseph and Nicodemus apply to this now. Joseph could only be a secret disciple, because he feared the Jews. Nicodemus had come to Jesus by night (Jn. 3: 1-21) and was very much still in the dark as can be seen by the spices that he brings. If Nicodemus had come to faith, moved into the light and into the inside of Jesus' following, he would have known that Jesus had already been anointed for burial at Bethany as described in John 12:1-7. As he was only *belonging* to Christ from the outside he duplicated what Mary had already done in preparation after Christ's death.

Michael McKinley on the blog: www.9marks.org/blog/belonging-believing-part-2, warns those who have high expectations towards a ministry concerned with seekers who may belong although they do not yet believe, that in a very important sense, non-believers can never truly belong to a church until they repent of their sins and commit themselves to Jesus. McKinley refers to baptism and the Lord's Supper as God ordained reminders of the above statement. Baptism is the way that we officially become part of the church and the Lord's Supper is the way we express our ongoing relationship with Jesus as our Lord (cf. McKinley 2010).

One of the implications of participating in the life of a congregation (and in regards to the above statement of McKinley) in a post-Christendom context is to acknowledge that people are suspicious of institutions and eager to find whether Christian beliefs also work in practice and not only in theory. So belonging before believing is very much a necessity for seekers to test whether Christians live out in their communities what they claim to be true. Tim Conder writes the following in his book, *A Church in transition* (2006), as expressed on the blog (2010) : www.9marks.org/blog/belonging-believing:

A doctrinal approach to community formation also has significant missional liabilities. One common axiom of emerging culture ministry is the declaration that emerging culture persons will join a community before affirming the beliefs of that community. In other words emerging culture persons place belonging before believing. Using doctrine as the doorkeeper essentially slams shut the front door of the church in the face of spiritual seekers. These persons need to enter and participate in community as part of their search for spiritual truth and goodness. In fact, they are far more likely to make their spiritual discernment based on the quality and characteristics of a community rather than its doctrinal propositions (Conder 2006).

One needs to consider that baptism and the Lord's Supper are indeed the shared identity of believers committed to Jesus and should not necessarily be regarded as cold doctrine for the sake of marginalizing people. Nevertheless is it necessary to be reminded that infant baptism expresses Gods preceding grace towards those who only belong and do not yet believe and that the Lord's Supper is also a symbol of hospitality that can support partakers in their growing belief. One should recognize that spiritual seekers are in need of community, but should nevertheless be motivated and assisted to finally accept the salvation available in Jesus through faith, by means of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

A second implication that is also of fundamental importance to mission strategists and church leaders alike is that in the context of post-Christendom, knowledge of Christianity is rather limited and people need a *gracious space* to come to an understanding of what Christianity entails. For those seekers, exploratory participation is safer than making a definite commitment.

How have these abovementioned implications become such an important aspect of participating in a church in the cultural shift signalled by the terms *postmodernity* and *post-Christendom*?

6.1 Three phases of ecclesiological understanding:

Three phases apply and need to be described. The first phase can be described as the **pre-Christendom** (approximately AD 33-AD 313) **phase** and is recognised by the

important implication of *believe before belong*. Although Christians shared their faith, community gatherings were not open to outsiders, as the possibility of spies infiltrating the community and endangering their lives, were a reality. Those who expressed interest in Christianity could not belong at first but had to undergo a lengthy and demanding process known as *catechesis*:

Catechists assumed no familiarity with the Christian story or its values; and, since belonging meant participating in a counter-cultural community, learning what to believe and how to behave were both necessary. Neither belonging before believing nor believing without belonging was feasible (Murray 2004: 14).

Alan Hirsch (2007: 17, 104) in, The forgotten ways, states that the early church had high standards for outsiders wishing to join. By the late second century aspiring converts had to undergo a significant initiation period to prove that they were serious in their quest to belong to the Christian following. These initiations involved personal examinations that required participants to demonstrate why they were serious about entering and belonging to the community of believers. Many were turned away because they were found unworthy. Proof of believing before belonging was thus necessary as authentication was of importance in the initial forming of the underground Christian movement.

The second phase can be described as the **Christendom phase** (approximately AD 313 - AD 1945), where every citizen of the nation state *belonged to the Christian church and its heritage – if not in person, at least on the official records*. In this phase of the Church history *everyone was required to belong to the church* and follow its system of belief. Belonging preceded believing, as infants were baptized as new members of the state church before they could understand what to believe (at least it was assumed with the help of parents that children would grow up to believe what their spiritual community believed).

As Christian beliefs became familiar due to the church's role as institution, instruction primarily focused on doctrinal issues and replaced the primary importance of biblical belief, as was the case in the pre-Christendom phase. By implication non-attenders were no longer unconverted, or unsaved, or outside of Christ. They simply were

unchurched. Those who were once the unconverted have become the unchurched (cf. Wells 2008: 16).

Hirsch (2007: 276) expresses the important notion that the Christendom church differed fundamentally from the New Testament church because of the following characteristics:

- The Christendom church functioned centripetally as it assumed a certain centrality in relation to its surrounding culture.
- Its influence and institutional power were symbolized in its association with impressive places of worship.
- The emergence of an institutionally recognized professional class of clergy separating professional Christians from lay Christians.
- The institutionalization of grace in the form of sacraments administered by an institutionally authorized profession.

The aim of this proximity was to last as long as the church retained its religious dominance over the prevailing culture and as long as people identified themselves by means of macro ideologies, national sentiment and political allegiances.

As this dominance was weakened by the advent of the Renaissance and the Reformation many still belonged, but only through loyalty, social conventions and family sentiment. As many could not connect Christianity and the claims of modernity, many retreated into a dualism of “belonging” to the Christian community on Sundays, but living the rest of the working week outside the sphere or influence of the church and its message. With the coming of the Enlightenment reason was crowned over revelation through science and philosophy and so the church found itself stripped of religious influence and facing the birth of the secular state.

With the final stages of the modern period the power of hegemonic ideologies has come to an end as people identify less with grand ideologies and more with subcultures related to technology and networks of different kinds. The **post-Christendom phase** has begun and is radically challenging Christendom notions of ministry.

We have to assume that among post-Christians the familiarity with Christian concepts will fade as the decline of Christendom has meant that Christianity has been losing its status as a *lingua franca*, only to be understood by those who are professing Christians.

It is therefore important that the church will anticipate longer journeys towards faith and not move on to disciplining new converts too quickly. Post-Christendom evangelization will consequently take longer, start further back and move more slowly.

Thus it seems that we will gain ground in the post-Christendom phase by helping outsiders to belong before we require them to believe.

6.2 The relationship between belonging and believing:

David Wells (2008) in, The courage to be Protestant: Truth-lovers, marketers and emergents in the postmodern world, begs to differ with me. In his book he investigates three major evangelical constituencies: *classical evangelicals*, the *marketers* and the *emergents*. With *classical evangelicals* Wells is referring to the Evangelical movement that followed after the Second World War and which was very much concerned with “doctrinal seriousness” (2008: 4). The biggest concern of classical evangelicals was therefore understanding and proclaiming the evangelical truths found in Scripture. Wells is concerned with the fact that *belong before believe* encourages younger age segments of society to not believe in any kind of absolute truth. He states that American Christians rate themselves high on relationships, but low on Bible knowledge. If one considers the Bible to be the source of truth then Wells is very sceptic of the notion, *belong before believe*:

This is part of our picture today. We are spiritual. We want relationships, but we do not want to be religious. Bible knowledge is increasingly considered part of religion in this growing and damaging separation of spirituality from religion (Wells 2008: 60).

This tendency to focus entirely on Christianity's simplicity has now been, according to Wells, deepened as the *marketing impulse* has taken hold of the churches. This implies

that with a need for spirituality and not religion, the seeker ends up controlling what is sought: “We the seekers come to determine when we will seek, what we will seek, and when we will declare ourselves satisfied” (Wells 2008: 189). He is convinced that we have been disconnected from place, family and an external God who has the power to reach into our lives and pull us around. Murray (2004: 75) voices the same concerns when he describes *belong before believe* as “Christianity without participating”.

Wells (2008: 16) understands the *emergents* to be focused on deconstruction of doctrinal seriousness and fundamental biblical truth. In his experience emergents are not movement builders, but rather pulling away from core or fixed systems of belief.

Wells (2008: 4) asks the important question whether we build our ecclesiology either on *sola Scriptura* or *sola cultura* and is concerned about the influence of culture over and against Scripture. Is it simply clearcut that if we allow a *generous space* in our meetings and gatherings for outsiders, to immediately belong and allow a longer journey to eventually believe, that we are not biblically orientated? If we allow the notion, *belong before believe*, to influence our missiological praxis, we are at least serious about reaching post-Christendom society by not ignoring the influence of their cultural context, but by recognizing that our thinking and theologizing needs to be contextual. (With *sola Scriptura* I do not plead for a literalist or fundamentalist reading, but for a contextual one). Listening to individuals and their cultural context is crucial if evangelization is to engage with the questions and issues that are at hand. Murray (2004: 83) states that reshaping the future church for mission means and entails that we need to start with the mission context, for missiology precedes ecclesiology.

Wells (2008) does not keep in mind that the Christendom phase represented the creation and progressive development of a Christian culture or civilization that functioned primarily from an ecclesiological stance. By implication, the church governed the cultural context and to minister meant simply to assist people to become biblically literate, and to engage into a relationship with the local church as part of the body of Christ, as everyone was already expected to belong.

In the post-Christendom phase that we are now finding ourselves in, we are “back” in the challenges of the pre-Christendom phase in regards to functioning again primarily from a missiological base and not from an ecclesiological base. Of course post-Christendom is not pre-Christendom, but churches in the first three centuries were marginal communities in a plural society, from which we can learn much. Similarly by negotiating the cultural shift into post-Christendom, we can learn from pre-Christendom Christian communities on how they negotiated cultural difficulties and were encouraged by them.

