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# **‘Stories, Senses and the Charismatic Relation’: A Reflexive Exploration of Christian Experience**

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**Submitted for Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology**

**University of Sussex**

March 2015

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

**Signature .....**

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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THESIS SUBMITTED FOR DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN  
SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

**‘STORIES, SENSES AND THE CHARISMATIC RELATION’: A REFLEXIVE  
EXPLORATION OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE**

### SUMMARY

This thesis considers the world of Christian faith, as expressed by a particular social group of which I have been a part since 1998, as an alternative knowledge system. Focusing upon the lives of a number of key agents, including myself, I argue that at the heart of this knowledge system is a charismatic relationship, in the Weberian sense, with a divine Other. This relationship is freely entered into, is conceived as involving movement into or towards an embodied, experiential and relational knowledge of God, and is often expressed by participants through such metaphors as a ‘journey’, ‘adventure’ or ‘quest’. My original contribution to knowledge is in taking a sociological concept, Weber’s notion of the charismatic relation, and innovatively applying this framework to the relation between humans and a transcendent or disembodied ‘Other’. My work responds to a) recent ‘ontological’ challenges within anthropology to ‘take seriously’ other worlds, b) invitations to those with strong religious convictions to practise anthropology without feeling that they need to lose those convictions, and c) recent debates within the anthropology of Christianity concerning how to deal with the agential characteristics of non-human/spiritual beings within ethnographic work. Through a reflexive exploration of experience, I examine how certain Christian people constitute their lives, observing how charismatic devotion to a divine Other implies both a sensorium that extends beyond the corporeal senses, as well as the ‘planting’ of various conceptual seeds that, by providing concrete metaphors of what life is, shape the lives of those willing to ‘receive’ them. As social actors seek to maintain ‘openness’ to this divine Other, a transformational journey results, in which human perception and conception are continually open to renewal. As a reflexive ethnographic account from *within* such an alternative knowledge system, this thesis makes an original contribution to phenomenological and sensory studies, as well as contributing to anthropological work on Christianity.

*For Rachel, Oliver and Asher*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### The Backward, the Ignorant and the Naïve

Brigitte Jordan (1997) in her article “Authoritative Knowledge and its Construction” describes a woman about to give birth in a high-tech hospital setting in America. The woman, who is twenty-five years old and is giving birth to her second child, has been labouring for ten hours. As a result of this process, the woman’s cervix has already opened, providing a passage for the baby’s head to eventually pass through. The woman has entered the second stage of labour in which she is experiencing increasingly powerful urges to push, which should culminate in the baby being finally pushed out. She is being attended to by a nurse-technician, and is connected to an Electronic Foetal Monitor (EFM), which the nurse regularly consults.

Even though the woman is desperate to push and knows that she is *ready* to push (her body is telling her so) the attendant nurse – through an array of persuasive means – is not allowing her to do so. The reason for this is that the physician has not yet examined the woman and given her the ‘all clear’ to proceed. He has been contacted, but is delayed in arriving on the scene. The woman in labour seeks to hold herself back, requiring measures of momentous effort. The physician still does not appear, and so the agony continues. The woman wants to push but is repeatedly told to wait until the physician shows up. Finally the physician enters, examines the woman, and declares that she is, in fact, ready. She pushes, and soon afterwards the baby is delivered.

Jordan examines the dynamics of authoritative knowledge present within this social context. She describes how, within this setting, certain knowledge “counts” (i.e. biomedical knowledge, the physician’s knowledge etc.) and certain knowledge doesn’t “count” (i.e. the woman’s knowledge of her own body) and is therefore dismissed. Jordan states that “frequently, one kind of knowledge gains ascendancy and legitimacy. A consequence of the legitimisation of one kind of knowing as authoritative is the devaluation, often the dismissal, of all other kinds of knowing. Those who

espouse *alternative knowledge systems* then tend to be seen as backward, ignorant, and naïve, or worse, simply as troublemakers” (Jordan 1997:56, my italics).

## Thesis Summary

In this thesis, I consider the world of Christian faith, as expressed by a particular social group of which I have been a part since 1998, as an alternative knowledge system. Focusing upon the lives of a number of key agents, including myself, I argue that at the heart of this knowledge system is a charismatic relationship, in the Weberian sense, with a divine Other. This relationship is freely entered into, is conceived as involving movement into or towards an embodied, experiential and relational knowledge of God, and is often expressed by participants through such metaphors as a ‘journey’, ‘adventure’ or ‘quest’. Through a reflexive exploration of my own and others’ experience, I examine how certain Christian people constitute their lives. I observe how charismatic devotion to a divine Other implies both a sensorium that extends beyond the corporeal senses, as well as the ‘planting’ of various conceptual seeds that, through providing concrete metaphors of what life is, shape the lives of those willing to ‘receive’ them. Through these processes a ‘world’ is created, a domain of charismatic devotion subject to the authority of the divine Other. This ‘world’, constituted through the embodied interplay of charismatic authority and devotion, is often referred to, in native terms, as the “Kingdom of God”.

My work both responds and contributes to a number of debates within anthropology. Firstly, my work responds to the pertinent challenges of dealing with alterity that have recently been raised by the proponents of what has come to be known as the ‘ontological turn’ (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; Alberti et al. 2011; Holbraad 2012), alongside the various critiques of this movement (Killick 2014; Vigh & Sausdal 2014; Mitchell 2015). In contributing an ethnography from *within* the alternative knowledge system of Christian faith, whilst drawing on anthropological work on the senses (Classen 1993; Classen & Howes 1996; Howes 2009) and phenomenological approaches attending to embodied experience (e.g. Csordas 1988, 1994; Desjarlais and Throop 2011; Mitchell 2015), my work presents a particular answer to the issues of dealing with alterity. Secondly, my work responds to the call for those with “strong

religious convictions” (Stewart 2001:328) to practise anthropology without feeling a need to lose those convictions, as well as to ongoing debates concerning whether secularism (Stewart 2001; Pina-Cabral 2001; Yalçın-Heckmann 2001; Gellner 2001; Kapferer 2001) and/or methodological atheism (Ewing 1994; Engelke 2002; Howell 2007; Bialecki 2014) constitute a hindrance to anthropological research. And thirdly, my work responds to recent interest, within the anthropology of Christianity, in phenomenological experiences of God (Luhrmann 2012; Cannell 2014; Stromberg 2014), as well as to how these experiences might be addressed in ethnographic work (Bialecki 2014; Mitchell 2015).

In this thesis, I employ a highly reflexive approach that focuses on embodied experience, beginning with an exploration of my own experience, in 1995, of entering the alternative knowledge system of Christian faith, in other words my conversion. By framing this series of events as my entry into my ‘field’, I am able to introduce a methodology of ‘radical’ or ‘deep’ participant observation. In this introductory chapter, I note two examples of other anthropologists, Jeanne Favret-Saada and Paul Stoller, who also employed methods of ‘radical’ participation within the alternative knowledge systems of their research participants – those of Bocage witchcraft and Songhay sorcery. I then introduce, through a short vignette, my own positionality as a Christian anthropologist living in a world where ‘the Spirit speaks’, before turning to consider how a person such as me might ‘fit’ within anthropology. I argue that epistemological shifts that have taken place over the last fifteen years have created a discursive space where it now might be possible to imagine or ‘conceive’ the Spirit speaking. I look at these shifts as they have centred around three debates: firstly, the relationship between secularism and anthropology, here recent anthropological work on the senses has the potential to challenge authoritative systems built upon strongly materialist perspectives; secondly, the pertinent challenges concerning alterity raised by the proponents of the ‘ontological turn’, and the subsequent critiques of this movement; and thirdly, recent discussions within the anthropology of Christianity concerning the issue of God speaking. Finally, by way of introduction to my central argument – that the lives described in my thesis may be understood as being in charismatic relation with a divine Other – I turn, in the final part of the chapter, to define the sociological concept of charisma as put forward by Max Weber, and look at the variety of ways in which the concept has been understood in sociology, psychology and anthropology.

## Witchcraft in the Bocage

When Jeanne Favret-Saada (1980) set out to research contemporary witchcraft in the Bocage region of Western France at the end of the 1960s, she discovered that, in line with Jordan's insights concerning alternative knowledge systems, most of the previous literature on the subject painted a picture of the peasants of that region in this way – as “credulous”, “backward”, “naïve”, and “marginal” (ibid.:3-4). These peasants, it was reported within the sophisticated urban streams of positivist discourse, attributed their misfortunes to imaginary ‘spells’ cast by witches and called upon ‘unwitchers’ (in truth charlatans) to turn back the effects of their supposed bewitchment upon the aggressors themselves. Whereas, in the case Jordan describes above, a hospital doctor may discount a woman's authority to know when to push without necessarily denying the validity of the biological processes going on, in French rationalist society any ‘knowledge’ of witchcraft was completely dismissed as falsehood. It quite simply did not exist. In response, the people of the Bocage, aware that their understandings and interpretations of reality were looked upon with disdain in modern post-Enlightenment France, most often refused to talk about witchcraft publicly. Instead, when questioned by outsiders, locals masked and suppressed what they *knew* about witchcraft and, in active self-protection, simply attributed such bizarre ‘beliefs’ to naïve ‘others’ – those more backward, or credulous, or marginal than themselves.

Favret-Saada realised that as long as she aligned herself with the mainstream rationalistic French society, thereby maintaining a non-participatory outsider's perspective, no local would ever talk to her, let alone reveal any personal experiences, of witchcraft. She also came to understand that witchcraft in the Bocage was all about *words* – words spoken by a witch that caused illness or misfortune, words blocked by an unwitcher (who acted like a shield between the sender and the receiver), and words subsequently turned back upon the perpetrator (ibid.:9). Since words were never interpreted just as knowledge or information, but as power, it rendered it impossible for an ethnographer to seek information for its own sake. The one who gained knowledge, including the ethnographer, gained power, and had to accept her place within the system of magical power relations as one who was both a potential threat and was potentially threatened (ibid.:11). In order to advance in her research, Favret-Saada also needed to

advance *into* the world of witchcraft – to allow herself to be “caught” both in words and in spells and, at the same time, to accept the social position that others assigned to her, the greatest challenge being cast in the role of ‘unwitcher’. In so doing she experienced both the power and the fear – as locals do – of living in a world of witchcraft, establishing her research upon a kind of ‘radical’ or ‘deep’ participation within an alternative knowledge system.

### **Sorcery amongst the Songhay**

Paul Stoller, researching in the 1970s and 1980s, employed the same measure of ‘radical’ or ‘deep’ participation amongst the Songhay of the Republic of Niger in order to understand the world of Songhay sorcery from within. In that setting, unlike in Favret-Saada’s France, sorcery and spells were part of a publicly accepted discourse, and therefore knowledge of such things did not need to be hidden or suppressed. And yet for Stoller himself, hailing as he did from an objectivist scientific culture, the transition from a positivist knowledge system (associated with that world) towards a local Songhay knowledge system (incorporating sorcery) was clearly a colossal one, and not without its tensions. His book *In Sorcery’s Shadow: A Memoir of Apprenticeship among the Songhay of Niger* (Stoller & Olkes 1987) could be read as the record of his own subjective – and often alarming – journey towards taking such an alternative knowledge system seriously. For example, in the passage below Stoller (ibid.:153) describes a nocturnal attack of sorcery in which his legs were left temporarily paralysed:

*Before my paralysis, I knew there were scientific explanations of Songhay sorcery. After Wanzerbe [where the attack took place] my unwavering faith in science vanished. Nothing that I had learned in academe had prepared me for Dunguri [the sorceress who carried out the attack]. In Wanzerbe, I had crossed an invisible threshold into the Songhay world of sorcery. Now I knew the fear of facing my own mortality. Now I knew the exaltation of repelling the power of a great sorceress. I could no longer be a dispassionate observer of Songhay society; I had become more deeply involved in things Songhay than I could have ever imagined.*

Here the ethnographer describes his transition across an “invisible threshold” from one knowledge system to another (see Van Gennep (1960[1908]); Turner 1969) whilst, at

the same time, highlighting the personal and affective dimensions of this transformation. Stoller is no longer a “dispassionate observer”; he knows both the “fear” and “exaltation” of becoming “deeply involved”. Leaving behind the inherited (and illusory) myth of a ‘neutral’ anthropological persona, he enters fully into an alternative interpretive world. That world works according to a causal scheme very different from the one he has left behind. In this new world, the casting of a spell by one person can affect – at a distance – another, and the warding off of that spell’s power can be accomplished through the ingesting of certain substances, or through the recital of protective incantations (Stoller’s own response – and cure – for his nocturnal paralysis). The most significant transition, of course, is taking place within Stoller himself: one set of explanations of reality and events (*scientific explanations of Songhay sorcery*) is being shaken and found wanting (*my unwavering faith in science vanished*) and another set of explanations (*the Songhay world of sorcery*) is found to be more adequate in explaining his present experiences. Here, as we shall examine later, it is ‘experience’ – and how we understand and interpret it – that plays a key role in tipping the balance.

### **What is an Alternative Knowledge System?**

In Jordan’s example of the woman giving birth in an American hospital, there are clearly two very different knowledge systems present upon which the various social actors are drawing. The first, what we might call *biomedical knowledge*, represents a system of knowledge about the human body (and in this case the processes surrounding birth) that has been built up over many years through extensive scientific research, observation and feedback mechanisms and, for the medical actors involved here, assimilated through academic institutions, medical literature, journals and practical training. Technological innovations, such as the EFM, are routinely incorporated into its structures, thereby enhancing the precision and detail of the knowledge (i.e. foetal heartbeats, strength of contractions etc.) being produced. The second, what we might call *intuitive knowledge*, is primarily represented by the woman’s experience and knowledge of her own body, not only what she knows from her previous birth experience, but also her reading of the waves of bodily urges which are giving her an overwhelming sense of what to do next. It may also be represented by the intuitive

‘sense’ that the nurse technician has – quite apart from the readings she is taking from the EFM – that this woman is, in fact, ready to give birth.

Jordan’s point is not that one system of knowledge is better than the other. Rather, “the central observation is that for any particular domain several knowledge systems exist, some of which, by consensus, come to carry more weight than others, either because they explain the state of the world better for the purposes at hand (efficacy) or because they are associated with a stronger power base (structural superiority)” (Jordan 1997:56). This ordering of types of knowledge, Jordan tells us, though it appears natural, is actually the result of continuous social construction. “The constitution of authoritative knowledge,” she writes, “is an ongoing social process that both builds and reflects power relationships within a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991)” (ibid.). Furthermore, it is not only reproduced by those associated with the stronger power base but, very often, by *all* the actors within a specific social domain. In the hospital room, for example, the ascendant and legitimate knowledge of biomedical science is not only instrumentally transmitted through the medical staff and, most prominently – and theatrically – played out in the personhood of the doctor, but it is also actively consented to by the woman herself. In holding herself back from pushing, even though she *intuitively knows* she is ready to push, the woman herself participates within the governing knowledge order, which is telling her that what she knows about her body, in fact, doesn’t count.

Through a close examination of the dynamics present within this hospital setting, it becomes clear what we mean, more specifically, by an ‘alternative’ knowledge system. An alternative knowledge system is only perceived as such when contextually positioned in relation to the primary – or “ascendant” or “legitimate” – knowledge system to which it is an “alternative”. The two knowledge systems are, within each specific context, not reckoned as equals. Thus, a woman’s intuitive knowledge of her own body *is alternative to* the technologically supported knowledge of biomedical science; the Bocage peasants’ knowledge of witchcraft *is alternative to* the rationalistic knowledge of mainstream French society; and Paul Stoller’s knowledge of Songhay sorcery *is alternative to* the positivistic knowledge of western science. But what is equally clear is that each of these scenarios, and the ways in which knowledge is ordered within them, is entirely dependent upon context. In different settings

knowledge could potentially be ordered differently. A natural homebirth, a household afflicted by witchcraft, and a sorcerer's hut might all represent social settings in which the above knowledge orders would be systematically reversed. A knowledge system is only viewed as 'alternative' when it emerges within a social context in which other knowledge systems, by consensus, have come to carry more weight.

### **'Where the Spirit Speaks': Anthropology from within an Alternative Knowledge System**

In the autumn of 2012, having returned to the University of Sussex after eighteen months of anthropological fieldwork in the southern Balkans amongst the network of Christian communities of which Rachel, my partner, and I had been a part since 1998, I sat down to begin writing my Doctoral thesis. It seemed appropriate to start by rendering some explanation as to how I had initially moved to the Balkans in 1998. And so I began with the following vignette:

*It is early spring, 1998. I am in a crowded cinema hall in Skopje, in the southern Balkans. The hall is mostly filled with teenagers and young people in their early twenties. On stage, the band are putting down their instruments, and beginning to mill amongst themselves. In the front row, a couple of people are still being prayed for. The place is buzzing. The crowd is diverse, yet there seem to be a disproportionate number of heavy metal-ers, their dark waist-length hair draped around black t-shirts pasted with skulls and demons. People are talking amicably amongst themselves. Scattered among the crowd are a number of Roma families, babies swaddled in ample breasts, whilst older, snotty-nosed children race the aisles, crashing into knees and stomachs. A silver haired lady, stick in hand, is seeking gingerly to make her way to the door.*

*It has been a good meeting. Now, amongst the hubbub of activity and noise, I am left for a few moments alone, in stillness. Surprisingly, in the midst of that space, I feel and hear the Spirit whisper two words to me. I am, to say the least, a little blown away – not so much by the experience of hearing God, but more by the content of the two words spoken. It is something unexpected, something I never imagined I would hear God say. The moment marks both the culmination of a process which has been taking place over the last six months, and the beginning of a longer journey that will take place over the next fourteen years, leading up to the present day.*



The original vignette goes on to describe my initial relational connection with Dave and Lynn Webb, Rachel's parents, and of how I decided to move to the Balkans in 1998 as part of an 'apostolic team' that they were planning to lead. In 2012, however, as I wrote to the best of my ability an honest account of the events surrounding that move, I became acutely aware of certain things about my description that stood out, most obviously my description of *feeling and hearing the Spirit whisper two words to me*. On reflection, such acute awareness, I would argue, primarily emanated from the fact that I was embarking upon narrating a story, my story, within a broader social context where 'hearing God speak' does not constitute a form of legitimate knowledge, and could well be dismissed as backward, ignorant or naïve. It was an indication that I was beginning to articulate an 'alternative' knowledge within a social context where other knowledge systems carried more weight.

In the following section, I turn briefly to look at this broader context, before examining the place of anthropology within it. I shall argue that epistemological shifts that have taken place within the anthropological domain over the last fifteen to twenty years have created a discursive space where it now might be possible to talk about, or to 'conceive', the Spirit speaking. Firstly, I look at the relationship between secularisms and anthropology. Here, I argue that recent anthropological work on the senses (Classen 1993; Classen & Howes 1996; Howes 2009) has the potential to challenge authoritative systems built upon strongly materialist perspectives. At the same time, building upon the EASA roundtable discussion (2000) initiated by Stewart (2001), taking the participants' insights concerning the *positive* aspects of secularism (Pina-Cabral 2001; Yalçın-Heckmann 2001; Gellner 2001), and following Kapferer (2001), I argue that, established upon secularist ideals, well-practiced anthropology continually leaves 'open' alternative interpretations and understandings of the world (ibid.:342-343). Secondly, I look at the pertinent challenges of dealing with alterity that have been raised by the proponents of what has come to be known as the 'ontological turn' (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; Holbraad 2012). The latter claim that, through starting from material encountered in the field, allowing theory to be built from this place, and through emphasising the ontological validity of different 'worlds', the power of alterity is 'unleashed' to challenge existing theories and to advance new ones (Fowles 2011:906 in Alberti et al. 2011). Critics of the movement, however, have highlighted its intellectual exclusivity, shallow ethnography (Killick 2014), lack of reflexivity (Vigh

& Sausdal 2014) and, through its over-dependence upon conceptual logic, its distancing from the lived world of *experience* (Mitchell 2015). I suggest that the way forward is to build upon the political challenges raised by the ‘ontological movement’, drawing from some of its methods, whilst allowing these criticisms to define a new trajectory (i.e. non-intellectually exclusive, deeply ethnographic, highly reflexive and focused upon embodied experience). Finally, I look at recent discussions within the anthropology of Christianity dealing specifically with the issue of God ‘speaking’ (Luhmann 2012; Cannell 2014; Stromberg 2014). Here, I argue that phenomenological approaches that attend to embodied experience (e.g. Csordas 1988, 1994 etc.), combined with recent challenges to methodological atheism (Bialecki 2014), have created a space for the possibility of including God as a social agent within the field of study.

### **Secularisms, the Senses and Anthropology**

In 2012, the broader context of my thesis writing was early twenty-first century Britain. Britain, as a modern secular country with the state linked to the Church but with the majority of its inhabitants expressing little or no religious commitment, manifests a particular ‘type’ of secularism. Talal Asad (2003) points out that ‘secularisms’ are historically situated and generated. The secularisms of France, Britain and America, for example, although having much in common, also express significant structural and imaginal differences (ibid.:5-6). Asad distinguishes the political doctrine of “secularism” from the epistemic category of “the secular” (ibid.:1). On the one hand, British secularism, as a political doctrine, may be seen to trace its origins back through nineteenth-century liberal society (ibid.:24) to Western Christendom’s attempts to deal with religious and political conflict from the sixteenth century onwards (Bangstad 2009:189). It is a means by which the modern nation-state seeks to define its citizens in terms that transcend articulations of the self through class, gender or religion (Asad 2003:5). The epistemic category of “the secular”, on the other hand, is formed through “a variety of concepts, practices, and sensibilities” coming together over time (ibid.:16). It is created through being placed in conceptual opposition to “the religious” (Ibid.:25), although both “the secular” and “the religious” remain fluid categories invested with varying meanings through social time and space (Asad 2002[1982]:115-116).

Asad suggests that, among other things, any analysis of secularism should begin with a curiosity regarding attitudes to the body and the structuring of the senses (Asad 2003:17). In this regard, the emergence of modern ‘scientific’ knowledge as an authoritative system within secular society can also be linked to a particular historical structuring of the senses by which ‘facts’ were to become established through empirical observation – that which was perceived through the commonly accepted sensorium of the five bodily senses (Chalmers 1999). However, Constance Classen (1993) points out that what seems a ‘natural’ ordering of the senses around physical, bodily organs is equally a matter of cultural construction. By introducing both historical and cross-cultural perspectives, Classen shows that the notion of there being five senses is by no means the only possible way of understanding, and conceiving, the sensorium. Other cultures not only have different numbers of senses, but also different ways of ordering and structuring them (ibid.:1). Almost arbitrarily requiring a relationship between the senses and the five ancient elements, it was Aristotle, Classen tells us (ibid.:2), who decided that there could be no more than five senses, his authority establishing such a numbering within the Western tradition. Subsequently, Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Descartes began to distinguish ‘mental’ from ‘sensory’ faculties, considering the latter as “purely physical mechanisms... [in other words] simply different modalities for conveying information about the physical world to the mind” (ibid.:4). In this way, Classen states, sensory perception came to be regarded as natural, rather than cultural, a conception which remains at the heart of modern ‘scientific’ understandings today (ibid.). Such a structuring of the senses, I would argue, has had the effect of generating an authoritative knowledge system based upon strongly ‘materialist’ perspectives that exclude other ways in which things might be ‘sensed’. It is within the social context of this particular knowledge system that my describing *feeling and hearing the Spirit speak* sounds particularly strange, and marks it out, within secular society, as an expression of an ‘alternative’ type knowledge. In brief, it appeals to a sensorium that extends beyond the commonly accepted corporeal sensorium (see Howes 2009; Gavriluk & Coakley 2012) by which the legitimate knowledge of a scientifically supported, secular society is created and sustained.

Anthropology, of course, is a child of modern secular thought. It emerged within the context of post-Enlightenment worldviews (Evans-Pritchard 1962; Stewart 2001:325; Kapferer 2001:341), which, more often than not, were happy to epistemologically

explain away any knowledge of the supernatural (Turner 1969:4). Crafting the new social sciences as distinctively secular, Durkheim, Mauss and Weber, Fenella Cannell observes, each wrote with a distinctly modernist tone as those who were living “just *after* religion” (Cannell 2006:1-2). Hence, Durkheim saw God as merely “a figurative expression of... society” (Durkheim 1965[1915]:226), whilst another key authority figure within the emergent social sciences, Karl Marx, dismissed the divine as simply “illusory” (Marx 1978[1843-1844]:54, both cited in West 2007). Embedded within this social and historical context, anthropology, Cannell states, “sometimes seems exaggeratedly resistant to the possibility of taking seriously the religious experience of others” (Cannell 2006:3), repeatedly gravitating toward explaining religious phenomena in terms of underlying sociological, political or economic factors (see also Stewart 2001:326-327). Evans-Pritchard, who converted to Catholicism after the Second World War, famously pronounced anthropology a thoroughly secularist discipline (Evans-Pritchard 1962, cited in Stewart 2001:327).

At the Sixth Biennial EASA Conference in Krakow (2000), Charles Stewart initiated a roundtable discussion centred upon the issue of whether secularism has impeded anthropological research (Stewart 2001). Interestingly, a number of the responses highlight many of the *positive* aspects of secularism. Pina-Cabral (2001) argues that secularism as a political ideal – that of “absolute freedom of expression and of the equality of rights independently of religious affiliation” – constitutes the most favourable political environment within which anthropology can flourish (ibid.:331-332; see also Yalçın-Heckmann 2001). Gellner (2001) makes a similar point. Citing the example of Nepal, in which religious and ethnic minorities are pitted against a privileged Hindu state, he argues, by contrast, that anthropology, “the project of sympathetically conveying and analysing other systems of thought, including religious systems... is one that could only have arisen in, and can only be perpetuated in, a moderately secular environment” (ibid.:340). Finally, Kapferer (2001) argues that, despite the fact that it has often been “committed to demonstrating the power of its secular thought” and bending all forms of practice to a demythologised western rationality, anthropology is, in fact, “secularism’s doubt” (ibid.:342). Ironically, this “doubt” finds its source in Enlightenment thought, the birthplace of a particular genre of modern secularism. In anthropology, Kapferer argues, through the co-joining of a Cartesian notion of radical doubt with the willingness to suspend disbelief when

encountering the lived worlds of others, ontological certainty is constantly de-centred and the possibility of alternative interpretations and understandings is continually left open. Kapferer thus presents an image of anthropology as an ‘open’ scientific practice which is “antagonistic to closure” (ibid.:343), and which is the enemy of the pernicious side of secularism which he defines as “blind faith” and “the new form of the religious” (ibid.). Anthropology, Kapferer argues, opposes a “religious secularism... that refuses to relinquish its hold on reality” and which reduces all difference to “what it already reckons the ‘truth’ to be” (ibid.:344). Therefore, within the very practice of its secularity, anthropology continually strives to break out of a limiting secularism blind to its own prejudice (ibid.).

Stewart (2001) shifts this discussion toward those anthropologists who either “ordinarily embrace religion in their lives” or have “religious experiences during fieldwork” (ibid.:325). Where do such people, he asks, fit within such a strongly ‘secularist’ discipline (and here Stewart is presumably referring to the ‘heavier’, ‘closed’ type of secularity that Kapferer opposes)? Within such a context, do religious convictions need to be set aside, or can such anthropologists “begin to factor their own religious backgrounds, beliefs and experiences into their research and writing?” (ibid.). He wonders what compromises those from other religious traditions have already needed to make in order to fit into anthropology’s mainstream form (ibid.:326), concluding that, in an epistemological environment of increased reflexivity, these questions *need* to be addressed. “At the moment,” he writes, “we assume that people with strong religious convictions must lose these before they can properly do anthropology. It might be, however, that we could learn much from the studies of committed Christians, Muslims, Hindus or even Wiccans” (ibid.:328). Stewart’s challenge highlights not only the presence within anthropology of an authoritative knowledge potentially working to silence the expression of other types of knowing that don’t fit within its own epistemological paradigm, but also the pressing need to question such a system. Established upon secularist ideals, the ‘open’ anthropology of Kapferer’s design might have the power to do just this. We turn now to another recent debate that carries the potential of having the same effect.

## Challenges of the ‘Ontological Turn’

Henare, Holbraad and Wastell (2007) propose that when an ethnographic encounter produces something that appears at first incomprehensible (for instance, the Spirit speaking), rather than retreating onto the safer ground of more “familiar [analytical] conceptions” – and thus explaining away the phenomenon – it signals an opportunity for new theoretical understandings to emerge *from the situation itself*. They propose taking “*things* encountered in the field as they present themselves” so allowing the “material... itself [to] enunciate meanings” (ibid.:2-4). Thus, when Holbraad encounters the “powerful powder” of Cuban diviners, or indeed the indigenous notion that a “stone is a person” (Alberti et al. 2011:903), the challenge to him, and subsequently to readers of his account, is not to resort to symbolic interpretations and explanations of how powder could possibly *be thought of* as powerful, or of how stones could *represent* people – and in so doing rendering the bizarre and uncanny ‘safe’ – but rather to *conceive* a world in which powder *is* power and stones *are* people. “Instead of seeing this as a problem of interpretation,” they write, “that is, of expanding familiar categories to illuminate unfamiliar instances, we suggest that it might rather be treated as one of assembling a satisfactory description – if it seems odd that powder should be power, the problem is ‘ours’ and not ‘theirs’” (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007:6).

The work of Henare, Holbraad and Wastell, and what has become more broadly known as the ‘ontological turn’, received much of its original inspiration from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s (1998) classic exegesis of Amerindian ‘perspectivism’. One of the central messages of this work is that the *position* from which something is ‘seen’ is everything, a characteristic which is vividly illustrated in Amerindian thought in which reality is apprehended differently “from distinct points of view” (ibid.:469). An Amerindian human being, Viveiros de Castro tells us, in normal circumstances, sees “humans as humans, animals as animals, and spirits (if they see them) as spirits” (ibid.:470). Animals and spirits, however, always see *themselves* as humans, as living in villages, experiencing culture and eating human food. Therefore, what appears as blood to an Amerindian human being appears as manioc beer (a human food) to a jaguar; what the former sees as maggots in rotting meat appears to a vulture as grilled

fish (ibid.:470). In short, animals see themselves as human, and their world as a human world.

Part of the implicit – and critical – message of Viveiros de Castro's work is that Amerindians have often been better at conceiving other beings' possible perspectives than anthropologists have. If an Amerindian lives in a world where animals, spirits and humans all see themselves as human from their own point of view, the best way for us to understand that world is not to translate it into our own terms, but rather to situate ourselves within an Amerindian perspective in the same way that an Amerindian respectively situates himself within an animal or spirit perspective in order to understand *their* world. From the others' point of view, their world – and the actions resulting from it (for example the employment of various rituals around the eating of certain animal meats in order to avoid cannibalism) – makes sense. Henare, Holbraad and Wastell take this methodology to its logical conclusion. In starting from the 'native's' point of view, and in seeking to avoid mere translation, they suggest that we conceive others' articulations not merely as "*cultural perspectives or beliefs*" but "as enunciations of different *worlds or natures*" (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007:10). They state that we are talking here about more than just different "worldviews" (an epistemological argument); rather we are talking about different "worlds" (an ontological argument).

They thus use the term "world" in a *strong* sense, for the implication of their approach is that there is not just *one world* which is seen from many points of view, but rather that there are, indeed, "*many worlds*" (ibid.:12). Methodologically (and methodology is their primary interest) the idea of "many worlds" is a powerful analytical tool, as it takes alterity seriously and, in so doing, has the potential of not merely explaining it away. It forces the anthropologist, and subsequently the reader, to attempt to conceive reality from a different place. For me, such an approach is potentially helpful in communicating 'a world' in which the Spirit speaks. Taking up an ontological approach, my challenge is "one of assembling a satisfactory description" (ibid.:6). The subsequent challenge for the reader is to imaginatively conceive such a world. Through this process, the confrontation with alterity, so indicative of the anthropological fieldwork experience itself, is moved from the fieldsite – that safely remote location of the 'other' – into the much closer relational space of the text. Henare, Holbraad and

Wastell suggest that such an approach not only avoids explaining away alterity, but also has the potential to “unleash” the very power of that alterity in order both to challenge existing theories and to advance new ones (Fowles 2011:906 in Alberti et al. 2011).

### **Critiques of the ‘Ontological Turn’**

The ‘ontological turn’ has not been without its critics. Evan Killick (2014), though supportive of the political perspective upon which the movement appears to be based, nonetheless questions the particular trajectory that it has taken. On a positive front, he sees the taking seriously of “alternative visions of the world” as “a political act, countering a history of colonialism and exploitation” which has often been exercised through “subordinat[ing] all others to a particular understanding of the world” and “explain[ing] their actions and beliefs from that perspective.” At the same time, in a critique of Holbraad’s book *Truth in Motion* (2012), Killick questions whether the analysis is being driven by the author’s own “intellectual pursuit” rather than by any *real* interest in the lives and practices of his research participants. He notes that the voices of the latter rarely filter through into Holbraad’s text, leaving the reader with an uneasy sense of uncertainty as to whether the ideas being presented really *do* fit with local indigenous perspectives. Further to this, Killick argues that a narrow focus upon one “point of ultimate alterity”, the fixing of a particular understanding of this point as if it were uniformly shared by local participants, and the emphasis upon a radical alterity which can *only* be explained through new concepts, open up Holbraad’s methodology and writing to accusations of both essentialism and exoticism. Drawing upon his own experience of Amerindians’ perspectival ideas, Killick suggests that the complex realities of ‘belief’ and ‘unbelief’ in which people *actually* live are not as neatly demarcated as Holbraad’s philosophically purifying and reifying method seems to imply. He observes that people often live in more liminal grey areas, holding an explicit tension between different ideas of that which is. This observation leads Killick to question whether, for any particular group, “a single, internally logical system of thought” – the very thing that Holbraad seems so keen to develop – “actually exists.” Following from this, he proposes that, in suggesting that he has developed a ‘true’ understanding of what is going on, Holbraad is in danger of the very same intellectual imperialism that he appears to be fighting against.



The remedy for these weaknesses, Killick argues – agreeing with Michael Carrithers (2010:196) – is found in ethnography. Ethnography, according to Killick, has already shown how Amerindian perspectival thought and practices are, in reality, much more complex than “the basic philosophical inversions that lie at the heart of Viveiros de Castro’s work.” It is ethnography, Killick states – “the actual words, actions and ideas of other people” – which has the power to generate “alternative versions that are much more complex and novel than anything ‘we’ can dream up.” And it is the lack of ethnography in Holbraad’s work that Killick sees as its greatest weakness. Drawing upon Tim Ingold, he emphasises that perhaps the greatest strength of anthropology – over philosophy – is its ability to enlist ‘the help of ordinary people’ (Ingold 1992:695-6), thereby reducing its intellectual exclusivity. And yet, contrary to this, through prioritising ‘ideas’ over and above the people who ‘hold’ them (Holbraad 2010:185), Holbraad explicitly pushes anthropology in the very direction of philosophy. “[I]n taking the people out [of anthropology],” Killick writes, “Holbraad loses his possible interlocutors who might limit his reification and exoticisation of their concepts beyond any emic recognition.”

Jon Mitchell’s (2015) critique of the ‘ontological turn’ comes from a slightly different angle. He summarises the self-proclaimed task of anthropologists within the ‘ontological turn’ as follows: “[They] suggest that rather than representing something else, we should take... apparently irrational beliefs at face value... The task of anthropologists is not to ‘interpret’ such beliefs or representations, but to think our way into a position from which we can acknowledge they are right, using this confrontation with radical alterity to reconfigure anthropological theorization.” He also, like Killick, notes the political aspect of this ‘recursive’ (Holbraad 2012) anthropological approach: “Rather than abstaining from truth-judgements, as does constructivism, recursive anthropology inverts them, seeing *others’* worlds as true, not ‘our’ interpretations of them. Where naturalism privileges the truth-claims of ‘science’, recursive anthropology seeks to ‘affirm the indigenous perspective *as against* that of the anthropologist’ (Holbraad 2012: 47 – [Mitchell’s] emphasis). If ‘we’ cannot understand ‘them’, then ‘we’ must find new ways of thinking” (Mitchell 2015). And yet, what does this process produce, if not ethnographic ‘representations’ of others’ worlds?

Holbraad (2012) argues that what we create in ethnography is not a representation, but

something completely new. Following Wagner (1981), he argues that through the ethnographic process we are to inventively define ('infinite') worlds, a process not so much of representing others' worlds, but of bringing new worlds into being. Although Mitchell sees this as a positive step in overcoming "conceptual rigidities", he perceives a problem in "the assumption that the processes of infinity are primarily conceptual, rather than perceptual – products of cognitive activity rather than the immediacy of human experience." "Infinity," Mitchell argues, "is a philosopher's mode of 'thinking through' that assumes that others also engage primarily in 'thinking through' the problems of the cosmos." And it is from here that Mitchell's primary critique of the 'ontological turn' emerges. "The ontological turn's philosophical solution to the problem of alterity," he writes, "...generates its own distancing from experience." And human experience, as we shall see, is much richer and deeper than that which can be contained within, and expressed through, conceptual logic.

In response, Mitchell proposes a "phenomenological solution" summed up in his notion of "mimesis". Mimesis is more than just copying; it is a generative form of "creative appropriation" in which an actor makes something his or her own, resulting in the creation of something completely new. Citing Bourdieu, Mitchell suggests that, in performance, the actual workings of mimesis most often take place sub-consciously: "The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life" (Bourdieu 1990:73 cited in Mitchell 2015). Mitchell takes as his example the case of Angelik Caruana, a Maltese man who, after noticing, in 2006, that his wife's statue of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception had begun to weep tears, began to experience visitations from the Virgin Mary. Since then, every week at a shrine outside his town, Angelik has received messages and visions, which are later conveyed to onlookers. Alongside this, he continues intermittently to experience the presence of a guardian angel, battles against satanic forces and the pain of Christ's passion. Mitchell effectively explains Angelik's experiences in terms of mimetic performance. Angelik, having lived his whole life within a Catholic Maltese context where statues are associated with both power and presence (Mitchell 2010) – and in which visions are an ontological possibility – himself continues to experience and constitute this world through his "encounters and interactions with such media of presence" (Mitchell 2015). "Angelik," Mitchell writes, "does not enact the pain of the passion, satanic attack, etc.

so much as embody them, making them his own, mimetically. Through taking on the postures of Our Lady and the crucified Christ, he experiences their presence within and through him. His performance, then, crosses a boundary, from accommodation to appropriation...”