Wells (2008) also does not make much of the reality that in the early church it was loyalty to Jesus and the experience of His Spirit that energized the early believers to believe, belong and behave accordingly and not because they were simply committed to Scripture (not to mention that the Bible as we know it was not available back then!). *Post-Christendom society is more attracted to the person of Jesus than to the Church or the Bible and its teaching of Christ.* Wells does not engage with this crucial fact thoroughly enough. Post-Christendom society will not engage in a *sola Scriptura* devotional kind of lifestyle, unless they experience a way to belong to Jesus and others from within their *sola cultura*. This implies that the method of our evangelization must be culturally relevant if we want to help seekers relate to Scripture from within their context. The challenge is precisely that many congregations have become out of touch with its context and its needs.

What are the implications that need to be seriously considered by missiologists when re-thinking the impact of post-Christendom in our churches and in our daily witness in the world? I believe there are five crucial implications that need our attention due to the cultural change from Christendom to Post-Christendom: *We need evolving churches and not necessarily emerging churches, we need centre-set churches not open or bounded-set churches, we need to experience the power of conversion again in our congregations, we need to reconsider the theology of church discipline and we need the Hebrew experience of knowledge more than we need the Hellenistic understanding of knowledge.*

6.3 Some contemporary church models:

The *centre-set* church model stands in contrast to the so-called *bounded-set* model (Murray 2004: 27), which has clear boundaries and maintains the integrity of a community of believers by excluding those whose beliefs are unacceptable. The bounded-set church model presents less often than two other models. The so-called *fuzzy-set church model*, has ill-defined boundaries and therefore operates much more flexibly, although still ensuring coherence through boundary maintenance. The fourth model is the *open-set church model* where there are neither boundaries nor a definite centre.

6.3.1 Evolving churches:

Murray (2004: 103) mentions in his reasoning that apart from the so-called emerging church there is the possibility of recognising the evolving church as (still) a liable possibility for being church in a post-Christendom context. Although new emerging churches might appear to be more adaptable and focused to reach those who are in need to first belong before they believe, the way forward into post-Christendom might very well be for inherited (institutional) churches to evolve, adapt and reinvent themselves as they have done in previous periods of cultural change. Do we need a missionary evolution or a makeover of institutional churches or do we need the new inventions of the emerging movement? As I presume the answer to the above might be an inclusion of both the evolving and emerging churches in partnership, to dismiss the contribution of institutionalised churches and abandoning hope for them still seems premature.

One should be careful in choosing exclusively for the Emerging movement as the next best choice for the post-Christendom context. The Emerging movement has a high percentage following the *fuzzy-set* principle. Most are too fluid to classify, let alone to assess their significance. There is no consensus as to what language to use in referring to this movement, nor is there any agreed scheme for categorising what is emerging.

Emerging churches, in general, have different convictions, are motivated by different concerns and assess their future development by varying criteria.

Wells (2008: 15) refers to the formation of the so-called *Emerging church* during the 1990's as a "loose coalition". He continues: "Here, far more than was the case among traditional evangelicals, there is a continuum in the core beliefs that is so wide that it might be wise to distinguish between the emergent church on the one end and those who are simply emerging on the other."

Murray (2004: 93) uses an evocative image for describing and interpreting the Emerging church *fuzzy-set* principles. He reminds us of a child's toy known as a kaleidoscope. Each time the viewer looks through the spy hole to review the brightly coloured shards seen previously, they have reconfigured themselves and each time different patterns appear. In emerging churches the only focused aspects of church are mission, worship and community, but then reappearing as ancient and yet showing contemporary elements. It is clear that what is emerging is fluid, diverse and still developing. We cannot know for sure what this uncoordinated phenomenon presages.

Emergents are without any doubt postconservative and postfoundational. As already explained above, the most obvious consequence of this is that a different understanding of the authority and function of Scripture has emerged in this movement. The understanding of Scripture is much looser and less definitive than what has prevailed in the past testimony of the church. Some invest great hope in emerging churches, perceiving this movement as evidence of needed missionary engagement. Others are sceptical, suspecting that they have previously been practising church this way and are even concerned this movement might distract the church from genuine missionary engagement.

The question therefore remains whether the church after Christendom will emerge or evolve. The evidence currently available is ambivalent for we cannot know for some time what this widespread emerging but uncoordinated phenomenon presages. On the one hand the Emerging movement highlights missionary and ecclesial issues the

church needs to confront if it wants to be competitive in the post-Christendom age. But I agree with Murray (2004: 98) that it is a possibility for the church after Christendom to very well still evolve from the inherited churches that have negotiated previous paradigm shifts. The shift from Christendom to post-Christendom is probably the most challenging since the fourth century shift from pre-Christendom to Christendom. Yet it is possible for institutional churches if willing to show courage and imagination, to use its historical resources to negotiate a new missionary ecclesiology in a post-Christendom context.

What do I perceive to be very important facets for the inherited church to evolve, for it to negotiate a new missionary ecclesiology in a growing context where seekers have the need to belong before they believe?

- The Evolving church needs to theologize in the Hebraic mode and not exclusively in the Greek mode.
- The Evolving church needs to reconsider its understanding of church discipline.
- The Evolving church needs to facilitate a practice where conversion is experienced as process evangelism and as an act of Godly intervention.

If the above could be accomplished in the process of inherited churches evolving to become a missionary *ecclesia* in their local community, I perceive the following outcomes to realise as support systems for those who at first belong before they believe:

- The formation of Christian communities where there is a sense of belonging, with a “Jesus as our companion” metaphor.
- The formation of Christian communities where the missionary *ecclesia* has open boundaries, but “centre-set” principles.
- The formation of Christian communities which function incarnationally (missional) rather than invitationally (evangelistic).

6.3.2 Centre-set churches:

The *centre-set* model appeals to churches wanting to encourage belonging before believing. In the following paragraphs I shall clarify what this does and does not mean.

What are the so called “centre-set” or “core” principles that are mentioned? These are principles that are in use to strengthen institutional congregations that are willing and brave enough to engage incarnationally into the post-Christendom context in order to establish a missionary ecclesiology with open boundaries. These are principles that need to help seekers understand the Lordship of Christ, the salvation that is to be found in Him and the Biblical guidelines that the Bible teaches us to maintain a true relationship with Jesus.

According to Murray (2004: 27) Christendom as a culture represented a *bounded-set*, because it maintained control of structures to ensure that everyone within its boundaries believed and therefore behaved accordingly. *The bounded-set* church model sustained communities by clearly articulating beliefs, prescribing the preferred behaviour and acknowledging those who behave accordingly. The bounded-set church model does have a role to play in the postmodern environment as it functions as refuges for some disoriented Christians after Christendom. In my opinion this model is restrictive as it takes a stance from a survivalist position and does not position itself to be culturally attuned to play a missional role in the community. Secondly there is not always a clear-cut understanding of where the boundaries should be operational. For some churches the boundary will include the entire national population sharing in a religious cultural history and heritage (for instance in Belgium every child born is considered to be Roman Catholic). For those following a more evangelical conviction, the boundary for who may belong shall be distinguished by those who have a testimony and those who don't.

Fuzzy-set churches allow too much *generous space* as those who want to belong could disbelieve many aspects of Christianity and behave in ways corresponding with contemporary norms rather than with traditional expectations. This is possible as it is unclear where the boundaries are and whether they are truly functional. Although this

model can be attractive to those who find bounded-set churches too oppressive, this model is unstable. It can easily revert back to a bounded-set structure or develop into a dangerous unsustainable open-set model of being church.

The *open-set model* is naturally inclusive and appears to have a philosophy of “anything goes”. This model could be extremely attractive to outsiders who do feel the need to belong spiritually, but are not by any means prepared to follow a religious path of being disciplined for Christ. This model does not advocate a decisive centre and therefore in the long run cannot foster sustainable community. Those churches that imagine communities to thrive and prosper without core values or guiding convictions might find the centre-set model improper.

The centre-set model has distinctive features (Murray 2004: 30):

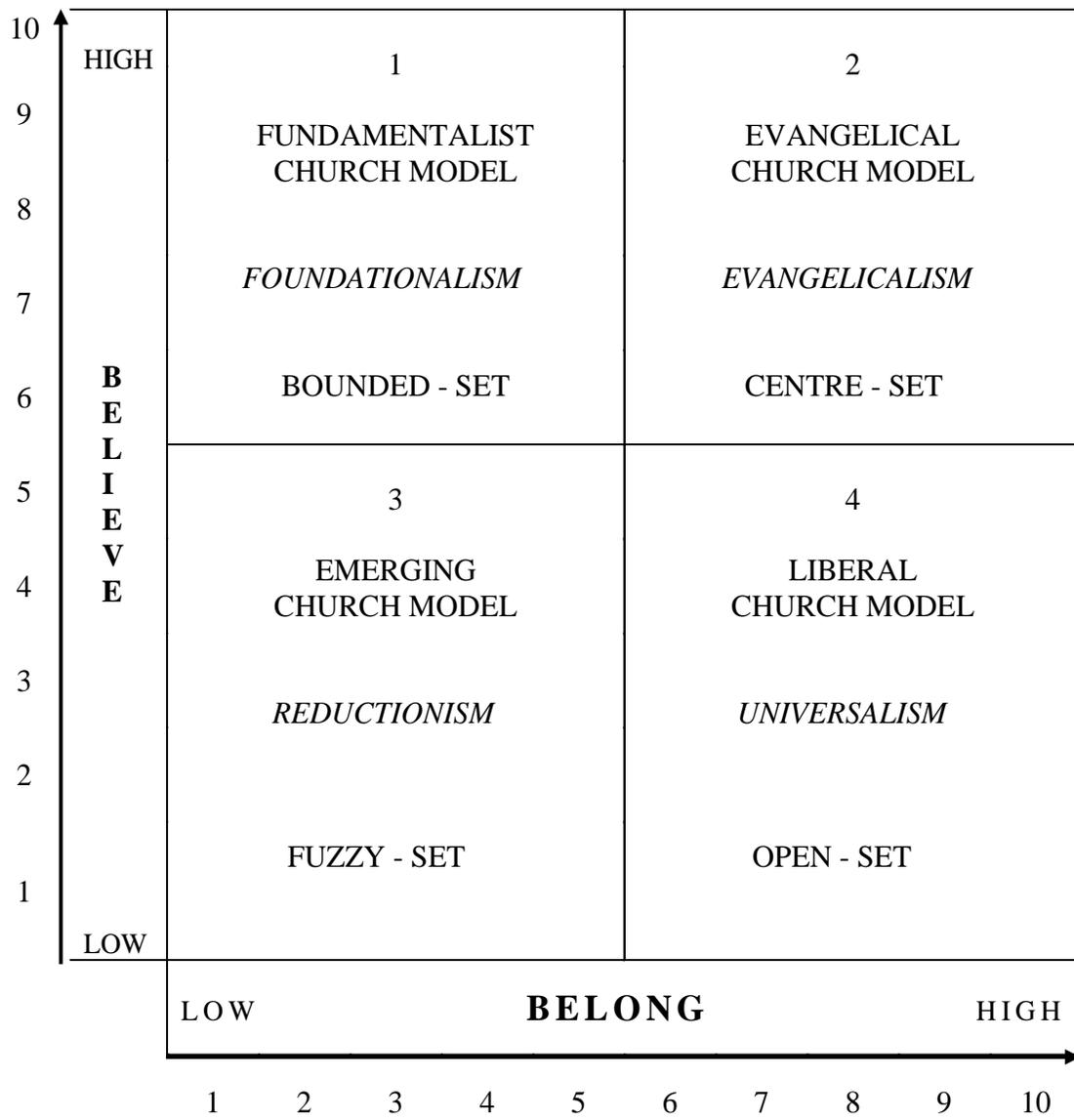
- It has a definite centre as well as non-negotiable core convictions, rooted in the story of Christ.
- The centre represents the focal point, around which members of the community gather.
- Its core convictions shape its identity and separate it from other communities in a plural and contested environment.
- The church expends its energy on maintaining the core rather than patrolling the boundaries.
- Confidence in its core convictions helps and assists the church to be inclusive, hospitable and open to those who are in need of belonging.
- Those who “belong” are supported in moving closer to the centre however near or far away they currently are in terms of belief.

Because centre-set churches can be as inclusive as open-set churches, as relaxed as fuzzy-set churches and as committed to principles as the bounded-set churches, I want to recommend this model as suitable for the challenges facing our post-Christendom context: “Centre-set churches encourage spiritual growth, theological investigation, intellectual honesty, receptivity to new ideas and new people, and a journeying image of

understanding” (Murray 2004: 30). Centre-set churches are formed by defining the centre. If this is communicated well in terms of its missiological functions, its necessary boundaries will emerge organically from within its ecclesiological activity. Centre-sets are not created by first drawing boundaries, but by establishing relationships with people related to or moving towards the centre as well as with those that are not:

Churches with healthy centres are secure enough to welcome those who are exploring faith and searching for authenticity. They are relaxed, non-judgemental communities where questions, doubts, dissent and fears can be expressed and where ethical issues do not preclude acceptance (Murray 2004: 30).

The above can be explained as follows:



Although I believe that centre-set churches will be a liberating and sustaining model to assist those who need to journey from *belong to believe* in a post-Christendom context, one should be aware of open-set or fuzzy-set models masquerading as such.

Some churches that claim to be centre-set communities have not really understood the model. Wells (2008: 17) describes emergents as “doctrinal minimalists” who are ecclesiological free spirits, who fit around a much smaller doctrinal centre and who determine as seekers what they will seek, when they will seek and when they are satisfied: “Soon we fall into the habit of thinking that the sacred is there simply for our satisfaction and for our use. We use the sacred when we want to just as we do any of the other consumer goods we buy” (2008: 189).

Wells (2008: 210-211) also criticizes the leadership in the Reformed tradition for minimalizing their doctrinal centre, which makes their ministry one which is at times non-foundational and off centre. Wells explains how the postwar resurgence of evangelical believing in the West gained a great deal of strength from its many churches and how this made it possible for many churches and organizations to work together around a commonly held objective. Centrally there was consensus about the authority of Scripture and the necessity of the Cross to set a centre-set ministry, but the core was narrowed in the sense that diversity of belief around it was allowed. With the passing of years the core has even begun to disintegrate and has been losing its depth as the reformational *sola*'s has lost its centrality in the sense that in Scripture alone is God's authoritative truth found, in Christ alone is salvation found, it is by grace alone that we are saved, and this salvation is received through faith alone.

He explains his concern by referring to the work of Bell (in Wells 2008: 86), which distinguishes between Scripture as a trampoline (fuzzy-set model) and Scripture as a brick wall (centre-set model). For Bell the doctrines of Scripture need to be perceived as the springs in a trampoline that propel us upward in our journey with God. However, as trampoline jumpers experience, the direction in which they are propelled is a bit unpredictable. So it is in post-Christendom life. We can say only what *seems* to be right in terms of what we believe. We have to interpret the doctrines of Scripture in our own

way depending on how we have been projected by our own context and circumstance. This again is also true of someone else who interprets the same text, but according to different cultural criteria.

It seems that contextuality can dethrone the centre-set values of churches. So to go back to trampolines, it would not matter according to the fuzzy-set model of Bell, if we took one or more springs out such as the Trinity and the virgin birth of Christ, as long as there are still enough springs left to get us airborne: "Scripture, to change the image, is not about living in a brick world where nothing changes and where one brick dislodged in the doctrinal wall may threaten to bring down the whole edifice of Christian life" (Bell in Wells 2008: 86).

McLaren (in Wells 2008: 86) in A new kind of Christian, dangerously indulges in the general concept that the world in the 1960's was like an adolescent, whereas by the 1990's it was all grown up. What evangelicals believed back then they can no longer believe now. McLaren is not only convinced that centre-set churches are outdated, but that their core doctrines need to be de-institutionalized so that we do not focus on which religion supports true doctrines, but which doctrines are good for post-Christendom seekers.

McLaren's point of reference is as if life were empty and without a centre and as if we were empowered by our choices to make and do as we find fit. And so we create our own centre, our own rules and we make our own subjective meaning. Paul's statement is that, since the fall, we have worshipped and served ourselves as the creature rather than the Creator (Rm.1: 25). We have replaced the centre of life with our own making and privatized our *fuzzy* truths for his absolute *brick-like* truth. Wells (2008: 100) describes this notion as rebellion, for people have wrenched themselves free from the hand of God and reject reality as He has defined it.

If we want to assist outsiders to belong once more to the body of Christ we urgently need to re-centre our ministry around core principles and practices resulting in purpose. If not, there will be no central gravity force pulling us closer to a life of being disciplined for

God's glory. Without a centre-set modelled congregation there will be a huge gap between simply membership of the church and truly belonging to its life of commitment to Jesus as its founder. Sociologists have pointed out that organizations in order to impact future generations, must have boundaries to maintain stability as well as be flexible in supporting its members (cf. Bosch 1993: 165).

One important issue that does come to mind is the question if we are not inviting the world into the church by not having bounded-set churches. Do we not then lower the standards of the Gospel to such a degree that we cannot differentiate between light and darkness? The so-called *believer's baptism* can indeed be an option to differentiate between those who are willing to follow Christ from a centre-set of beliefs from those who are only curious. In so doing we not only differentiate but also support centre-set criteria (cf. Lukasse 2009: 122-123). In the case of a Reformed ministry, one should keep in mind that the *believers baptism* is not such an acceptable praxis as in the case of Pentecostals. In the case of Reformers where the baptism of infants is more acceptable, the above solution is not sufficient. Rather a core principle could be that parents of infants that insists on the baptism of their child, need to have a true relationship with Christ and his bride-the local christian community.

Finally this issue brings one important question to be asked? Is there any difference between *belonging* and *membership*? As Steven Croft notes (in Murray 2004: 37): "member derives from *membrum* which means 'a limb or part of the body'...a very strong and close way of belonging." But "member" today sounds institutional and many find this terminology unhelpful. In a post-commitment culture, membership is problematic. Post-Christendom churches will need categories and terminology that are culturally attuned – but also counter-cultural.

The single category of membership (differentiating members from non-members) is experienced as exclusive in centre-set churches, where more nuanced, dynamic and inclusive concepts are operative. Post-Christendom churches may need various categories of belonging, as suggested by Murray (2004: 38):

- Flexible and relational, rather than institutional categories.
- Categories that encourage expressions of commitment that are consistent with behaviour.
- Inclusive rather than exclusive categories that refer to core values, rather than boundaries.
- Categories coherent with our identity as pilgrims who respond haltingly but hopefully to Jesus' call to follow Him.

John Drane's proposal (in Murray 2004: 37) is well formulated:

A stakeholder model in which there could and would be a place for diverse groups of people, who might be at different stages in their journey of faith, but who would be bound together by their commitment to one another and to the reality of the spiritual search, rather than by inherited definitions of institutional membership.

Postmodern society is not loyal to any given organization or institution on the sole grounds of tradition or heritage, but motivated by personal gain and practical criteria. Thus meaning that "church hopping" from one institution to the next is more what is to be expected in the future from church attendees. Postmodern people tend to support a philosophy or teaching as long as it fits their ideology and worldview. Should their ideology be challenged and accordingly corrected, they might have to move on to a new teaching to support their latest spiritual notion. Traditional membership categories in church management will have to make way for other less institutional vocabulary like: *visitors* and *participators*. *Visitors* can refer to those seekers only investigating the Christian belief and its authenticity, while the expression *participators* can refer to believers fully participating as members in the body of Christ.