It is this creative and constitutive aspect, deeply rooted in personal life history and experience, that Mitchell emphasises, and which he claims is not accounted for through the ontographic method. The latter presumes that “the processes inherent in belief are primarily conceptual” and that they can therefore be accurately re-framed through conceptual (and often philosophically inspired) inventive definitions. For Mitchell, however, it is primarily through practice and experience that people establish a sense of what is true, and not necessarily through a strict adherence to doctrine or “categorical logic”. Holbraad’s ontological method doesn’t account for the mimetic and embodied role that experience plays in the way that social actors constitute the realities within which they live. Nor, according to Vigh and Sausdal, in its regression to a type of “positivist empiricism” (Vigh & Sausdal 2014:60), does it generally offer reflexively nuanced accounts. Mitchell therefore advocates a methodological approach that is committed to examining “embodied process[es], rooted in practice and performance”, and which returns us “towards an understanding of the experiential, or existential, grounds of religiosity.”

Following these critiques, we might say that the proponents of the ‘ontological turn’ have raised, once more, the important issue of dealing with alterity, without necessarily providing a comprehensive solution. In starting from material encountered in the field and allowing theory to be built from this place, the movement echoes a kind of “grounded theory” (see Corbin & Holt 2005; Milliken 1999). Yet the philosophical trajectory upon which it embarks is ‘radically’ different from the latter in that, ironically, it appears to steer us further *away* from the lived worlds of participants. However, like Favret-Saada’s and Stoller’s work, the movement *does* challenge us to take seriously the lives of others, and this in itself can be fruitfully employed to work against the kind of closure that derives from reductionist accounts. This kind of ‘open’ anthropology, however, might only be possible through incorporating the criticisms raised against the movement and thereby setting a new trajectory, one that is non-intellectually exclusive, deeply ethnographic (Killick 2014), highly reflexive (Vigh &

Sausdal 2014) and focused upon embodied experience (Mitchell 2015). It is upon such characteristics that I have sought to build my thesis.

### **‘God Speaks’: The Anthropology of Christianity**

Fenella Cannell names Christianity as “the last major area of religious activity to be explored in ethnographic writing” (Cannell 2006:8) and Joel Robbins, writing in 2010, describes the anthropology of Christianity as “largely a product of the last decade” (Robbins 2010:635). Cannell notes that, in a context of “disciplinary nervousness about religious experience in general, the topic of Christianity has provoked more anxiety than most other religious topics” (Cannell 2006:3). Certainly, the notion of ‘going native’ amongst Christian groups has been heavily tabooed. Susan Harding (2000), researching amongst Christian fundamentalists in the 1980s, was warned by colleagues about the “dangers” of doing “this kind of fieldwork” (ibid.:58), such warnings causing her to think that her “credibility [as an anthropologist] depended on... resisting any experience of born-again belief” (ibid.). Anxieties about religious experience have surely not aided the task of taking seriously the lived worlds of Christians, especially when such worlds include sensorial engagements with transcendent dimensions that may engender a sense of discomfort amongst the more ‘secularly-grounded’.

Thomas Csordas (1988, 1994, 1997a, 1997b) represents one of the longest-standing anthropologists of the Christian domain, his studies beginning in 1973 amongst the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement (1997a:xii). Though not a ‘believer’ himself (Csordas 1997a), his work displays a deep respect for the people amongst whom he has researched. He outlines one of the tasks of ethnography as being to show how people who “might be regarded by many as ‘religious weirdos’ are [in fact] quite like ourselves” (ibid.:xii). Csordas employs a phenomenological approach. “[O]ne of the main aims of anthropologists drawing from phenomenological methods,” write Desjarlais and Throop (2011:88-89), “has been to bracket the assumptions that come from their own cultural and theoretical heritages in trying to understand more accurately and more fully a diverse number of cultural and experiential phenomena.” In employing a phenomenological approach that attends to embodied experience (Csordas 1988:122), Csordas works with a methodological toolkit that steers the researcher

toward taking seriously the lived world of his research participants, a world that, in Csordas' case, often includes experiences of transcendent entities. Alongside this, Csordas has maintained a relational longevity with the people amongst whom he has conducted his research, the result being, I would suggest, that within a context of mutual respect, such people's lives are increasingly difficult to subject to reductionist accounts.

The issue of religious experience among Christians, and in particular the experience of hearing God's voice, has been raised most recently by Tanya Luhrmann (2012) in her widely acclaimed book *When God talks back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. Working among Vineyard churches in Chicago and California, part of the 'new evangelicals' movement (Cannell 2014), Luhrmann examines how church members cultivate the sense of a personal relationship with Jesus as someone both imagined, yet real. Luhrmann locates Vineyard Christians within a much longer tradition of 'kataphatic' prayer, a tradition that emphasises the development of the imagination alongside sensory experiences of Christ. She argues that, through the practice of this kind of prayer, Vineyard Christians change their perceptions of the world, and develop an increased experience of a relationship with Jesus as a person. Peter Stromberg (2014) points out that there is the potential here to seem reductionist, as if hearing God's voice for Vineyard Christians is "nothing more than an illusion fostered by a particular set of prayer practices" (ibid.:219). But Luhrmann, Stromberg states, is careful to avoid this step. She asserts that her explanations of how 'kataphatic' prayer 'works' – through a process of what she calls 'absorption' – are "fully compatible with both secular and supernaturalist understandings of God" (Luhrmann 2012:223, cited in Stromberg 2014:219). Explaining how 'kataphatic' prayer increases, psychologically, the likelihood of church members hearing God's voice is in no way to suggest that that voice is not real.

Taking his cue from Luhrmann's book, Jon Bialecki (2014) states that anthropology, generally speaking, and most especially the anthropology of religion, has not been good at talking about God. This is partly due, he believes, to the fact that methodological atheism, "the imperative that all religious concepts and social institutions be considered human externalizations" (ibid.:33; see also West 2007), has, until now, been the default position within the discipline. God's surprising absence in the anthropology of religion, in the anthropology of Christianity, and, most specifically, Pentecostal and Charismatic

Christianity, is, according to Bialecki, “a lacuna that needs to be addressed” (Bialecki 2014:33). Following a Latourian-inspired object-oriented ontology,<sup>1</sup> he imagines what it might mean for anthropologists to *include* God as a social actor within their studies. One surprising effect, he suggests, might be that ethnographic accounts of social processes “come to more closely resemble the way that these movements are both understood and experienced by the ethnographer’s subjects” themselves (ibid.:43). Bialecki is interested in the way that “God works on” human subjects, “the procedures through which God is accessed by believers”, and “the phenomenal, evidential, or practice-based aspect of how [people] relate to, and interpret, God” (ibid.:39). These aspects he finds absent in most anthropological accounts of Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Evangelical Christianity, and yet refreshingly present in Luhrmann’s study. He asks what could be done in the future by an anthropology willing to include entities *beyond* “anthropos” (ibid.:43), an issue with which, he states, the anthropology of religion has yet to grapple.

These three debates – concerning the relationship between secularism and anthropology, the challenges that have arisen from the ‘ontological turn’, and of how the anthropology of Christianity might grapple with God speaking – together have created a discursive space in which an anthropologist *describing* the Spirit speaking to him creates a particularly interesting, and perhaps timely, event. In my thesis, in order to ‘take seriously’ a world in which the Spirit speaks, I employ a highly reflexive approach that focuses upon embodied experience and I appeal to a sensorium that extends beyond the corporeal senses, whilst also seeking to convey this world through vivid ethnographic description. My approach is ‘autobiographical’ (Okely & Callaway 1992), stemming from a desire to make the most of my own unique positionality as someone seeking to practise anthropology from within a particular type of Christian faith. In 1995, in my final year of study as an anthropology undergraduate at Cambridge, I underwent a powerful conversion experience, in which I ‘sensed’ God in a way that I had not done up to that point in my life. From an anthropological perspective, I have chosen to frame this significant event, with its strongly phenomenological aspects, as an entry point into my fieldsite, that site being a distinct ‘world’ of Christian faith and practice. As I have

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<sup>1</sup> See Bialecki’s article (2014) for an expanded explanation. My reference to Bialecki is not so much to do with taking up his theoretical approach, but more to do with the fact that authoritative voices within the anthropology of Christianity are, for a variety of reasons, considering this issue and suggesting ways of moving the study of Christianity forward.

subjected my conversion to further anthropological and sociological analysis, I have developed other framings too. My conversion may also be conceived as an entry into an alternative knowledge system, or as an entry into a charismatic relationship, in the Weberian sense, with a divine Other. The latter, in fact, implies the former, and it is to an exploration of the theoretical framework of the charismatic relation that I now turn.

## **Jesus and the Charismatic Relation**

Max Weber distinguishes three types of legitimate authority: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. Firstly, the legitimacy of *rational-legal* authority, according to Weber (1968a:46), is based upon the belief, both by those exercising authority and by those subject to it, in the “legality” of normative rules and the “right” of those raised to positions of authority to issue commands. In rational-legal authority, obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal order and, by extension, to those who exercise authority within its offices. Secondly, the legitimacy of *traditional* authority rests on the belief in “the sanctity of immemorial traditions” (ibid.) and the “right” of those upon whom these traditions convey authority, to rule. In traditional authority, obedience is a matter of personal loyalty to the person occupying the traditionally sanctioned position of authority. Finally, and relevant to my own study, the legitimacy of *charismatic* authority rests upon the devotion given, by those subject to its authority, to a specific person and “the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (ibid., Weber’s gendering). In charismatic authority, obedience is freely given to the charismatically qualified leader, and is an issue of “personal trust in him and his revelation” (ibid.:47).

Theories of charisma have, understandably, most often been applied to the relationship between humans and physically embodied political and religious leaders (e.g. Lindholm 1990, 2002; Csordas 1997a; Siegler 2002; Kamau 2002; Seale-Collazo 2012; Faubion 2013). But this need not always be the case. Drawing on Shils (1975), Thomas Csordas argues that charisma may be attributed to ‘objects’ other than just human beings (Csordas 1997a:137). “Charisma,” Shils writes (1975:127), “...is the quality which is imputed to persons, actions, roles, institutions, symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with “ultimate”, “fundamental”, “vital”, order-determining

power” (cited in Csordas 1997a:138). Here, both Shils and Csordas are following a Durkheimian line of thought, in which a symbolic ‘object’ is endowed, by the group, with supernatural or sacred qualities (see Lindholm 1990:31-32); this in contrast to a Weberian perspective where charisma is understood to be almost an innate quality of the person. And yet, to put it in these terms is to perhaps oversimplify the difference between Durkheim and Weber. The latter was certainly also aware of the *relational* aspect of charisma, arguing that charisma refers to “a certain quality of an individual personality” by virtue of which “he is set apart from ordinary man and *treated as* endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (Weber 1968b:48, my italics). “It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority,” Weber reminds us (ibid.:49), “which is decisive for the validity of charisma.” Bellah takes this line of argument a step further, arguing that charisma, being a relational concept, only actually “comes into existence... when it is recognized by a group” (Bellah 1970:7-8, cited in Csordas 1997a:137).

The anthropologist Charles Lindholm (1990) traces two emergent perspectives within Western thought which view charisma either in a positive or unrelentingly negative light. The first, already mentioned, emerges within sociological discourse and finds its roots in the thought of Weber and Durkheim. As we have seen, Weber attributes much of the effectiveness and energy of charisma to the radiance of the charismatic leader. Durkheim, on the other hand, locates this energy in the “collective effervescence” (Durkheim 1965[1915]:140 cited in Lindholm 1990:31) created by the group. According to Durkheim, this “physical experience of exaltation, intoxication and self-loss” (Lindholm 1990:31) becomes focused upon a symbolic object. This object – which may, in fact, be a person – is often endowed with supernatural qualities; although, for Durkheim, this is merely society mistakenly regarding “the mirror in which it views itself as the source of illumination” (ibid.:32). For both Weber and Durkheim, although the charismatic relation may be susceptible to excess, it is ultimately perceived as a “fountainhead of hope and faith, offering the felt truth of a better world” (ibid.:35).

The second perspective Lindholm traces finds its roots in the thought of crowd psychologists such as Tarde and Le Bon. Le Bon believed that a passive crowd, desiring domination, will instinctively follow anyone who appears larger-than-life,



employs emotionally charged rhetoric, and expresses intense beliefs (ibid.:42), the reason being that the members of the crowd have a fundamental desire to be formed into a unified shape. The charismatic leader, for his part, intuitively and dexterously ‘mirrors’ the innermost desires of the crowd and focuses their attention, thus stimulating their compulsive imitation and slavish worship (ibid.:42-44). This line of thought was further developed by Freud, who believed that crowds in a “primitive” state of consciousness “hunger for a hypnotic charismatic leader who will provide them with a point of absolute authority” (ibid.:52). Through the lenses of both Freud and the crowd psychologists, the charismatic leader appears as a “ruthless and overweening egoist, who by his very vainglory attracts the admiration of the humble members of the herd” (ibid.). Drawing upon Freud’s theory of romantic love – in which the isolated self experiences merger with another – Lindholm further suggests that part of the attraction of charisma for the follower is the grandiose and vitalising fusion he or she experiences with the leader, even as the self is lost in adoration and worship (ibid.:57-60).

Within these two streams of thought we get two very differently tinged perspectives upon charisma. Whereas the sociological perspective sees within charisma the potential for vitalising creativity and social reform, the psychological perspective sees egotistical and delusional psychosis in the leader, and regressive and infantile dependency in the followers: “the group and the leader are envisioned not as healthy, but as fundamentally diseased” (ibid.:67). Sociological perspectives attribute such a negative valuation of charisma to a process of rationalisation within a broader society wishing to protect itself from social critique. These perspectives thus tend to emphasise the *rationality* of charismatic action, even though this rationality may be of a different *type* from that expressed within the broader society. Furthermore, sociological emphases upon the experienced atomisation and isolation of modern society, in which possessive individualism and self-aggrandisement are the norm, help to further explain the attraction people might feel toward charismatic groups that offer what the broader society cannot deliver – affective and close-knit experiences of community. Since, following Durkheim, communal experience is seen as essentially healthy, the sociological perspective inverts the psychological perspective – not the charismatic group itself, but “modern society, in so far as it disallows community, is diseased” (ibid.:71-72).

Yet, even these positive sociological perspectives upon charisma have been swept aside, Lindholm states, by the direction mass movements have taken in the modern era (ibid.:89). Indeed, the examples that Lindholm goes on to explore do paint an overwhelmingly negative picture of charismatic involvement that seem to play out the crowd psychologists' worst nightmares: the charismatic fervour emerging around the figure of Adolf Hitler, the paranoid violence carried out by the cultic group surrounding Charles Manson, and the mass suicides associated with the persuasive but confused figure of Jim Jones. In fact, it is intriguing that Lindholm selects these particular case studies, as his project may be conceived, to some degree, as an attempt to make rational sense of situations and actions that appear, from the point of view of 'rational' society, to be completely rationally senseless. The only place that Lindholm locates a more positive Durkheimian manifestation of charisma is among the pre-modern shamanistic practices of societies such as the !Kung.

At the heart of my argument is that being a contemporary disciple of Jesus *essentially* represents a charismatic relationship. This relationship undoubtedly involves many of the elements that Lindholm has identified in charismatic relationships, some of which are drawn from Freud: devotion, worship, experiences of merger and loss of self, etc. All the Christians I know would be equally horrified by the atrocities of Nazi Germany, the paranoid violence of the Manson Family, and the senseless self-annihilation of Jim Jones and his disciples. And yet, I think many would also agree that their relationship with Jesus is equally charismatic in nature. This then causes us to put forward the suggestion that, although charismatic relationships may have many similar characteristics, the actual *substance* of the charismatic relation – how it is, in fact, embodied in thought, practice and action – is very much contingent both upon *who* is leading, and *how* the followers express their following. For example, both Gandhi and Hitler were charismatic leaders, and yet being a 'disciple' of Gandhi resulted in a very different charismatic manifestation from being a 'disciple' of Hitler. James Faubion argues that many of the portraits that we have of charismatic authority are, in fact, too "muscular" in nature to "be fully inclusive of all of the modulations of charismatic authority itself" (Faubion 2013:297). In other words, not every charismatic leader fits the crowd psychologists' mould of the "ruthless and overweening egoist" (Lindholm 1990:52).

My thesis is that a certain type of Christian faith, of which my own is one example, may be understood in terms of being a charismatic relationship with a divine Other, or, to be even more specific, with Jesus. Csordas, taking a Durkheimian stance, would perhaps understand this in terms of the processes by which Jesus, as an imagined symbolic or sacred object, is imputed with supernatural, life-giving qualities by those entering the charismatic relation. He would no doubt be interested in the rhetorical processes by which certain people attribute charisma to Jesus, and by which Jesus, as a symbolic object, is “elevated to a charismatic status through the influence on [him] of others’ rhetoric” (Csordas 1997a:141). But, as is perhaps clear from my thesis so far, my own perspective, and argument, is more ontological in nature. Experimenting with the frame of the secular, building upon the challenges of the ‘ontological turn’ to take alterity *as it is*, and responding to Bialecki’s musings about what an anthropology willing to include entities *beyond* “anthropos” (Bialecki 2014:43) might look like, my thesis is built upon a consideration of Christian faith *as a charismatic relationship with a divine Other*, where that Other is understood as being a social actor, just as real, present and active as any other social actor within the field of study. Such an approach is, indeed, experimental, and responds to Charles Stewart’s (2001) question as to what happens when those with “strong religious convictions” begin to practise anthropology without feeling that they need to lose, or perhaps hide, those convictions.

## Thesis Structure

This thesis is a reflexive exploration of Christian experience. As such, it begins with an in-depth exploration of *my own* experience, particularly as this relates to my own ‘entry’ into the alternative knowledge system of Christian faith. Through a detailed analysis of my conversion, I not only identify charismatic devotion to a divine Other as being at the core of my own faith, but also begin to unravel the ways in which *stories* and *senses* played a significant part in constituting that relation. Drawing on anthropological work on the senses (Classen 1993; Classen & Howes 1996; Howes 2009; Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012) and stories and metaphor (Fernandez 1972, 1974, 1986; Lakoff & Johnson 2003[1980]; Ingold 2000a, 2011), and combining sociological theories on charisma (Weber 1978[1968], 1968a, 1968b, 1968c; Eisenstadt 1968; Shils 1975) with theories on ‘belief’ and ‘faith’ (Ruel 2002[1982]; Lindquist & Coleman 2008; Pouillon

1982[1979]; Cox 2009; Fowler 1995[1981]; Tillich 1957) I examine the processes by which Jesus became the charismatic ‘object’ of my devotion. The central issue within such a relation, I argue, is that the charismatic ‘object’ is experienced and conceived as a vital source of *Life*.

Next, I begin to turn the anthropological gaze away from myself to look at what the lives of others, who express a similar ‘type’ of Christian faith, tell us about this charismatic relation. I focus upon Dave and Lynn Webb, with whom I moved to Thessaloniki, Greece, in 1998 as part of a Christian ‘apostolic’ team. Based around two life-story interviews, I explore the recurrent themes that emerge in Dave and Lynn’s lives. I observe how, at the core of their ideology, is a notion of ‘openness’. The charismatic relation, for Dave and Lynn, entails ‘openness’ to a divine Other. As ‘the heart’ remains open to the convivial intrusions of this divine Other, a transformational ‘journey’ results. This ‘journey’, for Dave and Lynn, is the adventure of faith. Through the analysis, I deepen an exploration of *perception*, particularly as this relates to the ‘spiritual senses’ and to what I call an ‘extended sensorium’ (Howes 2009; Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012; Lootens 2012), and *conception*, particularly as this relates to stories and metaphor (Fernandez 1972, 1974, 1986; Lakoff & Johnson 2003[1980]). Building upon Lakoff and Johnson’s work, and drawing on Fernandez, I argue that biblical narratives often provide concrete metaphorical images (Fernandez 1972:43, 1974:123) that are appropriated by social actors within processes of becoming, being employed to both situate the self and metaphorically to translate convincing, often sensorial, experiences of the divine from one domain of experience to another (Fernandez 1972:46). I look at these processes in Dave’s, Lynn’s and my own life.

Next, after painting a brief picture of how our life in the Balkans developed in the years post-1998, I turn to look at the life of David Carter, an English man who, in 2003, came to join our team living in Greece. This move entailed a significant personal transition for David, and I draw upon anthropological (Van Gennep 1960[1908]; Turner 1967, 1969; Turner & Turner 1978) and sociologically and psychologically influenced theological theory (Fowler 1995[1981]) in order to frame, understand and communicate some key aspects of this transition. In respect to the latter, and given the significance of a ‘journey’ metaphor within our own group’s ideology, I employ James Fowler’s (1995) developmental faith-stage framework in order, not only to elucidate David’s experience,

but also to communicate something of the value that our faith-group puts upon spiritual ‘movement’, transformation and change. The ‘journey’ metaphor, in this respect, is employed to both express and communicate social actors’ experience of the charismatic relation, while at the same time encouraging a transient attitude toward certain aspects of life (i.e. certain trajectories) that might hinder such a relation. Through painting a picture of how our relational ‘web’ developed post-1998, I seek to show how our group’s sociality progressed along lines of relational ‘openness’, which David’s story exemplifies.

This stands in stark contrast to the situation described in the final part of the thesis. Here, I recount my return to the Balkans at the start of 2011, in order to commence eighteen months of anthropological fieldwork. At that time, due to a relational ‘door’ that had opened to them, Dave and Lynn were spending half their time living in the north of Albania, and half their time still living in Thessaloniki. The ‘open door’ was an invitation made by a young Albanian couple to come and help them establish ‘community’ with a small church group that the couple were leading. However, when Dave and Lynn moved to Albania, this ‘door’ closed. I examine the complicated political and emotional dynamics surrounding this time, which were intensified by the fact that these events took place against the backdrop of a recent blood feud incident in which the young Albanian couple’s former church Pastor was shot dead. In examining our attempts to make ‘*relationship*’ with the young Albanian couple, and of how they avoided these initiatives, the charismatic nature of our own group’s faith and way of life is revealed.

The thesis progresses in a particular direction. It begins theoretically and analytically ‘tight’ and ‘loosens’ as the chapters progress, moving gradually towards reasonably thick ethnographic description in the final part of the thesis. At the same time, I have sought to include significant amounts of verbatim quotes in the chapters based around the life-story interviews. My reason for employing the first strategy is to avoid the pitfall of over-analysis. After setting up the theoretical framework in the initial chapters, my desire has been to allow the descriptions of people’s lives to speak for themselves. It is an attempt to allow the reader to see how the themes I have raised emerge and are played out within the complexity of real social contexts and human lives. The reason for employing the second strategy relates to the first. Through the

inclusion of significant amounts of verbatim quotes, I have sought to keep the people *in* anthropology (see Killick 2014; Carrithers 2010; Ingold 1992:695-6), aware that, for all the sharpness of our theorising, people's lives are far more rich, complex and interesting than our theory allows and very often 'overflow' the neatness of our theoretical models (Fowler 1995:185-187, 198; Dykstra 1986b:261-262).

## Chapter 2

### Stories, Senses and the Charismatic Relation

*“...people do not acquire their knowledge ready-made, but rather grow into it, through a process of what might best be called ‘guided rediscovery’. The process is rather like that of following trails through a landscape: each story will take you so far, until you come across another that will take you further...”*

*Tim Ingold, ‘Being Alive’ (Ingold 2011:162)*

#### Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how two anthropologists, Jeanne Favret-Saada (1980) and Paul Stoller (1987), in the course of their fieldwork, and in the course of their lives, each entered “alternative knowledge systems” (Jordan 1997). In terms of anthropology this is not unusual – entering into the worlds of others is what anthropologists *do*. What *was* unusual about both Favret-Saada and Stoller, however, was the degree to which they were willing to take the supernatural worlds of their research participants seriously and, in so doing, to bring many of their own ontological assumptions into question. For Favret-Saada, this involved advancing *into* the world of witchcraft, and allowing herself to be “caught” both in words and in spells. For Stoller, it involved becoming a Songhay sorcerer’s apprentice, and even employing a sorcerer’s art to defend himself against very tangible attacks (Stoller & Olkes 1987:153). Again, perhaps this is not unique. The experiences of Favret-Saada and Stoller may, in fact, resonate with a handful of anthropologists who have found themselves in similar situations. But what *is* extraordinary about both Favret-Saada and Stoller is the degree to which, having taken the supernatural worlds of their research participants seriously, they allowed their defining experiences of those worlds to reflexively filter into, and shape, their final ethnographic texts.

If we look toward the anthropology of Christianity, we struggle to find parallel examples. It is not that anthropologists have been immune to either conversion or deeply held Christian faith – Victor and Edith Turner, and Edward Evans-Pritchard are

obvious examples (Engelke 2002). Nor is it that Christian anthropologists have failed to be explicit about their particular ‘standpoints’ – Brian Howell (2007) and James Seale-Collazo (2012), for instance. But the deeply reflexive flavour that Stoller brings to his personal experiences of Songhay sorcery, and the unsettling sense of ontological questioning that this engenders in him, are, for the most part, absent from these accounts. It is rare, for example, to find a Christian bringing his or her conversion – an ontological shift often as dramatic as Stoller’s crossing his “invisible threshold into the Songhay world of sorcery” (Stoller & Olkes 1987:153) – under the same piercingly reflexive anthropological gaze. In fact, the accounts that come closest are those from the reflexively ‘unconverted’, those anthropologists who have allowed us to see how their encounters with ‘belief’ have shaken, even a little, their own sense of “ontological certainty” (Stromberg 1993:95).

Such deep reflexivity is present, for example, in Jon Mitchell’s (1997) account of his ‘moment with Christ’ in the glass-fronted niche in Malta. Here, while cleaning the glass in front of a statue of the crucified Christ, Mitchell found himself overcome by a peculiar sensation of excitement and nausea, very nearly causing him to faint. Believing that locals would attribute this experience to a divine encounter, he actually discovered a surprising lack of consensus concerning the cause of the incident. As a “non-believer” (ibid.:87), Mitchell explores these interpretations, before finally embedding his own explanation of his experiences within the human sciences, in other words in psychological and phenomenological terms (ibid.:87,91). A similar reflexivity is present in Susan Harding’s (2000) account, whilst working amongst Christian fundamentalists, of coming close to what Katherine Ewing calls the “embarrassing possibility of belief” (Ewing 1994:571). Driving home after a long and intense interview with a Baptist Minister, Harding was nearly involved in a car crash. Noticing that her immediate response was to ask herself the question, “What is God trying to tell me?” Harding realised that she had been “inhabited by the fundamental Baptist tongue [she] was investigating” (Harding 2000:34). Just as Favret-Saada was “caught” (Favret-Saada 1980:13-24) in the discourse of witchcraft, so Harding was “caught” (Harding 2000:59) in the Bible-based language of fundamentalism. And yet, during the course of fieldwork, she did not convert. Even though she admitted to crossing a membrane “into belief”, she never entirely crossed another membrane “out of disbelief” (ibid.). In contrast to Stoller, the local knowledge system of Harding’s participants was never so



fully persuasive that it became *more* authoritative than the knowledge system from which she hailed.

My aim in this chapter is to bring the same degree of reflexivity present in these accounts to my own experience of entering an alternative knowledge system, the world of Christian faith. In a sense, my own account picks up where Harding's left off – beyond the double membrane she speaks about. In the same way that Favret-Saada's and Stoller's ethnographies recount the processes by which they came to take an alternative knowledge system seriously, so this chapter recounts my own journey from one understanding of reality to another. It recounts, and then explores in more depth in the analysis that follows, a change in perspective, a shift in ontology, how an alternative knowledge system became, for me, no longer alternative, but personally authoritative. At the heart of this knowledge system, I argue, is a dynamic charismatic relationship with a divine Other. This relationship involves devotion and trust (Weber 1978[1968]:1117-1119, 1968a:46-47), an embodied 'following after' (Weber 1968c:254, 1968b:48-49) that is both based around, and engenders, transformations in perception and conception. The knowledge at the heart of this 'system', the knowledge that the Christian subject desires, and that is to some degree, and in a variety of ways, granted or attained, is knowledge of God, a relational knowledge that is never static, but is continually being constituted. Mirroring Ingold's (2011:162) quote at the start of the chapter, this knowledge is experienced not so much as an object that is 'owned', but rather as a storied relational 'path' or 'way' to be followed.

This account was written in the summer of 2013, but refers, for the most part, back to events that happened in the mid-1990s. Unlike Favret-Saada and Stoller, I was not, at that time, a fully-fledged anthropologist, nor was I involved in a period of fieldwork. I was, however (like these anthropologists), convinced that experience, participation and understanding were all somehow inextricably linked, and the account that follows seeks, at least in part, to unravel how. Based upon my memory of those events, it is, of course, contextually formed in the present, inevitably shaped by subsequent interpretations and the present imagined, primarily academic, audience (see Bakhtin 1986; Elbow 2000). For some of its finer details, and to cross-check my memory, I have drawn upon an extensive letter that I wrote to my parents in the early part of 1995.

## 1994 – 1995

As far as I can remember I have never really doubted the existence of God. Or perhaps it is better to say that, for me, God has always been there, at least somewhere in the back of my consciousness. You could claim that this is largely due to the cultural frame into which I was born. My mother, herself a convert to Catholicism in her early twenties, brought up my older sisters and me in the Catholic Church. Weekly Masses, First Communion and irregular Confessions were a part of our childhood repertoire. I like living in a world where God exists. God's existence, for me, has never been a major question.

At Mass, and to some degree through other influences such as school and family, I picked up the stories told in the Bible. By the time I turned twelve I was certainly familiar with both the stories about Jesus and the stories Jesus told. And yet, as my teenage years passed, I think I grew almost tacitly aware of a fundamental disjuncture between my life, as I was living it, and the life that Jesus lived and spoke about. From what I had understood of the latter, Jesus spoke about a radical 'following after' him that involved a wholehearted and embodied commitment, something that I was, certainly at that time, not willing to make.

I only reached that point in my very early twenties. I was in my final year of a Bachelor's degree in social anthropology at the University of Cambridge. The previous summer, partly to fulfil some long held personal desires and partly in the vague and rather disorganised hope of finding an ethnographic project, I had ended up travelling around Spain and northern Morocco by myself. Separated from friends and family, carrying only what I considered were the bare essentials – a small tent, a stove, and a Spanish dictionary – this Iberian trip had provided a liminal space within which some of life's deeper issues had begun to surface. Towards the end of that trip, over a plastic cup of illicit wine in a small town in the Rif Mountains, Mustafa – who had befriended me, I think, more for my money than my company – asked me a question. We had been discussing faith and the Quran. More specifically, Mustafa had been expressing to me, in increasingly evangelical terms, the importance of his faith to him. He paused for breath, and asked, "And what about you? What are you?"

I cannot remember my precise answer to Mustafa, but I do know what that answer signified – the fact that, in faith terms, I didn't know what I was. Having drifted, both in terms of attendance and in terms of my way of life, away from the Catholic Church since my late teens, I didn't feel that I could honestly call myself a 'Christian' any more. Added to that, anthropology had opened my eyes to other ways of seeing the world. Indeed, a large part of the reason I had chosen to study anthropology – doubting the unlikely probability that my own socially inherited 'faith-way' was the 'right-way' – had been to find out what other people in the world thought about who God is. And yet Mustafa's question brought into the light the fact that, despite gaining much (let us say, 'academic') knowledge of other religions, I was still no closer to answering the big faith questions – 'Who am I?', 'Who is God?' – in any kind of personal or engaged way. Mustafa's question highlighted the fact that I didn't have answers to what I now considered, deep down, to be some of life's most important questions. I couldn't simply close those questions by saying that I was an atheist. I was not. God was there, somehow, in the background, unknown, and more evident to me at that moment than before, unsought. I returned from Morocco determined to seek out the unknown.

That determination, as often happens when returning to a familiar environment, was short-lived. With the commencement of my final year at Cambridge, I was swept up in an array of different activities and commitments, not least of which were rehearsals for a whirlwind winter European tour of *The Tempest*. The 'God-question' inevitably slid to the sub-conscious backburner, only surfacing at times within the activities in which I was presently so consumed. Having been granted the role of Caliban, I plunged myself into his pitiful world, and in so doing gained a considerable empathy for this wretched character who, nevertheless, and perhaps like me, expressed moments of touching upon the transcendent.<sup>2</sup> The 'God-question' only came back to hit me in full force once the tour was over and I had returned to Cambridge, in a cold January, at the start of a new term.

At that time, in large part due to the break-up of a romantic relationship, I gained, perhaps for the first time, a heightened reflexive awareness of myself. As such, I was

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<sup>2</sup> I am thinking in particular of Caliban's poignant speech: "Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not. Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices that, if I then had waked after long sleep, will make me sleep again: and then, in dreaming, the clouds methought would open and show riches ready to drop upon me that, when I waked, I cried to dream again."

struck not only by my own ambivalence, but also my ability to bring considerable pain to those around me, people about whom I cared deeply. After returning from Morocco the previous summer, my determination to seek out the unknown had amounted to little more than an embarkation upon reading the Quran, a task that had been rapidly swallowed up by the term's activities. That search had yielded limited results. My deeper questions remained unanswered. Now, once more, I stood at a threshold, feeling, in terms of my spiritual quest, somewhat bankrupt. As I surveyed in my mind the major spiritual figures that I knew something about – Muhammad, Buddha, Jesus – I was increasingly attracted to the figure of Jesus, to both his life and his words. I felt that, of all the religious figures that I knew, his life pointed most clearly, in some way I did not fully understand, to an unknown God. My spiritual bankruptcy, however, meant I didn't know what to do with this 'sense'. The feeling that I had is best expressed in the prayer that I subsequently prayed. Alone in my room, I sat down and said to God, "God, I don't know who you are. But I know that you are real. Show me who you are." It was the first time I had prayed that way.

At about that time I had a sleepless night. The reason for my wakefulness was that a story was forming, and circulating, in my mind. The story was about a young boy who set off in search of the truth. His quest caused him to encounter various mythical characters, each of which, as he engaged with them, revealed a need that the boy could meet. In each case, their need was met out of the boy's own substance, out of his own being, so that, as the journey progressed, the boy ended up giving away his 'self'. To one character that needed vision, the boy gave his sight. To another that needed touch, he gave his sense of touch. And so on. Finally, all that was left of the boy was his breath. And into that relational space came another character that needed his breath even more than he. And so the boy gave away his final breath. There was silence. The boy's body was devoid of movement, of life. A long time passed. And then, all of a sudden, the breath miraculously returned.

For a whole night the story swirled through me, its branches growing and forming, taking shape, and then dissolving again. I spent the next three days sitting at my word-processor typing it out. By the end of that time, I intuitively felt that this story was not only about Jesus, but also about me.

The spring term in Cambridge had begun. As our final year wound on, our pigeon-holes were increasingly targeted by companies offering fruitful and rewarding careers. For me, none of them appealed. Within my own private space a different kind of story had begun to work its power. Few, if any, of my friends knew the journey I was on. But as I walked around the city, things began to change. Breath, I think, would be one way to express it. I would be walking down the street when, quite unexpectedly and for no apparent reason, I would be caught by a deep sense of joy. Not a shallow kind of joy, or the ephemeral joy of laughter that, as quickly as it alights, gets whisked up and blown away. But a *deep* joy, like a happy memory of childhood, long forgotten, suddenly rising through the intervening years. I would experience those moments like a breath from elsewhere, clean and clear, flooded with memory, filled with love and promise.

At the same time, I found myself halted by need. I found that I could no longer pass by the homeless on the side of the streets. Ignored shadows, once engaged, became real people with needs that, in some way, I could try to meet. To a cold man, I gave my coat. To another, I gave something else. Where I could, I *tried* to give. One afternoon, a man came up to me and asked me for some change. I gave him fifty pence, to which he was unusually grateful. He told me that I was the fifteenth person that he had asked. Later that night, I was out buying a burger with a couple of friends. It was about two in the morning and bitterly cold. In the street outside the burger bar, drunken students in black tie were swaying and hurling mock abuse at each other. Into the midst of this scene the homeless man I had talked to earlier in the day walked and sat down. He sat on a stone step opposite the window of the shop where my friends and I were now sitting, eating burgers. He looked desperate. He was staring blankly ahead, seemingly unaware of the mirth going on all around him.

I went outside, digging into my pocket to offer him the last of my change. As we talked, he told me that he had been thrown out of the shelter because he and his girlfriend had had some kind of argument. He had nowhere to go, and was going to sleep on the street. I asked him if he was going to be warm enough, and he said that he probably wouldn't, but there was nothing else he could do. Three hundred metres away, in college accommodation, I had a warm room with enough space for him to bed down for the night. I knew what I could offer. I knew what I should do. But I hovered,

afraid, afraid of him, of what he might do, of what he might think if I suggested he sleep in my room. I hovered there, unable to proceed. Finally, I wished him goodnight and walked away.

As I walked back to college, my head was in a daze. I walked slowly, for it felt like a lead weight was running through my body and dragging me steadily downwards. A hundred metres down the road I stopped, realising what a huge fool I'd been. I turned and ran back, but when I reached the burger bar, the stone step opposite stood empty. The man had gone. I searched the surrounding streets, but there was no sign of him. Finally, giving up my search, I made my way back to college. Once back in my room, emotion flooded out. I felt angry, with myself, with God. I was pursuing this journey with all of my heart. And yet it seemed impossible. And, in reality, God seemed no closer than when I had first begun.

Some days later, I was standing outside my supervisor's office with a fellow supervisee. As we waited, our talk turned to religion. I asked my colleague if he was "religious at all". He replied that he wasn't religious, but that he was a Christian. I felt confused, but intrigued. I then told him that I, also, was a Christian (the seriousness of my own private spiritual quest gave me the right, I now felt, to assert this claim). He asked me which church I went to, and I replied that I didn't go to church (for me, after all, being a Christian was about trying to follow Jesus, not about going to church). He invited me to go to church with him and, seeing no other way out, I agreed to go.

I enjoyed the church service. It was mainly a student congregation, but with a mix of young families and children. I would probably describe it now as reformed Anglican – a modern, contemporary-style service, taking place in one of the beautiful old churches in the centre of Cambridge. I enjoyed the hymn-singing, and the people I met seemed both happy and honest. And yet there was nothing significant that took place that seemed to connect to my own personal spiritual journey. As such, I don't remember the content of the sermon, or for that matter, other details of the event. It was pleasant. And yet, because I felt no connection between this event and my deeper personal quest, as we made our way toward the door at the end of the service, I had already decided that I would probably not come again.

My anthropological colleague, however, perhaps encouraged by my response to his invitation to attend church, began to tell me about a series of events being put on by the Christian Union that were due to commence the following day. As I later understood, every three years the Christian Union would organise a “mission week”, publicised across campus and taking place over a series of evenings in the Guildhall. Sensitive to a growing feeling of being evangelised, I attempted to be non-committal. By Monday morning lectures, my resistance had congealed into a plausible excuse. When my friend asked if I planned to attend the first of the talks that night, I replied that I had too much work to do. He appeared a little disappointed, but said if I changed my mind he’d see me there.

Somehow, over the course of the day, my attitude softened and changed so that, by a quarter to eight that evening, there was little that could have held me back from attending. I felt a kind of happy excitement. When I arrived at the Guildhall, my friend was leaning up against a wall waiting for me. We walked in and found a place in the auditorium. The room was buzzing, alive. I was struck by how many people were there. I don’t specifically remember the order of events. But the main focus, the primary reason for us being there was to listen to the main speaker, who spoke for about an hour. This is what I wrote in a subsequent letter to my parents: “The [speaker] was a man named Nigel Lee. He wasn’t a preacher. He was just an ordinary man with a family. He must have been about thirty-five or forty. He was laid back and witty. He quite simply explained what Christianity is, who Jesus is and why he died and rose again. This time, for the first time, my ears were open and I finally understood.”

## **Listening and Perceiving**

Susan Harding (2000), in her perceptive study of fundamentalist Christians in America, puts her finger, I believe, on one of the key themes within the process of conversion: *listening*. She states that social scientists, seeking to understand the reasons why people convert, are often interested in looking for patterns and possible causes – for example “psychological and social stress”, “previous conditioning” or “interpersonal influence” (ibid.:35). Indeed, all of these explanatory factors can be found, in some shape or form, within my own conversion narrative told above. And yet none of these, Harding

suggests, is able conclusively to answer the question ‘*why?*’ At most, they can provide only partial answers. More than that, a focus *purely* on such things can eclipse a potentially more significant element within the conversion process. “Crises, transitions, and upbringing as such,” writes Harding, “do not lead you to convert. They may make you more likely to *listen*, and anything that makes you more likely to *listen*, including the work of ethnography, is actually what makes you susceptible” (ibid.:57, my italics).

The narrative above deliberately cuts off at the moment of my greatest susceptibility. It is the point at which I am able (or enabled) to listen. “This time, for the first time,” I wrote just four weeks later, “my ears were open”. It is the point at which the gospel appears to make sense to me, from a personal point of view, for the very first time. It is the point at which I “finally understood”. Such understanding, as Harding perceptively intuits, presupposes a particular type of listening. At the time of my conversion, in an attempt to explain to my friends about my experience, I described myself at the mission nights as “listening in a way that I had never listened before”. Alongside my comments about ‘ears being open’ and ‘finally understanding’, this certainly seems to support Harding’s claim that listening is, indeed, at the heart of Christian conversion. This raises a question. Why did what I *heard* become so convincing that I, like Harding (ibid.:59), crossed the membrane into belief, but also, unlike Harding, crossed a further membrane out of disbelief? And this implies a further question. Why, when the message of the gospel had been present to me for most of my life (i.e. it was not a story that was new to me), had I never *heard* its message before?

Part of the answer to these questions may be found through probing, in greater depth, exactly what *type* of ‘listening’ and ‘hearing’ I am talking about here. Certainly the ‘listening’ that I am referring to appears to encompass much more than ‘listening’ in a purely physical sense. Therefore, we must ask what kind of sensorium is being employed, what kind of senses are being spoken about? And yet the answer, I would suggest, also goes *beyond* the senses, in that it is intimately linked to both need and desire, the result of a particular ontological positioning that *requires* one to listen, that crucially necessitates one hears. At the mission that week a ‘god’ was proclaimed, a charismatic ‘object’ was introduced that both invited my freely given recognition (Weber 1968b:48-49), whilst also promising to be a vital source of *Life* (see Shils 1975:127; Cox 2009:4; Eisenstadt 1968:xix). In what follows, drawing upon



anthropological work on the senses (Classen 1993; Classen & Howes 1996; Howes 2009), and combining sociological theories on charisma (Weber 1978, 1968a, 1968b, 1968c, 2009a; Shils 1975; Csordas 1997a; Eisenstadt 1968; Lindholm 1990) with theories on ‘belief’ and ‘faith’ (Ruel 2002[1982]; Lindquist & Coleman 2008; Pouillon 1982[1979]; Cox 2009; Fowler 1995; Tillich 1957), I look at the centrality of the Christian notion of ‘the heart’ within the conversion process. As such, I argue that ‘the heart’ be understood not only as a centre of ‘spiritual’ perception, attributed with the ability to perceive God and God’s activity in the world (Lootens 2012:56), nor merely as a centre of conception, by which the self writes itself conceptually into a new story (Harding 2000:56-57), but ultimately as a locus of devotion, a deep, central ‘place’ from which charisma is imputed (Shils 1975; Csordas 1997a:138; Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi). Conversional listening, within this frame, ultimately implies a willingness to recognise Jesus in this ‘place’ – in *one’s heart* – as one’s god, the charismatic ‘object’ of one’s devotion.

### **‘The Heart’ as a Centre of Perception**

As already argued, Constance Classen (1993) states that what seems like a ‘natural’ ordering of the senses is, in fact, just as much a matter of cultural construction. Different cultures, throughout time and space, have numbered and ordered the senses in a variety of different ways. David Howes (2009), in *The Sixth Sense Reader*,<sup>3</sup> further develops this point. Agreeing with Classen that perception is much more than a neurobiological process, but is, rather, a cultural one, Howes explores in more detail some of the multiple sensory trajectories along which humanity has travelled (ibid.:14-15). The Cashinahua, Howes tells us, order their sensorium around six “percipient centers” including the skin, the liver and the genitals, respectively facilitating knowledge of the environment, of deep-seated emotions, and of one’s essential “life force” (ibid.:2). Moreover, for the Cashinahua, the sensorium is not centred in the brain; instead “the whole body knows” (ibid.:16). The Hausa number the senses as two,

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<sup>3</sup> *The Sixth Sense Reader* is perhaps a misleading title, as it appears to presuppose a sensorium of five senses to which ‘something else’ is added. In fact, Howes shows that even modern materialist science would number the senses as vastly higher than a mere five. ““The more we study the structure of our sense organs, the more senses we appear to have” (Durie 2005:35). A conservative estimate would put the number of senses at 10, but it is generally accepted that our senses number 21, and radical estimates put the number as high as 33” (Howes 2009:23).

sight (*gani*) and another sense (*ji*) encompassing hearing, smell, taste, touch, understanding and emotional feeling (ibid.:2). Even in the West, there has been ongoing dispute about the number and boundaries of the senses. Aristotle, although responsible for numbering the senses as five, did, in fact, reason for another overarching sense that was common to the five senses, but not reducible to them (ibid.:17). He called this “the common sense”, a term which, in modern usage, has lost much of its original associations with perception. Even neurobiologists, taking into account senses that regulate balance, motion, blood glucose levels and pressure, have numbered the physical senses as high as thirty-three (ibid.:22-23). Thai Buddhists treat the *mind* – upon which pictures, intentions and thoughts appear – as a sense, equal to other senses that have “material contact as a condition of their immediate possibility” (Klima 2002:201, cited in Howes 2009:27). Howes argues, therefore, that when exploring the use of the senses, we must be ‘sensitive’ to the various “contexts of perception” within which the senses are emplaced and elaborated (ibid.:28,32). One way to do this, he argues, is to start with native categories.

Just as Thai Buddhists understand ‘the mind’ as a sense, Christians also connect ‘the heart’ with *both* perception *and* understanding. Anthropologists of Christianity have noted the frequency with which Christians speak about ‘the heart’ (for example Harding 2000:xii,19,34; Siegler 2002:55; Stromberg 1981; Turner & Turner 1978:8). “The heart is contrasted with the head,” writes Harding (2000:47), “and seems to mark the difference between unconscious and conscious knowledge and belief.” In my experience ‘the heart’, when talked about in these terms, is rarely associated with the *physical* organ, or even with the *location* of the physical organ. On several occasions I have been struck, when observing Christian preachers speaking about ‘the heart’, by the frequency with which a hand is placed upon the lower abdomen, indicating an association more with the gut or bowels. Such a placing seems to imply that ‘the heart’ is being used metaphorically here to refer one realm of experience (the emotional, spiritual, ontological ‘grounding’ of the human person) to another (the physical body). James Fernandez (1972, 1974) argues that this is exactly how metaphor works. Through connecting inchoate experiences to more observable realms, humans seek to convey experiences which otherwise might be difficult to grasp (Fernandez 1972:58). The placing of a hand upon the lower abdomen, while at the same time referring to this

area as ‘the heart’, would seem to indicate that a person is trying to communicate something about the ‘centre’ or ‘core’ of their being.

Insights into the Christian category of ‘the heart’ can also be drawn from the cultural context in which the term is elaborated and, in particular, through paying attention to the ways in which historical authority figures within the Christian domain have elucidated the topic. In Biblical accounts, Jesus speaks about the “thoughts” of the heart,<sup>4</sup> he describes it as a locus of “understanding”,<sup>5</sup> and associates it with both “seeing” and “hearing”.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, a lack of receptivity to the things of God is explained, most often within the gospel stories, in terms of hindered (‘spiritual’) perceptions – blindness, deafness, and ultimately hardness of heart. Matthew Lootens (2012) explains how Augustine associates the spiritual senses – those senses “capable of perceiving God and God’s activity in the world” (ibid.:56) – with the heart. Whilst a person’s corporeal senses might be able to perceive the physical world, it is the interior senses, the “senses of the heart” (ibid.:64), according to Augustine, that are able to perceive God. Elsewhere, the heart is described as the centre of spiritual sight. The apostle Paul prays for the believers in Ephesus that “*the eyes of [their] heart* may be enlightened” in order that they may know the hope to which they have been called.<sup>7</sup> And finally, the heart is associated with listening and hearing. In the parable of the sower, the heart is attributed with the ability to both hear and to receive the word of God,<sup>8</sup> pretty much synonymous with Harding’s effective ‘listening’ mentioned above.

Given this context, my comments to my parents that “*my ears were open*” and that “*I finally understood*” make much more sense. For ‘the ears’ that I am talking about here are ‘ears of the heart’, and the understanding that I am referring to is to do with a fundamental shift in perception which, many Christians would claim, is likewise an issue of ‘the heart’ – the way the heart ‘sees’, ‘hears’, ‘perceives’ and ‘understands’. Here, to strengthen the point, we might bring in Clifford Geertz and his famous description of “the religious perspective”. “A perspective,” Geertz tells us, “is a mode of seeing, in that extended sense of “see” in which it means “discern”, “apprehend”,

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<sup>4</sup> For example Matthew 9:4; Matthew 15:19; Mark 2:8; Mark 7:21; Luke 2:19; Luke 2:35; Luke 2:51; Luke 3:15; Luke 5:22

<sup>5</sup> For example Matthew 13:15; Matthew 13:19; Mark 8:17; John 12:40

<sup>6</sup> For example Matthew 5:8; Matthew 5:28; Matthew 13:15; Matthew 13:19; Mark 8:17; Luke 8:15; John 12:40

<sup>7</sup> Ephesians 1:18

<sup>8</sup> Luke 8:11-15

“understand”, or “grasp”. It is a particular way of looking at life, a particular manner of construing the world” (Geertz 1993[1973]:110). Geertz goes on to tell us that the religious perspective rests upon a sense of “the really real” and that “the symbolic activities of religion as a cultural system are devoted to producing, intensifying, and... rendering inviolable” this sense of the real (ibid.:112). Although I would take Geertz to task in terms of singling out the religious perspective for special treatment (i.e. the other perspectives he mentions – historical, scientific, commonsense etc. – can equally rest upon a sense of “the really real”), we might see that what he is highlighting here is, in fact, very similar to that which emerges through the apostle Paul’s prayer, namely, that there is a centre of ontological perception within human persons; in other words that the heart ‘hears’, ‘sees’ and ‘understands’.

It could be argued that Geertz is using sensory terminology here, in particular the idiom of sight, actually to express something quite different. Classen points out that sensory terminology is sometimes employed to convey mental processes that, in the West, due to a specific hierarchical ordering of the senses, are often expressed through visual metaphors (Classen 1993:58-59). For example, we speak about ‘points of view’, ‘observations’ and – most relevant to Geertz’s use of sensory terminology – we say, “I see” to mean, “I understand” (ibid.:58). In this way, sensory terminology is employed to represent processes of thought, or in Classen’s words, “we think through our senses” (ibid.:59). However, such an argument is built upon the assumption that thought is a non-sensory experience, an assumption that Thai Buddhists, Aristotle, and many other pre-Enlightenment ‘thinkers’ (or perhaps, ‘sensors’) would question. In fact, both Classen and Howes point to a particular moment in Western history, the Enlightenment, as being the point at which the mental and sensory faculties became conceptually separated and “defined as fundamentally different in nature” (Classen 1993:3; see also Howes 2009:20). Descartes, who distrusted the senses, and Locke, who didn’t, both came to consider the senses as ‘natural’ mechanisms for the purpose of conveying information about the physical world to the mind (Classen 1993:4). This historical dividing of the senses from the mind would seem to suggest that, for most of Western history, and certainly within the pre-Enlightenment world, thought may have been conceived as being much more sensory in nature. As a centre of both perception *and* understanding the Christian category of ‘the heart’ equally blurs a strict divide between the world of the senses and the world of the mind.

The observations made so far enable us to come up with a working definition of ‘the heart’ that we can begin to apply, heuristically, to my own conversion narrative. To sum up, an observation of Christian preachers’ physical gestures suggests that ‘the heart’ is not so much associated with the natural organ going by the same name, but is, rather, associated more with the gut or bowels. These gestures, indicating the lower abdomen, seem to point to the fact that ‘the heart’ is indicative of the ‘centre’, ‘core’, or ‘innermost being’ of a human person, just as the inner gut is located, physically, in the most central, ‘deepest’ part of the human body. Also, a reading of the ways in which ‘the heart’ has been spoken about within a Christian historical context – particularly through authority figures such as Jesus, the apostle Paul, and Augustine – would suggest that ‘the heart’ refers to a central (probably non-physical) sensory ‘organ’ attributed with the ability to perceive God. An exploration of my own conversion narrative reveals further dimensions of ‘the heart’, and it is to that task that we now turn.

### **Growing up with, and without, God**

My conversion narrative above begins with an ontological bias. I claim, in the first paragraph, that my default position has always been one of ‘God awareness’, and I put forward the possibility that this could be due, in large part, to the cultural frame into which I was born, particularly as it was shaped by my mother’s Catholicism. Such an interpretation fits well with a social constructivist approach (see Elliott 2005:18-22) that sees the nurturing family as a field of relationships (Ingold 2000a, 2011) or a community of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991) into which the “situated learner” (ibid.) – in this case the child – is enculturated, and within which shared meanings are learned and ascribed. Such ‘God awareness’, however, did not remain of central importance to me. At times it rested at “the back of my consciousness”, particularly as the teenage years progressed. During those years, although remaining aware of God’s existence (something I claim never to have doubted), I was unwilling to place God in a primary position in my life. To have done so would have meant not only standing out from the crowd, with an inevitable risk to popularity, but also an undesired re-ordering of my priorities. “Our real worship, our true devotion,” theologian James Fowler tells us, “directs itself toward the objects of our ultimate concern” (Fowler 1995:4). God was, quite simply put, not of “ultimate concern” to me at that point in my life. At the same

time, my religiously and culturally informed “sphere of nurture” (Ingold 2000a:144) provided a framework of understanding of what a God-centred life might in fact look like, of what “loving God” – as encapsulated in the gospel story – *meant*. This story, the story of Jesus, was both invitational (“come follow me”) and demanding (“give up everything”). It represented the very “wholehearted and embodied commitment” I was, at that time, not willing to make.

A “wholehearted and embodied commitment” to a leader based purely upon that leader’s perceived qualities is characteristic of what Max Weber describes as the charismatic relation (Weber 1978[1968]:1117, 1968a:46-47, 1968b:49, 1968c:260). In fact, the stories of Jesus, and his relationship with his disciples, represent an archetypal template of the charismatic relationship. In these stories, Jesus, as an itinerant preacher and healer, does not derive his authority from any rational-legal or traditional authority (Weber 1968b:50). Rather, he acts according to a ‘divine call’ and invites followers to be personally devoted to *him*, and to adapt their lives to his charismatic mission (Weber 1968c:254, 1978:1117,1119, 1968b:48). The “new obligations” (ibid.:51) that he teaches supersede people’s closest kin relations, his revolutionary message, designed to work “from within” (Weber 1978:1116-1117), encouraging a “completely new orientation of all attitudes toward the different problems and structures of the ‘world’” (Weber 1968b:54). In the gospel stories, Jesus teaches a way of life that contradicts normal economic rationality, and, together with his disciples, he lives outside routine occupations and obligations, in a type of liminality (Weber 2009a:248, 1968b:51). As a worker of miracles and a prophet, his divine mission is “embodied in him” (Weber 1978:1114,1117). He often opposes rational-legal and traditional authority, disrupts customs and law, and overturns previous notions of sanctity (ibid.). His life and ministry are characterised by numinous, magical dimensions. “It must not be forgotten for an instant,” Weber writes (1968c:254), “that the entire basis of Jesus’ own legitimation, as well as his claim that he and only he knew the Father and that the way to God led through faith in him alone, was the magical charisma he felt within himself.”

To express Jesus’ life in these terms is to look through Weber’s sociological lens, and to identify him, for the sake of my argument, as an archetypal charismatic leader who fulfils many of the characteristics that Weber identified with charisma. When Weber was developing his theory of charisma, there can be no doubt that he had the example of

Jesus in mind (for explicit examples see Weber 1968b:51, 2009a:250). But what relevance does the story about a charismatic leader living with his disciples in first century Palestine have for a child growing up in late twentieth century modernity? The answer is that my experience of the stories of Jesus, as I was growing up, was that they spoke beyond their initial sphere of enactment. In other words these stories were powerful (and threatening) to me because they appeared to invite me into a charismatic relationship, not with an embodied leader, but with a transcendent one. As I grew up with these stories, I felt this ‘pull’, alongside a ‘pull’ *away* from such a life. The tension between these two forces explains why I would describe myself, during my teenage years, as experiencing the tacit awareness of “a fundamental disjuncture between my life, as I was living it, and the life that Jesus lived and spoke about.” Even though others might have described me as a Christian, I was aware that, by the standard of these stories, I was a very long way from *truly* following Jesus. The narrative, of course, foreshadows a time when I will respond to the ‘pull’ of these stories, the invitation into a charismatic relationship, not with an embodied leader, but with a transcendent one.

Commencing studies at Cambridge entailed moving out of my childhood sphere of nurture. My encounter with anthropology, with theatre, with other ways of life, and with travel, was exciting and vitalising. The Iberian trip, in which I hitchhiked around Spain by myself, emerged out of this youthful spirit of discovery and adventure. The trip’s significance was that, as my first solo journey, it represented an ideological space within which I spent time considering – for the first time in the absence of close filial and relational ties – what really mattered to me. It was also situated temporally within a broader transitional period. Up until this point, lived out within a family sphere of expectation, life had followed a reasonably set, privileged, and personally unexamined, trajectory: school, year out, university. But, with just one year of study left, such blissful familiarity was now coming to an end, and the future, in all of its openness and absence of definition, was beginning to loom. Nobody (i.e. no present authority figure) had ever told me what I should be doing post-graduation. Or if they had, their words had been without effect. Separated both from university friends and family, in a certain ‘liminoid’ space (Turner 1974; Turner & Turner 1978), it became increasingly clear that nobody was responsible for my life but *me*. Fowler (1995:154,173,179) equates such an internal shift with a faith-stage transition in which one’s centring authority – previously

located externally to the self (either within one's social peer group or within one's own personal authority figures) – becomes relocated within the self. 'Who am I?' 'What is *my* life going to be about?' 'What *is* life?' *These* were some of the "deeper issues" that began to surface.

When I finally arrived in Morocco, Mustafa's question to me about my faith acted as what Joseph Campbell (1968[1949]), the comparative religionist and mythologist, might have called a "herald". Campbell, in his analysis of myths and folk tales from around the world, distilled some recurring patterns, patterns that are helpful for elucidating my own story here. The central figure, beginning life in a place of reasonably secure 'maternal' comfort, is called to a mythological adventure which follows the pattern of a rite of passage: separation – initiation – return (ibid.:30). This process is very often put into play by a set of circumstances or a specific character (but most often both) that acts as a "herald". The crisis of the herald's appearance signals for the hero the "call to adventure" (ibid.:51). "The call," writes Campbell, "rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration – a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand" (ibid.). At the same time the hero's "spiritual centre of gravity [is moved] from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown" (ibid.:58). The call to adventure, in other words, exerts a gravitational pull away from the subject's parochial world of experience and marks the beginning of a quest towards the indeterminate (see Basu 2004:162-165). Mustafa's question to me, spoken at a specific time and into a particular set of life circumstances and emerging personal questions, had exactly this heraldic effect. It explicitly brought to conscious awareness that of which I had previously only been subconsciously aware – that God didn't mean very much to me. Mustafa's 'seriousness' (see Carrithers 2012) about his own faith served only to highlight my own *lack* of 'seriousness'. As such, it brought the "God-question" back into the foreground, and marked the conscious beginnings of a quest of my own – "to seek out the unknown."

That question, however, back amidst the swirl of university life, only managed to retain marginal importance. My reading of the Quran, worked out perhaps within the same knowledge-gaining paradigm as my previous "academic" knowledge, represented only



one particular style of answering it, and, as such, didn't seem to lead anywhere. The question, however, did become embodied in a different sense – through rehearsals for *The Tempest*. Having been granted an interesting dual role, as the prince Ferdinand and the slave Caliban, I found myself attempting to link the two characters. As such, I decided that they were both lost, abandoned and alone, and that they were looking for something. They were both searching for that which would hold them, take care of them and love them. I decided that they were both looking for God.<sup>9</sup> This search, of course, is most painfully worked out in the life of Caliban. To him first Prospero, then Stephano become gods. Caliban's faith, his trust and his love are absolute. Yet they are misplaced. Caliban is at first cruelly mistreated by Prospero before putting his faith in another 'god' who turns out to be no more than a drunkard. He is left alone on the island, desperate to love and be loved. Through embodying his character, and journeying with him in his search, the "God-question", for me, moved beyond the realm of cerebral reasoning into the expression of an emotional and visceral longing. It became prayer.

At the same time my own personal 'gods' were beginning to crumble. "Real idolatry," writes Fowler (1995:18), "in the Jewish and Christian traditions, does not have to do with the worship of statues or pagan altars. Idolatry is rather the profoundly serious business of committing oneself or betting one's life on finite centers of value and power as the source of one's (or one's group's) confirmation of worth and meaning, and as the guarantor of survival with quality." The break up of a romantic relationship brought me to a place of awareness that others (however beautiful) were, in Fowler's stark theoretical terms, only "finite centers of value and power", and could not ultimately guarantee "survival with quality" (ibid.). Seen through a *biblical* frame, you could say that this marked a fundamental shift within me away from worshipping and serving created things towards an understanding that God might be the only true and worthy guarantor of life.<sup>10</sup> It was, in a sense, the final piece left to fall. And this is where I found myself at the start of January 1995. Here, a space opened up finally to confront and engage with the question that had, in some way or other, been bubbling away in the background for most of my life. *Who is God?* Alone in my room I sat down and prayed: "God... show me who you are."

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<sup>9</sup> I wrote as such in the letter to my parents.

<sup>10</sup> See Romans 1:25.

I think it will be clear what a turning point this is. Up to this point in the narrative, despite becoming increasingly interested in the “God-question”, it has remained a private quest into which I have not actively enlisted anybody’s help, least of all God’s. To ask God to show me who ‘He’ or ‘She’ is constitutes, in itself, an act of both surrender and trust (*‘OK, I can’t do this by myself; I know you’re there; show me who you are’*). This is no small thing. It expresses a trust not only that God *is* there (again revealing my ontological bias) but, even more importantly, that God is *good*.<sup>11</sup> It is a trust that has not been easily reached. In fact the reason that I had never “prayed that way” before was simply because I couldn’t, not at least *from my heart*. The last steps of my journey up to this point had borne painful witness – both through Caliban’s embodiment and within my own personal life – to the effects of trusting (being devoted to, living for) ‘gods’ that were *not* unambiguously good.<sup>12</sup> The lesson had been learned, the insight, perhaps, had been given. But my prayer is also an act of surrender in another sense. One may presume that if God is God, then God is also *big*. To invite God to reveal who He or She is constitutes an awesomely frightening prospect. It is not only dependent upon an innate trust that God is good, but also suggests a willingness for one’s place in the Universe – in that great System of Relations – to be re-ordered, to be redefined. It is therefore, at its most elemental level, also a confrontation with authority.

### **‘The Heart’ as a Centre of Devotion**

For Max Weber, devotion and trust lie at the core of the charismatic relation (Weber 1978:1117, 1968b:49, 1968c:260). “In the case of charismatic authority,” Weber writes (1968a:46-47), “it is the charismatically qualified leader as such who is obeyed by virtue of personal trust in him and his revelation,” a trust which is expressed through “complete personal devotion” (Weber 1968b:49) and faithful “surrender” (Weber 2009a:249). We have already seen how Shils (1975) expands Weber’s definition of charisma to include ‘objects’ other than just human beings. “Charisma,” Shils states (*ibid.*:127), “...is the quality which is imputed to persons, actions, roles, institutions,

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<sup>11</sup> It also expresses a further trust, implied within the first two: that God will *answer*.

<sup>12</sup> I wrote to my parents, “*If we believe in a God we must be sure we can trust Him, that He is the Absolute.*”

symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with “ultimate”, “fundamental”, “vital”, order-determining power” (cited in Csordas 1997a:138). Here, following Durkheim, Shils locates charisma more in the eye of the beholder than the ‘object’ being beheld. He not only broadens out the perceptual landscape where charisma may be thought to be located – in other words, not just ‘within’ people – but also gives us a definition of what he understands charisma to be. Charisma, according to Shils, is a *quality imputed* to ‘objects’ as a result of their “presumed connection” to ultimate things. The central issue for Shils is the connection that a charismatic ‘object’ displays, or rather, is thought to have, to a “*very central* feature of man’s existence and the cosmos in which he lives” (Shils cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi).

The concept of charisma, as it has been developed within the sociological domain, aligns with certain concepts of ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ within the Christian domain. The anthropologist Malcolm Ruel (2002[1982]), in analysing changing notions of ‘belief’ within Christian history, reminds us that the original Greek word ‘*pisteuo*’ and the Hebrew term ‘*mn*’ were used to express notions of trust or confidence in someone or something, an idea very similar to Weber’s description of the charismatic relation. Such terms, according to Ruel, were imported from everyday life in order to express the relational trust or confidence that a person, or a people, might have in God. Lindquist and Coleman (2008), drawing on the work of French anthropologist Jean Pouillon (1982[1979]), similarly describe one aspect of ‘belief’ as “putting confidence or trust in... someone or something” (Lindquist & Coleman 2008:5), emphasising the emotional, rather than cognitive, aspect of such action. The theologian Harvey Cox (2009), in an argument that closely reflects Ruel’s analysis of changing historical conceptions of ‘belief’, prefers to use the term ‘faith’ to express the “deep-seated confidence” we might have in someone or something, retaining the term ‘belief’ to designate one’s assent to certain doctrinal creeds. Resonating with the way Weber, Shils and Eisenstadt speak about the charismatic relation, Cox writes, “We can believe something to be true without it making much difference to us, but we place our faith only in something that is *vital for the way we live*” (ibid.:4, my italics). Echoing Ruel’s insights, one of Cox’s central arguments is that contemporary Christian ‘faith’ has often been reduced to dogmatic, fundamentalist ‘beliefs’.

One person that, in his descriptions of the workings of faith comes closest to

sociological descriptions of charisma is the theologian James Fowler, whom I have already been quoting. Following the comparative religionist Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Fowler, like Cox, distinguishes ‘faith’ from ‘belief’. “Faith,” writes Fowler, “is the relation of trust in and loyalty to the transcendent about which concepts and propositions – beliefs – are fashioned” (Fowler 1995:11). Like Weber’s notion of charisma, Fowler’s notion of faith is relational: “there is always *another* in faith. ‘I trust *in* and am loyal *to* [someone or something]’” (ibid.:16). Like Shils, Fowler acknowledges that the ‘object’ of devotion need not be another human being, but is rather a “center of value and power” – be it a person, cause, institution or whatever – that promises to sustain us, and to confer meaning and worth upon us in the midst of a dangerous and uncertain world (ibid.:18). Such centres of value and power, in other words those things that are of “ultimate concern” to us (Tillich 1957), “exert,” according to Fowler, “ordering force in our lives” (Fowler 1995:25). If charisma, to Shils, “is the quality which is imputed to persons, actions, roles, institutions, symbols, and material objects because of their presumed connection with “ultimate”, “fundamental”, “vital”, order-determining power” (cited in Csordas 1997a:138), then faith, in Fowler’s terms, is the act of imputation.

Fowler, as a Christian theologian, also takes us a step further than Shils, into a *Christian* understanding of the person that suggests a possible locus of faith, and therefore also the source of charismatic devotion. Faith, for Fowler, is an issue of *the heart*. Again drawing on Smith, he argues that faith involves setting one’s heart upon someone or something. This setting of one’s heart involves perception, vision, a ‘seeing’ of the intrinsic value and worth of that to which one offers devotion (Fowler 1995:11). It is also a matter of the will. Just like Weber’s charismatic devotion which is *freely given* and based upon *recognition* (Weber 1968b:49), faith – the devotion of the heart – cannot be coerced and is based upon perception of the intrinsic worth of an ‘object’. “We do not commit ourselves – ‘rest our hearts upon’ – persons, causes, institutions or ‘gods’ because we ‘ought to.’ We invest or devote ourselves because the other to which we commit has, for us, an intrinsic excellence or worth and because it promises to confer value on us” (Fowler 1995:18). In other words, it is perceived as having charisma, as a charismatic ‘object’.

I would argue that Fowler, in a different context and with a different set of references, is

pointing to exactly the same phenomenon described by Weber, Shils, Eisenstadt, and others within the sociological domain. Moreover, Fowler's proposal of 'the heart' as the *source* of faith, adds an interesting tool with which to think about charismatic devotion. I have already argued that 'the heart', as an indigenous Christian category, is indicative of the 'centre', 'core', or 'innermost being' of a human person, and that it is understood, also, as a centre of perception, a key sensory 'organ' attributed, in particular, with the ability to perceive God. Now, combining Weber, Shils and Eisenstadt with Fowler, we can extend this definition: 'the heart' being understood not only as a centre of perception, but also as a centre of charismatic devotion, in other words the 'place' from which charisma is imputed. In this light, my narrative above could be read, equally, as a journey of 'the heart' which examines the processes by which the charisma I had imputed to various things – for example, through my university years, to the ideal 'other' of a romantic dyad (see Lindholm 1990:183) or, during my teenage years, to the opinions of significant others – gradually, through a series of events and experiences, became 'unstuck' and eventually re-located in God.

### **'The Heart' as a Centre of Conception**

Broadly speaking, my conversion narrative hinges around a 'key moment' – my sitting down to pray, "God... show me who you are." Everything up to this point may be understood as an attempt to explain how this point has been reached, and why it feels significant. The narrative from this point implicitly suggests ways in which this prayer might be being answered – in other words it hints at ways in which God *might* be showing me who He or She is. Peter Stromberg (1993) argues that this is exactly what Christians do. Post-conversion, we Christians re-narrate the past in the light of new ontological understandings, weaving together past events – questions, crises, experiences – only now inclusive of another agential character, God. In so doing, we not only testify to others about the validity of our new-found faith but, more importantly to Stromberg, through the act of speaking, we actually *constitute* that faith, and therefore a particular type of self, again and again, in the present. As also for Harding, language for Stromberg is a fundamental part, *the* fundamental part, of conversion. And there is a great deal of truth in Stromberg's argument. The problem, however, is that in making language the central concern, Stromberg is in danger of missing deeper changes

within human persons, changes which, as I have already argued, are taking place at the level of ‘the heart’.

Lakoff and Johnson (2003[1980]) state that our thoughts, actions, the way we organise our relations, the way we communicate, and our fundamental perceptions of what is real, reflect, what they call, our “conceptual system” (ibid.:3). “Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities” (ibid.). The central argument of their book, *Metaphors We Live By*, is that this conceptual system is largely structured around metaphor – the ability to understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another (ibid.:5). Like Stromberg, Lakoff and Johnson acknowledge the importance of language within this matrix. In particular, they highlight sensitivity to language as a key research strategy for getting at the metaphorical conceptual system that underlies and supports the linguistic metaphors a person may be employing. The reason for needing to do this is that our conceptual system, for the most part, remains something largely tacit and hidden, and attentiveness to language is an excellent way of making this tacit system explicit. “[O]ur conceptual system,” they write (ibid.:3), “is not something we are normally aware of. In most of the little things we do every day, we simply think and act more or less automatically along certain lines. Just what these lines are is by no means obvious. One way to find out is by looking at language. Since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like.”

The important point here, in terms of my argument, is that a person’s linguistic expression is the fruit (and not the root) of much deeper levels of conception. These deeper levels affect not only language, but every area of a person’s life – thoughts, actions, perceptions and so on. Language, as Lakoff and Johnson argue, is an important source of evidence of what constitutes a person’s conceptual system, but it is not the only source. In a similar way, many Christians would say that it is “out of the overflow of *the heart* [that] the mouth speaks”,<sup>13</sup> but the thoughts and attitudes of ‘the heart’ are also evidenced in other ways – through actions, perceptions, the way we relate and so on. Although the Christian category of ‘the heart’ and Lakoff and Johnson’s notion of a

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<sup>13</sup> A quote from Jesus in Luke 6:45; Matthew 12:34

conceptual system are not *entirely* synonymous ('the heart' encompasses significantly more than a conceptual system) there are substantial enough overlaps between the two ideas to advance a further suggestion. I have suggested that the Christian category of 'the heart' be understood as a *centre of perception*, as well as a *centre of devotion*. Lakoff and Johnson's framework would suggest something more. In the sense that 'the heart' aligns with the idea of a person's conceptual system, it may also be understood as a *centre of conception*. In this understanding, it is not only out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks, but also that a person acts, relates, and lives. 'The heart' is not simply a receptive centre, but a creative one.

Experience, I would argue, has the power fundamentally to re-structure our conceptual systems, and therefore the realities within which we live (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:3). And *experience* is exactly what a conversion narrative, such as my own, points towards. The logic of a conversion narrative is this: 'These were the *experiences* that I had, and these *experiences* caused me to see things in a new and different way.' Putting language at the heart of conversion, Stromberg remains suspicious of the relationship between language and experience. "If one wants to study the conversion experience," he tells us, "one is better off looking first to the conversion narrative, and exercising caution about inferences concerning events the narrative presumably describes" (Stromberg 1993:15).<sup>14</sup> Stromberg's approach, although highlighting the interesting ways in which language works, stops short of being able to take seriously the Christian subject's *experiences*, experiences that have been lived through (Bruner 1986:3-5) and have, I would argue, played a significant part in re-shaping the subject's core metaphorical conceptual system out of which a subject's language 'flows'. It is these experiences, through my conversion narrative, that I am trying to get at and explore.

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<sup>14</sup> Csordas (1994, 1997b), employing a phenomenological approach focused upon embodiment, is far less suspicious of the relationship between language and experience. "It is still common," he writes, "for those who express interest in the study of experience to confront an objection that runs something as follows: 'you cannot really study experience, because all experiences are mediated by language – therefore one can only study language or discourse, i.e. representation'" (Csordas 1994:11). Csordas sees the presumption of "an unbridgeable gulf between language and experience" (1997b:xii) as indicative of "the dominance of semiotics over phenomenology" (1994:11). In employing a phenomenological approach that attends to embodied experience (Csordas 1988:122), Csordas works with a methodological toolkit that steers the researcher toward taking seriously the *experiences* of his research participants.

We now have a heuristic toolkit with which we are able to explore, in some depth, the nature of my own experience. ‘The heart’, as a percipient centre, is able to “perceiv[e] God and God’s activity in the world” (Lootens 2012:56); ‘the heart’, as a conceptual centre, is the birthing place of new metaphors that powerfully shape life as lived; and ‘the heart’, as a centre of devotion, directs itself towards various charismatic ‘objects’ that promise to both sustain and protect. Within my own narrative, all these elements are deeply intertwined. For instance, it is only when I reach a point of *devotion* (a prayer from ‘my heart’ – “God... show me who you are”) that God ‘speaks’, implying a dimension of ‘spiritual’ *perception*, through a story that invites me to develop a new metaphorical *conception* of what life is. In other words, in answer to my prayer, there is no immediate stripping back of the veil of knowledge in some kind of revelatory ‘showing’. Rather, the emergence of the ‘Night-Story’ represents the planting of a tiny conceptual seed, which, if nurtured through embodied devotional action, will engender a transformation in perception, most importantly, as we shall see below, a transformation in *self*-perception.