6.3.3 Conversion:

The *evolving* church needs to facilitate a praxis where conversion can be experienced as part of process evangelization as well as an act of Godly intervention and not human haste:

There has been a holy disquietude in many circles with the “altar call” and “decision” approach to conversion. There has also been disquietude about the rather bland socializing processes at work in many liturgical/catechetical traditions, with some clear calls to re-examine the whole conversion process. And this not only as a result of careful studies on the process of conversion, but also because we have become more aware of Jewish proselytism and the potency of nurturance into the faith (McKnight 2010: 33).

The road towards faith is for many postmodern people a lengthy process and not a sudden crisis experience. Conversion also involves multiple factors of which personal (friends and family members) rather than institutional influence is significant (cf. John Finneys in Murray: 2004: 57):

I would like to explore what I believe to be a more biblically, theologically, and socio-historically sound view: conversion as a dynamic, complex, ongoing experience, profoundly responsive to particular times and places and shaped by the context of those who experience it (Costas 1980: 173).

Many come to faith by means of spirituality rather than doctrine, persuaded by spiritual experience rather than by an awareness of guilt or applied apologetics. Therefore the shift from *event to process* is of such significance. Nevertheless, one should not underestimate the power of events *within* the process of conversion towards those who at first only belong before they believe. Therefore the shift from event to process does not exclude the significance of events within the process or the validity of encouraging those who do not yet believe, but then without pressure for a specific momentary decision:

God-with-us draws by the power of attraction rather than ruling us by a forceful exercise of power. So commending faith in that God, whose freedom and love Christians see incarnated in Jesus Christ, will be in the attractiveness of what Christians say or do, drawing others to explore the faith, rather than in pressurizing for conversion (cf. Page 2000: 167).

Christendom distorted the biblical meaning of conversion by assuming that everyone born into a so-called “Christian” society was automatically considered to *believe* without some truly first *engaging into, and belonging with, true followers of Christ*. Conversion was therefore perceived as unnecessary as all that was needed was “confirmation of

what had been assumed since birth” (Murray 2004: 31). In a post-Christendom ministry towards those who are in need of belonging, but not yet prepared for believing, the above sentiment is unsustainable.

In the ministry of postmodern society, conversion is not only biblical, but also a necessity to be able to make a distinction between those merely belonging and those who are prepared to come to faith. Conversion depicts the divide between simply belonging to a social Christian form of community or to be associated with counter-cultural Christian discipleship (Murray 2004: 31). I do agree with the notion of process evangelism, but not without biblical and authentic conversion theology.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew verb *shub* is used and means “to return”, thus calling on Israel to turn (again) from its sin and to return to Yahweh. In the New Testament, *epistrepho* is often used in relation to the turning of unbelievers to God (Acts 3: 19, 26: 20). *Metanoeo* means “to change one’s mind” or to simply adopt another view. The uses of these words underscore several aspects of conversion. Although conversion can emphasize a totally new allegiance to Jesus, it can involve the adoption of a new worldview, or a continuous repenting and turning from sin (cf. Costas 1980: 182-183).

Conversion as a biblical theme has been distorted for the reason that historically it has been perceived as an imperialistic demand for obedience to institutions and higher authority. In some cases conversion is felt as an ethical norm being subject to a dominant church: “Despite Christendom’s demise, pre-packaged theology, condescending approaches and assumptions that converts will conform to the predilections of the evangelist have continued to plague evangelism” (Murray 2004: 32).

But the understandable aversion of Christians and others to conversion language must not stand in the way of a recovery in post-Christendom churches of an authentic biblical emphasis on conversion. Of course there are difficult questions on this topic: *Does belonging before believing* delay allegiance towards a counter cultural Christian discipleship? Does process evangelism downplay the crisis of decisive commitment to Christ? Do centre-set churches imply that no paradigm shift is necessary for those who

move from merely belonging to believing? On answering these questions, churches after Christendom will need a healthy theology about conversion. Invitations to follow Christ must be winsome rather than placing heavy religious burdens on those moving from belonging to believing.

It is important that conversion must imply an ongoing journey of discipleship for those receiving such invitations. Conversion as a paradigm shift should stimulate new ways of following Christ and living a Kingdom life, not arrival at a pre-determined destination. This needs to be a lifelong process. D.J. Tidball (2006: 85) takes a look at “The social construction of evangelical conversion: A sideways glance” and comes to the conclusion that although setting conversion dates is important for evangelicals, the reality is that conversion is mostly a process of socialisation rather than a powerful reorientation:

The language of conversion ought perhaps to be replaced by the language of socialisation and the moment of so-called conversion seen more as an affirmation of commitment, one of several, which those maturing in the faith will experience.

The testimony of the New Testament and pre-Christendom church history is consistent: conversion is necessary for building Christian communities where those who at first only belong can authentically move forward, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to conviction and belief.

6.3.4 Church discipline:

The question can be asked whether the topic of the practice of church discipline is not in danger when one considers the issue of *belong before believe*? Is the holiness of God not at risk when one primarily focuses on how to accommodate those in the world who are in need of intimacy and spirituality and not necessarily religion?

The simple answer to this question is that in reality the holiness of God is not a pressing concern for postmodern people. To live according to the doctrinal teaching of the institutional church is for postmodernists at most a point to consider or to ponder, but

not likely a searing reality. Many experience God as being in a distant realm and we are living in our own. God is there and we are here. This is a concern for Wells (2008: 239) who acknowledges that outsiders, who belong before they believe, rather have a constant preoccupation with psychological wholeness instead of biblical holiness.

On considering the importance of building relationships with those who belong, but who do not yet believe as those in the local Christian community do, it would be foolish to suppose that the sole purpose of church discipline is to purify the church from all sin. The truth is that the church will never be completely pure. In the post-Christendom context it is necessary to rather help outsiders to first belong and to further act their way into a new way of thinking in regards to Christ and the Gospel of grace. It is the Holy Spirit's work that applies the saving grace of Christ that eventually brings about purity in thought, word and deed. We can but only support one another to this end (cf. Wells 2008: 239).

In Matthew 18: 15-17 we find four steps that Jesus outlines for church discipline:

- Go to your brother or sister.
- Take one or two others along.
- Tell the church.
- Treat them as pagans or tax collectors.

Murray (2004: 180) interprets Matthew 18: 15-17 and distinguishes five markers:

- Those who at first only belong and are mentored and modelled on their way to faith have to be disciplined in such a pastoral way that it contributes to the role of action and reflection.
- Once he or she responds in a positive manner and takes the above as a teaching experience there is no need to proceed to the next step.
- The aim throughout is to assist those who only belong at first to be "won over" from mere belonging to believing and thus to achieve restoration and reconciliation with Christ.

- It is very important that in Matthew 18: 15-17 there is no mention of church leaders having a monopoly on imposing church discipline; this is rather presented as an expression of reciprocal pastoral care among the members themselves. Any experience of church disciplinary action from a top-down position of hierarchy will not function well in the context of post-Christendom evangelization. In Christendom church discipline was imposed by leaders as an exercise of clerical power. Such power dynamics will distort relationships in post-Christendom churches, with those who belong but do not yet believe. Spiritual and ecclesiastical leadership is inevitably necessary and will become involved in the third and fourth steps, but even then it is only to ensure the process is handled well.
- Exclusion from the community will only be the last resort. A realistic perspective helps to understand that evolving churches are fallible communities and that restoration is not always achieved. Churches then face two options, to compromise their core (centre-set) values or to act with integrity and review the growth of those who belong but do not yet believe.

The attitude with which we approach those who only belong but do not yet have proven spiritual fruit, as expected from evangelical believers, is of utmost importance when practising a missionary ecclesiology. Every approach needs to exclude arrogance and intolerance. Confrontation will have to be exercised with sorrow, being fully aware of human weakness:

“Go to your brother or sister” is not prompted by spite, antagonism or refusal to accept differences but by concern. “Taking one or two others” is not to rally support, but because we value their discernment and recognise we might have misread the situation. “Telling it to the church” does not imply “naming and shaming” but allows the community to rehearse its core values and invite everyone to embrace them afresh (Murray 2004: 181).

Each step then challenges those who merely belong, to grow positively on to becoming believers.

“Pagans and tax collectors” can be regarded as first-century classic community outsiders as they were treated as no longer belonging to the community. But nevertheless these *outsiders* were potential *insiders* whom Jesus loved to call to belong on the *inside*, calling them to repent, to follow him and join his community.

Murray (2004: 183) asks: what kind of churches can practise this process sensitively and creatively (to assist those who only belong to stay long enough in order to reach personal faith in Christ)? He shares the following:

- Churches need to be centre-set with clear, agreed and deeply owned core values.
- Churches that understand how to operate loving confrontation.
- Churches that induct newcomers into this shared understanding.
- Churches that are realistic about the struggles of those only belonging and not believing, in regards to the post-Christendom paradigm.
- Churches that foster patient friendships with those who belong, but do not yet believe.
- Churches whose community life is so rich that no longer belonging provokes soul-searching.

Indeed a contemporary missionary ecclesiology will have to change its focus about church discipline. We should change the focus of discipline from the root meaning of *censure* (an institutional word), to its original root meaning to *disciple*.

Centre-set churches are more suited for running church discipline among soul searchers because of the following positive characteristics:

- They are relationally minded and less likely to apply their core values legalistically.
- They are better able both to preserve the integrity of their core beliefs and to communicate acceptance of those struggling not to violate it.