### **The Planting of a Story**

Tim Ingold (2011:143,159) argues that the primary way that human beings come to ‘know’ is not through the transferral of a mass of information from one person to another, information which is subsequently sorted into categories within the mind of the receptive knower (what he calls a ‘complex-structure’ understanding of knowledge formation), but rather as they follow – in both body and mind – paths of movement through the lifeworld (what he calls a ‘complex-process’ understanding). The former he associates with “an academic model of knowledge production” in which truth “is to be found on the library shelf, groaning under the weight of scholarly books and periodicals, rather than ‘out there’ in the world of lived experience” (ibid.:15). The latter, by contrast, is a model in which a person only knows “through an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment” (ibid.:159) – a relationally rich meshwork “teeming with multiple forms of life” (ibid.:142). Just as the epitome of the former (‘complex-structure’ knowledge formation) is classification, so the epitome of the latter (‘complex-process’ knowledge formation) is storytelling (ibid.:160). “Making their way from place to place in the company of others more



knowledgeable than themselves, and hearing their stories, novices learn to connect the events and experiences of their own lives to the lives of predecessors, recursively picking up the strands of these past lives in the process of spinning out their own” (ibid.:161). Guided by the lives and stories of others, individuals learn to “negotiate a path through the world” (ibid.:162). It is in following a path – a “movement along a way of life” – Ingold argues, rather than through the transmission of information to be categorised, that people “grow into knowledge” (ibid.).

It is interesting in this light that, in early January 1995 – and in the midst of my own quest for a particular type of knowledge – it is a *story* that keeps me awake at night. The introduction of a story suggests a paradigmatic shift in my experience and understanding of the way that something might be known – not, as in my previous reading of the Quran, through an “academic” acquisition of more knowledge or information, but rather through the eventually embodied outworking of a parable. The Night-Story – swirling, forming, taking shape, dissolving – may be seen, in part, as my attempt to make conscious sense of another story, the story of Jesus. I am, in Ingold’s terms, picking up the strands of past lives in the process of spinning out my own, not only the lives of those through whom the story of Jesus has been made known to me – my mother, Catholic priests, teachers etc. – but also the apparently more distant strand of Jesus’ own life. The parallels, for anyone that knows the story of Jesus, are obvious. Like the Good Samaritan, the boy in my story is not able to pass by when he encounters the needs of others. Like Jesus, the cost of the boy’s engagement with others is very great, progressively requiring him to lay down his own life, a process which eventually reaches its apex in the giving away of his final breath. And, as also in the gospel stories, the moment of death is subsequently surpassed by a moment of resurrection.

The story, appearing in the night and containing extraordinary characters and supernatural occurrences, has the qualities of dream, fairytale and myth about it. And this, in some sense, is not surprising. Carl Jung (1990[1959]) tells us that the unconscious contents of the psyche very often find conscious expression through dreams and the storied events and characters found within fairytales and myths, and that these will most readily appear when consciousness is at its weakest (ibid.:67). Jung’s framework of understanding is built upon a number of ontological assumptions that are worth exploring here as they suggest some interesting ideas as to the *source* of this

particular story. Like Freud, Jung believed that the human psyche was essentially made up of a mixture of conscious and subconscious (or unconscious) elements. Unlike Freud, however, Jung was convinced that the unconscious element of the psyche contained more than merely forgotten or repressed personal experience (ibid.:3,42). He believed that the psyche also consisted of a “deeper layer”, universal in nature, that was the mysterious birthing place of “primordial images” and “mythological motifs” (ibid.:58). This deeper layer he termed “the collective unconscious”, and he believed that, through a process of evolution and repeatedly shared human experience, archetypal images and motifs – existing somewhat like formless and latent potentialities – had become embedded within this deeper realm. Like crystals growing around their axial structures, these “archetypes” would only find conscious expression as they were “filled out with the material of conscious experience” (ibid.:79) within individual human lives.

Certainly Jung’s ideas would go a long way toward accounting for the lucid power with which I experienced this particular story in my life. It was, as will be shown below, quite simply life-changing. And yet, to draw upon Jung here in *explaining* the power of the story is perhaps problematic, not because his ideas cannot be effectively employed to explain subsequent events (Jordan’s efficacy argument), but because his voice, generally speaking, lacks authority within the anthropological domain (i.e. he does not occupy a place of structural superiority). One of the reasons, according to Charles Laughlin and Vincenza Tiberia (2012), that the writings of Carl Jung have *not* been popular within anthropology is that his psychology expresses a type of structuralism which is at variance with the cultural relativist and social constructivist accounts of human sociality that have gained popularity in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (ibid.:129). The contrast between these perspectives, in many ways, boils down to the oft-debated relationship between human sameness and difference (see Moore & Sanders 2006:1-4; Argyrou 1999). Where Carl Jung appears to attribute a greater degree of non-negotiable ‘sameness’ between human beings, a social constructivist account emphasises the degree to which human beings are purely products of their contexts, thereby enlarging the explanatory role of culture. Both perspectives would, of course, attribute a *certain* amount of ‘sameness’ amongst human beings, but the distinguishing factor lies in where the lines are drawn between what is taken to be universal and what is unique.

Since the starting place of anthropology is to deal with the unique, it is very difficult – from an anthropological point of view – to argue for, or indeed prove, that a particular characteristic of human life is universal. Even when such claims are made, they are all too easily debugged with a simple counter example from a different social group – Popper’s black swan immediately proving that not all swans are white (Popper 1959[1934]:27). As such, we must take, from an anthropological point of view, Carl Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious as just that – an idea. It may or may not be true. Within the Christian domain, however, Jung’s ideas are readily employed for the very reason that his idea of the collective unconscious easily translates into a notion of Universal Spirit. And here we have the meeting place of two very different ontologies – secular anthropology and Christianity – potentially producing two very different explanatory frameworks. On the one hand, I have suggested that the Night-Story represented my conscious attempts to make sense of the story about Jesus, an interpretation that fits nicely with Freud’s understanding of the psyche, Jung’s idea of the *personal* unconscious, and indeed the social constructivist approach with which I began this analysis. For the story about Jesus was something that I *learned* in early childhood, it may, at various points, have been forgotten or repressed, but, even if this were the case, it thereby merely moved from consciousness to the unconscious, and back into consciousness again. All this may be true. Jung’s ideas, on the other hand, suggest that there might be *more* going on: for the archetypal images and motifs which emerge from the “collective unconscious” (or we might even say, in Christian terms, from “the Spirit”) are suggestive of more universal, and therefore shared, experiences of engaging with the realities of being human. The Night-Story, within this frame, is not only an interpretation of the life of Jesus, but also a ‘whisper’ from a transcendent world. It represents an ongoing and intense human struggle with the more universal, and powerful, themes of life, death and rebirth.

Campbell (1968[1949]), drawing upon the work of Jung, has developed this point even further. Campbell’s approach was to bring together “a host of myths and folk tales from every corner of the world” (ibid.:viii) and – though, of course, acknowledging their many differences – to look for the similarities in their basic shape and form. His approach resonates very strongly with that of Jung since it rests upon very similar ontological assumptions: namely, that all humans, though the inhabitants and creators of hugely diverse cultural variety, share a fundamental and common experience of being

human, and that this experience, though it is given voice in a multitude of different ways, can be ‘mined’ for essentially common themes. From his host of myths and folk tales, Campbell distils what he calls “The Monomyth” – an underlying story structure and pattern of themes and characters that repeatedly appear, in their great variety of costumes, across the world. These, in other words, are Jung’s universal unconscious “archetypes” finding cultural expression through the local “material of conscious experience” (Jung 1990:79). What is interesting about the structure of Campbell’s “Monomyth” is that it follows the basic pattern of a rite of passage: separation – initiation – return (Campbell 1968:30). “The central figure or “hero” – representing each one of us – begins life in a place of reasonably secure maternal comfort but is called to a mythological adventure (separation) involving the crossing of a series of thresholds. Each of these thresholds, as in the pattern of a rite of passage, involves a death and rebirth (initiation). The intensity of the thresholds increases until finally the hero encounters a supreme ordeal that requires his or her own self-annihilation, the surrender of life itself. Once more the hero dies, but is now reborn transfigured – expanded both in terms of consciousness and being (ibid.:246) – before being challenged to return to the place where he or she began in order to share with others the elixir of life (return).

## **Living Stories**

The story that emerged to me in the night follows this very same pattern, which is, of course, also the pattern of the story, or myth, about Jesus. The story I wrote begins as follows:

*When the old man was a boy he went in search of the truth. He sat on the stone doorstep and thought hard about where truth would be. After a while, a bird came and sang in his ear: “Truth is high, higher than this world can be.” At this the boy felt happy, as he knew where he must go. He gathered together some food and, placing it in a pouch that he tied to his belt, he set off for the mountain...*

There are a few things worth picking out here. Firstly, the story is about a “boy” – a child, a novice, someone who does not yet ‘know’. It reflects my own positionality as someone who admits to not knowing who God is, and yet desires this type of

knowledge. We encounter the boy first on a stone doorstep. In fact, implicitly, it is *his* doorstep, the doorstep of his family home, of his parental nest (Campbell's place of maternal comfort). Sitting in this comfortable place, the boy is aware that something is lacking, evidenced by the fact that he feels a need to go in search of that something, what he refers to as "the truth". Yet as long as he remains seated on the step that *truth* is illusive – it cannot be known, however "hard" he *thinks* about it. It cannot be worked out within that particular system of knowledge, but rather requires a *different* kind of knowing. Access to this other kind of knowing is reliant upon an external agent. If the bird had not come and sung in his ear, the boy might have sat there forever *thinking* about where truth might be. The bird acts as a herald, inviting the boy to *a path* of adventure (Campbell 1968:49-58; Ingold 2000a, 2011). The truth cannot be known by merely thinking about it, but only as the boy responds to the invitation to move along a "way of life" (Ingold 2011:162). The boy feels happy, perhaps no longer weighed down by his heavy, intense thought, gathers some simple belongings, and sets off.

The story conceived within me gives me a new metaphor with which to think about life and upon which to act. James Fernandez (1974:123) argues that metaphor works by providing a more concrete image for something that is difficult, conceptually, to grasp. At the same time, as metaphors are appropriated by social actors they lead to performance and action (Fernandez 1972:43, 1974:120). In Lakoff and Johnson's terms (2003), the metaphors that lie at the core of our conceptual system structure and affect our thoughts, actions, relationships, and our fundamental perceptions of reality (ibid.:3). Based upon these understandings, we might say that the appropriation of new metaphors therefore engenders transformation and change, the instigation of new ways of being in the world. In this respect, the Night-Story plants within me, within my 'heart', a new kind of metaphor. The inchoate notion of a search for truth and a search for God is made more graspable, more concrete, through being expressed within the narrative form of a journey (Fernandez 1974:123). Specifically, the story connects a search for truth with an embodied relational journey of progressively laying down one's life for others. The story 'speaks', it has a message: if you are searching for truth, then follow this way.

The boy's setting off is therefore one of the most significant aspects of the story. For just as the bird acts as a herald to the boy, so in my life the story itself acts as a herald to me. The boy's journey causes him to engage with others, and to listen to their stories.

My journey, from this point, also causes me to engage with others – in this case the homeless of Cambridge – and to listen to their stories. Just as the boy, through listening to the *expressions* of others, is drawn into the *experience* of their lives (see Bruner 1986:3-5; Dilthey 1976:230), so am I also drawn into the lives of the homeless and, as a result, am compelled to act. The boy gives away parts of himself. I also try to meet the needs of others through giving. But it is here that the stories part. The mythical boy continues on his journey, giving away his life even to his last breath, and so experiences a life renewed. I, however, reach a threshold beyond which I cannot pass, but which nevertheless reveals powers at work in my life of which I have previously been unaware. In Campbell's frame I have begun, through the boy's story, to heed the dangerous and fascinating vapours rising from the Aladdin's cave of the unconscious. They are experienced as dangerous because "they threaten the fabric of the security into which we have built ourselves", and yet they are also experienced as fascinating because "they carry keys that open the whole realm of the desired and feared adventure of the discovery of the self" (Campbell 1968[1949]:8). It is precisely through the crisis of a perceived threat to the fabric of my security that a heightened awareness of self now emerges, a crisis that is instigated by a homeless man sitting on a stone doorstep.

As I go out to meet the man, I naïvely offer him what I think he needs, money. But the 'gift' is ridiculous, as it bears no relation to the need. As we talk, his story – his expression of his experience – opens up to me. It is one of disagreement and of his subsequent expulsion from the shelter. I ask him if he is going to be all right, and he quite honestly replies that he doesn't know. It is a bitterly cold night and, as I listen to his story, his need becomes blindingly obvious to me. He needs somewhere warm to sleep. I can offer him such a place. But at this point the rational voice of self-preservation kicks in: 'What if he's dangerous?' 'What if he's a thief?' 'What will he *think* if I offer him a place to stay?' In the mythical Night-Story the boy moves on from one character to the next. He encounters them one by one (their stories, their needs), in each case he counts the cost to himself (which increases with each character he meets), and then, with almost cheerful resignation, he gives that which is needed (which in the end costs him his life). He is carried forward by love, and is reborn. I encounter the man on the stone doorstep (his story, his needs), count the cost of my engagement (the risk of offering him a place to stay), and walk away. The rational voice of self-preservation wins out.

### **'Seeing' Oneself in a New Light**

Susan Harding argues that, in the second half of the twentieth century, through the preaching of crusade evangelists like Billy Graham and Bill Bright, and through the desire to find a shared common ground amongst Fundamentalists, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and both Conservative and more Liberal Evangelicals, a renewed language of what counted as being a Christian emerged: "someone who had realised he was a sinner, asked Jesus to forgive him, and accepted Jesus into his heart as his personal saviour" (Harding 2000:19). Harding perceptively reflects here the core elements of a broad range of evangelical perspectives. Namely, only the person who 'realises' his sin will *feel* the need for both forgiveness and salvation, only the person who *understands* himself a sinner can be saved. This process not only suggests a transformation in self-perception – a '*seeing*' of oneself in a new light – but also, ultimately, the subsequent re-writing of that self within a different story. The transformation in self-perception fits within Harding's category of "anything that makes you more likely to listen" (ibid.:57), whilst the subsequent re-writing of the self within the gospel story equates to a particular dimension of the listening itself.

Certainly, the process of a 'realisation' of sin played a hugely significant part within my own conversion. Through the writing of the mythical Night-Story I mapped out in broad daylight a personal guide of what a search for 'truth' might entail. It also expressed my internal grappling with what the story of Jesus might *mean*. As stated, behind the Night-Story lay a search for an understanding of what it meant to lay down one's life for others. The story gave voice and symbolic form to deeper currents present in my life at that time and, as such, it became a conscious expression of that which I was already intuitively feeling. It also appeared as the beginnings of an answer to my prayer – "God, who are you?" – in that it seemed to set before me a way of life marked with a promise of discovery (i.e. the 'truth'). As such, the story was implicitly invitational – a re-emerging within the present context of the charismatic call of Jesus to "come follow me", the very call that I had been so reluctant to respond to through my teenage years. The implicit challenge of the story, what I have termed its "heraldic" nature, was to 'make real' the message it seemed to convey, to seek to live out in real-

life terms “the way” it appeared so clearly to point to and, in so doing, finally to close the gap between the gospel story and my life.

What I discovered, however, was unexpected. In seeking to close one gap, another opened. The devastation that I felt at not helping the homeless man was not primarily to do with the man himself but, even more than that, it was to do with the earth shattering experience – and hence ‘realisation’ – of the gap between my own life and the life of Jesus (the latter being metaphorically expressed in the story of the mythical boy). Having set out, for the first time, to follow Jesus *with all of my heart*, my encounter with the homeless man and my refusal to help him, brought before my eyes, in painfully stark terms, the previously unseen powers of self-preservation at work in my own life. I was, in short, experiencing a transformation in self-perception. It made me see how different from Jesus I really was, a realisation which I experienced in my body as I walked away from another person’s need – a sense of feeling dazed, of being dragged downwards by a great weight, of being stopped in my tracks etc. This gap between my own life and the life of Jesus was rephrased the following week when the evangelist described sin as a “falling short” of God’s standard or way, God’s standard or way being expressed and embodied in the life of Jesus, the sinless man. This served, at the time, as a very adequate description, as it provided a convincing frame of understanding by which I was able to make sense of my experience.<sup>15</sup> It was the first time I had truly understood myself, in relation to Jesus, as “a sinner”.

One of the great insights of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s exegesis of Amerindian ‘perspectivism’ (1998) is that the position from which something is ‘seen’ (or indeed heard) is everything.<sup>16</sup> Reality is apprehended differently “*from distinct points of view*” (ibid.:469). One of the primary reasons I was able to ‘hear’ the gospel that week in Cambridge, that the “supernatural order [became] real, known, experienced, and absolutely irrefutable” (Harding 2000:36) was because I was apprehending reality from a location radically different from any I had been in before. My own search had

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<sup>15</sup> Here we hark back to Stoller’s crossing of his “invisible threshold into the Songhay world of sorcery” (Stoller & Olkes 1987:153). In Stoller’s case his experience of bodily paralysis shook his former conceptual world and, as a result, his “unwavering faith in science vanished” (ibid.). Explanations derived from the Songhay world of sorcery provided him with a more convincing frame of understanding by which he was able to make sense of his present experiences.

<sup>16</sup> Viveiros de Castro is certainly not the first to make this point, which goes back to feminist epistemologies, and standpoint theories (see Mies 1983; Haraway 1988; Harding 1987, 1992; Narayan 1993; Enslin 1994).



reached a dead end, an impasse as it were. Outside the burger bar, faced with the need of another, and at the same time confronted with my own rational fears, I had experienced my own powerlessness to do what I perceived as the right thing, to follow a clear path of sacrificial love. Carl Jung describes such a situation as an “archetype of transformation” in which one’s getting stuck in “a blind alley” or an “impossible situation” acts as a forerunner to “illumination or higher consciousness, by means of which the initial situation is overcome on a higher level” (Jung 1990:39). That “higher level” paradoxically involved, in part for me, a descent – an acceptance of my own sin and powerlessness and thereby a re-understanding of my own *position* in the gospel stories – not as the good Samaritan that always helps others, but rather as the man on the side of the road needing help. It was only from the latter position that I could perceive and accept, for the first time, such a profound kind of help from God. I experienced the realisation that not only did Christ die for sinners, but that Christ died *for me* (see Harding 2000:56-57).<sup>17</sup> It was only from the latter position that I was not only able to listen, but also to hear, not only able to look, but also to see, and to understand.

### **The ‘Coming Alive’ of the Spiritual Senses**

During the mission week in Cambridge I began to ‘sense’ things in a completely *different* way from how I had ‘sensed’ things before. My broader experience entailed not just entering a different frame of understanding, it also involved entering a different sensory and perceptual world. Drawing on the French anthropologist Jean Pouillon (1982[1979]), Lindquist and Coleman astutely observe that the ‘believer’ doesn’t really ‘believe’ in the existence of God: “For the believer,” they write, “the existence of God is not ‘believed’ but ‘perceived’” (Lindquist & Coleman 2008:5). From an insider’s viewpoint ‘new birth’, or ‘birth in the Spirit’, is experienced in exactly this way, as a perception of that which already *is*. Through an “opening of the spiritual senses” (John Wesley cited in Mealey 2012:253) God, who is already present, is at last *perceived*. Coleman describes how in the logic of incarnation the Christian mind and body are

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<sup>17</sup> “Christ’s death,” Harding writes (2000:56-57), “raise[s] a question that must be answered by all those who come after: Whom did Christ die for?” As believers answer, “He died for me,” she argues, they “close the gap; they fulfil or complete the story.”

understood as being “colonized by the transcendent world of the Spirit” (Coleman 1996:111). The metaphors that a person *experiencing* conversion might employ are likely to be slightly different – the mind and body being ‘brought to life’ through the permeation of the Spirit’s breath, or the experience of the Spirit as life-giving water ‘bubbling up’ from a deep internal spring. But the issue is the same – new birth is something to do with the Spirit emerging, settling or dwelling *within* the human person. In this regard, the mission week in Cambridge represented, for me, an ontological shift in which God’s presence became a tangible reality, something that I discernibly ‘sensed’ within and around me in a way that I had never done before.

One of the problems that we have, according to David Howes (2009), in thinking about the senses is that our ideas of *how* something can be ‘sensed’ might be reasonably narrow. As we have seen, he and Constance Classen (1996:93-94) suggest that through exploring the diverse ways in which ‘others’ construct the *sensorium* – referring both to the seat of sensation and the sensory apparatus itself (Howes 2009:1-6) – we not only enrich our understanding of diversity, but also become aware of the historicity and cultural specificity of our own understandings. Howes illustrates this through referring to the perceptual paradigms of the Hausa, Javanese and Cashinahua who each have numbers of senses less than, different from, or more than the conventional Euro-American “five”. An “overexposure” to the Euro-American fivefold arrangement of the senses, Howes argues (2009:3), potentially blinds us to other ways in which the sensorium might be arranged, to other ways in which things might be ‘sensed’. Tim Ingold (2000b) critiquing the work of Classen and Howes and what has come to be known more broadly as the ‘anthropology of the senses’, argues for a greater ‘sensitivity’ not to the ways in which different ‘cultures’ construct different sensoriums, but to the ways in which *individuals* interweave their lived experience with discourse in ongoing processes of making themselves understood to others (ibid.:282-285).

Within Christian thought, the idea that the sensory apparatus extends beyond the five bodily senses is not something new. “Christian authors,” write Paul Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley in their edited volume, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, “of all ages have used sensory language to express human encounters with the divine” (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012:1). Origen of Alexandria, living in the second and third Century, is credited as the first to use the expression ‘spiritual senses’ (*sensus*

*spiritalis*) to refer to those parts of the sensorium which extend beyond purely physical human perception (ibid.:2-4; Vinge 1975 cited in Howes 2009:18). Augustine, as we have already seen, associated the spiritual senses – those senses “capable of perceiving God and God’s activity in the world” (Lootens 2012:56) – with the heart. He and other early Christian authors in the West, working within a post-Aristotelian framework, developed their notions around the conception of there being *five* ‘spiritual senses’ which worked in a way “analogous to but not reducible to ordinary sense perception” (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012:3).<sup>18</sup> And yet, since there are no tangible ‘spiritual sense organs’ comparable to the more visible ‘corporeal sense organs’ the strict delineation of *five* spiritual senses has itself been brought into question (LaNave 2012:165; Rahner cited in Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012:5). Origen himself, for example, spoke of ‘*one* divine sense’ but then went on to speak of the ‘*many* forms of that sense’ (McInroy 2012:25, my italics). Karl Rahner, in a seminal article written in the 1930s, at first expounded a doctrine of the spiritual senses closely analogous to the five physical senses, but in his later work considered such a strict division “rather forced”, preferring instead to emphasise “the unitive character of spiritual perception” (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012:4-5).<sup>19</sup>

I have already mentioned how, on the first day of the mission, having initially been quite resistant to attending the meeting, my ‘heart’ changed throughout the day so that, by the early evening, I felt a kind of internal, gently bubbling excitement about going, actually a kind of joy. Upon entering the auditorium, my friend and I found a place to sit. As I have said, when the speaker began to talk, I began to listen in a way that I had never listened before. In truth, I found him very easy to listen to; he spoke in a calm and mildly humorous way. But my attentiveness cannot merely be explained by his agreeable style. Most remarkable to me was how much I *wanted* to listen, how much I

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<sup>18</sup> Augustine, for example, wrote of how he “tasted” God, was “touched” by him, found him “fragrant,” and of how God “shattered [his] deafness” and “put to flight [his] blindness” (from his *Confessions*, cited in Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012:3).

<sup>19</sup> This move is interestingly reflected in Ingold’s argument against compartmentalising the senses but instead, following Merleau-Ponty, to consider the body as a “synergic system” (Merleau-Ponty 1962:234 cited in Ingold 2000b:268). Dealing in particular with vision and hearing, Ingold writes as follows: “I have suggested that the eyes and ears should not be understood as separate keyboards for the registration of sensation but as organs of the body as a whole, in whose movement, within an environment, the activity of perception consists” (ibid.). Interestingly, this reflects the Cashinahua notion, cited by Howes, that “the whole body knows” (Howes 2009:16) as well as the latter’s claim that the anthropology of the senses has moved increasingly in this direction – away from “separating out sensory modalities” (Howes 2010:334) toward an ‘intersensorial’ approach examining “the multi-directional interaction of the senses and of sensory ideologies” (Howes 2005: 9).

*wanted* to understand the things he was talking about. My listening, I found, was centred in a very deep part of my body, in a very deep part of my being. My attention was ‘gripped’ in a gentle but firm way. Alongside this, there was a feeling of opening out, a kind of inner spaciousness that connected me with the spaciousness around me. I felt both ‘gripped’ and, at the same time, totally at ease. It was as if the very spaciousness in which I found myself was enabling my attention to be focused. As this man spoke, it seemed to be bringing not only a change in my understanding, of my possible ‘place’ within a new and different story, but also a change in how I was *experiencing* listening itself. Metaphorically, if the body were compared to a house, it felt like underground rooms that had been shut up and never used before were being opened up, and with that came the opening of a different realm of sensory awareness, a different capacity to hear.

On a subsequent evening of the mission, I had another subtle, and yet strange, sense of a change in perception. In front of me, amongst a full row of people, was a severely disabled man in a wheelchair. I remember him being abnormally small, as if his growth had been halted in childhood. His head, although primarily bald, was sparsely covered with straggly wisps of hair. Mentally he seemed alert and was enjoying the company of his friends. After I sat down, my eyes kept settling upon him. I just couldn’t stop thinking how *beautiful* he was. It was that sense of profound beauty that, taking me by surprise, was now grasping my attention. He seemed absolutely complete, not lacking in any way, and just *so* beautiful. What was strange was that this ‘sense’ was completely new to me. I knew that, in ‘normal’ life, I didn’t usually see things this way. Despite, on one level, being able to ‘see’ all his ‘imperfections’, all I could really *see* was beauty. In ‘normal’ circumstances I would, most likely, have dismissed him as looking odd. And yet I was overwhelmed in quite a lasting way by *another* sense of perception that saw only beauty. This ‘other’ sense, in fact, overwhelmed my usual perception, engendering in me a sense of awe, and giving me a feeling that I was somehow seeing this man through different eyes, through eyes not entirely my own. It was that sense, a wonderful sense I have to say, that caused my gaze to keep returning to, and settling upon him.

Through that mission week, these changes in perception – both in how and what I was ‘hearing’, and in how and what I was ‘seeing’ – were accompanied by other changes

too. The weather that week in Cambridge was quite remarkable, marked by the most translucent blue skies.<sup>20</sup> There was, within this, a sense that what had been distant and far off, had now come close. This shrinking of distance to closeness seemed to take place for me in a number of different ways, mostly centred on a tangible experience of God's presence. Much of this was related to the message – not only that Jesus *died* for me, which, as we have seen, was something that I was very happy to accept, but also that Jesus rose from the dead, bringing forth the implication that he is, even now, still alive. As I began to accept or to 'enter' this message – to consider it as true, that is – my perception of both time and space changed. In the presence of something eternal, the time between Jesus' resurrection and the present day appeared to dissolve. What had existed for me as dead, and in the far distant past, was suddenly alive and very close. Alongside this, my previous objection to God (of still seeming so far away) was suddenly undone. The clear blue sky, the created order, seemed to reflect this. With all obstacles removed, God *felt* close.

Combining Augustine's idea that the spiritual senses are interior senses, that they are "senses of the heart" (Lootens 2012:64) by which a person is "capable of perceiving God and God's activity in the world" (ibid.:56), with my own suggestion that 'the heart', as a Christian category, refers to the 'centre', 'core' or 'innermost being' of a human person, we may say that the changes taking place within me, that I am describing above, are changes that are taking place at the level of 'the heart'. Through my language, through my metaphors, I am certainly seeking to convey experiences that have something to do with 'depth', experiences that appear to be taking place deep within me. At the same time, I am describing a more general change in perception whereby the world around me has begun to take on different qualities. Not only does the sky appear more vivid and more translucent than it has ever done before, but my perception of others appears, at times, to be overwhelmed by a sense not entirely my own. If charisma is, as its original meaning suggests, a "gift of grace" (Weber 1968a:47), then my surprising perceptions of beauty, which are both vital and fascinating, may also be conceived as being fundamentally charismatic in nature.

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<sup>20</sup> For an interesting comparison in 'ecstatic experience', see Merleau-Ponty's description of gazing into blue skies, which Ingold parallels with Zuckerkandl's experience of the same activity (Ingold 2000b:264,267).

## **'Touching' the 'object' of Charismatic Devotion**

Charisma, according to Shils, is a *quality imputed* to 'objects' as a result of their "presumed connection" to ultimate things. The central issue for Shils is the connection that a charismatic 'object' displays, or rather, is thought to have, to a "very central feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives" (Shils cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi). In the words of Shmuel Eisenstadt, charismatic involvement "is rooted in the attempt to come into contact with the very essence of being, to go to the very roots of existence, of cosmic, social, and cultural order, to what is seen as sacred and fundamental" (Eisenstadt 1968:xix). Following Fowler (1995), I have argued that 'faith' is strongly related to charisma, where 'faith' is understood both as an action (the act of imputing charisma) as well as a state, the relation of trust in and loyalty to a particular 'object', the latter becoming, for the one subject to it, a "center of value and power" promising sustenance and the conferral of meaning and worth upon the devotee in the midst of a dangerous and uncertain world (ibid.:18). 'Faith', in these terms, corresponds to what Malcolm Ruel (2002[1982]) identified as the ancient meaning of 'belief' within the Judaeo-Christian tradition, in other words a relationship of trust and loyalty to a particular 'god'. It is, according to Fowler, an issue of 'the heart'.

Part of the advantage of such a framing is that it does not depend upon a separation of the 'religious' from the 'non-religious'. Fowler's definition of faith is universal. Everybody has centres of value and power to which they give allegiance, and upon which they depend, in some shape and form. Most often our faith is dispersed amongst many centres. In other words, most of us live with many 'gods' (see McLean 1986:159-161). The difference for the Christian convert is that faith has become intensified and focused in a particular way. Other centres of value and power, finite ones, have perhaps begun to collapse or to lose their charismatic appeal. Maybe these loci of devotion, these charismatic 'objects', have failed in that they have not brought the well-being that they promised to bring (Weber 1978:1114), they have not proven, in experience, to be the vital sources of life that they promised to be. Whatever has taken place, the person teetering on the edge of Christian conversion (that state that colleagues warned Susan Harding so sternly about) has begun to reach beyond the finite and into the mysterious realm of the infinite to find a charismatic 'object' large enough to be worthy of such

devotion of ‘the heart’, an ‘object’ which proves to be that fundamental and vital source of *Life*.

One particular critique of Fowler’s work is that it is overly focused upon the cognitive, intellectual aspects of faith and downplays other dimensions, particularly those that are emotive or affective (Broughton 1986:93; Schneider 1986:241-243). Indeed, reflected in the title of his seminal work (1995[1981]), Fowler characterises faith primarily as a quest for *meaning*. An exploration of my own conversion has highlighted other aspects of (specifically Christian) faith and experience that go well beyond the cognitive and into the realm of the sensory. Drawing upon recent anthropological work on the senses, and employing a notion of the ‘spiritual senses’, has enabled me to write about and to frame these aspects of experience. Indeed, the anthropology of the senses takes us beyond a quest for meaning, to appreciate the phenomenological *experience* of the charismatic object and its vitalising qualities. It could, however, be argued that even when social actors, such as myself, employ sensory terminology in order to convey ‘spiritual’ experience, we are doing something fundamentally metaphorical in nature. We are, to follow Fernandez (1972:46), translating or moving experience from one domain (concrete experiences of God) into a different domain of experience (the corporeal senses) in order to make ourselves understood to others (Ingold 2000b:282-285). For instance, when ancient mystics such as Gregory of Nyssa, Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure and Bernard of Clairvaux expressed ‘touching’ God as the ultimate goal of the mystic path (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012:9; Coolman 2012:133-134), they were no doubt seeking to convey concrete experiences of God through translating those experiences into a sensory modality, and in so doing highlighting both a particular aspect of their experience and the sensory metaphor through which that experience was being conveyed, namely, intimate contact.

In seeking to convey my experience I find myself also, finally, drawn to a metaphor of ‘touch’. In fact, in this section I have already, through the voices of others, begun to introduce such a metaphor – Shils’ “presumed *connection*” to ultimate things, Eisenstadt’s description of charismatic involvement as an “attempt to come *into contact* with the very essence of being” (Shils cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi, my italics). To employ a sensory metaphor by which an inchoate experience might be more easily conveyed, to ‘touch’ a charismatic object is to experience its life-giving force, to

surrender to it, to give oneself over to its authority, to acknowledge it as one's god. Christian faith, certainly in my experience, is about coming into contact with, resting one's heart upon, a *particular* charismatic 'object', a *particular* god. In this chapter, I have sought to show what this process meant for me. What I have described is an embodied process in which 'the heart' – as a centre of devotion, of conception, and perception – played a central and key role. I have described the process by which I came to rest my 'heart' upon Jesus, for he is, of course, the *particular* charismatic 'object' to which I refer. As stated above, Susan Harding recognised a defining thread amongst a broad range of Christians as this: to be a Christian is to realise you are a sinner, ask Jesus to forgive you, and accept him into your heart as your personal saviour (Harding 2000:19). But this definition, although true, falls short. For me, the central 'revelation', that which impressed itself upon me more than anything else during the week of my conversion, that which caused me the most wonder and amazement, was not that 'Jesus died for me' but that 'Jesus is God'. And this 'revelation', I would argue, was intimately linked to the fact that, during that week, I allowed Jesus to become *my* god, the numinous, life-giving 'object' of my charismatic devotion (Weber 1968b:48-49). In the next chapter, we shall begin to look at how this relation is worked out in the lives of others.



## Chapter 3

### Metaphorical ‘Moves’, ‘Open Hearts’ and ‘Invited Intruders’

*“I should like to define metaphor simply as ‘a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun (an I, a you, a we, a they) which makes a movement and leads to a performance.’”*

*James Fernandez (1972:43), ‘Persuasions and Performances’*

#### Introduction

In the last chapter, I argued that Jesus *was* a charismatic leader, in Weber’s sense, when he ministered as a man in Palestine in the early first century, but, more importantly, he is *still* experienced as a charismatic leader today by many who follow him. Through an analysis of my own conversion experience and narrative, I have suggested three aspects potentially involved in experiencing Jesus as a charismatic leader, all of which are rooted in what Christians call ‘the heart’. ‘The heart’, as a centre of perception, also associated with the ‘spiritual senses’ – those senses “capable of perceiving God and God’s activity in the world” (Lootens 2012:56) – only ‘came alive’ for me at the point that I reached a place of ‘surrender’, where God became, in a serious sense, a charismatic ‘object’ to me. From that point, numinous dimensions began to filter into and permeate my life, whether, for example, in the form of a mythical story, or in unexpected experiences of joy. ‘The heart’, as a centre of conception, became for me the ‘planting’ place of the mythical story, a narrative that began to provide me with new metaphors of what life might be, namely a journey into ‘truth’ expressed as a path of sacrificial love. And finally ‘the heart’, as a centre of devotion, formed an underlying gravitational pull towards a transcendent Being, and therefore engendered certain ‘serious’ responses to those things both perceived and conceived. For example, the mythical story didn’t remain *just* a story, but began to be played out within the context of my life, ultimately leading to a transformed understanding of self and an embodied experience of grace.

I ended the last chapter through framing and describing my experiences of an encounter with Jesus in terms of connection to a vital source of *Life*, entailing devotion and surrender to a particular charismatic ‘object’. As is clear from my descriptions so far, my experiences of connecting with Jesus as a charismatic leader were highly sensory in nature. In connecting to a vital source of *Life*, one might say that I felt this *Life* emerging from deep within me, from within my spirit or, in the terms I have framed it so far, from within my ‘heart’. Many Christians would describe this experience as ‘birth in the Spirit’, or being ‘filled with the Holy Spirit’. Applying a Weberian frame to Christian experience allows us to speak about another interesting dimension. One of the characteristics of the charismatic relation that Weber describes is authority. To ‘follow’ a particular leader is voluntarily to grant that leader a place of authority within one’s life. Within a Christian context, this relationship is often expressed through such notions as Jesus being one’s ‘Lord’ or ‘King’, which is another way of saying, in sociological terms, that he is the voluntary ‘object’ of one’s charismatic devotion. Implicit within the notion of the ‘Kingdom of God’ is this dimension of authority. In terms of this image, one might conceive ‘entry’ into the Kingdom of God as related to the degree to which one has made Jesus one’s King.<sup>21</sup>

In this present chapter I begin to turn the anthropological gaze away from myself and to look at what the lives of others, who express a similar *type* of Christian faith, tell us, not only about ‘the heart’, but also about a certain way of life engendered by a charismatic relation with a divine Other. The story that I tell continues to have a strongly autobiographical component, as the people upon whom I focus in this chapter – Dave and Lynn Webb – are my parents-in-law, with whom I have been involved since I moved with them to Thessaloniki, Greece, three and a half years after my conversion, in the autumn of 1998. For eleven years, between 1998 and 2009, I lived and worked alongside Dave and Lynn as we connected with various church groups in Greece, Albania, Republic of Macedonia and Bulgaria, as well as cultivating relationships more locally with people from a range of ethnic backgrounds and expressions of faith. In 2004, Rachel, Dave and Lynn’s eldest daughter, and I got married. In 2008, Rachel and I had our first child. And in 2009, we moved to the UK for me to undertake a Masters

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, what it means to make Jesus one’s ‘King’ is by no means obvious, just as experiencing Jesus as a vital source of *Life* might not, for many, be as sensory as my descriptions of initial encounter imply. For instance, the life of the apophatic mystic could equally be framed in terms of charismatic relationship with a divine Other where transformation in perception is valued highly, but sensorial perceptions of God are, comparatively speaking, hardly valued at all.

in Cross-Cultural Research Methods at the University of Sussex. At the start of 2011, we returned to the Balkans to carry out eighteen months of anthropological fieldwork based amongst a portion of the network of relationships that we had formed in the years since 1998.

At that time, due to a relational ‘door’ that had opened to Dave and Lynn, they were spending half their time still living in Thessaloniki, and half their time living in Shkodër, a city in the north of Albania. The ‘door’ that had opened was an invitation made to Dave and Lynn by a young couple that we knew in Shkodër to come and help them establish ‘community’ with a small church group that this couple were leading. Given that this opportunity encompassed two themes that were of central interest to me – ‘transformation’ and ‘community’ – Rachel and I agreed that we would also split our time between Greece and Albania, primarily living alongside Dave and Lynn, with the hope of observing an interesting moment of transition within the Albanian church group’s life. Upon moving to Shkodër, however, Dave and Lynn discovered that the young couple that had invited their help had backed off. Rachel and I arrived to find Dave and Lynn in the uncomfortable place of wrestling through what their expectations of ‘*relationship*’ with this young couple should now be. After several months, it became clear that the Albanian couple did not desire anything beyond a very ‘surface’ connection with Dave and Lynn, so curtailing any influence the latter might have wished to have in terms of helping the group transition towards a new expression of ‘community’.

What emerged from this situation, from an anthropological perspective, were a whole number of new and interesting questions. Why did ‘*relationship*’ with this young couple not work out? What expectations did Dave and Lynn, even Rachel and I, have in terms of ‘*relationship*’, and how were these different from those of the young Albanian couple? What does ‘*relationship*’ even *mean* to our core group? And where did these ideas come from? What *other* ‘core values’ were at work within Dave’s, Lynn’s, Rachel’s and my own lives? And what did these reveal about our particular *type* of Christian faith, in contrast, perhaps, to other *types* of Christian faith? Since ‘*relationship*’ with the young couple was not developing as we had wished, and since Rachel and I were deeply socially embedded with Dave and Lynn, it meant that I could only explore and answer these questions in any significant depth with our *own* group,

and not with the local Albanian one. Access to what the young Albanian couple really thought about things often remained hidden behind a quite carefully managed surface politeness, which rendered it impossible for me to really get at *why* they were distancing themselves. Over time, as this distance grew, the likelihood of being able to access their perspectives increasingly slipped away.

The research field that remained wide open to me, however, was our own small group. Dave and Lynn understood something of what my project was about, and were open to being participants in my research. Given the longevity of my relationship with them, alongside the fact that, since 1998, I also had been involved in the development of what we had been doing in the Balkans, it seemed to make sense to develop my project as a self-reflexive exploration of our own group's faith and way of life. At the same time, since Rachel and I were, between January 2011 and July 2012, living alongside Dave and Lynn, it provided plenty of opportunity to attentively observe our own particular ways of being in the world: *what* we talked about and *how* we expressed those things, the ways in which we negotiated relationships amongst ourselves and with others. Although 'anthropology at home' (Jackson 1987) has become increasingly common within the discipline, situating research within *such* close familial relationships is still something of a rarity (for other exceptions see Enslin 1994; Khare 1983; Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987; Nakleh 1979 and Narayan 1993) and carries with it a unique set of methodological and ethical challenges (Jackson 1987:14).

Methodologically, one of the potential difficulties for the native ethnographer is the blinding effects of familiarity that may "blur the object to be described" (Segalen & Zonabend 1987:111; see also Löfgren 1987:76). Ardener (1987:49) argues that if what happens within a social space has the appearance of 'uneventfulness' it is rendered difficult to perceive. On the one hand, an event's lack of 'significance' may cause it to pass unrecorded (Stephen & Greer 1981:125); on the other, extensive knowledge to local contexts may cause the ethnographer to be too literal-minded, to take too much at face value and to not question the proper meanings of signs or metaphors (Hastrup 1987:104). As a counterbalance, Stephen & Greer (1981:124-125) suggest that extra caution is necessary for the native ethnographer, advocating the adoption of an "artificial naïveté" that asks questions about the most obvious elements of social reality

and takes notes on mundane elements of life in order to develop a sensitivity to those things that otherwise may pass unnoticed.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges for the anthropologist working ‘at home’ is an ethical one – knowing how much to reveal to a wider audience. Enslin (1994:557-558) is sensitive to the risk of exploiting friendship for the sake of research. Jones (1970:255) writes that the ethnographer, as a trusted friend or relative to whom deeply personal information is revealed, would be both “dishonest and disloyal” to reveal it. “The demands of science must be carefully weighed against those of humanity,” writes Mascarenhas-Keyes (1987:189), as the careless and unchecked publication of certain materials could lead to the long-term disruption of close, familial relationships. Thus, Nakleh (1979:349), whilst writing about his native village, found himself hovering over every word – wrestling as to *just how much* he should conceal. For me these issues have been paramount, as I have sought to choose carefully, within the context of committed relationships of intimacy, what is to be revealed and what must remain hidden. Enslin, in this regard, suggests that there are times when it is best not to write. “Some events,” she says, “conflicts, debates, conversations, tragedies, and joys should be learned from and acted upon in the local scene rather than being written about for the intellectual benefit or voyeuristic desires of Euro-American audiences” (Enslin 1994:557-558).

Part of my solution to this dilemma has been to seek not to disclose and comment upon other people’s lives more than I would be willing to disclose and comment upon my own. Certainly, awareness of this issue has formed part of my motivation for exploring, in depth in the previous chapter, such a significant episode within my own life-story. In this present chapter, I focus in on Dave and Lynn. Based on interviews carried out in late 2011 and early 2012, I use their life-stories as a tool not only to introduce them to the reader, but also as a means of exploring their experiential, ideological and conceptual world(s). Emerging from an examination of their life-stories are similar themes to those emerging from an examination of my own: namely, charismatic relation with a divine Other (devotion), notions of an extended sensorium encompassing what might be referred to as the ‘spiritual senses’ (perception) and the significance of a number of similar conceptual metaphors in the ongoing constitution of life as lived (conception).

## Summary of Argument

In this chapter I deepen my exploration of how metaphor works within people's lives. Building upon Lakoff and Johnson's (2003[1980]) work, and drawing on Fernandez (1972, 1974), I examine how biblical narratives often provide *concrete metaphorical images* (Fernandez 1974:123, 1972:43) that are appropriated by social actors within processes of becoming. At the same time, sensory perceptions provide *convincing concrete experiences* of the divine that subsequently become metaphorically translated "from one domain into another by virtue of a common factor which can be generalized between the experiences in the two domains" (Fernandez 1972:46). Filling in some contextual history, I look at this process as it was played out within my own life through my initial connections with Dave and Lynn. In other words, I look at how sensorial experiences of contact to a vital source of *Life* convinced me that moving to the Balkans with them was a good idea, and how this move was subsequently framed for me within a biblical narrative. Next, I turn to an exploration of Dave and Lynn's lives, taking note of particular themes that appear central to their ideology, themes such as 'movement' and 'adventure'. I argue that underlying these notions is a more fundamental root metaphor of 'openness'. I look at how Dave and Lynn apply the metaphor of 'openness' to the way family life is structured, food is shared, and community life is enacted. Since metaphor is, according to Fernandez, "the translation of experience from one domain into another by virtue of a common factor" (ibid.) I begin to build up, through an analysis of their life-stories, a description of several different domains of Dave and Lynn's life-experiences where this metaphor can be applied. To some degree, it is *I* who am explicitly making these metaphorical 'moves' in order to illustrate and explicate different aspects of their lives.

In Part One of the chapter (*'Openness' in Community*), I look at Dave's early childhood experiences of 'community' as it was expressed through family and church life. Next, I look at Lynn's descriptions of her and Dave's experiences as part of an intentional Christian community in Sussex just after they got married. In both cases, I argue, there is a common theme that exists, a theme that is woven around the notion of 'openness'. In brief, the theme is this: an essential vitality within any social group is maintained by keeping its borders permeable and flexible and by not 'hardening up' the group's

boundaries. In other words, as a social group maintains an ‘openness’ to what I call a ‘convivial intruder’ or a ‘trusted other’, the latter’s (occasionally uncomfortable) presence ‘unsettles’ the group dynamic, thereby preventing it from forming ossified boundaries, and sinking into a type of reified lifelessness.

This same metaphorical conceptual structure can also be translated to another sphere of Dave and Lynn’s experience, namely their relationship(s) with God. In Part Two of the chapter (*‘Open’ Hearts*) I look firstly at how this is exemplified in Dave’s conversion at age twenty-one, before turning to look at Lynn’s own family background, conversion and her first encounters with Dave before they got married. Both Dave and Lynn’s conversions, I argue, are essentially stories of how they ‘opened their hearts’ to God, and are shaped around a similar pattern to that described in the previous paragraph. In both cases the object that is vitalised through maintaining a permeable flexibility and ‘openness’ to the voice and presence of, in this case, a transcendent ‘Convivial Intruder’ or ‘Trusted Other’ is ‘the heart’. Like me, Dave and Lynn describe experiences that are highly sensory in nature, thus highlighting the importance of perception in the formation of convincing concrete experiences that are then available for metaphorical translation.

As well as ‘openness’, I observe how themes of ‘movement’ and ‘adventure’ appear to have been introduced into Dave’s life in and around his experience of conversion, and into Lynn’s life in the time just before she got married. In Part Three of the chapter (*‘Openness’ and ‘Movement’*), I argue that these metaphors of ‘movement’ and ‘adventure’ are also fundamentally structured around a central theme of ‘openness’. As ‘the heart’ remains open to the convivial intrusions of a divine Other, a transformational journey results. Life, for Dave and Lynn, *is* this transformational journey, which is also the adventure of faith. I finish by looking at how a prophetic word received by Dave and Lynn just after they got married provided them with a conceptual metaphor that not only reflected their experiences of life thus far, but also furnished them with a desirable image around which they could continue to structure their lives. The prophetic story, concerning the Israelites following the cloud of God’s presence through the wilderness, provided Dave and Lynn not only with an initial template of what a life of faith might entail, but also a broader vision of the charismatic life of the ‘church’ as a body of people ‘open’ to God – able to *perceive* God’s presence and *devoted* to following Him wherever He leads.

## Metaphorical ‘moves’

We have already seen how Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that our core “conceptual system” (ibid.:3) is metaphorical in nature. Human beings make sense of their world through translating experiences from one domain into another. James Fernandez (1972, 1974) adds significantly to this idea in proposing the common direction along which metaphors ‘move’. “The elementary definition of metaphor (and metonym) from which one should work,” Fernandez writes (1974:120), “is the predication of a sign-image upon an inchoate subject.” According to Fernandez, a metaphor provides a more concrete identity for that which is nascent, which is incomplete, and as yet ill-defined; it imaginatively ‘moves’ an object “from the abstract and inchoate in the subject to the more concrete, ostensive, and easily graspable in the metaphoric predicate” (ibid.:123). Fernandez gives an example: “in *mercy... droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven*, the *gentle rain* gives to the abstract and vaguely conceived *mercy* a concreteness that literal definition is hopeless to achieve” (ibid.). Moreover, in line with Lakoff and Johnson, Fernandez argues that metaphors, when adopted by social actors, are constitutive and creative: they influence behaviour, create scenarios, and facilitate performances (Fernandez 1972:42). This is especially true, Fernandez argues, in processes of identity-making, in which a concrete metaphor may be predicated upon the unfinished or incomplete self (ibid.:43-46, Fernandez 1974:120-124). The man who predicates an image upon himself, who comes, for instance, to believe he is a lion, a lobster or a frog, in each case acts accordingly.

Sharon Parks (1986), drawing on the work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), argues that metaphor is central to our being able to express our convictions and intuitions about the non-physical world. Writing from within an assumed paradigm of merely corporeal senses, she writes, “When we want to express feelings and concepts... we must appropriate an object or act from the sensible world, an image, to serve as metaphor or transport for the knowing of the supersensible. We give form to our experience of life, our experience of acting and being acted upon, by appropriating images through which we grasp and name and comprehend. We meet reality, participate in reality, and express our experience of reality by embracing it in metaphor” (Parks 1986:147). In the following section, I introduce how such understandings are



relevant to comprehending the lives of certain Christians as they appropriate concrete metaphorical images, not only to make sense of inchoate situations, but also in processes of transformation and personal becoming. I start by describing this through my initial relational connections with Dave and Lynn.

## **1995-1998**

In 1995, in the period after my conversion, my experience caused me to gravitate towards, and indeed seek out, people who had had some kind of similar experience in terms of God. At that time, there were some ‘unusual’ things happening within the broader church scene. In 1994, what was being called an “outpouring of the Holy Spirit” had been taking place across a broad swath of Evangelical, Charismatic and New Churches. Church groups that had never before experienced such things were being swept along by something of a Pentecostal wave. In my final months in Cambridge, I connected with this ‘move’ and met people whose sensorial experiences certainly seemed to align, in many ways, with my own. After completing my university finals, I returned to Cheltenham (my home town) to look after my parents’ house while they were away for the year in America, my father having been offered a temporary job teaching at a school in Massachusetts. Back home, I joined a small Charismatic church that was meeting every Sunday in the local village hall.<sup>22</sup> I became very involved in the church, helping to run the youth-work, attending as many prayer meetings as I could and playing an active role in a local house-group which met in a church member’s home every Wednesday evening. At the same time I was ‘consuming’ a fair amount of Christian literature, reading the Bible on a regular basis, and sharing my faith with whoever appeared open to listening.

My local church near Cheltenham was part of a broader relational network of Charismatic churches primarily based in the West of England. These churches were not structured or formalised enough to count as an organisation or denomination, but were loosely affiliated as a result of sharing similar outlooks and expressions of faith. At that

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<sup>22</sup> ‘Charismatic’ here refers to a group’s self-definition as a particular ‘type’ of church with emphases upon, for instance, baptism in the Spirit, speaking in tongues and emotional and physical healing (see Csordas 1988:123, 1997a).

time, in the mid 1990s, the churches were in the habit of meeting for a week each year at a summer-camp organised by the leaders of a large Charismatic church in Bristol. It was at one of these events, most likely in 1996, that I first met Dave and Lynn Webb. Dave (in his mid-forties) and Lynn (in her mid-thirties) were at that time leading a thriving Charismatic congregation near Bicester in Oxfordshire. Dave was quite intentional, in the period after I met him, in inviting me over to visit them in Oxfordshire. I liked Dave. He was blunt, friendly and somewhat ‘irreligious’. I also discovered that Dave and Lynn lived with an ideology of ‘openness’. They lived with an ‘open’ home and an ‘open’ family life. As such, they were open to non-kin members, in this specific case me, being present and even playing an active role within their home and family in a way that I had not experienced before. As a young single man, I felt embraced into the life of their family.

Dave and Lynn, in the years before I met them, had made connections with a number of church leaders and groups outside the UK, particularly in Sweden, Germany and the southern Balkans. They would occasionally make trips overseas to visit these different groups, and in late 1997, Dave invited me to join him and Lynn on a trip they were planning to make to the Balkans. That autumn, we attended a conference in Thessaloniki, before spending time in Skopje with a church group that Dave and Lynn knew quite well. During that time the ‘seed’ of an idea was planted about the possibility of moving down to the region. In the midst of a meeting a ‘prophetic word went out’, around which Dave and Lynn subsequently began to shape some of their thoughts and ideas: “It is time for an apostolic [quite literally ‘sent’] team in Thessaloniki.” Six months later, in 1998, I returned to the Balkans with Dave. By that time conversation had definitely moved on – from merely talking about further visits to the region, to the serious consideration of establishing this more permanent local team. By the end of the trip, Dave declared that he and Lynn were ready to make that move, Lynn having responded to this suggestion by saying that her bags were already packed.

At that time, I had a mental ‘prophetic’ image of myself sitting on the edge of a wooden, kitchen seat: I could stand up and also walk, with Dave and Lynn, into this new life if I wanted to or I could, quite simply, remain seated. Both choices were valid, and both seemed right. Following both Fernandez and Parks, we can see here a clear example of metaphor at work. An inchoate ‘sense’ about a significant decision that

needs to be made is rendered more graspable through a concrete image that appears in my mind (Fernandez 1972, 1974; Parks 1986). This image clarifies the situation for me and highlights the issues involved. To ‘stand up’ involves movement; it involves ‘stepping’ into the unknown and moving away from life as I have known it thus far. It also involves a certain amount of commitment, a willingness to step ‘*into relationship*’ with Dave and Lynn and to begin to walk with them in their journey. All these factors, these feelings are brought together in a single, concrete image. Significantly, I interpret and experience this clarifying metaphorical image not only as my ‘heart’, ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ seeking to make sense of a particular situation, but also as God ‘speaking’ to me (and again we might highlight the metaphorical quality of my use of the term ‘speaking’). I describe the image as ‘prophetic’. There is a lightness of touch about this voice, a lack of judgement that facilitates freely given devotion, and engenders in me a feeling of freedom about the decision to be made.

My eventual choice can be related to Shils’ insight about the relational dynamic at the core of the charismatic relation. The follower follows because he or she believes the charismatic object to be connected to a “*very central* feature of man’s existence and the cosmos in which he lives” (Shils cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi). Six months previously, just before embarking upon my first trip to the Balkans with Dave, I had been given a prophetic word that, during that trip, *I would experience God’s fatherhood in a new way*. Up to that point, within a Charismatic church context, I had been given many similar words, the majority of which had just ‘floated by’ without too much engagement. As such, I had ‘held’ this prophetic word in the same way that I had ‘held’ those others: I was open to something happening, but equally open to just letting it ‘float’, and eventually, if necessary, just ‘float’ away. However, from the moment that I sat down in a friend’s car to be driven across to meet Dave in order to fly to the Balkans, I did experience a marked ‘vitality’ in the Spirit. This experience continued, in different ways, throughout the trip, and the overwhelming sense *was*, indeed, a deep sense of divine fatherhood. This experience seemed somehow related to my connection with Dave, and therefore seemed to indicate to me that a) my relationship with Dave might somehow be significant to me in terms of my ongoing connection to a vital source of *Life* (i.e. the Spirit) and b) my being in the Balkans might also be significant. Six months later, in the spring of 1998, I returned to the Balkans and had very similar

experiences. I therefore decided to stand up and walk. In other words, I made a decision to move to the region with Dave, Lynn and their family.

Upon returning to the UK, that decision was ‘confirmed’ on the one hand through the approval of my church leaders but also, more significantly, through hearing the well-known Four Square pastor, Jack Hayford, speaking at a conference in Birmingham. Hayford took as his expository text a short passage from Genesis 12, in which God calls Abram<sup>23</sup>: “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.”<sup>24</sup> Having already made the decision to move to Thessaloniki, understandably I found a particular resonance in this verse. In adding another concrete metaphorical image to the landscape of my imagination (the image of Abram setting off at God’s invitation and command) it added substance to the decision I had already made, whilst also filling out, in my mind, what this move might entail: a *leaving* (certainly physically, perhaps emotionally, probably psychologically) of country, friends and family, in order to go where God was telling me. In this respect, the image of Abram setting off was, for me in 1998, an echo of Jesus’ call to give up everything and follow him, the “complete personal devotion” that Weber puts at the heart of the charismatic relation (Weber 1968b:49, 1968c:260). Unknown to me at that time, this same ‘word’ carried a great deal of significance also for Dave and Lynn. Very early in their marriage, Dave and Lynn had *also* felt God speak to them about the life of Abram. In 2011 Dave tells me, “It was when [Lynn and I] first got married that God had spoken to us about leaving our country, our family, and our father’s home for a land that he would show us. And [there was] that sense that our life was going to be an adventure.”

Through these examples we see how metaphorical images (of standing up from a kitchen seat, of Abram setting off) are constitutive and creative, just as Fernandez suggests. Elsewhere, Fernandez defines metaphor as “a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun (an I, a you, a we, a they) which makes a movement and leads to a performance” (Fernandez 1972:43, see also 1974:120). In other words, metaphors are employed in processes of becoming by the continually unfinished self. “In the growth of human identity,” he writes, “the inchoate pronouns of social life – the ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’, ‘it’ – gain identity by predicating some sign-image, some metaphor upon themselves” (ibid.:122). “For what is more inchoate and in need of a concrete predication than a

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<sup>23</sup> Abram is later re-named Abraham.

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 12:1

pronoun!” he exclaims (Fernandez 1972:46). “Personal experience and social life cries out to us, to me, to you, to predicate some identity upon ‘others’ and ‘selves’” (ibid.). Fernandez draws an example of this from his observations of the way children play in the Asturian mountain community where he carried out his research. Recognising the characteristics, relations and differences between various animals (cows, cats, chickens, dogs, rats etc.) children, in their play “tend towards the imitation (i.e., the predication upon the inchoate pronoun) of some animals rather than others, choosing the animals that occupy the more desirable positions in the quality space of their culture” (Fernandez 1974:124). At the same time, through choosing a different animal, children can swap and change the particular subject space that they are occupying. In so doing, they playfully experiment with different relational ways of being in the world through imbibing and acting out, with others, these different metaphorical images.

There is a key here to understanding how Christians such as myself, Dave and Lynn appropriate images within processes of becoming. As one might expect, in a Christian context the images appropriated are often biblical ones.<sup>25</sup> Also, as we have already seen, charismatic devotion implies a particular response to stories, a particular relation by which stories become ‘lived out’ in the respondent’s life. It could be argued that this kind of appropriation has much greater implications than mere children’s play. The image of Abram setting off, and later images of Abraham the sojourner, provide concrete pictures of charismatic devotion to a divine Other. Such images were foundational in terms of shaping the life of our group as we moved to Greece. In brief, Abraham set off on a journey without knowing where he was going, lived like a stranger in a foreign country (dwelling in tents), and was looking *beyond* the earthly realm (that which is seen) towards something eternal (that which is unseen) – that which the writer of Hebrews describes as “a heavenly country”.<sup>26</sup> In fact, the life of Abraham, certainly as our group has interpreted it, can be understood as an archetypal template of permanent liminality in relation to the temporal realm. Like the other exemplars of faith that the writer of Hebrews mentions, Abraham, seeing him who was invisible, lived transiently upon the earth.

In 1998, just before we moved to the Balkans, Dave and Lynn sold their house in Oxfordshire, took their three girls (aged 14, 12 and 9) out of school, passed the

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<sup>25</sup> Of course, this is not necessarily always the case, as is illustrated by the image of the kitchen chair.

<sup>26</sup> Hebrews 11:8-9, 16

leadership of their thriving church in Bicester over to younger hands, and bought a car big enough to drive comfortably across Europe. It was with a great sense of anticipation and excitement therefore that we arrived in Greece, equipped only with some camping equipment and a sense that God was somehow in this. After two weeks camping on a beach overlooking the entrance to the Thermaikos Gulf, we found an apartment to rent in nearby Peraia (Περαία), a fast-growing suburb of Thessaloniki. And by that autumn we were ready to move the rest of our belongings down from the UK to the Balkans. That task was taken up by two English ladies from the churches of which we were a part. Some months previously, we had been sitting around the dinner table with Angela, one of the ladies, when she said, “I just believe that meeting around the table is going to be significant for you.” The comment struck such a chord with Dave and Lynn that one of the first items of furniture that they bought upon arrival in Greece was a large marble table, around which twelve or thirteen people could be seated. And, from the outset, the presence of ‘the table’ began to shape our social life and connectedness to a large degree. Around the table we sat and ate, we worshipped and prayed, chatted and laughed, broke bread and shared wine. The addition of another family from Dave and Lynn’s church near Bicester, and a number of ‘singles’ such as myself, meant that, by the time the ladies set off back to England with an empty truck, we were eleven around the table, living in three different houses locally, but regularly meeting together to eat. And thus we began to make our home, like ‘strangers’, in a foreign land.

## **PART ONE: ‘OPENNESS’ IN COMMUNITY**

### **Dave and Lynn’s Ideology**

Much of Dave’s speech today is laced, implicitly and explicitly, with notions of movement and adventure, the idea that life is not only a journey to be travelled but also an adventure to be lived. For example, in a newsletter that Dave sent out at the start of 2011 entitled “*A Year of Movement*,” he wrote, “I believe Movement is a good word to describe what the year will hold for many of us. I want to encourage you to press on, advance on the journey... I see a new generation of believers who will not necessarily conform to the familiar ways of working – therefore movement must be at the heart of

our lives... so be ready for an unfamiliar path.” In a Facebook invitation sent out in August to some of our friends in Shkodër he wrote, “I would like to invite you to join us for an evening of conversation around the garden table... I think that we all feel that Life is a spiritual journey/adventure that we need to keep pressing into....” And, at an open house gathering in October, he explained to those present, “Our life is something of a journey. [Lynn and I] have not stayed in one place for too long. But I want to say this – it has been a great adventure. And that adventure continues. [But] it is not just adventure for the sake of it....” And so on.

I have suggested that the Christian category of ‘the heart’ be understood as a centre of perception, devotion and conception. In respect particularly to the latter, the metaphors of movement at the core of Dave and Lynn’s conceptual system(s) have created for them, and continue to create for them, a particular way of life – one that values life ‘on the move’, that sees life as an ‘adventure’, and is most definitely averse to ‘settling’. And yet, certainly for Dave, these metaphors of movement don’t appear to have always been present in his life. I have reason to believe that he used to think and live very differently. This was made evident to me through an interview I conducted with Dave in our lounge in Shkodër, Albania, in late November 2011, in which Dave talked quite extensively about his childhood. For Dave, despite the prevalence of an ideology of ‘adventure’ in his adult life, when he recalled his childhood, this notion was markedly absent. Not only was Dave’s childhood comparatively sedentary, he also appears to have been relatively content within its parochial boundaries. The notion of ‘life as adventure’ only seems to have been introduced into Dave’s life in his late teens and early twenties, and is particularly implicated within the whole period surrounding his conversion. Memories of his childhood, particularly his experiences of its convivial sociality, do provide Dave, however, with another key theme, besides ‘movement’, around which he and Lynn *also* build their lives, the idea of ‘openness’. In the following section, I begin to look at how this theme emerges within particular domains of experience within their lives.

### **‘Open’ House: Dave’s Early Childhood Experiences of Community**

Dave was born in 1951 in Southport, Merseyside. His dad, Stanley, and mother, Marjorie, got married just after the Second World War, and moved from Liverpool, where they had both grown up, twenty miles north to Southport where, upon returning from the war, Stan had been offered a job working in the stock rooms of a newly set up Vauxhall branch. Both Dave’s parents grew up as churchgoers: Stan as a choirboy and member of the Boy’s Brigade at St. Lawrence’s, an Anglican church in Kirkdale, and Marjorie at the Westminster Road Congregational Church just along the road. They had no sooner moved to Southport as a newly married couple, than they started attending a local church.

“I think I was in church two weeks after I was born,” Dave tells me. “I mean, the thing about it is, I don’t think that any of my family would have gone to any church out of conviction to do with their faith – you know, the *beliefs* of the particular local church. They went to the church which was near where they lived. Both in Southport, where my mum and dad moved to, and in Liverpool, where they both came from, I would say that the *social* aspect of the church’s life played as big a part as the faith dimension, if not more so in Southport, possibly.

“[My sister and I] were at church every day of the week. Monday, we played badminton. Tuesday, we went to youth group. Wednesday, we went to scouts. Thursday night was a night off. On Friday, we played badminton again. There were a couple of big events in our life. And one of them was the annual sort of pantomime which was put on. And basically, the youth group used to sort of run the pantomime. I mean at sixteen I was one of the ugly sisters!”

I laugh. “So it was always good fun then, your church?”

“Oh yeah.”

“So do you think that your understanding of church today,” I continue, “in terms of the social, community aspect of church – do you think that that has been influenced from your childhood and your experience?”



“In a sense I think it has, yeah. I think also the lifestyle of our family as we grew up. I’ve thought about this a bit, as well. In some respects, it’s quite interesting because even Lynn’s family were a bit, a bit in a sense of ‘open’, you know. I know her parents are younger than my parents but certainly, in their growing up, there was still this sense that the door was open, or there was a key in the door, and people would be coming and going for a cup of tea and this sort of stuff – with her gran, nana as she was called. Certainly, our house, I mean every day my mother wasn’t at work, at four o’clock the ladies in the street would come and have a cup of tea. These were Nora and Auntie Bel who lived along the road... and just different ones. They’d all come and have a cup of tea together.”

“So the boundaries to your house and your household were quite loose?” I ask.

“Yeah, because [initially] we didn’t have any family in Southport. And so the church was effectively... the people in the church were the people you felt safe with. And we all lived close to each other. I mean, Auntie Bel lived next door, Nora lived around the corner. When we moved, everybody else moved as well. So we were all still only around the corner.

“[At the weekends] we would go to Liverpool because Everton were at home. And that was always a really busy house, my grandma’s house, because she looked after Alan’s family across the road as well, because the mother had died. And everybody turned up at grandma’s for tea. The pressure cooker would be going in the kitchen, and auntie Betty and uncle Don, Heather and Marge, Alan, uncle Bob, grandma and grandpa, mum and dad and me and my sister, we would all be there Saturday tea time. And then we’d all be bundled in the car to drive home, having played in the street all afternoon or whatever.”

### **‘Openness’ and Community**

Ever since I have known Dave and Lynn, the idea of ‘community’ – expressed both through church and family life – has been a core theme within their lives. When I visited them near Bicester in 1996, and touched the life of the church they were leading at that time, it was my very first encounter with the *type* of community that reflected

their ideology. Similarly, when we moved to Greece in 1998, the idea of community was central to the life we envisaged, in large part contributing to our later self-designation not merely as a ‘church’ but as a ‘spiritual community’. In Dave’s descriptions of his early childhood, I recognise many characteristics of his *ideology of community*, characteristics that have emerged at other points in his life, particularly as he and Lynn have sought to ‘create community’. “A particular past perseveres [in memory],” write Olick and Robbins (1998:129), “because it remains relevant for later cultural formations.” According to Berliner, memory works not only as a recollection of past events and experiences but also as the residual traces of the past *in the present* (Berliner 2005:200) – traces which are continually mobilised and reconfigured in the here and now in order to project a possible future (Candau 2010:29). The notion of community expressed in Dave’s descriptions is one of *an affectionately close group of people, living in close proximity and involved in one another’s lives on a (near) daily basis, where those in need are taken care of and resources are shared*. One of the central characteristics of this ideology is formed around a notion of ‘openness’.

“It’s quite interesting,” Dave says, “because even Lynn’s family were a bit, a bit in a sense of ‘open’, you know.” In describing Lynn’s family, most specifically her grandma’s house, as “open” Dave is, of course, making a comparison with his own childhood home. What does this “openness” entail? How, in short, was it manifested in family life? Dave tells me that in Lynn’s family, and so implicitly in his own, there was “this sense that the door was open”, “there was a key in the door” and “people would be coming and going for a cup of tea and this sort of stuff.” Dave then makes explicit the comparison with his parents’ home: “Certainly, our house, I mean every day my mother wasn’t at work, at four o’clock the ladies in the street would come and have a cup of tea. These were Nora and Auntie Bel who lived along the road... and just different ones, they’d all come and have a cup of tea together.”

The images that Dave uses are succinct and powerful: the “open door” (if not literally, at least metaphorically), the key positioned on the outside of the door: implying that the family space is not locked and bounded, but rather open to being disturbed, and even inviting a type of convivial intrusion. And those who are welcomed, whose presence is desired, and who are free to come and go across the threshold of the ‘home’ are not only “family”, but “church”. In Dave’s narrative one seems to be interlaid upon the other so

that the boundaries between the two appear difficult to discern (i.e. is Auntie Bel a kin relation or simply a church friend who is so relationally close as to be designated by a kinship term?). In either case, the common quality of this group of people – whether church or family (or both) – is that they are “the people you felt safe with” so establishing, it seems for Dave, a benchmark for community. This expression of “openness” is pushed even further in Dave’s description of visiting his grandma’s house in Liverpool at the weekends. The house is not only described as being so ‘open’, so welcoming and full of people, that it appears to be bursting at the seams, but also as a place where those in lack are cared for, where there is a proactive “openness” (of ‘heart’, perhaps) to the needs of others: “[Grandma] looked after Alan’s family across the road as well, because the mother had died.”

The concept of ‘community’ has a long-standing history within the social sciences (Amit 2002:1; Williams 1976; Delanty 2003; Kamenka 1982), and has often been associated with the marking of boundaries – either through the analytic attempts of social scientists to designate ‘bounded wholes’ against increasingly globalised backdrops (Amit 2002:2), or through social actors’ own endeavours to determine the boundaries of their own group of belonging (Anderson 1983; Cohen 1985; Barth 1969; Gupta & Ferguson 1997). Helmuth Plessner (1999[1924]), writing in the 1920s during the rise of the new right and German youth movements, rightly warned of the dangers of communities employing overly strong processes of boundary marking and exclusion. Similarly, Wenger (1998:6) recognises that as communities become insular they can also “become liabilities”. It is in this light that Dave’s notion of “openness”, particularly when associated with the family home, is particularly interesting, as it seems to suggest a core belief that part of the essential vitality of any social group is dependent upon maintaining softer, more flexible boundaries – that the ‘circle’ of community be not closed, but left open, just as the door of the family home itself is left ajar, or imagined with the key invitingly placed on the outside.

At the same time, those crossing the threshold of Dave’s childhood home do, in fact, have a good deal in common with Dave’s family. They are part of a larger group of relations that is made up of Dave’s parents’ kin and their local church community. Most importantly, the common characteristic of this group of people is that they can be *trusted*. The door of Dave’s parents’ home is not open to just anyone wandering in.

The boundary that is loosened with the comings and goings of these trusted ‘others’, and perhaps the reason for Dave’s fond recollection of this particular aspect of his childhood, is the tight boundary of the ‘nuclear family’. Dave and Lynn (as we shall see below) live with a strong notion of ‘extended family’ which is established along similar lines to those Dave describes from his childhood – relationship and trust.

### **‘Open’ Table and Extended Family**

As mentioned, as I got to know Dave and Lynn, I discovered that they very much lived with this ideology of “openness” – they lived with an “open” home and an “open” family life and were open to non-kin members, in this specific case me, being present and playing an active role within their home and family in a way that I had not experienced before. When we moved to Greece, this “openness” became concretely symbolised in ‘the table’, hence establishing in real-life terms Angela’s prophetic word to us: *“I just believe that meeting around the table is going to be significant for you.”* Large enough to seat twelve or thirteen people around it, the marble table visibly expected and invited the presence of others beyond the immediate ‘nuclear’ family unit to participate in a core family ritual – eating together. Through the sharing of the substance of food and drink, and the sociality that surrounded it, ‘others’ were incorporated, to a greater or lesser degree, within family life. In fact, in a social and historical setting that was new to *all* of us, one could argue that through this process a new ‘type’ of family was created – not drawing upon notions of shared biological substance but upon a notion of ‘*relationship*’ and shared spiritual substance.

Janet Carsten (1995, 1997), challenging anthropological notions that kinship always draws its reference from ‘Euro-American-type’ ideas of biological procreation, shows that, for the Malays on the island of Langkawi people become kin as much through living together and the giving and receiving of food as through having shared the same womb. Rice, cooked on the household hearth, once ingested becomes blood. Therefore, sharing the same rice creates the same blood – the stuff, in indigenous thought, of kin-relatedness. Though situated in a completely different cultural context, such ideas cast an interesting light upon the notion of the Christian table – the place of the shared meal – and, in particular here, the instigation, on Jesus’ part, of the ritual of

breaking bread and sharing wine within the context of such a meal, the bread and wine, of course, being symbolic of Jesus' own body and blood (i.e. his very 'substance'). Symbolically, through the ingestion of these substances, the disciples express their belonging to, and becoming of, the body of Christ on earth. In the light of Carsten's study of Malay thought, Jesus' action could also be understood as the initiation of a new form of relatedness, the body of Christ also being understood as the *family* of God. One of the effects of conceiving relatedness in this way is that this broader 'imagined' family, and the very real commitments that it entails, may challenge the tightly held boundaries (within our own commonly atomised Western milieu) of the modern 'nuclear' family unit.

Lynn attributes her own ideas of this style of family life, what she calls "extended family", not, like Dave, to early childhood, but to her experiences, as a recently married woman in the 1980s, of living with Dave as part of an intentional Christian community in Sussex.

"I like a home environment," Lynn tells me, "and I like an *extended* home environment. What I did enjoy [about the community in Sussex] was having lots of people all the time for meals. So there was a whole... lifestyle of people going to people's houses and enjoying that sort of time. And I did enjoy young people coming to live with us for extended periods, or shorter periods of time."

"Can I just ask you one thing about that? Had you experienced that earlier in your life when you were younger, I mean was that part of your upbringing?" I ask.

"No, not really; we were a nuclear family."

"So you didn't have too many people coming and going through your home really?"

"It was the very 'dinner-parties-set', because of course it was the seventies. But it wasn't extended, embracing and... no, no..."

"So you definitely experienced that at the [Sussex community]?" I ask.

"So there was community, which was great, *openness* which was... life, character-building. I wouldn't say it was great because people did encroach on too intimate areas of people's lives, but it was a good learning curve. Extended family was something that

I knew was at the bedrock of what David and I wanted to do for the rest of our lives. But also I think a church life where you worship together and prayed together and live common lives was again another very big part of what we wanted to live like.”

Whereas Dave made no active choice to become part of his childhood community (i.e. he was *born* into it), by contrast, the community that Lynn describes here, the Sussex community, was something that she and Dave *chose* to be part of just after they got married. They joined it by intention, and lived and worked as part of that community for the best part of four years. Susan Brown, in her edited volume on *Intentional Community*, notes that such communities are always “purposely and voluntarily founded” and usually centred on a specific goal relevant to a particular group of people (Brown 2002:5). The community that Dave and Lynn joined would fit this description. It was a Christian community, geographically situated on a large country Estate in Sussex, made up of both families and single people, with strongly communitarian characteristics, and an emphasis upon worship and discipleship.

Ten years younger than Dave, Lynn was born in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1961, and describes her father as then working in insurance, and her mother as a stay-at-home mum who worked, before she got married, as a nurse. Her family life, emerging at a different historical moment to Dave’s, and perhaps reflecting a different socio-economic status and trajectory, seems to have taken a divergent form to the ‘open’ community-style family life of post-war Liverpool that Dave describes. Lynn’s parents, she tells me, were of a ‘new generation’ and expressed a different form of family life and sociality (“the very ‘dinner-parties-set’”) to the previous one. In characterising her parents’ sociality as “the very ‘dinner-parties-set’” Lynn is, of course, making an *explicit* contrast with the style of socialising and eating she experienced as part of the Sussex community. The dinner party might be said to embody a particular type of sociality (formal, organised, people only coming by spoken or written invitation, arriving at a set time, sitting around a set table to eat, wearing a particular style of evening dress and so on). This contrasts not only with the ‘open house’ of Dave’s childhood (informal, comparatively unorganised, people arriving upon their own initiative without needing to be invited, letting themselves in, not requiring a particular dress code and so on) but also with the “extended family” of the community in Sussex. Within these different types of family life and practices there are, I would suggest,

different levels of boundary keeping going on. The dinner party allows for sociality whilst keeping the everyday boundaries of the family unit quite clear, distinct and potentially impermeable (i.e. it may be described as ‘closed’). “Extended family”, which Lynn experienced (perhaps for the first time) living in community in Sussex, allows, even invites, others to ‘intrude’ upon or participate in the everyday life of the family, its boundaries being both more flexible and permeable (i.e. it may be described as ‘open’). The former, which Lynn associates with “nuclear family”, is not in her eyes as “embracing” as “extended family”.