- They are less concerned about what spiritual stage people have reached than about the direction in which they are travelling. Travelling from belong to believe is more important than merely spiritual knowledge without an evangelical foundation.

Bounded-set churches are too single minded, open-set churches have no basis on which to confront and fuzzy-set churches will become confused. Centre-set churches do have the ability to practise loving confrontation in ways that allow messy forms of belonging within an honest and open community.

6.3.5 A Hebraic paradigm:

Hirsch (2007: 122-124) has a strong argument in favour of those who first belong before they believe by stating that “we tend to process things as we go” (2007: 123). Murray’s (2004: 58) investigation adds further insight as we find that many come to faith via spirituality rather than doctrine. Seekers are persuaded by spiritual experience rather than apologetics as they are searching for their spiritual identity in truth rather than in conflict.

If outsiders are welcome to at first belong before they have to believe, it is primarily the task of the local congregation to apply discipleship so that those belonging can eventually believe. This cannot simply be achieved by the mere transfer of information outside of the context of ordinary life. It is not a solution to try and think our way into a new way of acting, but rather we need to act our way into a new way of thinking (cf. Hirsch 2007: 122).

Western Christendom and Christendom in its totality are very deeply influenced by the Greek (Hellenistic) ideas of knowledge. By the fourth century AD the Platonic worldview had almost completely secured its dominance over the former Hebraic one in the

church. Later on it was Aristotle who became the prominent philosopher for the church which operated under a Hellenistic domain⁷.

A Hellenistic view of knowledge is concerned with concepts, ideas, types, forms and the nature of being. In contrast we find that the Hebraic view is more concerned with issues of “concrete existence, life-orientated wisdom and the interrelationship of all things under God” (Hirsch 2007: 122). It is hard to change outsiders’ negative perceptions of Christendom by merely giving them new concepts and ideas of what it is like on the inside of a centre-set church community, as our behaviours are deeply entrenched in us via our habits, upbringing, cultural norms and erroneous thinking. In other words, we need to take the whole person into account when considering the *belong before believe* policy. This will require the local Christian community to educate those who at first belong, in the context of belief and faith. The way we do this is in the Hebraic mode, indeed the way Jesus did with His disciples, by acting their way into a new way of thinking. This is the way Jesus formed His disciples. They not only lived with Him, but also ministered with Him and made mistakes and were corrected by Him. Ideas and information are important, but they are generally needed to guide activity and are best understood in the real drama of life.

If our starting point is an outsider in search of spirituality, but who has no involvement in the church, and we see it as our task to change the person’s perception by helping him or her to first belong before he or she has to believe, taking the Hellenistic approach will mean that we provide information through books and teaching to try and get the person to a new way of thinking and eventually to a place of belief. The problem is that by merely addressing intellectual aspects of the person, we fail to help him or her produce the fruit that appears when belief sets in.

The assumption in Hellenistic thinking is that if people get the right ideas they will move from belong to believe. The Hellenistic approach therefore can be characterized as an

⁷ I am aware that in my argument here about a Hellenist understanding over against a more acceptable Hebrew understanding I am in a sense applying stereotypes. Some New Testament authors in texts such as John’s Gospel (the idea of the *logos*) and in Luke-Acts (Paul’s speech at the Areopagus) made conscious attempts to contextualize the Gospel in Hellenist thought forms. A certain measure of generalisation is therefore inescapable in my argument.

attempt to try to *think our way into a new way of acting*. Both experience and history show the fallacy of the above. All that happens is that we change the way an outsider thinks while his or her growth in faith remains largely unaffected.

When considering the hebraic approach, the outsider is experiencing embodiment as he or she participates with others who belong. Mentoring and modelling allows for action and reflection, which leads to those who at first only belong to eventually believe. *Acting our way into a new way of thinking* allows not only for content, but also for the context to lead us into an insiders' faith. The Hebrew concept allows for participation from the outside, on the periphery as well as for a *generous space* on the inside, in spite of disbelief and unbelief.

In the modern church, most of our preaching is focused on the logical presentation of facts to move people towards a decision, which worked well for a modern mindset. But because of the shift in communications in the last decade, our form of preaching needs to go beyond the intellect and be interactive. To see people be transformed from merely belonging to active faith participation and see people become disciples, we need to give people truthful experiences along with truthful teaching.

The modern mindset teaches that transformation starts with facts that eventually will lead to faith that leads to correct behaviour. The emerging cultural shift demands a movement from experience to behaviour to belief. When those who only belong experience that they may worship together with those who already believe, their behaviour towards those who believe changes. This positive experience of acceptance leads to a different sentiment towards the church and Christianity that in the near future leads to an openness for Jesus and His saving grace.

If all of the above could be accomplished, then institutionalised churches could evolve into a missionary *ecclesia*, meaning then to *evolve* in three specific areas:

- From an overwhelmingly exclusive Greek mode of theologizing to a more consistent Hebrew understanding of spirituality.

- From an institutional and clerical authoritative understanding of church discipline to a relational form of church discipline that provokes soul searching and repentance before Christ.
- From a conversion theology demanding a date and place of conversion to a conversion theology understood as a Godly intervention that can also be experienced as a process.

For an effective missionary ecclesiology we need centre-set churches over and against open-set churches. Any discipline, whether it is spiritual or factual, has to have a strong and decisive core or centre if it wants to interact with other disciplines without neglecting its own identity. Open-set churches are taking an open stand for every new trend and thus can lead their followers to somewhere or nowhere. Centre-set churches assist seekers to enter and lead them in time to an ecclesiology that is centred in Jesus Christ and that proclaims the core of the Gospel.

For an effective missionary ecclesiology we need evolving churches and not necessarily emerging churches. As mentioned earlier, one should be careful in choosing exclusively for the Emerging movement as the next best choice for the post-Christian context. The Emerging movement has a high percentage following the *fuzzy-set* principle. Most are too fluid to classify, let alone to assess their significance. There is no consensus as to what language to use when referring to this movement, nor is there any agreed scheme for categorising what is emerging. Emerging churches, in general, have different convictions, are motivated by different concerns and assess their future development by varying criteria. Institutional churches therefore need to develop new infrastructures to meet the social needs of their communities and needs to evolve from “playing it safe” to becoming a part of a (messy) missionary ecclesiology.

For an effective missionary ecclesiology we need to minister to potential believers from a Hebrew understanding of knowledge and not necessarily from a Hellenistic understanding. This will require the local Christian community to educate those who at first belong in the context of belief and faith. The way we do this is in the Hebraic mode, indeed the way Jesus did with His disciples, by acting their way into a new way of

thinking. This is the way Jesus formed His disciples. They not only lived with Him, but also ministered with Him and made mistakes and were corrected by Him. Ideas and information are not unimportant, but they are generally needed to guide activity and are best understood in the real drama of life.

For an effective missionary ecclesiology we need disciple-making and not traditional church discipline. The attitude with which traditional church discipline used to be practised in the Christendom period was from an “almightier than thou” position making the guilty party feel insecure and unworthy of his or her membership. The process of disciple-making allows for a *generous space*, allowing for error without separating the trainee from his or her support system – the Christian community of believers.

For an effective missionary ecclesiology seekers and visitors attending church meetings and services need to be transformed by the power of God and not through following church programmes. The *missio Dei* has to do with God’s concern with the lost human condition and His power to save through the person and mediation of His son Jesus Christ, as well as in His own time. Programmes tend to ask for an outcome of some sort. They tend to push for results and commitment, prior to those attendees’ characters being touched by the grace of God. Spur of the moment emotional decisions do not honour God, but the transformation of the human condition through the timing and inspiration of the Holy Spirit does.

6.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I tried to sketch my understanding of a missionary ecclesiology working on the principle that seekers have to be encouraged to belong before they are led to believe. As has become clear, this will have important consequences for our way of life as members of Christian churches in a postmodern context. In the final chapter I will attempt to point out the effects of the most important of these consequences.

Stuart Murray (2004) in Church after Christendom – belonging, believing and behaving confirms the above in his research, though from a different angle. He remarks that although Christians in the Early Church shared their faith freely with friends and neighbours, church membership was not open to outsiders: the danger of spies infiltrating the Christian community precluded this. In the Ancient church outsiders were welcome to attend meetings, although they were excluded from participating in the Eucharist. Those who did show interest in Christianity explored this through a lengthy process known as *catechesis*. This explained what Christians believed and how they behaved. It also assessed whether enquirers were ready to take further steps towards future belonging. Catechists assumed no familiarity with the Christian story or its values and, since belonging meant participating in a counter-cultural community, learning what to believe and how to behave were both necessary. Neither belonging before believing nor believing without belonging was feasible. Growth in believing and belonging (and behaving) went hand in hand.

In Christendom, everyone was required to belong to the church and believe (or at least publicly subscribe to) what it taught. Belonging preceded believing, for infants were baptised into the church before they could even understand the content of belief, but it was assumed they would grow up to believe what everyone else believed. All mainline church history (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant) has through the ages in the Constantine paradigm accepted that people could belong without believing. Membership in all these churches as state churches was predicated on nominal belief. It was exactly in the Christendom age that belief was actually of only nominal importance, as belonging mattered most.

Murray (2004) therefore confirms that a *generous space* (my own expression) for seekers and newcomers in the local congregation gives people a fair opportunity to at first understand the cost of discipleship (behaviour), as Jesus taught it to those following Him to the top of the mountain as we read in Matthew chapters 5-7. Murray is of the opinion that if seekers do have the opportunity to belong and to experience faith in praxis (Mt. 8: 1-9:8), the correct Christian ethical behaviour will follow. Murray testifies to this in the following two testimonies:

He mentions a man called Ben who was not a believer. He was a Jew and an agnostic. But over the years he watched and listened, developed friendships in the church, took part in various church activities and attended more regularly than many members. The church welcomed him and waited patiently. He imbibed their values and shared his own concerns, prayer requests and, finally, prayers. One day he called God “Father”. Shortly before he died, eighteen years after first attending the church, he was baptised as a believer.