### **Leaving the Circle of Community ‘Open’**

So far, we have seen how Dave and Lynn apply a metaphor of ‘openness’, as a positive value, to home and family life, expressed through such ideas as the ‘open door’ and the ‘open table’. At the core of such ideas, I would argue, is a conceptual framework that follows a particular pattern, and expresses a deep-seated value. Namely, that the way to maintain an essential vitality (in this case, within a social group) is by keeping one’s borders permeable and flexible, in other words by not ‘hardening up’ one’s group’s boundaries. In this way, a social group maintains an ‘openness’ to the convivial intruder, or the trusted other, whose (occasionally uncomfortable) presence continually ‘ruffles up’ or ‘unsettles’ the group dynamic, thereby preventing the group from forming ossified boundaries, and sinking into a type of reified lifelessness. This same metaphorical conceptual structure, I would argue, is also translated to another sphere of experience within Dave and Lynn’s lives, namely their relationship(s) with God. Here, it is not the table, the home, or group life that is in danger, through being ‘closed’, of gravitating towards a type of sterile stagnation. The object that is vitalised through maintaining a permeable flexibility, an ‘openness’ to the voice and presence of, in this case, a transcendent and Convivial Intruder is ‘the heart’.

With this in mind, we now turn to look at Dave’s conversion, the point at which, I have suggested, another important metaphor entered his life: the notion of *life as movement or adventure*. This conceptual metaphor has played a foundational role in governing the kind of life that Dave and Lynn have lived, a life that, in many ways, has exemplified movement. And yet, even though Dave and Lynn have lived in many different places,

to see this metaphor as being played out merely in terms of a kind of geographical nomadism is to miss an essential point. The adventure that was initiated for Dave at his conversion was primarily an adventure of faith, a journeying into a 'world' beyond his experience thus far. Such a journey, I would argue, is both relational and transformational. It implies an 'openness' of heart to relationship with a mysterious and transcendent Other, whose ongoing 'intrusions' not only keep 'the heart' alive, but also, on the 'journey', continue to render transformations in perception and conception. Just as the boundaries to 'home' and 'table' can be tightened to the point of exclusion, so also, at any point, this transcendent Other can be excluded through 'closing the door', 'hardening the heart' or, in other words, tightening and solidifying the boundaries of the (innermost) self. By contrast, Dave's conversion may be read as exemplifying the very opposite, a process by which he became 'open' to the convivial intrusion of this transcendent Other and his previous sedentary existence was, in all likelihood, permanently unsettled.

## **PART TWO: 'OPEN' HEARTS**

### **Seeds of Adventure**

Dave's childhood experiences of family and church community life were played out within the context of a reasonably small geographical space: Southport and north-central Liverpool in the 1950s and 1960s. Talcott Parsons, writing in the year that Dave was born, echoes this notion of community grounded in a local area: "a community is that collectivity the members of which share a common territorial area as that base of operations for daily activities" (Parsons 1951:91; see also Gray 2002; Kempny 2002). Considering Dave's later mobility in adult life (he and Lynn have moved house more than twenty times, relocating not only within the U.K., but then subsequently overseas) it is striking, by contrast, just how much his parents' and his own early experiences of community were based within a specific locale. At age eighteen, however, something began to change. Having left school two years previously, Dave began a new job organising advertisements in a local newspaper. The day Dave started this job, a new minister also began work at the church within which Dave had grown up. The new minister, unfortunately, was severely lacking in confidence. Whenever he spoke to the



congregation over the course of the next two years “[he] was very hesitant and stumbling and made mistakes when he was preaching and got lost and confused and stuff.”

“This was the United Reformed Church?” I ask Dave.

“Yes, that’s right. This was the one where I grew up, the main one. And then one Sunday night, he walked in and he didn’t speak from any notes, he spoke from his *heart*. And you could see this absolute, radical change in him. And at the end of the service, I decided I would ask him what was going on. ‘Something’s happened with this guy,’ [I thought]. And he told me that he’d been to some meetings at Hesketh Bank and that he had encountered Jesus in a remarkable way, and he knew his life would never be the same again.”

From that point on the minister started “hassling” Dave. “That was January,” Dave tells me, “and over the next six months he would give me books to read – *The Cross and the Switchblade*, *God’s Smuggler*, *Nine O’clock in the Morning* – Christian adventure books they were really, which I think we lack a bit of today. I read them all, couldn’t put them down.”

An adventure might be said to involve a person journeying – physically, psychologically, or both – outside an “accustomed milieu” (Turner & Turner 1978:7-8,13; Turner 1978:xv) and to incorporate both an element of risk and commitment (Varley 2011:89-90). With the sharing of these Christian adventure books by the local minister, there seems to be introduced into Dave’s life a new notion, a new concept – the idea that *life itself* could be conceived as an adventure. *The Cross and the Switchblade* – the story of a country preacher working amongst disillusioned (and often violent) youth in New York city; *God’s Smuggler* – the story of a Dutch missionary smuggling Bibles into Communist countries at the height of the Cold War; and *Nine O’clock in the Morning* – an autobiographical exposition by a high church Anglo-Catholic Episcopalian on the baptism in the Holy Spirit – all describe ‘worlds’ well outside Dave’s experience of life thus far, well outside his ‘accustomed milieu’. They appear, therefore, to open up in Dave’s imagination new realms of possibility.

The minister’s conversion also seems to hail the first emergence within Dave of an attraction toward a specific manifestation of charisma. For two years, the minister’s

authority (to lead and to teach the church) appears to have been derived solely from his position within an established institutional order – his appointment to a hierarchical office by the rational-legal or traditional authority of the United Reformed Church (see Weber 1978[1968]:1114;1117, 1968b:50). It is only at the minister's conversion – the introduction of a miraculous event that is visibly manifested in his transformation – that he becomes, for Dave, an attractive person to follow. It is the start, however subtle, of a relationship based not upon rational-legal or traditional authority, but upon charisma (Weber 1968a:46). To cite Shils again, the central issue in a charismatic relationship is the connection that a person displays, or is thought to have, to a “*very central* feature of man's existence and the cosmos in which he lives” (cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi). Dave wonders what has happened to the minister. Has he *actually* come into contact with a fundamental and vital source of *Life*? And is *this* what lies behind his transformation?

As we have seen, the relational dimension of charisma implies that, in order for it to be valid, it must be recognised, a recognition which is freely given and often based upon a “‘sign’ or proof, originally always a miracle” (Weber 1968b:49). The minister's transformation appears to be Dave's first encounter with this ‘other’ miraculous dimension – the life of the Spirit as it tangibly manifests in the life of someone he knows, and which has engendered a transformation that has taken place at the level of ‘the heart’. Although not convinced, Dave is intrigued. And this intrigue causes him to begin his own journey towards the indeterminate, and away from the experience of his ‘accustomed milieu’. We could say that Dave, at this point, is beginning to experience a charismatic attraction toward the divine, which is starting to draw him away from the parochial sphere of his youth. This journey appears to have been significantly initiated by what Dave perceived in the minister's transformation, but is also being fuelled by the books he has been given that are providing him with new narratives of what life can be, namely an adventurous journey into the unknown. Dave is beginning to incorporate into his conceptual system, to allow into his ‘heart’, these new metaphors that implicitly carry with them a vibrant potential for transformation and, as it turns out, the possible reorientation his whole perceptual system.

## Encounter

“And then,” Dave continues, “I went on holiday in the summer to a Christian Endeavour holiday centre, which was a pretty safe place to go – they weren’t very ‘Christian’ normally. And [I] met a whole bunch of really on fire young people who were Christians. That’s where I encountered God for myself really, as opposed to trying to be persuaded, which is probably the way I would describe what had happened [up to that point]. I experienced God for myself really.”

Having observed, at a distance, the minister’s transformation, and having secretly devoured the literature that the minister gave him, Dave then enters, for himself, into an experience that is equally transformational. “Experience”, according to Edward Bruner (1986:3-5), is how events as they happen are received by consciousness. In Bruner’s understanding, “experience” is fed not just through sensory data and cognition, but also through feelings and expectations, images and impressions (*ibid.*). It is our immediate perception of a lived reality. We can already see how Dave’s feelings and expectations, the images and impressions that he is receiving are being affected and shaped by the minister’s transformation and the adventure books that he is reading. And yet something happens to Dave during his time at the Christian Endeavour holiday centre that is markedly different in nature to anything that has happened to him before. What has happened to him before he describes in the language of *persuasion*, what happens at the holiday centre he describes in the language of *encounter* and *experience*. For both Dave and the minister, it is this element of ‘encounter’, it seems, that brings about a shift, an internal movement in knowledge, expressed as a movement from ‘head’ to ‘heart’, from theoretical to empirical knowledge, from persuasion to experience, from knowing *about God* to *knowing God* (see Aquino 2012:117; Wainwright 2012:228).

“The difficulty with experience,” Bruner tells us, “...is that we can only experience *our own* life, what is received by *our own* consciousness” (Bruner 1986:5, my italics). In order to know about the experience of others, we are dependent upon “interpreting expressions” (Dilthey 1976:230), where *expressions* are “encapsulations of the experience of others” (Bruner 1986:5) in representations, performances or texts. Up until the age of twenty-one, any knowledge Dave might have claimed to have of God

was primarily based upon interpreting, and in some cases responding to, the expressions of others. In my interview with him, he has already told me of two different occasions in his childhood when he “gave his life to Jesus” – the first when he was eight or nine years old at a beach mission in Southport, and the second when he was twelve or thirteen at a youth rally at the local Bethesda mission. In both cases, Dave remained unconvinced, and essentially unchanged, by these experiences. In early adulthood, even if influential others around him were claiming to have had some personal experience of God – for instance the new minister recounting how he had “encountered Jesus in a remarkable way” – Dave’s *own* knowledge remained second-hand, dependent as it was upon interpreting the minister’s *expression* of his *experience*. Although perhaps convincing to some degree (in that Dave was intrigued), he is still not *convinced*. He only becomes convinced when his personal knowledge moves beyond the expressions of others (persuasion) into the realm of experience for himself.

When Dave arrived at the Christian Endeavour holiday Centre in the summer of 1973, one of the first things he did was to take a stroll down by the river. There he met a “nice girl from Ireland.” “We just got chatting,” Dave explains, “and I said to her, ‘Perhaps we can spend some time together this week.’ And so she sort of said, ‘Well you’re a Christian aren’t you?’ So I said, ‘Of course, of course.’ So she said, ‘Great, come to the prayer meeting tomorrow morning with me.’ So I thought, ‘Dear me, I’m on my holidays, you know. Do I really want to go to a prayer meeting?’ But anyway, she was nice and there was this sense that a lot of people were going, you know.”

At half past six the next morning, Dave arrived at the prayer meeting. He describes it as follows: “I went along to the prayer meeting, and the first day I went, on the Monday, there was probably about twelve or fifteen people there, just in a small dining room. And I went in, and it was just completely outside of my experience. People were singing. People had guitars. People were *real*. They were sincere about what they were doing. They were praying in tongues, as I understand now. Because I didn’t understand then what was going on. And actually, it was just a really great sense of, ‘God is at work here, this is really interesting.’ And this would go from about half-past six, 6:45 to about half-past eight. It was not just a fifteen-minute prayer meeting at the start of the day. So I sort of got a bit hooked on going. I mean, if I’m honest, I was more hooked on going to this prayer meeting than I was hooked on this girl really. So

then, I went along each morning, and actually, steadily, as the week went on, the group grew. So as it got to about Wednesday, we had to move out of this dining room because there wasn't enough room for people. And there would be something like forty-five, fifty people turning up."

"For the prayer meeting?" I ask.

"For the prayer meeting, yeah. So I remember the Friday morning as I went down a) I felt physically sick because I was exhausted, because I'd been going to bed late at night and getting up early in the morning. And b) I had this sense of, 'Oh dear me, this is the last day of the week.' I was actually on holiday for two weeks, and this was the end of the first week. And I think I just had this sense within me that something was going to happen today. And I went in, and literally within minutes of sitting down I felt God speak *to me*."

"In what way?"

"Well, through tongues and interpretation of tongues – which was not spoken, 'David Webb, blah, blah, blah.' It was spoken out into the meeting. And for the next hour I sat there sweating my pants off really, because I didn't really know quite what to do, or how to respond. But I knew that in some way I needed to. And so, roundabout an hour later, coming up to eight o'clock, if I'm not mistaken, there was another sort of prophetic type word. And at that point, I knew that I needed to respond. And there was a guy called Mr. Harrison, who was one of the older men there. He was probably about your age, about fortyish. He just said, 'God is speaking to some people in this room this morning and you just need to know that this is how you respond to him.' And he gave one or two headlines as to what to do. And I responded in accordance to what he said, really. And I felt then as though I'd got struck by lightning. These guys came running across the room, laid hands on me – young, enthusiastic guys about my own age, really. And, yeah... I just think that my life was completely radicalised within."

"So did you feel that you got struck by lightning in your response to Mr Harrison, or when these guys laid hands on you?" I ask.

"It was as their hands landed on my head, I think."

"Right right. So it was something quite... *physical*, as well as spiritual, you think?"

“Yeah,” Dave responds but he doesn’t sound convinced, “yeah. I always described it as, when I was a kid, we used to collect sticklebacks in jam jars and put them on the shelf, on the window ledge outside the house. And it was great for a day or two, but then you would lose interest in them, and your mother would be saying, ‘Can you clear this up.’ And eventually you realise you’d better clear it up, and there was a jam jar full of dead fish and green slime. And then, as you put it under the tap outside in the garden, you put the tap on, all of this slime just came out of you, and it would sort of peel off, this green film which had attached itself to the jam jar, and you’d be left with a clean jar. I think that’s what I felt happened.”

It could be argued that everything that Dave tells us here, even perhaps from six months earlier when he observed a transformation in the new minister, is what convinces him. Interestingly, from the outset, Dave’s responses to others’ experiences of God have been couched in positive terms. We have already seen how Dave, at this point in his life, is displaying an attraction toward the charismatic. He is *intrigued* about the minister’s transformation and goes to ask him what has happened to him. He *reads* the books the minister subsequently gives to him. When he goes to the first prayer meeting at the Centre, he is *impressed* by the sincerity of what is going on: his response is positive, it is one of amazement. Rather than reacting and responding negatively to the sincere singing, to the praying in tongues, things which were “completely outside of [his] experience”, and therefore could have made him feel uncomfortable, he puts a *positive* interpretation upon what he sees: “God is at work here, this is really interesting.” Even before this experience, Dave has hinted at a deeper spiritual longing through an interesting turn of phrase: he described himself as “*trying* to be persuaded” which seems to suggest, to me, that Dave *wanted* to ‘believe’ but somehow couldn’t, he *wants* to be convinced. You could say, in this way, that Dave was ‘open’ to what was about to happen, the climactic events of the Friday morning meeting.

Earlier, we saw how Dave and Lynn applied the notion of ‘openness’ to the family home and to the table. Dave pictures the door to the family home being ‘open’ to a broader group of trusted relations. Lynn pictures the table as being ‘open’ to those who creatively extend the domain of family life. In both cases the boundaries of a particular unit (the ‘nuclear’ family) are loosened and extended through the inclusion of trusted others. The ‘circle’ of community is not closed, but left open; the door to the family

home is left ajar, with the key invitingly placed on the outside. These trusted others add vitality and constantly unsettle the stagnation that threatens to form around social isolation. Here, Dave's story of his conversion is essentially woven around this same theme – how he came to 'open' the door of his heart to a transcendent, yet trusted, Other; how, when he "responded in accordance to what [Mr. Harrison] said" Dave 'opened' the door to a Convivial Intruder who would, from that point, permanently unsettle and vitalise his life.

Moving beyond the conceptual and towards the perceptual, Dave's language at this point emphasises the sensory nature of his experience. Even before the meeting started, Dave had a "sense" that something was going to happen that day. Within a few minutes of sitting down he "felt" God speak to him. Upon responding to Mr. Harrison's instructions Dave "felt... as though [he'd] got struck by lightning." The last sense is so specific (and dramatic) that, in my interview with him, I want Dave to expand more on what exactly it was that he experienced. What does he *mean* when he says he "felt" as if he got struck by lightning? He has described two guys running across the room to lay hands on him. I want him to be specific. Did he *feel* the lightning strike before they reached him (when he responded to Mr. Harrison), or at the point that they laid their hands on him? The former would imply something more remote, the latter would suggest something analogous to a transferral of electrical charge brought about through touch. Dave is not completely sure (perhaps it didn't really matter), but thinks it was as "their hands landed on [his] head." I want him to be more specific about his experience. "So it was something quite... *physical*, as well as spiritual, you think?" Dave, however, is not convinced by my categories. They clearly don't somehow encompass the experience. Instead he turns to metaphor. The best way to describe what the experience was like is to translate or 'move' it into a different sphere of experience (Lakoff & Johnson 2003[1980]; Fernandez 1972; Basu 2004:152,173): "I always described it as, when I was a kid, we used to collect sticklebacks in jam jars and put them on the shelf...". Dave's description of the forgotten jam jar – "full of dead fish and green slime" – is markedly vivid. The key moment, of course, is when it is put under the tap in the garden, the tap is turned on and "all of this slime just came out of you, and it would sort of peel off, this green film which had attached itself to the jam jar, and you'd be left with a clean jar."

Dave here ‘slides’ between the two situations he is describing – the cleaning out of the jam jar and his being “struck by lightning” on that Friday morning. What appears like a verbal slip – “all of this slime just came out of *you*” – in fact just highlights the way in which the metaphor is working: the purpose of the jam jar story is to elucidate the lightning experience, to seek to convey it in terms of something else, thereby “translating abstract bodily feelings into words” (Hunt & Sampson 2006:21). Whatever ‘hit’ Dave that morning was something like lightning and something like a powerful jet of fresh water which somehow went right inside of him and “peel[ed] off” – and here we return again to the jam jar – the “green film” that had attached itself to the inside of the jar. I don’t think there is any point in speculating what this “green film” represented in Dave’s life. To do so would reduce the discussion of what I perceive as a primarily *sensual* experience to an intellectual or theological level, to the realm of interpretation or understanding. Was Dave aware of this layer of filth before he was struck, or was it something that he only became aware of ‘in the moment’? We don’t know. We have to remember his explaining it in terms of the jam jar metaphor, as indeed his comparing it to lightning, is only a *later* attempt to verbally convey what actually happened, what he actually ‘sensed’. The comparison, presumably, didn’t occur to him at the time, as he was caught up in an immediate and highly sensory experience. What we can say, however, is that Dave perceived, and still perceives, this experience as a positive thing. It is good to be ‘open’ to God, because God does good things in your life, like clean you up, like remove the slime that has attached itself somehow deep ‘inside’ you.

To follow David Howes (2009:3), in his introduction to *The Sixth Sense Reader*, we might say that an “overexposure” to the fivefold arrangement of the senses, an arrangement that, as we have seen, is often historically attributed to Aristotle (Gavrilyuk and Coakley 2012:8; Classen 1993:2), potentially blinds us to other ways in which the sensorium might be arranged, to other ways in which things might be ‘sensed’. As I have already argued, this is especially true when it comes to those things that are not necessarily perceptible *purely* through the physical bodily senses. It seems that Dave’s story seems to support this suggestion. When I seek to pin him down about what he means by his statement, “I felt as though I’d got struck by lightning”, he appears hesitant about fitting it within the categories I offer him: “So it was something quite... *physical*, as well as *spiritual*, you think?” Is Dave’s hesitation something to do with the fact that our conversation is taking place within a stream of discourse that imagines the



physical and the spiritual as somehow distinct? Is Dave reluctant to describe his experience as “physical” because, to do so, would seem to suggest that it is somehow *less* “spiritual”? Could it be that what he experienced *did*, in fact, encompass both physical and spiritual dimensions, but Dave, for whatever reasons, is just reluctant to put it in these terms? Or is it that the categories that I am offering to Dave don’t quite provide the right frame within which the experience can be conveyed?

Whatever the case, we still have the fact that Dave is using ‘sense’ language: “I *felt* as though I’d got struck by lightning.” How else, we might ask, *could* he express what he experienced? Perhaps there is not another language available to him, in which case ‘sense language’ – language that analogises experience to familiar bodily sensations (Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012:3) – has to do.<sup>27</sup> Such a language, I would argue, is only problematic if we remain conceptually within a fivefold corporeal perceptual paradigm. Taking our cue from Classen and Howes (1996), however, we might suggest that Dave is operating within a sensorium that is somewhat broader than this, even if it is difficult to pin down exactly what this entails. If this is the case, we can, indeed, say that Dave did ‘sense’ something (something very powerful, something which, in fact, changed his life), but that this ‘sense’ certainly doesn’t fit neatly within the fivefold sensorium. Dave employs metaphor to try and fill the gap, to verbally express the experience and thereby translate abstract feelings into words (Hunt & Sampson 2006:21). He describes what he sensed as *something* like getting struck by lightning, and *something* like a powerful jet of water cleaning out the inside of a filthy jam jar. But clearly these descriptions are not enough to encompass the experience. “Metaphorical structuring,” Lakoff and Johnson remind us (2003:12-13), “...is partial, not total. If it were total, one concept would actually be the other, not merely be understood in terms of it.” Whatever it was that happened, it was an experience that was so powerful that it rendered certain in Dave what no amount of “persuasion” – listening to others’ expressions of *their* experiences – had been able to do. He therefore describes it as an “encounter”, a transformational experience in which he was “radicalised within”.

In Dave’s story, we see the coming together of the three aspects of ‘the heart’ I have drawn out from an analysis of my own conversion, in this case being structured around

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<sup>27</sup> Also, as far as I know, Dave has never actually been struck physically by lightning, so he is using what he *imagines* this experience might be like in order to convey something else, to convey something, presumably, about power, shock, energy etc.

a metaphor of ‘openness’. He perceived a transformation in the minister, and hungrily devoured the books the minister gave him, thus demonstrating that his heart was ‘open’ to allow the seeds of a new metaphorical conceptual system – *life as adventure* – to be planted therein. The minister’s conversion also appears to be the point at which Dave began to experience a charismatic attraction toward the divine, demonstrated by his positive responses to the ‘work of the Spirit’ that he observed in those around him. This charismatic attraction, combined with the idea that a journey of adventure inevitably leads one outside the experience of one’s ‘accustomed milieu’, led Dave to a place of what appeared to be a risk-laden choice – the decision to ‘open the door of his heart’ to an unknown and transcendent Other. As he did so, in what was an archetypal act of charismatic devotion and surrender (Weber 1968b:49, 2009a:249), he experienced the intrusion of this transcendent Other, a highly sensory experience (like ‘lightning’, like ‘water’) which engendered a complete reorientation of Dave’s entire perceptual system. If the jam jar story is understood as a metaphorical move to communicate something of what he experienced in his ‘heart’ (as I believe it is), then we can also say that, just as the filth was removed from the inside of the jar, so Dave, at this point, experienced a ‘cleaning out’ of his innermost being that, from his point of view, enabled him to perceive the world, and presumably God’s presence within it, more clearly.

## **Lynn**

Despite the fact that Lynn was born in 1961, against a turbulent backdrop of wider social change, she describes the cultural environment in which she grew up as “very ordered”, an era in which children were sent to Sunday school because it was the “done thing” and religious festivals were “rigidly adhered to”. She describes her parents’ faith as non-radical: nominally Church of England, they attended only at Christmas and Easter. Nevertheless, they still felt it right to send Lynn along to Sunday school. This appears to have been as much for practical reasons as any faith-based motives. As in Dave’s childhood, it was a time, Lynn tells me, during which much community life was still based around churches. Lynn associates the breakdown of this somewhat traditional, formal and structured way of life with the emergent free-thinking of the 1960s:

“It was becoming more and more free, I think, as the sixties went on,” she tells me. “People were thinking, ‘I don’t want to do this,’ ‘I have to start thinking.’ And I think it was probably because of the worldwide things that were going on, you know, the crises – nuclear crises and the Cold War crises type things. People were starting to think. The Vietnam War made people start to rebel against governments, and not just take everything as read. They started to think for themselves. And so I think that trickled down into whether you *believed* or not, and whether God was relevant.

“In a sense, both of my parents instilled in me the fact that there *was* a God, but that he was just, he was too distant. And then I think I began... because you start to grow up, and you start thinking, and you’re taught in school... I suppose in my early secondary years, you were taught that there were other points of view, and other ways of life. And so your eyes began to open. But again you had to think for yourself, ‘Is this a road for me? Or am I going to go down a road of believing?’ I went to a very big comprehensive secondary school, and again you were taught to think and question, and so things were sort of eroded and numbed, and whatever. And, if you were going to have a faith, [then] that would need to be out of your *own* conviction, not just out of the mainstream.”

For Lynn, what seemed to be “eroded and numbed” within the critical, questioning environment of secondary school was the unquestioned solidity of her inherited childhood faith. She started to realise, perhaps, that such an expression of faith was insufficient for the next stage of life, or certainly inadequate to sustain her in the complex and diverse wider social sphere within which she now found herself. If she was to have “a faith”, then it would need to be *her own*.<sup>28</sup> During her adolescence, however, Lynn describes these questions of faith being put “on the back burner” as she involved herself in having fun and exploring other things. Unfortunately, parallel to this, her parents’ marriage began to fall apart. As a result, when Lynn was between fourteen and sixteen years old, she and her younger brother “moved around a lot” – travelling with their mother to live for a period of time in South Africa. The anxiety

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<sup>28</sup> In the next chapter, we look more closely at this transition between ‘faith-stages’. James Fowler characterises what Lynn is talking about as a transition from a tacit and conformist “synthetic-conventional faith” toward a more explicit and personally ‘owned’ “individuated-reflective” one (Fowler 1995:151-173; 174-183).

and insecurity created by these events caused the question of God, in an emotional and practical way, to come to the forefront in Lynn's life.

"[My parents'] marriage disintegrated to such an extent that I was sort of questioning... I was beginning to question, 'Oh, God where are you? Could you look after *me*? Because I don't know what's going to happen to *me*.' So it just became a question in my mind, and I just sort of left it, because I was trying to sort of survive as it were. But events were such that my mother moved away [with my brother and I], and I remember at that point I asked God if he could look after me. And we moved away to a country, where it was very... it was a very *religious* country, a very 'Christian' country [South Africa] – well, certainly the people that I was connecting with. And I began to see something different in their lives [from the way that] I was actually living at the time, and [the way] my parents had lived. It just seemed that everything that [my parents] had lived by – the values and principles and stuff – hadn't worked. [And so] I was looking for someone else's values and principles to see whether *their* values and principles worked.

"So I was involved in a group of people who did have a Christian faith and experience that... my eyes were opened to. So the God I asked [to] help me, and the God that they were living by faith [in] sort of began to... it began to come together. And so I think it was at that point, when I was sixteen that I began to have a faith."

Lynn goes on to describe an encounter with God that is not dissimilar to Dave's, in that it hints at an experience that is highly sensorial, and yet conceivably refers to a sensorium that encompasses more than just the corporeal senses. In terms of a charismatic relationship, Lynn's encounter is significant in the fact that it is conceived specifically as an encounter with *Jesus*. Lynn comes into charismatic relation not just with a vague and amorphous God, but with a specific person. As we have seen, a charismatic leader's legitimacy, Lindholm states (following Weber), is based, at least in part, upon the immediate "recognition" by his or her 'followers' of the leader's "miraculous quality" (Lindholm 1990:25; Weber 1968b:48). Psychologically, Weber states, this "recognition" of charismatic authority by those subject to it often arises out of "enthusiasm, or of despair and hope" and results in "complete personal devotion" (Weber 1968b:49). Here, in Lynn's life, we see something of this process at work. The disintegration of her parents' marriage causes her a great deal of anxiety – in the midst

of the breakdown she does not know who will look after her. We could say that, as a result, she looks to God in *despair* – “It just seemed that everything that [my parents] had lived by... hadn’t worked,” she says. And yet she also looks to God in *hope* – not only the hope that God will, in fact, look after her, but also that she will discover a *way of life* (i.e. “values and principles”) that works. With the coming together of her personal cry for help and what she *sees* in the lives of the Christians around her, this hope congeals into something stronger – “a faith”. This “faith”, in turn, leads to an encounter and an experience.

“Yes, it was a specific time and event and experience,” Lynn tells me, “that... in a sense, my... my transformation happened over a weekend. I went away with these people for a weekend, and I was just totally flabbergasted by the way that they were living, and the things that I could see... And I thought, ‘Wow, I want that sort of life.’ So there was an invitation given out on the Sunday morning about, ‘If anybody wanted to meet this Jesus who...’ Well, there was a sermon about getting out of the boat and going to this Jesus. And it was an important decision that you made, that *you* took some steps, and Jesus came and did the rest. It was given in quite a naïve way. So I was able to say, ‘OK, well I’m taking some steps.’ And I felt Jesus took some steps to me, and that was when he just burst into my life, and into my heart. And I felt that my spiritual experience began from that day. Other things had led up to it, but that was the specific point.”

An employment of the concept of the ‘spiritual senses’ is justifiable here, I believe, in understanding not just Lynn’s experiences of Jesus bursting into her life and into her heart, but also the things she *saw* in the lives of the people around her that so attracted her in the first place into this charismatic relation. She comes back to this point later in the conversation in order to further explain her conversion: “I saw that these people’s lives were filled with joy, and peace. And when people look at other people who are living a life of peace, it really is quite a tangible thing that you can see. So that was quite dynamic for me really to observe, and want to experience myself.” The fact that Lynn emphasises that this sense of peace was “tangible” illustrates her awareness that, for the most part, or seen through a particular lens, ‘peace’ might be considered something quite *in-tangible*. And yet, it was something that she could *see*. I have no doubt that Lynn interpreted this ‘peace which she could see’, and would interpret it

today, as having substance, the evidence, as it were, of God's presence, of eternal things unseen.<sup>29</sup> This tangible joy and peace, seen through 'spiritual eyes', was part of the miraculous evidence that convinced Lynn, in my words, of the validity of Jesus as a charismatic leader. To quote Weber again: "It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma. This is freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a "sign" or proof, originally always a miracle, and consists in devotion to the corresponding revelation, hero worship, or absolute trust in the leader" (Weber 1968b:49). The fact that "recognition" and "devotion" are "freely given" demonstrates that discipleship is something voluntary, something embarked upon as an 'act of the will'.

At the point that their visas ran out in South Africa, Lynn's mum returned, with Lynn and her brother, to the UK. On arriving back in England, Lynn was afraid that she wouldn't have the companionship of fellow Christians. However, the fact that she felt quite alone in her faith also made her more certain that this was truly *her* decision to follow Jesus, and that she wasn't just being carried along by the crowd. Being alone, for Lynn, helped her to become more strongly established in her faith and to grow quickly. She finished her education and left school. Wondering what to do next, she felt God guiding her into something she was "quite joyful to do" – she decided to go to college for two years to study childcare and nursing. Her unhappy home life at that point also thrust her upon God, she tells me, further strengthening her faith. When she finished college, she walked into a job which she describes as "perfect for her" – working in a hospital for premature babies. Then, at a church weekend, she met Dave. Meeting Dave came out of the blue for Lynn. "I was going to travel the world," she tells me. "I wasn't going to get married until I was twenty-four, twenty-six at least. I was on a roll, and I was working towards travelling, working towards having my own flat, and living quite an independent life. And I was quite glad about that..."

"So what caused you to change your mind?" I ask.

"Mmmm," Lynn replies enigmatically.

I laugh, somewhat awkwardly.

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<sup>29</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:18; Hebrews 11:1

“I haven’t a clue, I haven’t a clue!” she continues. “I suppose if you.... if you meet somebody and you fall in love, and again you hear God’s voice saying that this is the life that I want you to live. Because I did feel that He spoke to me at certain points to say that I want you to live a *different* life from everybody else. ‘I want you to live a life of faith and I’m going to...’ I can’t work out exactly when He said, ‘I’m going to direct you on an *adventure*’, but I felt [it was] that sort of concept. Whether I felt He used that word or not, I don’t know, but I knew that I was not going to live a normal life... with 2.4 kids and a mortgage... [My friends] were all going to university. A-levels were very important and study was very important. And I didn’t want any of that. I wanted to be free from shackles. I felt I was a free spirit.

“So I met David at a church weekend – and, you know, again it’s a daft thing – because obviously he had his eye on me. And I didn’t know that this was the guy who... I was going to marry. But at the weekend... again you sort of... it’s a bit daft... but I just felt that God said to me to tell this guy, ‘Go and say to this guy, ‘I want to encourage you.’” So you sort of feel a bit like...” Lynn laughs, embarrassed. “So I did. I just said, ‘I just felt The Lord says he wants to encourage you. I don’t know why.’ So, anyway, he took it the other way: ‘Okay, she’s encouraging me to pursue her!’” We both laugh. “Which he did, and of course it was all through letters at that point... We married eighteen months later. And again, after about six weeks of us being married, the Lord spoke to us very distinctly and separately that we were going to give [up everything we were doing], and go to live in the [community in Sussex]... So he spoke to us separately, but at the same time. And then we moved. Things again fell into place very quickly and we moved down south, giving everything up within six months. So at the start of January 1983, we were living down in Sussex in a community, and we lived there for four years.”

Here, in Lynn’s descriptions, we can begin to see how a metaphor of ‘openness’, of having an ‘open heart’ towards God, starts to translate into another key metaphor within Dave and Lynn’s lives, a metaphor of ‘movement’. When Lynn meets Dave, her plans (of travelling, of having her own flat, of living an independent life) are suddenly interrupted. She explains this reorientation in part through falling in love, and in part through hearing God speak to her about living “a *different* life from everybody else”, one that will be a “life of faith” and that will have the characteristics of “an *adventure*”

about it. Her subsequent decision to marry Dave implies an internal movement, a shift within her expectations, conceptions and goals for what *life is*. Six weeks after they are married, once more ‘openness’ (to God) translates into ‘movement’, but this time for *both* Dave and Lynn. God speaks to them “very distinctly and separately” that they are to give up everything and move to Sussex in order to be part of an intentional Christian community. Their ‘openness’ to hearing God speak (perception), combined with their willingness to follow His lead (devotion), means that within six months of being married, they have radically reoriented their goals and moved into a completely new setting. Below we shall see how a prophetic word given to Dave and Lynn on the eve of their departure (conception) provided them with a concrete conceptual metaphor expressing this dynamic. The image given was of the Israelites following the cloud of God’s presence through the wilderness. Life, according to this image, entails a perceptual ‘openness’ to God and a devotional willingness to follow where He leads. It is the image of a charismatic relationship with the divine in which ‘openness’ implies ‘movement’.

### **PART THREE: ‘OPENNESS’ AND ‘MOVEMENT’**

#### **‘People of the Cloud’: Presence, Openness and Movement**

Dave’s conversion marked the beginning of a new phase of his life in which ‘movement’, in its many different forms, was to become increasingly important. Shortly after his conversion, Dave began to mix with new groups of people: “For me a number of the most profound experiences that I had after becoming a Christian were, like meeting this couple who lived down in Woolwich in the autumn after I’d become a Christian – November time was the first time that I met them. And actually they had this house called *The Way*, and it was just full of Christians who basically, I don’t know that I would call them hippies, but probably we were, in one sense we were. We weren’t so ‘out there’ like some of the hippies. But this couple, Brian and Viv, who ran the place, basically had got a vision that home needed to be at the heart of Christian faith. If you were to ask Lynn, she would tell you that there’s been a whole number of times in our married life when I’ve said to her, ‘What I would really just like to do is to have a pan of curry on the stove on a Friday night, and basically just have the front door



open, and anyone who wants to come round can just come in. And they can just help themselves. And if you want to bring anything to eat or to drink then...' You know, that's what I'd really *like* to do. And that's part of what I would like church to be like. And I think that when we got to Greece, maybe subconsciously, unconsciously, certainly the whole concept of meeting around the table ties in with that."

There is, of course, an echo here of Dave's childhood experiences of community, of living with an 'open door' and an 'open house'. There is, however, a significant difference between Brian and Viv's home and Dave's childhood one, a difference expressed not only in a 'hippie' culture, but also in the name that the couple have given their house. "*The Way*", referring to Jesus' claim of being "the way, the truth and the life",<sup>30</sup> expresses an ideology of movement. It suggests a people on the move.

"From the point that I became a Christian," Dave tells me, "I had this moment of decision to make, when I wanted to go off and serve the Lord. And my dad gave me a two-minute window of opportunity, which I was able to take. He got into great trouble with my mother for giving me that. I have this vivid memory of having bought this mini-van, mini, and the back doors on it were really rusty, so I sprayed them orange. I filled them with fibreglass, and sprayed them orange. And over a dent I put a 'New Life in Jesus' sticker. And I remember getting into this mini, with my guitar and a small bag of my belongings, and driving off into the sunset. It was sort of along those lines! What you actually realise is that that was quite a significant moment, really. And it came from Brian and Viv a bit, it came from the influences that I came under at that time."

After Dave left home at age twenty-one, he did some youth work in north Wales, then he worked in a small church in London for six months as a volunteer, before getting a job with the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. "[Life] saw [me] definitely on the move," he says, "life in upheaval. And [it] brought me into contact with lots and lots of people living in different ways. And then, actually, I went to train for the Ministry. And in some respects, you look back and think, 'Why on earth did I even do that?' But I think God told me to do it – because it gave [me] some foundations of some sort, really. In the end, I did four years training [and then served for only] two and half years as an ordained minister. I must have been a huge

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<sup>30</sup> John 14:6

disappointment after they had poured all that money into me. But then [Lynn and I] went off on this journey with [the leaders of the Sussex community], and it was an incredibly fluid lifestyle. The reality was that [we] got the bug for living our life on the move, really.

“Lynn and I had been married about six months, and we were about to leave for [the community in Sussex]. I’d resigned from the churches where I was the minister for the previous two years or whatever, and it was about the tenth or eleventh of January, and this guy stood up in the announcements and said, ‘I’ve got an announcement, I’ve got a word from God for David and Lynn Webb.’ And so [the man] who was leading the service said, ‘Right, you’d better come and sit out here.’ So we came and sat down on two chairs, and a lady called Pauline – whose surname I can’t remember right now – she sat down and wrote it down in shorthand, and,” Dave laughs, “then she typed it up and gave it to me.

“And it was a word that we were to be people of the cloud. And when the cloud moved, we were to move, and when the cloud stood still, we were to stand still. But there would be people who would be saying, ‘Move, move!’ But the cloud would not be moving. And there’d be others who’d be saying, ‘Stay, stay!’ And the cloud would be moving. And we had to make sure that we were people of the cloud. And then, it was a long prophecy about how God would take us... I’ve got it probably in Greece, the word actually. It’s quite fascinating. I read it not that long ago. ‘And I will take you from a large place, to a large place, to a large place.’”

The cloud spoken about in the prophetic word is an image that would be familiar to anyone who has knowledge of Old Testament stories. It almost certainly refers to the pillar of cloud that travelled with the Israelites after Moses led them out of Egypt into the wilderness: “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.”<sup>31</sup> Firstly, the pillar of cloud, as also the pillar of fire, is associated with the presence of God – the Lord is “in” the cloud, and “in” the fire. In fact, every time the cloud is mentioned, it is associated with *presence*, with the presence of God himself. When the people grumble that they have no food, “the glory of

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<sup>31</sup> Exodus 13:21

the LORD appear[s] in the cloud.”<sup>32</sup> When Moses ascends Mt. Sinai, it is the Lord that comes to meet him “in a thick cloud” that covers the mountain.<sup>33</sup> After God commands the Israelites to make a sanctuary for him, that he “may dwell in their midst”,<sup>34</sup> the cloud descends and covers the ‘tent’, the “glory of the Lord” so filling the tabernacle that Moses is unable to enter.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, the cloud sometimes moves, and, in so doing, initiates the movement of the Israelites: “And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped... Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time that the cloud continued over the tabernacle abiding there, the people of Israel remained in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out.”<sup>36</sup>

The story was ‘received’ by Dave and Lynn shortly after they were married, as they were about to set off on their adventure of life together. The prophetic story, spoken *into* Dave and Lynn’s lives, is constitutive, in that it *creates* something. It speaks about, and, in a sense, brings into being – at least in the form of a conceptual seed of potentiality – a way of life that Dave and Lynn are to live and to pursue. Knowing something of Dave and Lynn’s life-stories up to this point, we can see, also, how this story is not something that is completely foreign to them. It aptly reflects, in fact, their own desires of the kind of life that they want to live. At the same time, it is equally vague. Its contents are to be filled out with the details, the choices, and the unique journey of Dave and Lynn’s life-story together. The fact that Dave is telling me the prophetic word some thirty years after it was given is evidence, I believe, that it *was* something that they ‘received’ – into their hearts. It was not a word that they either dismissed or forgot, but rather, over the years it has had, it has gained and it continues to have significance. This story, this prophetic word, has been a reference point that has helped Dave and Lynn steer the particular lives that they have ended up living.

The obvious interpretation of the word is that Dave and Lynn are to be pilgrim people, nomads that follow where the Lord leads. They are to live in God’s presence, the cloud of his being. When God moves, they are to move. When God stays still, they are to stay still. The story acts as a conceptual metaphor for Dave and Lynn, by which – if

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<sup>32</sup> Exodus 16:10

<sup>33</sup> Exodus 19:9; Exodus 19:16; Exodus 24

<sup>34</sup> Exodus 25:8

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 40:34-35

<sup>36</sup> Numbers 9:15-23

they ‘receive’ it – they can begin to order and shape their lives. As we have seen, Fernandez defines metaphor as “a strategic predication upon an inchoate pronoun (an I, a you, a we, a they) which makes a movement and leads to a performance” (Fernandez 1972:43, see also 1974:120). The metaphor provides a “more concrete, ostensive, and easily graspable” (ibid.:123) image that is predicated upon a subject not yet fully formed. Here, the inchoate subject is ‘life’, and more specifically Dave and Lynn’s nascent ‘life together’ as a newly married couple. The story is saying something about their ‘life’, it is giving a more concrete, easily graspable image of what life *is*, namely a nomadic journey directed by the presence of God. If Dave and Lynn accept the metaphor, if they ‘receive’ the prophetic word that is, then the “movement” that Fernandez refers to takes place, a movement “from the inchoate in the pronomial subject to the concrete in the predicate” (Fernandez 1972:45-46). The identity of the inchoate subject begins to be shaped by the more concrete metaphor (ibid.:42), and this, according to Fernandez, leads to a “performance”. In other words, the metaphor begins to be lived out. The king who is told that he is a lion and who believes it, Fernandez explains, acts accordingly: “he roars at his subjects and stealthily stalks those he thinks are enemies to his interest” (ibid.:54).

The cloud story is, at heart, another image of charismatic relationship with God. It is a story of complete personal devotion, by a company of people, to a transcendent and yet immanent charismatic leader. This charismatic relation, for the contemporary disciple (unlike perhaps for the Israelites in the story) is dependent upon a sensorium that extends beyond the corporeal senses. The cloud of God’s presence is presumably something that, for the contemporary disciple, is not something perceivable through the physical eye. It requires *another* kind of sensing. The story builds upon Dave and Lynn’s experiences of the divine thus far, and as part of this presupposes this extended sensorium. If it did not connect to their previous experiences, at least to some measure, then it would not be convincing (Fernandez 1972:58). At the same time, it reflects their desires. Dave and Lynn *want* to be in charismatic relation with God, they *want* to follow the cloud of God’s presence. If the story did not in some way reflect their desires of what life should be, they would, in all likelihood, not ‘receive’ it. The story, therefore, reflects both experience and desire. It not only translates “experience from one domain into another” (ibid.:46), thereby making that experience more graspable and communicable – a “leaping beyond the essential privacy of the experiential process”

(Fernandez 1974:119 following Skinner 1945) – it also provides a desirable conceptual metaphor of what life is.

### **Invited Intrusions**

In this chapter, I have begun to turn the anthropological gaze away from myself toward others expressing a similar type of Christian faith. I have argued that similar themes emerge through an analysis of Dave and Lynn's lives to those that emerge through an analysis of my own. Namely, that their lives, after their conversions, can be understood as expressive of charismatic relationship with a divine Other. Their stories deepen our understanding of the aspects of 'the heart' that I identified through an analysis of my own conversion. We have seen how Dave and Lynn's lives exemplify a) the workings of an extended sensorium by which "God and God's activity in the world" (Lootens 2012:56) are perceived, b) the processes by which conceptual metaphorical seeds become planted in 'the heart', subsequently shaping lives as lived, and c) the centrality of charismatic devotion within these processes. I have suggested that Dave and Lynn's affective experiences of 'community' – for Dave in early childhood, and for Lynn as part of the intentional community in Sussex – have significantly shaped their understandings and expressions of family and church life today. I have argued that the notion of 'openness' that Dave and Lynn metaphorically apply to these spheres of experience, can also be translated to other spheres too, particularly their experiences of relationship with God, and the 'openness' of heart that is at the core of this charismatic relation. Finally, metaphors of movement and adventure, which we have seen entering Dave and Lynn's lives at various points, can also be connected to 'the heart' that is 'open' to the convivial intrusion of this divine Other, an attitude which engenders a 'journey' of faith.

We have also begun to see how living with an 'open heart' towards God implies transformation. This is most explicit, of course, in the conversion process. Here 'the heart' that is open begins to sense and to perceive in new ways. A new domain of experience opens up which 'the heart' subsequently attempts to conceptualise, express and communicate through new metaphors. "The soul that is struggling to utter itself flies to whatever signs and instruments it can find in the visible world," writes Horace

Bushnell (cited in Parks 1986:147), “calling them in to act as interpreters.” I, for instance, reach for images of underground rooms being opened up and skies being vitally translucent and clear in order to express something of what ‘listening’ and conversion felt like. Dave reaches for images of lightning and dirty jam jars being powerfully washed out. Lynn talks about taking ‘steps’ towards Jesus and Jesus taking ‘steps’ towards her, and of the latter bursting into ‘her heart’ and into her life. The experiences, I would argue, are *real* and involve things that are powerfully sensed. The translation into a different domain of experience is metaphor at work; it is the metaphorical move. Each of our stories, therefore, exemplifies not only transformations in perception (the ways in which reality is sensed) but also transformations in conception (the ways in which reality is conceived and expressed).

I have also employed a ‘metaphorical move’ within this chapter in order to express something quite difficult to express within Dave and Lynn’s (and implicitly my own) lives, something about their relationship(s) with God. I have taken the image of the ‘open door’ and the ‘convivial intruder’ from Dave’s descriptions of his early childhood, and translated this into the domain of experience of what it means, for them, to live with ‘open hearts’ towards God. It must be remembered that metaphorical structuring is partial and not total, one thing does not entirely fit the other or they would actually be the same (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:12-13). But the translation is adequate. Such a move has enabled me to talk about some of the experienced vitalising qualities of such a life, as well as to begin to touch upon some of its implications. For instance, the ways in which ‘openness’ to the intrusions of a divine Other sometimes implies that one’s goals or life-trajectory might be dramatically interrupted and changed. In Lynn’s descriptions, upon meeting Dave, of the radical reorientation of her life’s goals and expectations, and then her move, with Dave, to be part of the community in Sussex, we see how ‘openness of heart’ towards God (and, in this case, towards Dave) meant, for Lynn in this instance, both transformation and movement.

The intrusion of an ‘other’ into one’s life, whether that ‘other’ is divine or human, is an implicit theme running through the chapter. It is reflected in Dave’s intentionality in pursuing ‘*relationship*’ with me in the period of time after I first met him (his friendly ‘intrusion’ into my life), in Lynn’s descriptions of extended family (the ‘intrusion’ of an other into the family sphere) and Dave’s descriptions of his childhood home (the

‘intrusion’ of the convivial guest). It is also reflected in the significance that I put upon joining them and their family in their move to the Balkans, in other words the ‘intrusion’ that one feels *upon one’s independence* as one allows oneself to become integrated within a close-knit community. There is, in this respect, a subtle sub-narrative that runs through the chapter. On the one hand, following an Abrahamic pattern, the journey of faith is conceived as involving an apparently individuating process of ‘leaving’ one’s native sphere of nurture. At the same time, whether in terms of Dave and Lynn being incorporated into the Sussex community, or of me being incorporated into our nascent community in Greece, there is a parallel process of being drawn *into relationship*, a moving away from individuation toward being incorporated into a connected ‘body’ of people within a charismatic community. In ‘community’ one has to accept that the atomised boundaries of an individualistic self will not, and cannot, be sustained. The self-connected-to-other-selves-in-community must remain ‘open’ to being intruded upon, just as he or she intrudes upon others. Dave and Lynn’s notion of ‘community’ incorporates something of this element of intrusiveness. ‘Community’, for Dave and Lynn, is not simply a collection of individuals living ‘parallel’ lives, but rather a company, a body, of deeply connected people.<sup>37</sup>

In the following chapter, I look at how our ‘community’ life developed during our initial years in the Balkans. In 1999, a year after we moved to Greece, Derek Brown, the leader of our informal church network, gave our ‘team’ a number of prophetic words that he felt would be helpful for us in the development of what we believed we were doing in the Balkans. One of those words, based upon a scripture in the book of Revelation, was “Go through open doors”.<sup>38</sup> Built upon what I have argued in this chapter, I look at how this framing word had the effect of transforming our self-

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<sup>37</sup> Stephen Verney (1976), writing out of his own experiences of Christian ‘community’, expresses a similar notion: “In the life of a small group,” he writes, “we discover the depth and complexity of our relations with other people... [and] as we experience this group life we become aware that human beings flow in and out of one another. We are not individuals, not like billiard balls which bump against one another, but part of an organic cell – we interact, interlock and interplay with each other... at a deeper level, we seem to be *open* to one another” (Verney 1976:117-118, my italics). Given this description of ‘community’ life, it is perhaps surprising to discover that, within anthropology, there has been ongoing debate as to whether Christianity is, in large part, responsible for an individualistic ethos (Strathern 1988; Brown 1992; Smith 2012; Hess 2006; Mosko 2010). Going against the prevailing tide of arguments connecting Christianity to individualism, Mark Mosko (2010) argues that Christianity, with its immanent God and highly relational ethos, more closely reflects ‘dividual’ notions of persons-in-relationship (Strathern 1988) than *in-dividualistic* ones. My experience of ‘community’ as we began to express this in Greece and based upon Dave and Lynn’s ideology, certainly seems to support Mosko’s suggestion. However, we must equally remember that ‘Christianity’ is expressed in many different ways, some of which may be more individualistic than others.

<sup>38</sup> The image of the open door appears in Revelation chapters 3 and 4.

understanding towards one in which *we* might be conceived as the convivial intruders I have described here. Firstly, I look at this process as it was worked out for me in relation to the extended family of an immigrant community in the town where we lived. Reflecting Dave's images of convivial sociality, of having an 'open house', this family 'opened the door' of their home, and their family life together, to me. Secondly, I look at this process as it was worked out in the life of one particular English man as he began, in 2001, to visit us in Greece, and subsequently, over the next few years, made a decision to move to the Balkans to join us. Reflecting the images I have painted of having an 'open heart', this man experienced the Spirit's (and perhaps our) 'convivial intrusion' into his life as both vitalising and transformational.



## Chapter 4

### ‘Hitting a Waypoint’: A Story of Faith Transition

*“Liminality may perhaps be regarded... as a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise.”*

*Victor Turner (Turner 1967:97)*

#### Balkan Tables and ‘Open Doors’

After we moved to Peraia in 1998, in fulfilment of Angela’s prophetic word to us (“*I just believe that meeting around the table is going to be significant for you*”), the table did become “significant” in a number of different ways. Given the importance of this type of commensality within the Mediterranean region, and particularly Greece (Loizos & Papataxiarchis 1991; Papataxiarchis 1991; Cowan 1990; Herzfeld 1987; du Boulay 1974), one might think that the word was particularly appropriate. The fact that it encouraged us to re-evaluate our inherited English church culture and to value time spent eating together over and above trying to persuade people to come along to ‘church meetings’ did enable us to connect more easily with local Greek people. However, as our life in Peraia developed, we found that it was often the most marginal people who were most attracted by the life of our group. In 2011, reflecting back over the many years that we lived in Greece, and perhaps even wrestling with what the purpose of our being there was, Dave concludes, “I think that we *did* offer community to a whole number of people who had no community.” Interestingly, the people he then goes on to list are primarily young single immigrants from Albania, Georgia or Bulgaria, those living in northern Greece without a family community immediately nearby. “I think that we offered community to all of those people who didn’t have a family,” Dave says, “who didn’t have a home.” You will recall Dave’s vision of church from the last chapter, of having a pan of curry on the stove on a Friday night, the door open, and, for anyone who wants to, the freedom to walk in and to help him or herself. “That’s part of what I would like church to be like,” Dave says. “And I think that when we got to Greece, maybe subconsciously, unconsciously, certainly the whole concept of meeting around the table ties in with that.”

But it was not just Dave and Lynn's large marble table – a place for the gathering of an “extended family” – that was marked with significance. As we began to integrate within the local town, the people that we got to know started to invite us to eat at their tables too. For example, shortly after we settled, I met a young Georgian man, recently arrived as an immigrant in Greece, who went by the name of Rezo. Rezo invited me to visit him in his home, a two-room basement apartment on a hillside overlooking Peraia, just off a dirt track where the town bordered the countryside. There he lived with his older brother, Kostas,<sup>39</sup> as they eagerly awaited the arrival of their parents, Boris and Emma, from Georgia. Their apartment was fifty metres up the road from their uncle Vassili's house. Uncle Vassili, a large, kind-hearted man, about fifty years of age, fond of his beer and his homemade raki, was patriarch of the broader family. He had arrived in Greece many years before, established residency on a legal basis, and managed to secure work as a labourer for the local Council. He was now acting as a gateway through which other members of his family were arriving in Greece. Vassili's wife Ksenia (Emma's sister) was a small lady with a somewhat religious orientation, her sentences often punctuated by “Praise God!” (“Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ!”), accompanied by a glance upwards made with a hurried sign of the cross. Like Dave and Lynn, Vassili and Ksenia kept ‘open house’ and ‘open table’. Rezo and Kostas, in the time before their parents arrived, ate daily at Vassili's table, and when I arrived on the scene in late 1998, I also became an honoured guest.

When Boris and Emma finally did arrive from Georgia, I drove Rezo to the central bus station in Thessaloniki to pick them up. He was anxious that they might not have made it across the border, for, like he and Kostas, his parents were arriving with no papers and no legal basis to be in Greece. Boris and Emma's initial years in Greece were therefore characterised by hiding. Boris would rarely leave the house and, when he did, it would only be to go the fifty metres to Vassili's, where the two men would sit and play ruthlessly competitive games of backgammon (τάβλι). Emma ventured a little further, finding work, like Ksenia, cleaning local homes in Peraia. They were primarily dependent upon their two sons finding work on local building sites, work which at that time during the building boom of the late 1990s was never hard to find. After Boris and Emma were established in their little house, it was my habit, for the first few years that

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<sup>39</sup> It is common in Greece for immigrants to take Greek names, often to facilitate functioning in the broader public sphere.

we lived in Greece, to walk up the hill once a week to see them and their family. The inevitable greeting – whether from Rezo, Kostas, Boris or Emma – was an indignant “Where have you been?” (“Πού ήσουν;”) usually followed by “Why did you not come?” (“Γιατί δεν ήρθες;”), my canonical response – always delivered with a hint of irony – being, “Here I am!” (“Εδώ είμαι!”).

No sooner would I arrive, than Emma would be in the tiny kitchen preparing food. I would sit with Rezo and Kostas around their low table, in the winter the small wood-burning stove (σόμπα) pumping out heat into the tiny room, whilst Emma would bring us plates of tomatoes sprinkled with oregano and drizzled with olive oil, chopped bread, hot peppers, a fresh omelette or a bowl of chicken soup. With thick, cement-toughened hands the boys would dip their bread and cajole me into eating, whilst telling stories of how they had avoided being captured by the police that day. Small tumblers would be placed on the table and Rezo would reach for the home-made raki, always making sure my glass was full, and that, when we raised a toast, the lip of his and Kostas’ glasses were always lower than mine, in honour of the oldest. They would ask systematically after relatives in distant lands, and sympathise with me at the pain I must feel that my own parents were so far away. “But you have David, and he is like a father to you” (“Αλλά έχεις David, και αυτός είναι σαν πατέρα σου”). We would raise a toast, and then another, wishing health and blessings upon those we loved, both near and far. “With health and family what else do you need?” (“Αν έχετε την υγεία και την οικογένεια, τι άλλο χρειάζεστε;”). Emma would join us at the table. Then further toasts would be raised, invoking wisdom and sturdy legs to walk the paths that God had set before us, the first toast always being reserved for Him. Hours later, my heart warm with affection, my belly stuffed with food, and my head dizzy with raki, I would get up to walk back down the hill to my shared apartment in the centre of Peraia. My attempts to leave would always be greeted with indignation: “James, [why are you leaving] so early?” (“James, τόσο νωρίς;”). To which I would routinely reply, with equal indignation, “What are you saying, [my] friend? It is late!” (“Τι λες, φίλε; αργά είναι!”). Finally, my hosts would reluctantly resign themselves to my departure, asking when I would visit again.

When Derek Brown, the leader of our informal church network, visited us in Greece in 1999, he gave us a number of prophetic words which he felt would be significant to us

in the future, and which also might be helpful for us in the development of what we believed we were doing in the Balkans. One of those words, based upon a scripture in the book of Revelation, was “Go through open doors.”<sup>40</sup> Spoken into our given context, we very quickly interpreted the idea of the ‘open door’ as referring to people, in other words *people* were open doors, not just any people, but specifically those people who were open to ‘*relationship*’. When I got to know Rezo, he both appeared to me as an ‘open door’ (in that he was open to be my friend) and at the same time he opened a door before me, the door into his home and into his extended family. By going through that door, by participating in the life of his family, I began to belong, and in belonging, I gained an awful lot. I was nourished – physically, spiritually and emotionally – at his table. At the same time, there began to develop a sort of reciprocal relationship between Rezo’s extended family and ‘my own’ (in that he correctly perceived that Dave was “like a father to [me]”). When Boris tripped, fell and broke his leg outside his house, it was Dave who came and picked him up and took him to a special doctor in Thessaloniki who didn’t ‘require papers’ (i.e. residency papers). When Rezo finally did get arrested by the police, it was Dave and I who attempted to visit him in prison before he was deported, and finally managed to wave him off – under police escort – at the airport (he arrived back several months later under a different name). At the same time, Vassili and his extended family continued to open wide the door of hospitality to us and to our broader group.

There were times when this would even require extending tables or creating entirely new ones. In the first years that we were in Greece, we had numbers of people visit us from churches either in England, Scotland or Germany. On one particular occasion, in the summer, Vassili insisted upon hosting just such a large group of us on his front porch. Since no table could be found large enough to seat so many people, Rezo and Kostas, after we had all arrived, gathered scraps of wood from the yard and built one, whilst Vassili cooked large pieces of pork over a wheelbarrow full of burning coals. On another occasion, Vassili and Ksenia hosted a small group of us at a table in their garden. Our church friends from England, unfamiliar with the Georgian rhythm of toasting and drinking, were downing shots at an alarmingly fast rate, keenly offering for my translation their own range of apparently suitable toasts. When one of our group (in an apparent haze of confusion) raised a well meant, but somewhat misplaced, toast to

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<sup>40</sup> The image of the open door appears in Revelation chapters 3 and 4.

Laika the space dog, I felt it was time to leave. I led the joyfully inebriated group back to their hotel – with them singing praises of Georgian hospitality all the way – where they summarily slept it off. In hindsight, they should have taken a leaf from Vassili’s mother’s book. After toasting, and whilst everyone’s back was turned, we observed her once sneakily tip her raki out over the living room carpet. Unfortunately, some years later Vassili’s house burned down, which always caused us to wonder if there was a connection.

I hope that you will pick up some of the affection that I had, and still have, for Rezo, Vassili, Emma, Boris and their broader family. For that affection is part of the ‘meaning’ of the open door and, of course, ‘*relationship*’. Dave and Lynn had their own ‘open doors.’ They were sitting at other tables, sometimes in Greek homes, sometimes in tavernas, with their own selection of friends. But Rezo and his family were definitely an open door *to me*. There were a number of scriptures by which we made sense, at that time, of the open door and of the welcome that one receives within a particular social domain. One of those was the instruction that Jesus gives: “Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace be to this house!’ And if a son of peace is there, your peace will rest upon him. But if not, it will return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide...”<sup>41</sup> Another was from the book of Revelation: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me”.<sup>42</sup> Reflecting my argument in the previous chapter, these scriptures refer to two different, and yet connected, domains of experience: ‘open homes’ and ‘open hearts’. They both combine the image of the open door with the act of hospitality,<sup>43</sup> the second in such a way that the ‘openness’ is not purely manifested externally, but internally too – “I will come *in to him*”.

In the years after we arrived in Greece we went through the ‘open doors’ that emerged before us. This meant that we began to make ‘*relationship*’ not only with local people, such as Rezo and his broader family, but also with others living further afield. This fitted with our understanding that we were ‘called’ not just to one area, but to a region. We felt no need to demarcate clearly the boundaries of this region geographically. As

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<sup>41</sup> Luke 10:5-6

<sup>42</sup> Revelation 3:20

<sup>43</sup> See also Luke 12:35-37.

various relational doors opened we found ourselves travelling as far south as Athens, as far east as Alexandroupoli (Greece's border city with Turkey), as far north as Skopje, and as far west as Edessa. Also, somewhere present within our ideological background was a "Macedonian call" based upon a story in Acts in which the apostle Paul, whilst travelling west through the regions of Galatia, Phrygia, Mysia and Troas, receives a night vision. In the vision a man of Macedonia appears to Paul, and urges him to "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Almost immediately, Paul and his companions set sail for Neapolis, and from there travel on to Philippi where they encounter various people who are open to their message.<sup>44</sup> Having previously been prevented by "the Spirit of Jesus" from entering Bithynia, Macedonia therefore appears to these early disciples as an 'open door'. In a sense we followed this same principle, looking for people who were 'open' to us, and then following those relationships.<sup>45</sup> In this way, the movement of our lives began to be played out upon a relational web stretching out across the southern Balkans.

There were two ways, then, in which our relationships developed during our first years in Greece: through people becoming incorporated (to various degrees) into our own "extended family" or *oikos* and through us becoming incorporated (to various degrees) into the *oikoi* of others. Rezo, for instance, always remained very marginal to our own *oikos*. He would rarely come and relax in our homes, would almost always refuse food, and would commonly give the impression that he couldn't stop for long as he was, he always told us, on his way somewhere else. The vast weight of my relationship with him was based on me becoming incorporated into *his* extended family, an environment in which he appeared relaxed and 'at home'. As a person who had an extended family community nearby he understandably felt no need to be incorporated, in any great depth, into ours. Similarly, although we, as a broader group, were happy to be hosted in Vassili's home (or at one of his vastly extended tables on his porch), when we attempted to reciprocate this hospitality, the dynamic that resulted was decidedly awkward. Our Georgian friends, so relaxed and colourful in their own environment, sat uneasily at Dave and Lynn's table, politely refusing to eat, and merely pecking at a few morsels of the vast array of food that we had spent a long time preparing.<sup>46</sup> Partly out

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<sup>44</sup> The story is found in Acts 16.

<sup>45</sup> For an interesting parallel approach in anthropological methodology see Marcus 1998:90-91, "follow[ing] the people."

<sup>46</sup> See Herzfeld 1987 below on the political dynamics of hospitality.

of frustration with this dynamic, we decided that it was much easier to allow Vassili and his family to host us in their own environment, a situation within which they appeared altogether happier.

The instruction to “go through open doors” acted as a prophetic metaphor. It was prophetic in that we understood it to be of divine origin, it was metaphorical in that we applied it to different domains of experience (Fernandez 1972, 1974). As implied by the other scriptures quoted above, our looking for ‘open doors’ was as much about looking for people with ‘open hearts’ as it was about being invited into people’s homes. Of course, the one may well be connected to the other, but this needn’t always be the case. Michael Herzfeld (1987) highlights the political aspect of certain expressions of hospitality. Through generous hospitality, he states, guests may be subordinated or “englobed” to the moral and political advantage of their host (ibid.:77). A fear of such ‘englobing’, in fact, may well have been the reason that Vassili and his broader family refused to eat at our table. They didn’t want to be indebted to us. Equally, they seemed to find the cultural shift to our table awkward and uncomfortable. They didn’t know how to act. In order to make ‘*relationship*’ with them, we needed to submit ourselves, therefore, and enter their world.

### **Openness, Movement and Liminality**

In the last chapter, we saw how, within our group’s ideology, having an ‘open heart’ toward God is connected to both transformation and ‘movement’, the latter referring as much to internal shifts as to physical ones. In this respect, some of the relationships in which we experienced the greatest degrees of ‘openness’ (of heart) were with those people who came from *outside* the Balkans to spend extended periods of time with our group. From 2001 onwards, a stream of people from our previous church connections visited us, some of whom found the environment of our group in Greece a sufficiently safe relational forum – removed from the structure of their ‘normal’ life – in which to discuss intimate matters of the heart. For some, this may have been related to the fact that our group represented a liminal space in which old ideas and values could be brought into question, and within which new ones had the opportunity to emerge. Such processes of transformation were usually initiated by an acceptance of and participation

in the level of ‘openness’ and ‘*relationship*’ present amongst us, a characteristic that was often experienced as both deeply challenging and, at the same time, attractive. Within this context, it was often those who ‘opened their hearts’ to one another and to us who experienced God’s vitalising convivial intrusion deep within their lives.

Victor Turner (1974) relates such processes to the relational dynamic that often develops in liminal situations, a dynamic he called *communitas*. According to Turner, one of the characteristics of *communitas* is that ‘barriers’ between people come down and “a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities” is experienced, a “mutual understanding on the existential level” (ibid.:79; see also Varley 2011). “[When] spontaneous *communitas* is upon us,” Turner writes, “we place a high value on personal honesty, openness, and lack of pretensions or pretentiousness of any kind” (Turner 1974:79). One of the people who participated significantly in this dynamic aspect of our group, and whose story we look at below, was an English man called David Carter. David first visited us in the Balkans in 2001. Having established a particularly good connection with us, he returned in 2003 for three months, then in 2004 for a further six months, subsequently migrating in 2006 to join us living in Greece. Those years marked for David a season of significant transition and his story serves as a good example of the type of internal ‘movement’ and transformation that can take place within someone as they find such a forum of relational openness, allowing others – both human and divine – to ‘intrude’ upon their lives.

In order to frame David’s story, I draw further upon James Fowler’s (1995[1981]) work on faith, conceiving David’s story primarily as a transition in terms of his faith. Faith, according to Fowler, is a dynamic system of images, values and commitments that guides a person’s life. Since every person is, to a large degree, guided by such factors, faith – in Fowler’s terms – is a universal phenomenon. It is part and parcel of being human. Drawing on the work of Paul Tillich (1957), the existentialist philosopher and theologian, and the unpublished work of Richard Niebuhr, the Christian ethicist, Fowler puts forward a notion of faith as being composed of the values that have centring power for each of us. What, asks Fowler, are the things that are of *ultimate concern* to us? “Our real worship, our true devotion,” he tells us (in other words our faith in action), “directs itself toward the objects of our ultimate concern” (Fowler 1995:4). Through empirical research with several hundred participants – and drawing on the



developmental theories of Jean Piaget (cognitive), Erik Erikson (psychosocial) and Lawrence Kohlberg (moral) – Fowler proposes a developmental pattern for human faith as it progresses through six broad stages: from the undifferentiated pre-stage faith of infancy progressing to the “universalizing faith” of adult maturity. If Weber, Shils and Eisenstadt have provided us with a conceptual framework for thinking about charismatic devotion in terms of a relationship of trust and loyalty to that which is “cosmically and socially central” (Shils cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi) within our lives, to which we give allegiance and to which we are responsive, then Fowler gives us a longitudinal map with which we are able to think about how our relations to such “center[s] of value and power” (Fowler 1995:18) might change over time.

It was David Carter, in fact, who first introduced me to the work of James Fowler in 2012, as I was finishing fieldwork. In the light of his own sense of personal transition in the previous years, I suspect that one of the things that David found attractive about Fowler’s Faith Development Theory (FDT) was its explanatory power concerning his *own* journey (of faith) during that time. Given David’s attraction to Fowler, alongside the overlap, already discussed, between Fowler’s notion of faith and sociological ideas concerning charismatic devotion, it seems entirely appropriate to explore David’s life through Fowler’s faith-stage lens. Also, having introduced, in the last chapter, the idea that ‘openness’ of heart translates into a conception of life as a transformational ‘journey’, an exploration of David’s life *seen* through Fowler’s lens gives us the opportunity to add some substantive content to what such a ‘journey’ might entail, to how such a ‘journey’ might be played out within the embodied reality of a person’s life. As already argued, following Fernandez (1972, 1974) and Lakoff and Johnson (2003[1980]), metaphors and stories provide more concrete, easily graspable images and narratives through which people translate, and indeed interpret, their experience. In this respect, Fowler’s framework acts, both for David in his interpretations of his own life, and for me, in my employment of it here, as yet another story through which experience might be explored. And this story, in itself, tells us something about the moral space within which David and I, and implicitly Dave, Lynn and others with whom we are ‘connected’, live.

## Fowler's Limitations

Faith Development Theory is the product of the pluralistic environment in which it was conceived. It is an attempt to develop a framework that makes sense of a particular dimension of human life (faith) irrespective of any specific 'religious' or 'non-religious' content, "to theorize, not only across religious lines, but also about secular centers which function as gods among believers and nonbelievers alike" (McLean 1986:158). Working from a starting place of asking what is of 'ultimate concern' to people, the concept of faith that Fowler utilises transcends any 'religious'/'non-religious' dichotomy. Craig Dykstra (1986a:54-55), however, questions whether Fowler has tried to incorporate *too much* in his theory of faith, proposing that the diversity of what different people and groups mean by "faith" may be so great that to talk about faith in any generic sense becomes meaningless. Instead, he proposes starting from the specific locations of people's lives, working from these places in order to develop contextual 'faith biographies' (ibid.:61) that take account of particular and local understandings and expressions of 'faith' (see also Nelson & Aleshire 1986:191). Similarly, Fernhout (1986) argues that Fowler's descriptions of faith are too imprecise, amorphous and inclusive, making faith development difficult to distinguish from other types of development, such as identity or ego development (ibid.:65-66,70). In order for the theory to be applied to a broad range of contexts, Fowler has shied away, Fernhout believes, from what the latter sees as the "the core of faith" – faith as commitment – and not integrated this element into his entire theory. If this were done, Fernhout argues, it would help to distinguish faith more clearly from other types of knowing (ibid.:85-87). In response, Fowler argues that the complex, often mysterious, multi-faceted character of faith frustrates the "conceptual crispness" (Fowler 1986b:281) that Fernhout most likely desires, stating that although he has written at length, and from a variety of angles, about faith, he has worked hard never to "over-systematize it into a manageable concept" (ibid.).

One of the questions often raised about Fowler's Faith Development Theory concerns its universal applicability. This question arises partly from Fowler's research methods and partly from the latter's positionality as a white, male Christian theologian/psychologist/social scientist. Since the theory developed out of empirical research done in a late twentieth century Euro-American setting, Baxter (2006 cited in

Coyle 2011) questions whether it is valid to apply this model to other social and cultural contexts. Considering that a large number of the people in Fowler's empirical case studies were Christian, Broughton (1986:93) argues that the theory itself reflects only a very *specific* trajectory of faith. Nelson and Aleshire (1986:186), from a different angle, argue that the theory did not emerge purely *from* the data, but instead significantly guided the data's collection. Despite these criticisms, however, they argue that Fowler's theory does "contribute to new ways of thinking and the discovery of new knowledge" (ibid.:200), he "has introduced his biases, been self-conscious about them, and told his readers about them" (ibid.:190). In other words, he has been explicit about the limitations of his own data. With these limitations in mind, they argue that Fowler's study is adequate for the *proposal* of a theory, but inadequate for its *confirmation* (ibid.), suggesting that it provides detailed "heuristic information" for a wider community to test and evaluate with broader sampling and more varied research methods (ibid., 199).

Parks describes Fowler as "first a [Christian] theologian and ethicist and then a psychologist and social scientist" (Parks 1986:143). He is working, McLean states (1986:176), "at the interface of theology and developmental theory" (ibid.:176). Parks points out that as a Christian, many of the metaphors that Fowler uses to illustrate his stages of faith are explicitly drawn from the Judeo-Christian tradition (Parks 1986:144), a fact that doesn't help support his claims for the broader applicability of his scheme. Furthermore, considering that the majority of theory makers that Fowler draws upon are men, Maria Harris (1986:126) questions the degree to which his theory is simply a reflection of *male* experience. Following Gilligan's (1982) critique of Kohlberg's model of moral development (one of the foundations of Fowler's theory) in which she questioned the androcentric bias of development toward increasing autonomy, we might indeed ask whether Faith Development Theory is applicable across gender. Like Nelson and Aleshire (1986), Harris sees the solution to these criticisms to lie in the carrying out of a greater variety of empirical research. She calls for more studies to be done by women and of women's experiences, as well as for an enrichment of Fowler's theoretical frame through the inclusion of more women theorists such as Gilligan.

A final critique of Fowler's stage theory is that it is "hierarchically value-laden" (Schneider 1986:246). Indeed, his theory does describe "an ongoing process, of

forming and reforming our ways of being in and seeing the world” (Fowler 1986a:37), in which progression through the stages is seen as a *good* thing, a process, in many ways, of maturation. If, for instance, one’s centre of value and power involves the divine, then progression through the stages entails, in this case, a movement toward “wider and more accurate response[s] to God, and toward more consistently humane care for other human beings” (ibid.:38-39; see also Parks 1986:140). Schneider interprets this in a negative light, as an “achievement” framework (Schneider 1986:246), but I believe, in seeing the journey of faith through a competitive lens, this misses the point. Fowler is not so dogmatic about his scheme. Quoting Erickson, he encourages taking theories “with a serious playfulness and a playful seriousness” (Erickson cited in Fowler 1995:xiii). He proposes that his stage theory can act as a helpful hermeneutic and reconstructive aid, a “scaffolding for remembering” in the understanding and interpretation of one’s own life (Fowler 1986b:294-295) as well as a “scaffolding for anticipation” in its ability to foster an awareness that one’s journey might not be over, and that one’s faith might conceivably be shaped very differently in the future (Fowler 1986b:295).

Dykstra argues that developmental theories cannot tell us all we need to know about people, but they *can* provide us with tools that prepare us to see more deeply into what is going on in other people’s lives (Dykstra 1986b:261). Fowler’s stage aspects, he argues, do just this. They provide a “hermeneutic device” that cause us to attend to dimensions of people’s experience that we might otherwise miss. They are not exhaustive, so we should not be limited to them, but they are significant, and therefore we should not ignore them (ibid.:261-262). He points to the importance of *how* a theory is used. He argues that we should avoid misusing the stages in order to classify and box people. Instead, we should look for “the reality... of the phenomena that the stage descriptions are an attempt to describe” (ibid.:262) by attending “to particular people in the light of the descriptions (and, then, to the descriptions in the light of the people)” (ibid.). If the descriptions help us “to see others more clearly and profoundly” then they are immensely useful; if not, they should be ignored or improved (ibid.). “In other words,” he writes (ibid.), “we should not just listen to what the theory says, but engage in the same empirical-analytical process that Fowler does in developing and refining these descriptions.” In the analysis that follows I attempt to do just this. Through combining Fowler’s stages of faith framework with Turner’s work on liminality, I

explore a particularly significant moment of transition in David's life. In so doing, I show not only what 'openness' of heart means to our particular group, and of how this is always relationally constituted, but also how such 'openness' engenders transformation and change, the experience of which can be conceptualised through larger 'journey' narratives, such as Fowler's specifically *developmental* frame.