Mary was in her late fifties. She had never been to church before and she knew nothing about what Christians believed. She sat quietly at the back. On her way home she found herself “speaking in this odd language”. The next day she returned various small items she had stolen from the office she cleaned and in the evening went to make peace with a neighbour to whom she had not spoken for twenty years. The following Sunday she returned to church, asking, “Why am I doing these things?” She too was soon baptised as a believer.

In the case of Ben and Mary it was a sequence of belonging, behaving and finally believing. No matter whether the aspect of *belonging* is followed by *behaving or believing*, it has to begin with a *generous space – allowing seekers to belong. Therefore to give true seekers the opportunity to sit at the feet of “Jesus”, and to be able to listen to “his” teaching on what is expected from those who enter the Kingdom of heaven.*

7.1 Dimensions to explore

Which dimensions or areas of present-day postmodern life may be usefully exploited as “generous space” where people can belong even before they believe?

7.1.1 Lost relationships:

According to my understanding, postmodern society is longing for more intimate relationships as especially the way of life in First World countries in North America and

Europe becomes more and more impersonal and alienating. People want to connect and be connected. This longing resonates with a loss that is very deep and painful in the postmodern psyche. This is what the emergents have sensed correctly. Rather than following the route of mega evangelicalism with its large church marketing structures, emergents have gone to small, connected groups, to networking and back to intimate relationships.

This sense of “disconnectedness”, as Wells calls it (2008: 31), is very much an irony as never before have the lines of communication between people been more efficient than in our culture. Postmodern people could be referred to as the *Wired Generation* living in a mostly electronic age. However in spite of all the communication methods and opportunities, postmodernists represent humanity as being more lonely than ever before in history: “We are in touch with everyone potentially, but we know almost no one and are known by almost no one in particular” (Wells 2008: 31).

Postmodern people may very well have a sense of hollowness, of not belonging and of having a yearning for connection and community. Postmodern people have a longing to belong and to experience connectedness with others. The overwhelming presence of technology and the wide range of communication options, have cut most people loose from the communities that used to define their world and in which modern people were anchored psychologically. Postmodern people are living in an increasingly globalized context economically, informationally, and psychologically.

Postmodern people are therefore lonely and the Church, as Christ’s body in the world, has the opportunity to help them belong to a renewed Christian community, even if they do not yet believe in what the church teaches. The loneliness of the postmodern generation is greatly exacerbated by the many forces of life that militate against belonging to any place and any group of meaningful community. Postmodern people are, for example, those who are carried by unstable economic tides from place to place – even country to country:

We are those whose families have been like confetti in the wind, part blown in this direction, part in that. What is the bottom line effect of it all? What is the

psychological importance? Loneliness is the modern plague. This is the plague, being disconnected, of not being rooted, of not belonging anywhere in particular but to everything in general. Commitment, real bonds, a real belonging has become a stone, rare, much sought after and when found, treasured (Wells 2008: 33).

Because postmodern people are an uprooted generation, being drifters and disconnected, they are alone and experience a lost sense of belonging. The result is that in inner city neighbourhoods, gangs have sprung up as an inner city culture, as substitution for belonging to families. They are surrogate families for what is not there. Many sub-cultures have also emerged to help people belong to different types of communities, for example, skaters and biker communities.

The church can never be anything else but the Body of Christ, but this community of people has to be incarnated in many different contexts so that it can serve as the *oikos* of Jews and non-Jews, Greeks, Romans, slaves, everybody (1 Cor. 9: 19-23). It is clear from Paul's discourse in 1 Corinthians 9: 19-23 that these incarnations will differ in various contexts and among different cultures in order to truly reflect the missionary context. Due to the reality in missiology of a "pluriverse of ecclesiologies" (cf Saayman 2009: 287-300), let us then speak of church as *church-with-others*, especially in some industrialised or postmodern First World countries like Belgium. This can lead to a possible bond between church and mission. This entails that where mission can be envisioned in postmodern times as *accepting those who are in need of belonging before believing*, the church, on the other hand, can be called to be a *church of human fellowship*. Thus reflecting Bosch's reality of mission as the mother of theology (1991: 15-16) and therefore also as "mother of the church" (cf Haacker 2005: 249-262). The dominant Christological metaphor in such a church of human fellowship will have to be: Jesus as our companion in the form of his body. What does it mean to be a church which incarnates Jesus in the first place as our companion?

7.1.2 Jesus as our companion:

Ruth Page (2000: 21) in God with us – synergy in the church, attributes a simultaneity to God who both "holds" us and at the same time "lets us be" so that we can mature

religiously and emotionally from mere belonging to believing. Here it is important to maintain the distinction between “letting be” and “letting go”. *Letting go* implies dismissal, separation and even the notion of abandonment. *Letting be* on the other hand, implies the continual care God has for seekers to whom freedom has been given to belong although they at first might not believe. While the people of God remains the fixed “home” for believers, God is also the *friend* and *companion* of those in a time of transformation, moving from merely belonging to actually believing: “Thus there may exist with God a relationship which moves and responds to circumstances, is flexible in that sense rather than fixed, and whose reality in human life is chosen, entered into deliberately, rather than born into” (Page 2000: 21).

I understand being a *friend* as referring to the existence of a few intimates with whom one can share one’s thoughts, hopes and fears. The two major characteristics of friendship in my opinion are trust and honesty. Page (2000:22-23), following Moltmann, indicates that such a friendship-metaphor, as an important theological concept, distinguishes between *existence for others* and *existence with others*. To be there *for* someone implies necessity and necessity can lead to domination. On the other hand *existence with others*, is free from necessity and compulsion. Therefore true friendship is the reasonable passion for truly human fellowship. Such friendship grows out of each one’s *generous space* and will continue only if the space of each is respected by the other. A friend is not supposed to fill a need as required from us, but is someone with his/her own personhood. What should emerge in a friendship is a mutual desire for the other’s wellbeing, whether the person is only in a relationship of belonging to the body of Christ or finally coming to faith.

“I have called you friends” (Jn. 15: 5) rather than servants, says the Johannine Christ to his followers and on that Moltmann comments: “In the fellowship of Jesus they no longer experience God as Lord, nor only as Father; rather they experience Him in His innermost nature as friend” (cf Moltmann in Page 2000: 23). God offers a personal one-to-one relationship as a needful divine way of relating to humans in their transformation process from merely belonging to truly believing. This relationship based on faith is offered and not imposed, showing God’s trust that those growing from belonging to

believing will respond with trust of their own. This is a relationship which takes place in the midst of our daily life as it is lived in the post-Christendom age, in all its successes and failures, and is a place where self-examination of it all may take place in God's presence.

Even in friendship the private space in which people find themselves remains and this is true also of our spiritual friendship with God. God is with us in our transition from belonging to believing, rather than overwhelming us. We have freedom to "run" alongside God or to venture in the opposite direction.

As it seems that the *friendship metaphor* relates well with the notion of freedom (gracious space) when growth takes place among those who at first only belong to finally believe, it will also be the way for the church to go, exploring the meaning of "with" in all the situations it faces. These are the effects of power working by attraction, permitting those belonging from a distance, the freedom to choose to enter into faith:

But even as friends and companions of God, we remain the people we are. The preposition "with" implies closeness and commonality of aim, but no take-over. God remains God and we are who we are in our context. It is thus that God works in the world – not to interrupt or overturn the freedom of creation, but to encourage and persuade those open to the effects of divine presence in shaping how they should be and what they should do (Page 2000: 52).

For those making the transition from belong to believe the church can fulfil an essential role. Here people may gather with others on the way, in liturgy and proclamation. But then its character needs to define a relationship by "with". If what the church says and does, does not relate to the abovementioned relation of encouraging each other on pilgrimage, what the church does in its services will be of minor impact on post-Christendom. In so far as the church does not adapt, what it needs to put into practice is a way to express "*withness*", which is both attractive and effective. So in the post-Christendom age the preposition "over" will not do. Belief over the need to belong, the centre over the periphery, numbers over spiritual growth, experts over laity, etcetera, is clearly a preference for power being used to impose and not to attract. To allow for outsiders to first belong before they have to believe will be to something much less

tightly controlled, considerably less powerful in the top-down sense and more diverse. All in all it could mean a messy process in a muddled church, but nevertheless if we are going to adhere to a model of a pilgrimage church moving from belong to believe, it might never be possible to lay the rules down in advance.

Does this not present a serious danger that the gospel message may be distorted? In order to answer this question, we have to pay attention to a missionary *ecclesia* with open boundaries focusing on centre-set principles.

7.1.3 Open boundaries with centre-set principles:

On being church in the post-Christendom age one has to think differently about what church is and how people become part of it: "It is just as much a family to belong to, as it is a set of beliefs to adhere to" (McClung 2008: 189). In the post-Christendom age we cannot work with the single notion that people come to faith in Jesus at a specific moment in the timeline of their life, through simply believing in a set of church doctrines. Rather it is about getting to know and trusting in Jesus through a journey, from belonging to believing, with many stops and starts along the way.

If this is the case then the sociological paradigm known as the *bounded-set* principle does not apply well to inviting people to really know Jesus. The biggest concern for me with the bounded-set paradigm is that it rather describes how we determine if people are "one of us".

The bounded-set way of thinking does not work well when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus. We need another way of seeing. Some people, whose hearts are actually far from Him, look as if they are close to Jesus. And there are others who are very devoted followers of Jesus and may not look like a Christian, but have come to a place of faith in Jesus in their heart (McClung 2008: 190).

The route to go if one is serious about befriending lonely and alienated postmodern people (in my opinion) is what is called the centre-set paradigm. So the binding force is the strong attraction emanating from the centre of an open community, not the clearly marked set of boundaries which force people to remain either outside or inside. The

boundaries could be fuzzy in terms of who is really “in” and who is “out”, but the central focal point is always clear: devotion and obedience to the person of Jesus Christ.

If we are truly implementing a missionary *ecclesia* among our postmodern neighbours and non-Christian friends we will have to cope with “messy” boundaries; just as in Jesus’ ministry it was not always clear who was or was not yet a disciple of Jesus among His followers. In reality we have believers who don’t seek, and seekers who don’t yet believe. Thus if we can live with messy unclear boundaries, but yet a clear centre, we have grasped the importance of making disciples: “We lower the bar for doing church so that everyone can be part of it, and we raise the bar for being a disciple so that everyone knows what it means to be a disciple of Jesus” (McClung 2008: 193).

Hirsch (2007: 47) fully agrees with McClung when he explains the importance of having core practices complying with spiritual discipline when helping postmodern people to belong to the body of Christ. He understands the many temptations facing those who, in the context of post-Christendom, have moved from belonging to believing. Accordingly he and his leadership put together some centre-set principles that newcomers have to respect and get involved in so that discipleship can form among those entering into the Christian community. The following is an abstract from the book, The forgotten ways (2007: 47), showing centre-set principles as understood in the evangelical ministry:

	CORE PRACTICE	SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE
T	Together we follow	Community (Togetherness)
E	Engagement with Scripture	Integrating Scripture into our lives
M	Mission	Being involved in God’s <i>Missio Dei</i>
P	Passion for Jesus	Worship and prayer
T	Transformation	Accountability

When evolving into a ministry in the post-Christendom context I believe (my personal observation made on interaction with significant numbers of postmodern people) that three criteria should be kept at close range when focusing on centre-set principles. Postmodern people are constantly searching and longing to “see” God in his “transcendence”. This *upward (or transcendental) aspect* of spirituality has to do with worship, communion and daily disciplines of prayer. Postmodern people are also longing for companionship and to experience belonging and acceptance, even before they believe. This could be called the *intimate or inward (or immanent) aspect*. This need can be answered by mentoring and studying the Word together. The *forward or outward aspect* has to do with challenging those who belong to a commitment of discipleship. Sharing the Gospel and planting churches in other locations are important principles in this regard.

McClung (2008: 232) promotes only three centre-set principles with corresponding disciplines that correspond well with a reformed theological stance.

Love God:

Believe in God, repent and be baptized.

Live holy lives: Love God with your whole person.

Pray, worship and read God's word.

Love each other:

Gather together with others and take part in the Lord's Supper.

Forgive those who sin against you.

Love the world:

Give to others your time, money, and life.

Go and make disciples of all nations.

Wells (2008: 225) is of the opinion that for the Evolving church to be successful in the post-Christendom age it must reveal its otherworldliness as it is not of this world, but born of God's grace. And that is very difficult. Where do we find the evidence of this? What does a church look like that has this character? How can we see that it knows that it is the enterprise of God and not a product of merely human engineering or interest? Wells finds the answer in the classical Reformed theology with its three marks of the true church:

Where the Word of God is preached.

Where the sacraments are rightly administered.

Where church discipline is applied.

Wells remarks that these centre-set principles of the classical theological notion are not foolproof as one can find churches that exhibit all three principles but nevertheless do not attract those who are in need of belonging. Although these principles are helpful in pointing to three core values that newcomers should be aware of, they are nevertheless seriously inadequate as they include no reference to the transformative vocation of the church as erector of signposts of the reign of God.

Centre-set principles in any case do not have to hamper outsiders who wish to enter and who are in need of belonging before they believe, but can help them to understand the serious consequences of claiming the Gospel and following Christ.

In centre-set churches accountability can take place, which is important when those who at first only belong move into faith. Centre-set principles allow a generous space in Christian meetings, so that anyone can enter to experience the presence of Christ, but sets clear principles in regards to what is expected from disciples. In centre-set churches it is possible for those who only belong and do not have a Christian background, to stay focused on the key evangelical faith statements, and not get lost in theological side-issues.

Will “belonging before believing” continue as a post-Christendom phenomenon in postmodern society? It all boils down to what we mean by “belonging”. Richard Thomas (in Murray 2004: 22) suggests that finding ways of speaking to the spirituality of a generation who do not at first believe, but who are in need of belonging, is not a matter of bringing them in, but of changing our understanding of the nature of Church itself. He suggests that “believing” could be seen as already “belonging” (to the universal church?) and therefore that not “belonging” to a local church can even be a virtue. This interpretation is unconvincing as the important role of disciple-making cannot reach its full potential unless outsiders “belong” to a group of believers assisting them in their journey to faith. The way we do this is in the Hebraic mode, indeed the way Jesus did it with His disciples, by acting their way into a new way of thinking. This is the way Jesus formed His disciples: What you hear you will probably forget at some stage, what you see you might remember, but what you do yourself you will understand. Training is somewhat different than teaching. To assist seekers to not only belong, but to eventually come to faith in Christ and to understand what they believe in, we need training and not only teaching (cf. Lukasse 2009: 141,146).

It is of core importance that the Institutional churches that once served in the Constantine paradigm and are evolving to minister to postmodern people in a post-Christendom age, understand that becoming a part of the *ecclesia* happens when people come to faith in Jesus, and not when they confess to believe the right doctrine.

7.1.4 More incarnational (missional), less invitational (evangelistic):

We should not imagine a ready supply of non-belonging seekers waiting to join refurbished post-Christendom churches. A more creative missional approach will be required with less of an evangelistic campaign.

A post-Christendom ministry that will attract postmodern people to the centre of belonging and eventually to believing will have to view the Christian mission far more in terms of the incarnate Christ. A true missionary *ecclesia* cannot only be concerned with

the eternal and heavenly blessings bestowed upon us from Jesus, because He ascended to the heavens, but also with the human Jesus of Nazareth who walked among men and women and who took compassion on those who were marginalized. Jesus was God incarnate among us: "In this model, one is not interested in a Christ who offers only eternal salvation, but in a Christ who agonizes and sweats and bleeds with the victims of oppression" (Bosch 1993: 513). Jesus was active in His culture, not allowing His divine rights or prerogatives to overwhelm His relationship with ordinary human beings: "He sanctified the ordinary" (McClung 2008: 34). Jesus lived purposefully and He lived an integrated type of spirituality.

To such a Christ outsiders will not only want to belong, but in due time also believe. For many churches Jesus' humanness is only a veil hiding His divinity and they do not perceive his humanness as the incarnational force helping those who at first only belong to come to faith in Christ. The emphasis on the significance of Jesus' incarnation is calling our attention to Jesus who lived as a simple Galilean man, suffered, was executed and died on the Cross.

For evolving institutional churches, relying on a centripetal model that expects seekers to attend services in church buildings is completely inadequate for the post-Christendom context. In post-Christendom one finds that people who have an interest in spirituality do not readily translate this interest into church attendance. Although belonging may precede believing, we must reach out to people instead of expecting them to come to our meetings and ministries. Reshaping our institutional churches to evolve into missionary *ecclesiae* means starting with the mission context as missiology precedes ecclesiology (cf. Murray 2004: 94). The incarnational is absolutely fundamental to understanding our mission in the world and to grasp the fact that the church which obediently wants to follow Jesus, is on mission with God. Having an incarnational ministry allows members of the body of Christ to *identify* with outsiders, to *localize* with them as they enter to *belong*, *although they do not yet believe* and to be *available* to them as they journey on the path to faith in Christ (cf. McClung 2008: 34).

Some church models on the cutting edge of contemporary culture seem unwilling or unable to extend their ecclesiological enterprise into a missionary ecclesiology. Ecclesiological renewal (“evolution”) and missiological initiative need to operate under the guidance of theological reflection, always reminding church leadership of the need to be true to the church’s incarnational nature. This requires of us to become genuine parts of people’s lives without discrediting them for *belonging before believing*. The great danger of failing to incarnate the Gospel is “spiritual imperialism” whereby we impose an operational mode of *believe, behave and belong* on people in a post-Christendom context who have the need to operate on a basis of *belong, behave and believe*. “People need freedom to discover Jesus on the inside of their culture, not in an imposed culture from the outside” (McClung 2008: 35).

The Emerging movement does not, however, have a broader understanding of the incarnational or missional character of Christ’s ministry than the orthodox or institutional denomination. In general, Emerging churches proclaim similar theological emphasis: “creativity rooted in God as Creator; community rooted in God as Trinity, and contextualisation rooted in God incarnate in Jesus” (cf. Murray 2004: 94). Although for emergents, mission is the non-negotiable starting point to a true missionary ecclesiology and although their leadership is cautious to describe non-missional or non-incarnational groups as emerging and suspect that some emerging churches are self-indulgent distractions from the mission to which churches are called, their shortcomings are lasting transformation in terms of the Reign of God and in regards to eschatology. Internal reconfiguration that does not impact the world is not incarnational.

Nevertheless we still need hospitable and evolving institutional churches that align themselves with the post-Christendom context in which those who do not yet believe can participate as they explore faith. Still we must beware of Christendom temptations – waiting for people to come to us rather than going to them, downplaying conversion and neglecting the necessity of an induction process.

The attractional approach to reaching post-Christendom seekers is more successful in improving our programmes, projecting better visuals, and getting people to attend our

church meetings. It caters to the consumer mentality. The institutional church competing in the context of the post-Christendom age cannot only be inviting, but has to penetrate people's core existence. Process evangelization and seeker-sensitive meetings are improvements on prior evangelistic campaigns, but they are still invitational rather than incarnational. A missionary ecclesiology means engaging with people in their own context, which means networking in society and befriending people from different sub-cultures in society.

As post-Christendom develops, seekers who have no connection with any church will come to faith through relationships with individual Christians. Incarnational forms of mission no longer rely on attractional methods, but rather follow creative and courageous initiatives: "If belonging before believing is applicable to such initiatives, the key is Christians 'belonging' within many neighbourhoods and networks, and building relationships through which 'believing' can begin" (Murray 2004: 22). It asks of us to belong with outsiders while they find in us the courage to eventually believe. The following are five criteria which can help those who only belong to eventually come to a lasting faith commitment (cf. Lukasse 2009:189):

- Where seekers or visitors experience genuine friendship from the congregation.
- Where seekers or visitors experience a feeling of 'belonging' in the congregation.
- Where seekers or visitors are invited to join into small group sessions.
- Where seekers or visitors are given a (small) ministry within one year of meeting regularly with the congregation.
- Where conversion is never ministered manipulatively.

How is such a ministry to be embodied?

7.2 The fivefold ministry:

The five missionary-ecclesiological guidelines that I have introduced in Chapter 6 (evolving churches, centre-set churches, conversion, church discipline and the Hebraic

paradigm) that are important for institutionalized congregations to take note of and that can assist them to minister to seekers that are in need of *belonging before believing*, do need ecclesiological embodiment of some sort. This we find in the fivefold ministry as it is written in Ephesians 4: 11 “And it is he who gifted some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, and still others to be pastors and teachers.”

Each office of the fivefold ministry, Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher, carries its own distinct anointing and has its own individual work. For these offices to work together, and accomplish the building up of the body of Christ, they must recognize their differences and be yielded and submitted to one another. Each of these offices is directed by the Holy Spirit to the work of service.

Those with an *apostolic gift* and who are called to have an apostolic ministry are well gifted to assist institutionalized congregations to *evolve* into new futuristic ministries that are relevant to the post-Christendom context and challenges. Apostolic ministry and its leadership ensure that Christianity is faithfully transmitted from one context to another. It moves from a modern paradigm to a postmodern paradigm. This office enables the local congregation to network among those who are longing to belong, prior to them having any Christian witness, and in so doing to position the congregation strategically for future church planting among those seekers. Those with an apostolic calling can enter clubs, societies and sub-cultures to start an evangelistic witness.

Those with a *prophetic gift* and who are called to have a prophetic ministry are well gifted to assist institutionalized congregations to become more *centre-set* in their ministry perspective and less bounded minded. Prophets can help traditional congregations to refocus their energy on those prime beliefs that bring seekers closer to Jesus and not to wander off and get sidetracked with dogmatic issues that are not helping seekers to find salvation in Christ; ensuring the missionary obedience of the Covenant community. This office enables the local congregation to act towards social justice and to empower those being poor, lost and enslaved (Is. 58).

Those with the gifting of an *evangelist* and who are called to have an evangelistic ministry are well gifted to assist institutionalized congregations to truly experience (again) the power of *conversion*. Evangelists can assist congregations to rekindle the need for conversion and to use such an experience in evangelization of post-Christian communities by making clear the offer of salvation so that people can respond in faith. This office enables the local congregation to minister to seekers by means of evangelistic outreaches, radio and TV broadcasts and pastoral visits.

Those with the gifting of a *pastor* and who are called to serve in a parish can assist institutionalized congregations to come to a new understanding of church disciplinary action that enables the congregation to support seekers with more patience and assistance and therefore to focus on *discipleship and not only on discipline*. This office enables the local congregation to grow into a loving and spiritually mature network of relationships and community by means of an *open-set model* of worship and inclusive cell groups.

Those with the gifting of a *teacher* and who are called to have a teaching ministry are well gifted to assist institutionalized congregations to not focus their teaching of seekers and newcomers on only intellectual issues of Christianity (*the Hellenistic way*), but to help outsiders experience the presence of Christ by helping them to explore and come to understand the heart of God (*the Hebraic way*). This office enables the local congregation to develop teaching material that can help seekers to value centre-set principles despite an open-set model of *ecclesia*. This entails valuing Scripture, the Lordship of Christ in all areas of life and the local church as Christ's body.

Such an approach will undoubtedly have important implications for ecclesiastical life. I wish to point out just some important ones.

7.3 Some important ecclesiastical implications:

7.3.1 Catechesis:

Mainline mission churches, as well as the younger sister churches they instituted in Africa, generally regarded catechesis as knowledge transfer: those outsiders who expressed the wish to join the church had to complete a set period of catechetical training. This training was generally aimed at providing catechumens with a basic introduction to the specific denomination's doctrinal teachings. When the required period (generally at least 3 years) had been completed, the catechumens were allowed to make a public confession of faith in front of the congregation, and then to join the congregation in their first Eucharist/Holy Communion. This confirmed the general Christendom understanding of believing before belonging. If churches wish to operate on the principle of belonging before believing, this ecclesiastical practice will obviously have to undergo fundamental changes.

The task of preparing a new generation for commitment towards the local Christian community and to Jesus as the Lord of the Church, will require more input than simply teaching Biblical and doctrinal (confessional) truths. Christian teachers/catechists will have to *belong* with and *live* with those they want to lead towards believing and faith, as Jesus once *belonged* to and *lived* with his twelve followers. He ate with them, slept with them, talked with them while walking between towns, they visited together in the cities, they fished together on the Sea of Galilee, they prayed together in the mountains and worshipped together in the synagogues and in the Temple. To assist seekers on their journey from belonging to finally believing one truly needs a strategy of discipleship rather than a transferral of cerebral knowledge. Getting to know one's pupils and understanding their specific contexts is required to build friendship and trust towards a practical faith devoted to Jesus.

7.3.2 Evangelism:

If one considers the position of *belonging before believing* in ministry, evangelism should be practised *within* the ministry of the congregation and not so much in terms of 'seeking the lost' on the outside. Once seekers feel welcomed and accepted in the community of believers then catechesis, as mentioned above, can be put to the test. Evangelism from within the congregation can only be effective in the long run, when it is based on friendship and relational communication. The Vrije Evangelische Kerk (Free Evangelical Church) in Belgium, for example, understands the importance of the above in a post-Christendom context. The local community is frequently invited by their local evangelical church to special community/village/suburb occasions such as Do-It-Yourself workshops, travel info evenings, and even wine tasting events. At these gatherings people are invited to visit the evangelical church for a Sunday service or a special meal. When visitors become frequent participants in the church meetings they are not only included into the life of the congregation, but also invited to *belong* to a house group of people with whom spiritual relationships can be built over time. Over an average time of three years these seekers come to faith, by means of mutual and spiritual relationships built through living in community.

7.3.3 The Lord's Supper:

In the Reformed tradition only young adults are allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper and then only when they have publicly confessed their faith in the Lord after undergoing catechesis. Although I came to faith at the age of thirteen years, I could only join in the Lord's Supper at the age of eighteen years, after I had completed my catechesis and a public confession of faith. Outsiders and seekers who felt the need to join such meetings (celebrating Holy Communion) but did not comply to the above standards (catechesis and confession of faith) were simply left to be outsiders. It is a serious obstacle to inviting outsiders and seekers to belong to the congregation by means of friendship evangelism and then not to share this spiritual meal with them. In the context

of the old near East and therefore the Old Testament, it was a sign of acceptance and friendship to share a meal with strangers. By allowing strangers, seekers and outsiders to share in the Lord's Supper one not only establishes a strong message of *belonging before believing* but communicates an important evangelistic message: that Jesus as the risen Lord is not exclusive in his love, but truly inclusive.

When *catechesis* is seen and practised as not only a means to teach, but to disciple those who at first only belong and *evangelism* is done from a friendship and relational stance and both of these ministry positions are reflected in an *open sharing of the Lord's Supper*, then one can truly move forward from a *church for others* to a *church with others*. To be a church *with* others, rather than *for* others is also the challenge foreseen by David Bosch: "The church is an event *among* people rather than an authority addressing them or an institution possessing the elements of salvation, of doctrines, and offices" (1993:380). This development from a church *for* others towards a church *with* others not only makes ecclesiology truly missionary, but also reveals the true nature of God: "*Immanuel, God with us*" (Mt 1:23).

7.4 Conclusion

By investigating and comparing the nature of the church in some post-Christendom models and in parts of the New Testament I have tried to assess by which of the two concepts, *Believing before belonging* or *Belonging before believing*, a missionary ecclesiology (as a theological discipline) should be structured in future.

I have found that the axioms of *believe before belonging* and *belong before believing* do not necessarily have to be in conflict with each other, but when focusing on post-Christendom evangelization, more of the church energy has to focus on the challenge of adapting to the needs of those who want to belong but not necessarily, at first, to convert.

I have found that a missionary ecclesiology that will assist seekers in their journey is one that understands the priority of allowing those who are in need of belonging but not

believing to experience a *gracious space* in the worship of the church for seekers and thus allowing for a *process phase* whereby those who only at first participate can eventually come to faith.

A missionary ecclesiology that functions with an open mind in regards to a *gracious space*, on allowing those who are in need of belonging before believing in the worship of the church, and as well as allowing God's timing in converting those who only belong to eventually believe by means of a *process phase*, has to have a ministry with a strong *centre-set model*. This implies a model with no boundaries, but with a definite centre that is communicated in no uncertain terms. The so-called fivefold ministry as found in Ephesians 5: 11 needs to be part of the content of such a centre-set model.

Any missiological enterprise needs in the long run an ecclesiological embodiment to safeguard its objectives. As shown above, I find the fivefold ministry in Ephesians 4: 11 to be an ecclesiological embodiment to realize the five missionary ecclesiological guidelines in reaching post-Christendom seekers. As I have only *introduced* the five missionary-ecclesiological guidelines in regards to the fivefold ministry as a possible future partnership towards church planting among post-Christian seekers, this opens up a new field of possibilities and needs future in-depth research.

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