### **'Hitting a Waypoint': A Story of Faith Transition**

In late 2011, based upon a personal research interest in transformation, I sat down with David to conduct a life-story interview with the specific purpose of exploring moments of transition in his life, moments (which may, in fact, have been extended periods of time) in which he came to see the world around him, and his relation to that world and to others, in significantly new ways, "true psychological passage[s] from one way of seeing and understanding to another" (Turner 1985:205). Fowler associates such moments with *faith-stage transitions*, moments of particular interest as, often through the many challenges that life brings to us, we start to experience the inadequacy of our own particular way of being in the world. This way of being may in fact gradually crack and fall apart, and, in its place, another way emerges which is oriented around transformed centres of ultimate concern. Certain faith-stage transitions, I would suggest, thus follow the same kind of pattern as a *rite of passage* (Van Gennep 1960[1908]).

It was Victor Turner (1967, 1969) who first took Arnold Van Gennep's processual ritual scheme and broadcast it more widely within the Euro-American anthropological domain of the 1960s and 1970s, suggesting that Van Gennep's lens could be applied to "*all* processes of spatiotemporal social or individual change" (Turner & Turner 1978:2, my italics). Van Gennep, focusing upon 'simpler' pre-industrial societies, had identified three phases through which individuals or groups commonly pass when undergoing change. The first involved a separation from a well-defined state of status (Van Gennep 1960:3,110); next, there was a period of liminality in which initiates were caught "betwixt and between" (Turner 1967) states; and finally there was a process of re-aggregation into a similarly well-defined state or status (Turner & Turner 1978:2; Van Gennep 1960:3,10-11,110). The key phase for Turner – and the one that was of most

interest to him – was the “betwixt and between” stage. Situated outside the norms of social structure and obligation, this liminal space provided a dynamic context in which old patterns of thought and action could be undone, and in which new patterns might be formed (Turner 1967:98-99). It not only represented a state of nothingness and death (Turner 1969:95,100; Turner & Turner 1978:249), but also a nascent place of potentiality and creativity (Turner & Turner 1978:3; Turner 1969:127; Turner 1967:106), “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (ibid.:97). Compare this with one of David’s descriptions of his life after he had begun to visit us in Greece:

“I think you could say that that whole period between 2003 and 2005-ish was sort of having reached a point, and then sort of deciding on a new course, really. In hindsight it sort of feels like... almost like a *void*, your life is a void where... a void of creativity in a sense where you could do anything if you wanted to. Well, you *can* do anything, but it’s sort of discerning what’s in your heart really.”

Certain characteristics of liminality are self-evident here – emptiness, nothingness, creativity and potentiality. But also present is a slightly *different* metaphor of transition to the one employed by both Van Gennep and Turner. Instead of a transition between ‘states’, David speaks about a transition between pathways, or, to be more precise, between ‘courses’. He is, in fact, expanding upon a sailing metaphor that he has just introduced into the conversation: “[It was] a time when I was... sort of in transition in terms of my life, you know. Somebody described it as a ‘waypoint’ – when you’re sailing, where you set a course to a waypoint; and when you hit that waypoint, and you then set a new course.”

As we have seen, Lakoff and Johnson (2003[1980]) suggest that all human experience and understanding is fundamentally structured around metaphor. Metaphor, they argue, is to do with much more than language, it is at the very heart of our conceptual system, governing not only our thoughts, but also our actions and perceptions of reality (ibid.:3). At its most basic level, metaphor involves “understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (ibid.:5). In talking about life, David employs a sailing metaphor that highlights certain characteristics: namely that life may be understood and experienced as expressive of certain governing trajectories. Turner’s notion of ‘states’ highlights very different characteristics: namely, stability and structure (Turner

1967:93; Turner 1969:94; Turner & Turner 1978:249). These two linguistic expressions – ‘states’ and ‘courses’ – represent just the tips of much larger conceptual metaphor-based systems which, for the social actors who employ them, both highlight and hide certain characteristics about life (Lakoff & Johnson 2003:10).

Within the anthropological domain, Tim Ingold (2000a, 2011) has most fully developed this notion of pathways of becoming. Ingold suggests that people grow and are grown within particular “sphere[s] of nurture” from which they “draw not just their perceptual orientations but the very substance of their being” (2000a:144). “This process of growth,” he suggests, “is tantamount to a movement along a *way of life*” (Ingold 2011:xii, my italics). It is my purpose in this chapter to *push forward* the metaphor of human life following various ‘courses’, ‘pathways’ and ‘ways’ in order to see what fresh light this sheds upon experiences and understandings of transition. I would suggest that such a conceptual system is appropriate here, not only as it reflects the research subject’s own understandings, but also as it neatly fits with Fowler’s notion of faith – the dynamic system of images, values and commitments that guides a person’s life. Within this framework, that which is of “ultimate concern” (Fowler 1995:4) to a person may be understood as contributing, to a large degree, to that person’s governing trajectory, the particular ‘course’ that they find themselves following. To draw on David’s imagery, periods of transition represent the various ‘waypoints’ that a person may reach, liminal spaces within which “novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner 1967:97) and in which one’s trajectory or life-course may be brought into question and radically altered. Here, Turner’s notion of liminality, along with associated ideas of *communitas* and liminoid phenomena (Turner & Turner 1978; Turner 1985), provides an ideal lens through which to examine such periods of transition – not between states, but *between pathways*.

### **Setting a Course: David’s Initial Sphere of Nurture and Matters of ‘Ultimate Concern’**

One of three children, David was born in 1973 in Watford, England. His father was the manager of a wholesale food warehouse, while his mother looked after the children at home. Both David’s parents had been brought up in Christian homes. As a married

couple, through the 1960s and 1970s they were involved in the Charismatic renewal movement in the UK. When David was about ten years old, his family moved to Hampshire to become part of a large and growing Charismatic church. I ask David if he thinks that his parents' faith was a significant factor in shaping him and the way that he saw the world as a child growing up.

"Yes," he replies, "I suppose, having been involved in that sort of church scene ever since I was little, growing up with that, with friends in it. And your parents very involved, life sort of rotated around that really, in what I suppose, in Christian circles, was quite a – you know – a *new* way of doing church. In a sense we were always on the new thing. So I suppose that's probably shaped me."

"Would you say you've always believed in God then?" I ask.

"Yeah, I think so, yeah. There was never any other option. I suppose." He laughs. "In a sense you grow up in an environment as a child and it's just what's... [It's] the way you see the world, isn't it, the way your parents see it."

David begins here with a starkly simple and yet fascinating anthropological insight – the environment in which one grows profoundly influences and shapes the way in which one *sees* the world (Turner 1967:95; Ingold 2000a:141-148). Fowler tells us that a child in the "intuitive-projective faith" (Fowler 1995:122-134) of stage one, in which thought and language begin to converge, begins to compose images of 'an ultimate environment' – "a comprehensive frame of meaning that both holds and grows out of the most transcendent centers of value and power to which faith gives allegiance" (ibid.:28). These images are strongly influenced by the "examples, moods, actions and stories of the visible faith of primally related adults" (ibid.:133). In Ingold's terms, this social environment represents a "sphere of nurture" within which a child initially grows and is grown and which contributes not only to "their perceptual orientation" but also to "the very substance of their being" (Ingold 2000a:144). For David, significant dimensions of this sphere of nurture were established by his parents and that which was of 'ultimate concern' to them. He thus gained images of a "world" in which God was a constituent part. As a young child, David uncritically accepted his parents' faith as his own: "[It's] the way you see the world, isn't it, the way your parents see it."

This process of growth, Fowler tells us – which is equivalent, in Ingold's terms, to a



child's first steps along a *way of life* (Ingold 2011:xii) – continues into what he calls the “mythic-literal faith” (ibid.:135-150) of stage two. Here, a child works hard to sort out the real from the make-believe, whilst at the same time starting to employ narrative in order to construct and communicate his or her images of an ultimate environment. As in stage one, whatever ‘God-images’ that appear will generally take the form of those offered by a child's immediate cultural environment. In this stage a “person begins to take on for him- or herself the stories, beliefs and observances that symbolize belonging to his or her community” (Fowler 1995:149). For David, from age ten upwards, this community consisted, to a large degree, of the Charismatic church group to which he and his parents belonged.

At age sixteen, David left school and started work at a local golf course, training to be a golf professional. This opened up a new world to him, which became the root of some internal tensions, centred mostly upon balancing the demands of practising and competing with church commitments and friendships.

“I sort of remember,” David says, “being torn between wanting to do the golf and then having other desires to do ‘churchy’ things, whether it was aspiring to have a ministry or something. I mean in hindsight you wonder whether that's more to do with the need to belong, in terms of the desires to do something meaningful in church, maybe it's more about wanting to be known and seen. I think, in reflecting, I think I've always been slightly swayed by other people's, other people's direction in a sense. Yes, it's just interesting to think about in terms of wrestling between the golf and the church stuff is that you end up... maybe my passion was the golf, but because nobody else was interested in golf in that scene I was very much on my own in that sense, in that sort of social scene. And of course my main friends were more focused on wanting to be involved in church. And [with] the need to be accepted and to belong, you get swayed... because you think, ‘If I want to do *that* [be more involved in church ministry], then I'll be more accepted.’”

One of the characteristics of Fowler's third faith-stage – what he calls “synthetic-conventional faith” (Fowler 1995:151-173) – is its conformist nature. In this stage, arising usually in adolescence, the individual's experience of the world reaches beyond the family, yet at the same time remains “acutely tuned to the expectations and judgments of significant others” (ibid.:172). On the one hand this can help in focusing a

person's commitment to certain values, but at the same time there is a danger of becoming *too* dependent upon the opinions of others and the desire for their acceptance, what Fowler, following Parks, calls the "tyranny of the they" (ibid.:154). In this stage "authority is located externally to the self. It resides in the interpersonally available 'they' or in the certified incumbents of leadership roles in institutions" (ibid.). Here David admits to adjusting his desires in order to find acceptance (or to continue to be accepted) within a particular social domain. His faith, at this stage, may therefore be described as conventional or conformist – both characteristics of Fowler's stage three faith.

At the same time, balancing two distinct social realms creates a tension within him, which eventually results in a crisis. At age eighteen he describes himself as "wrestling... with church and what it was all about over a period of months;" at the end of which he concludes that the issue was not so much to do with church, as to do with God: "that [he] *did* believe in God and [he] couldn't imagine living another way without... that sort of part of [his] life." In contrast to previous childhood decisions he describes this as "more of an adult decision... to follow a certain route." Here David specifically employs the metaphor of pathways or routes in order to describe the trajectory of his life, that which is of 'ultimate concern' to him, in other words, his faith. The centrality of God in David's life is causing him to go in a particular direction.

Over the next ten years David's life develops along two trajectories, two paths, that in a sense he finds difficult to reconcile, partly because he appears to be functioning within a socially informed paradigm of what it means to love or serve God. On the one hand, there is his life 'outside' of church. Shortly after the decision just mentioned, he lost his job. He then found another job in a golf shop in a local shopping centre, where he worked for two or three years. Despite playing some golf in his spare time, he decided he no longer wanted to pursue it professionally. Desiring a job with better pay, he found work as a trainee manager with a convenience store company, a job in which – because his family had always been in the food trade – he describes himself as feeling "quite at home." After three years, he commenced a training management course with a major UK supermarket. When nothing opened up in terms of promotion, at age twenty-five and through contacts of his father's, he began working with the Association of Convenience Stores as a trade relations manager. This small company provided limited

opportunities. So, at age twenty-eight, David went self-employed and began working alongside his father importing foods.

The other trajectory David's life developed along was centred upon his desire for God: "I think underneath all of that there's always been a relationship with God really, a desire for that relationship. And it's always been quite a central, a central thing in my life in different forms I suppose." This desire was very much worked out within the 'God-frame' that David had at that time, the church sphere within which he had grown up. "In my twenties, I was very involved in the church and different groups and projects – whether it was worship group, or going out on a mission or something, or I got involved with [one of the leaders in the church] and some prophetic teaching, a sort of course which people came to, and a practical as well. So I was with him... supporting in the sense that if there were breakout groups then we would lead those. And if there was some ministry, then we would get involved in that. So we did that, and after that we went to India and Germany and stuff [on ministry trips]... So there was always an expression of wanting to *do* something for God, I suppose. And I never really tallied that up with how to earn an income. I suppose I always felt the two as quite separate."

There is, of course, a tension here that is leading towards a further crisis. David's faith, at this stage, is not holistic. It is not just that it is centred on two different areas of ultimate concern, but it sets one arena (his work) in opposition to another arena (church and ministry). The latter, in David's consciousness, is morally elevated because it is within *this* arena that he is working out his relationship with the divine; it is here – rather than in his work – that he feels he is "do[ing] something for God." At the same time, there is an economic dimension that is pulling David in two different directions. He cannot 'tally up' serving God and earning an income. Although God is many things to David at this point in his life, he is not a provider. That, David believes, is *his own* responsibility. Such an understanding essentially sets David's life on two (potentially divergent) pathways, centred on two different loci of ultimate concern: on the one hand, loving and serving God; on the other hand, economic survival.

Underlying this, one of the key characteristics of a stage three faith is, according to Fowler, that it is characterised as being a "tacit system" (Fowler 1995:161) that remains personally unexamined. "The person in stage three is aware of having values and normative images. He or she articulates them, defends them and feels deep emotional

investments in them, but typically has not made the value system, *as a system*, the object of reflection” (ibid.162). When persons at stage three encounter situations that lead to critical reflection on their tacit value system, they may begin to transition to stage four’s *explicit* system. But for many people this transition never happens. Fowler describes the faith of a significant portion of the many adults that his team of researchers interviewed as being characterised by the patterns of a stage three synthetic-conventional faith – a tacit and conformist style of faith which becomes “long-lasting or permanently equilibrated” (ibid.:161). “For many reasons... people resist or avoid... invitations to awareness of and more conscious responsibility for their beliefs and values. [Instead] they reaffirm their reliance on external authority and their commitments to their particular values and images of which they are aware” (ibid.:162).

### **‘Coming Unstuck’: the Beginnings of Separation from a Childhood Sphere of Nurture**

When David was in his mid-twenties he went, with some of his church leaders, to India.

“I suppose going to India was quite a big thing for me,” David says. “It was quite a shock, but the biggest shock was coming back. There’s a sort of shock in when you go out there, in that it’s a totally different world. You can’t relate England and India in any way together. There’s so many differences that you feel like, ‘Where am I?’ And then seeing how much, seeing the poverty and how much people *haven’t* got, and just being put in situations that you are just like totally out of your comfort zone, out of your depth, but still trying to hold yourself together in some way. That was quite a challenge. So it was the way that everything was different – the people, your surroundings, your comforts.

“But I think when I came back I sort of had a bit of a wobble in a sense because I couldn’t really equate what I’d just experienced with going back to normal life – you know, normal work, normal church. It didn’t really seem to *mean* anything anymore. It didn’t really make any sense, that here we were standing in church singing all of these lovely songs and everybody being quite passionate. And yet I had just been to this place where people didn’t... either there was poverty and need. I just wondered how did God fit in... the God that I had sort of taken with me out of this sort of churchy, English

church experience, out to a place like that, how did *He* fit into somewhere like India? And then, in a sense, maybe He was more *real* in India, or the experience was more real in India. And then you come back, and you realise the sort of frivolity of what we're doing. What is this actually? Standing here on Sunday singing all of this stuff, what difference does it make to people in need?

"So did that bring about any change in me? I don't know really. I think it probably did, in that it made me grow up a bit. I think there probably was some...." David pauses for a second to think. "Yeah, I think it did change me quite sort of fundamentally... I think that it did make me a bit more 'worldly wise', or broaden my perspective I suppose you would say. It made me see that there was a world beyond [the town where I'd grown up], and the church [there]. So that may have even been the start of... seeing the 'rift' – you know, the separation in a sense. Because certainly my closest relationships with [the people that I'd grown up with] – I mean they'd never experienced that. I suppose that was the difficulty in that what I had just experienced, I couldn't communicate to them because they didn't care, and they had no... they didn't know what I was talking about. So it was sort of the sense of aloneness: that the relationships that you've just left, where you're in tune and everything, you'd gone off and come back and you'd changed.

"I mean [one of the leaders] and I had one experience [in India] where we went off to visit a church, and they sort of drove us in this old Volkswagen van which stank of petrol, across what seemed like a desert somewhere for hours. And staying the night, with these friends, these people, we were staying the night in their house, it was like a mining village, so I think they had one room and a kitchen. We slept in another room, which I'm not sure whether it was theirs or not, but which was just concrete, there was nothing there, just concrete and a bed. Eating their food and stuff, and that for me was like totally out of my comfort zone, so you feel like you don't know where you are. 'Where am I?' You've been dropped off in the middle of nowhere. It's quite... which, I feel a bit embarrassed about in a sense. Because I was in my mid- twenties, I'd got to my mid-twenties and never really had an adventure, or travelled, or had any sort of worldly experience. And then you go away, and you get – what do they call it – culture shock."

"So it's interesting then," I ask David, "in reflection, do you think that perhaps – I mean

you mentioned it – that perhaps that might have been the beginning of the process of you becoming ‘unstuck’ [David: “Right, yeah”] from that world, in a sense, the church world [in which you’d grown up]?”

“Yeah possibly,” David replies.

Here we have the first indications of David starting to transition from a stage three ‘synthetic-conventional’ faith towards a stage four ‘individuated-reflective’ one (Fowler 1995:174-183). Specifically, he has entered a situation – going to India – which has begun a process of critical reflection upon his own tacit value system. The fact that this process has begun within him sets him apart, in a sense, from his peers, who have neither been through this same experience, nor appear to understand the process as it is beginning to emerge in David’s life. From early childhood David seems to have grown through the various faith-stages while avoiding, for the most part, any major crisis. But the transition from stage three to stage four faith is markedly different in that it bears the much fuller characteristics of a rite of passage. This is because the central issue within this transition is, Fowler suggests, “leaving home” (ibid.:173); which may be understood not merely as a physical, or even an emotional departure, but also, I suggest, as a profound reassessment of one’s governing trajectory. For the social actor involved in such a transition it may be experienced as a kind of coming of age.

The initial phase within any rite of passage, as we have already discussed, is separation (Van Gennep 1960:3,110). My suggestion is that David’s experiences in India, which themselves bear all the characteristics of a mini rite of passage, leave such a significant mark upon him, both in terms of his sense of self (or, in fact, loss of his *former* sense of self) and his image of God (or, in fact, loss of his *previous* image of God), that his trajectory is subtly but significantly altered. His faith has entered a process of being re-oriented. His awareness of this fact increases when he returns from India and discovers that he is no longer “in tune” with his closest friends. A divergence of trajectories has begun. David suggests that this might have even been the start of a “rift”, a “separation.” Knowing some of the events that will take place in David’s life in the following years, I would suggest that it was the first step in him ‘leaving home’.

## Reaching the Threshold: 'Leaving Home'

In 2001, at age twenty-eight, and just after starting to work alongside his father importing foods, David made his first trip to Greece. Over the next few years his relationship with me and with Dave Webb would become very significant for David, and, as mentioned above, he would eventually move to join our group in 2006. Of the many people that came to visit us, David was one of the few that stayed in touch. He would sometimes call me on the phone to chat, and whenever I was in the UK I would usually go and stay with him. In the spring of 2003 he came to visit us again in Greece and, finding a forum in which he was able to speak “quite openly”, decided to return for a further two weeks in July. Meanwhile, things took a turn for the worse in terms of his father’s business. After losing several contracts, the business was no longer in a position to continue providing David with work. When he came to visit us that summer, David was in the process of making some fairly major decisions about what he was going to do next in life.

“Yeah, that was the sort of crunch point for me,” David says. “I didn’t know what job I wanted to do, and I wasn’t very enthusiastic about just going and finding another job – particularly having worked for [myself] a bit. I didn’t really want to have to go back into employment. I was quite happy doing what I was doing [being self-employed]. But clearly I couldn’t continue. So I sent out loads of applications for jobs and stuff, and had some interviews. But I remember going to the interviews and really wondering *why* I was there. I had no enthusiasm for it. It probably came across. Then, coming out here [to Greece]... and I don’t remember what we did really, but I do remember we went to Nikiti at one point. And we were probably talking a lot about it over the time, and you guys were probably encouraging me to... ‘What do you want to do?’ sort of thing, and to make a decision.”

I start to chuckle, remembering the time.

“But I didn’t really know what I wanted to do!” David continues. “So you sort of put me in a corner and hit me over the head with a baseball bat!”

Dave and I, after two weeks of talking with David about what he might do next in his life, had actually reached a point of feeling quite frustrated. One of our suggestions had been that he return to Greece in the autumn for a period of three months, and see what

came out of that time. Although this idea seemed in many ways to appeal to David, he appeared reluctant to make a decision, preferring rather to continue *talking* about the decision. Toward the end of his stay it felt like we were going round in circles, talking about the same things again and again. To Dave and me, the choice to come and spend some time in Greece didn't seem like such a huge decision to make, but to David it clearly was. It was a threshold that, for some reason, was very difficult for him to cross. Finally, we said to David that we didn't want to talk about his future any more. This topic had become the primary focus of nearly all of our conversations, and it was draining. There was nothing more to discuss; we told him that he just needed to make a decision. It is interesting that, for David, this felt like being put in a corner and being hit over the head with a baseball bat.

"I mean it's quite amazing," David continues, "to think of the contrast between those two weeks, and then actually coming down here for three months and the experience that I had in that time – which was incredibly positive and life-changing. Yet those two weeks in July was... in a sense, when you compare the two, they were two different people it seems – the one that was here in July, and then the one that ended up leaving in December 2003."

"So that's really fascinating," I say, "in terms of transformation then, what you're saying. Obviously you feel that that was quite a time in which you became a different person?"

"Yes. Definitely. Yeah, yeah."

"So let me just go back to the... the July, and to ask – why was it so difficult to make a... what was it that you were wrestling with that made it *so* difficult to make that decision?"

"I think I was scared. Because I had never been away from home more than a couple of weeks. And I probably was scared and embarrassed in a sense. Because there I was, I was thirty then, and I couldn't really bring myself to... I didn't want to be away from home!" He laughs.

"So 'home' being what?" I ask, "Because you weren't living with your parents at that time?"



“No, I had my own house then. Home being I suppose the area, and family and friends. You know – the scene in which you live. So I suppose I found myself... I didn’t really just want to go and get another job just for the sake of it. The business was unable to sustain me anymore, although I wanted it to. But clearly those were two dead ends. And so, in a sense, well maybe there was only one other route open to me, but I was shit scared about taking that route really.” He laughs. “So that, of course, was the crisis. So it wasn’t so much that you guys put me in a corner, but in a sense the circumstances put me in a corner by which there was only one exit. I certainly couldn’t see another route. I suppose in my mind... I had a mortgage, so in order to keep facilitating my life in England I had to then produce an income. And of course that means getting a job and following a route through, and I couldn’t really see another way to... out of that. I thought there are some commitments which you’ve got to keep.

“So I suppose I was a bit scared and then probably a bit embarrassed. Because I was scared to make that decision, I was probably embarrassed because I was unable to make a decision! And, of course, then that opened a bigger can of worms which was more to do with the fact that I hadn’t learned to make decisions for myself, or to take any responsibilities. I had always looked to other people to help me to make those big life decisions, and give me some direction. I wasn’t really prepared to, or able to take a step into something which *I* wanted to do, or felt that *I* wanted to do off my own back. I always needed someone else’s approval. So I think all those things held me back really. Or made me not want to make a decision, I suppose.”

“Yeah, yeah. And what did you feel when you’d made that decision [to come down to Greece for three months]?” I ask, chuckling. “Because I remember that you said that you’d felt a bit bullied into it and you sort of had some feelings that...”

“Well immediately there was a sense of relief that I’d made the decision, and some excitement. Yes, so some relief and excitement... which lasted a couple of hours.” We both laugh. “Then we drove back from Nikiti back to Peraia. By which time I was mulling it over and thinking, ‘Oh shit, what have I done? What am I doing? I don’t want to do this!’ And I think I was leaving the next day anyway. And I think from that point I sort of... there was a slow backtrack, to some point of security or some point of control, where I felt I had a bit more control again. Yeah, I suppose that’s interesting, because I think it’s good that you guys forced me to make a decision. But in the end the

decision didn't stick because it wasn't my decision. And I sort of backtracked.

"We had a [worship] meeting that evening in the office, and then we went back home and we chatted on the balcony. And it sort of dawned on me in a sense that here I was, thirty, in all sort of manners and in outward appearance a man, but actually just felt like a little, small lost boy who's been sent off to Cub Camp, and is homesick!"

I laugh at David's description. "Right okay."

"That actually happened to me once! It brought back all of those feelings again, and I couldn't really believe... I felt it very hard to believe... And quite revealing, I found it quite revealing that, of all of my life and experiences, and a certain standing that I put myself in as being at – as a young man who'd sort of got things together in his own life, and within the church seen as somebody of some standing in stature and potential for the future, that actually – when the shit hit the fan – when it came down to when I was revealed, I wasn't that person at all. I was a little boy going to Cub Camp who was homesick."

"Yeah right." We both laugh.

"I think it was very releasing for me to have seen that."

"Right. So that was a good thing?" I ask.

"Yes, a good thing to see. Because I think it then gave me a place to build on. I wasn't building on the false ground of thinking that I'm this kind of person, and people think this about me. But actually I realised that I'm just a little boy and I haven't really grown up yet."

David's incredibly rich description, which still, for its pure honesty, makes me chuckle every time I read it, is immensely revealing in terms of the *affective* dynamics at work within this particular transition. It illustrates most poignantly the powerful emotional forces involved. It is small wonder that, according to Fowler, the majority of people his team interviewed had never crossed this difficult threshold, preferring rather to remain in the seemingly much safer environment of a 'synthetic-conventional' way of being. As is clear from David's story, the experience of 'leaving home' is much more than simply moving out of his parents' house, which he had done many years before.

“Home” for David is a multi-layered phenomenon, a dense entanglement of emotions and commitments. It is, in his own words, “the area, and family and friends;” “the scene in which you live.” In Ingold’s terms it is the “sphere of nurture” within which David has grown and been grown and from which he has “draw[n] not just [his] perceptual orientations but the very substance of [his] being” (Ingold 2000a:144). The process of ‘leaving home’ therefore represents a true separation – not just from a socially constituted sphere, but also from a *way of life* that has grown for David within that sphere, a *way of life* within which he feels both safe and secure, and to which he feels attached.

Part of the challenge for David in ‘leaving home’ is that it represents moving across a threshold into a void of unknowing in which the values by which he has lived and oriented his life thus far are radically brought into question. Within this void David’s own perceived personal achievements – “as a young man who’d sort of got things together in his own life, and within the church seen as somebody of some standing in stature and potential for the future” – are suddenly undone. He sees himself in a new light – as “a little boy [who hasn’t] really grown up yet.” Central to this ‘revelation’, I would argue, is that David becomes aware that he is, in fact, living with a range of securities from which he has never really separated himself, and which are, in fact, governing his trajectory of becoming. These tacit securities are suddenly exposed, and the psychological effect upon him is to make him feel like a little boy who hasn’t really grown up – as a person who has never really left the safety and security of a particular *way of life*. So in what ways does David feel “at home” – safe and secure – within his particular way of life?

The first issue, I would suggest, has to do with David’s relation to authority. David admits that part of the reason he finds it so difficult to make a decision to come to Greece for a further three months is that he “had always looked to other people to help [him] to make those big life decisions, and give [him] some direction;” “[he] always needed someone else’s approval.” In terms of his work, he tells me, this process had always been worked out in relation to his father; in terms of other aspects of life, in relation to church leadership. Lacking a fundamental confidence in his own ability to make a ‘good’ decision, David feels ‘safe’ working within this paradigm of authority. But he also recognises it as a subtle refusal, on his part, *truly* to take responsibility for

his own decisions, actions and life. “I hadn’t learned to make decisions for myself, or to take any responsibilities,” he tells me.

Later, while I am transcribing the interview, David’s comments strike me as odd. In his early twenties, he had been given responsibility for managing two shops, which, despite the fact they were “an absolute mess”, he had effectively turned around. Taking this into consideration, I later ask him what he had meant by saying that he had not learned to “take any responsibilities.” He tells me that, for him, managing the shops represented a *different* type of responsibility – a responsibility within a particular role. What he had been talking about previously was a *deeper* sense of responsibility for his own life, and the decisions related to that. It was in this realm, he felt, that he had never *really* taken responsibility.

As mentioned above, one of the characteristics of Fowler’s stage three ‘synthetic-conventional’ faith is its dependence upon external authority (Fowler 1995:154). “For a genuine move to stage 4 [faith] to occur,” Fowler writes, “there must be an interruption of reliance on external sources of authority... [and] a relocation of authority within the self” (ibid.:179); “it is in this transition that [a person] must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes” (ibid.:182). As we shall see below, this transition for David entailed an internal shift not only in relation to the voices of his elders (particularly his father and church leadership) but also in his understanding of his relation to God.

This connects to the second way in which David feels ‘at home’ in England within a particular way of life. In adolescence, Fowler suggests, one learns to see oneself through the eyes of others and, particularly through the ‘mirroring’ that takes place through significant others (for example close friends), one “compose[s] hypothetical images of [oneself] as [one thinks] others see me” (ibid.:152-153). Through this process “one gathers and falls in love with a forming personal myth of the self”(ibid.:151) which is as much based upon others’ perceived expectations, as upon one’s own sense, of who one is. The trajectory that David has been following has caused him to grow into a particular ‘type’ of person based, to a large degree, upon his personal myth of the self. He sees himself as being quite successful, both in terms of his work and in terms of the roles that he plays in the church, and he likes, I believe, the way that this makes him *feel*. He enjoys both perceiving himself, and being seen by

others in this way. Within a particular sphere, he enjoys a certain status. The crisis comes when, within a different sphere, with its inherently *different* ways of valuing success, he realises he “[is not] that person at all”, but rather “just a little boy [who hasn’t] really grown up yet.” It is a ‘revelation’ from which he can either recoil, or which he can accept. His acceptance of this new ‘status’ would imply a willingness to establish his life upon radically new values and commitments. David ultimately sees this ‘revelation’ as a good thing, and employs a building metaphor in order to explain why: “Yes, [it was] a good thing to see. Because I think it then gave me a place to build on. I wasn’t building on the false ground of thinking that I’m this kind of person, and people think this about me.”

A third way in which David is embedded within a particular way of life in England is in his relation to economy. Through his twenties, the trajectory of David’s work life has been one of achievement (both in terms of status and in terms of increased finances) within an industry (the food industry) in which – upon entering and due to his father’s involvement in that same industry – he describes himself as feeling “quite at home.” At the same time David sees himself as being bound to a way of life by certain economic commitments. “I had a mortgage,” he says, “so in order to keep facilitating my life in England I had to then produce an income. And of course that means getting a job and following a route through, and I couldn’t really see another way... out of that.”

“As members of society most of us only see what we expect to see,” Victor Turner writes (1967:95), “and what we expect to see is what we are conditioned to see when we have learned the definitions and classifications” [and priorities, I would add] “of our culture.” David’s house, although a tangible material sign of his success within a particular sphere, embeds him within a way of life that appears to narrow his vision of what is possible. It is only as this way of life begins to fall apart (through his father’s business not being able to sustain him financially any more) that another “route”, another possibility, opens up for him; and yet a route which he is “shit scared” about taking, partly, I believe, because of the powerful emotional attachment he feels to an economically structured and seemingly secure way of life within which he feels safe.

## **An Abrahamic Pattern of Faith**

In Chapter 3, we saw how the image of the call of Abram (“Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you”) played a significant part in Dave’s, Lynn’s and my own life. Dave and Lynn heard God speak this word to them soon after they got married. For me, hearing Jack Hayford preach on this word in 1998 not only confirmed my decision to move to Greece, but also provided me with a template of what that move might entail. The struggle going on in David’s life, which I have been describing above, and the events that followed, which I describe below, could also be framed through this Abrahamic lens. David’s challenge is (in Fowler’s terms) ‘leaving home’ or (in Abrahamic terms) leaving his ‘country’, his ‘people’ and his ‘father’s house’. I have argued that this process began with David’s trip to India, during which time the familiar was unsettled within him. In particular, his childhood image of God (“the God that I had sort of taken with me out of this sort of churchy, English church experience”) was brought into question. It was exposed as inadequate and, in some sense, false (“then, in a sense, maybe [God] was more *real* in India, or the experience was more real in India”). Moreover, upon returning to England, David found that he no longer fitted with his ‘people’, in particular his closest friends (“it was sort of the sense of aloneness: that the relationships that you’ve just left, where you’re in tune and everything, you’d gone off and come back and you’d changed”). These processes continued up to his present crisis point in Greece, and have now come to the fore in the issues I highlighted above, most especially his relation to authority and connected struggle to take true ownership and responsibility of his own life and destiny (in Abrahamic terms, the challenges of leaving his ‘father’s house’). In the last chapter, I also mentioned how other images of Abraham were foundational in terms of shaping the life of our nascent group in Greece, particularly the image of Abraham setting off in obedience “even though he did not know where he was going”,<sup>47</sup> a characteristic we shall see emerging in David’s life below.

## **The Liminal Void**

David returned to England and, in his own space, made the decision to return to Greece

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<sup>47</sup> Hebrews 11:8-9

that autumn. He thus entered a period of time (2003-2005) which he describes as “a void of creativity;” what Turner describes as “a realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” (Turner 1967:97). The most intense period seems to have been during his initial three months back in Greece, which, as David has already indicated, was a time of profound personal transformation. In 2011, I ask him about this.

“In what ways do you think you changed, I suppose, during that time?” I ask, “Or maybe the *easier* question to answer, is ‘in what ways do you think you came to *see* things differently during that time? If you did?’”

“How I saw things differently? I don’t know that I could say how I saw things differently. When I think about myself towards the end of 2003 compared to that summer... I think I sort of grew up really. I think I left 2003 more of a man. In July, I think I was, you sort of feel you’re a bit more like a boy.”

“Still at Cub Camp?” I ask.

David laughs. “Cub Camp! Yes, still at Cub Camp.”

“You shook off Cub Camp?”

“And joined the Scouts!”

We both laugh.

“*We* spent a lot of time together, didn’t we?” David continues. “And with Dave. I think it was... I think I was starting to see that there was a bigger world out there and that I... there were a lot of choices, a lot of things that I could do, you know. I didn’t have to be ‘locked into’ the sort of life that I had been in up until that point; that I could be adventurous. I think that was the big thing for me at the time – seeing that adventure and taking risks. I think I had grown up quite sort of conservative in my risk taking – particularly with bigger decisions. I think I was probably afraid to take a risk. Whereas I think in that three months I’d felt that God was talking to me more about being adventurous, and living a life of faith, and not needing to know particularly where something was going, but, you know, taking steps and following... sort of following, following an unknown path.”

I ask David if there was anything that he was reading in the Bible at that time that he found helpful or significant.

“OK, there was one Acts scripture – where there was a thing about, ‘It seemed good to... it seemed good to us and the Holy Spirit’ or something like that... And the thing that I took out of that was that it... ‘*seemed* good.’ I think I [wanted] to know some definites, you know. But to see that they were making decisions on the fact that, [*he adds casually*] ‘Well, it just, you know, *seemed* good to us really.’ Totally.... quite releasing, I think.”

“In a sense,” I suggest, “you realised that actually your life had a lot more possibilities than perhaps you had previously thought. And also – if I’m understanding correctly – that you kind of understood, perhaps you sort of began to understand the ‘will of God’ in a different way? So rather than being something external, [i.e.] God giving you definite [instructions], like kind of, “You do this. You do that.” And you follow a voice. The thing about ‘*seeming*’ – kind of ‘it *seemed* good’ – it’s not so definite, [there’s] a bit more kind of ambiguity in it. But actually it’s also more of an *internal* decision, it’s more *your* responsibility than God’s. It’s not just God’s responsibility.”

“Yeah, that’s right,” David says. “It seemed quite scary because you realise that you have to take responsibility for your own decisions. Whereas I think before, the sort of mind-set that I’d grown up in was that you’re always looking for God’s will... and that that was a sort of ‘set path’ that you were to follow. But I think I decided to move more into a place where... where I... I was given some responsibility, I think.”

David goes on to describe the period of time toward the end of his three-month stay in Greece. He recounts a conversation between himself and God about what he should do next with his life.

“And I remember I sat on the bed in my bedroom,” he says, “and I didn’t know what to do in a sense. So I started having this conversation with God saying, ‘I don’t know what to do. What do I do?’ And I remember feeling like God was saying to me, ‘Well, what do you *want* to do?’ Which for me was quite a big question. Because having been used to a sort of... my sort of God as, well, ‘You do this. You do that.’ God is really sort of directing you. To feel like God is saying to you, ‘Well, what do *you* want to do?’



“And I remember saying, ‘Well, I don’t know. I don’t know what to do!’” He laughs. “And I remember sort of feeling like God was saying, ‘Well, just make a decision.’ And again, my question back was, ‘Well, I don’t know *how* to make a decision when I don’t really know what to do!’ And then feeling like God saying, ‘What you decide is not important. What’s important is just to make a decision.’ Because it’s best for you to discern as best as you can what’s in your heart, and make that decision. When you make a decision, you then put yourself in the place of creating it I suppose, moving towards it. But also open to the fact that if it’s wrong then the door will close sort of thing. But all the time I was in un-decision, I wasn’t really creating or doing anything.”

“Right okay, yeah.”

“Because I think for the first time I realised that there is a process of maturity in the spiritual life whereby, you know, when you’re a child spiritually then God treats you like a child.”

“And you do what you’re told,” I suggest.

“And you do what you’re told to do. But then as you grow, you know, the things that you would see in a normal father-child relationship, that you trust what you’ve taught your child to do, and you start to let them make decisions for themselves. They might make mistakes but... there’s a sort of gradual release of responsibility in a sense. I suppose I started to see that, and started to make my life decisions out of that, with those sort of thoughts in the back of my mind. Which I think then, with that sort of understanding, gave me some confidence to start to make decisions that I hadn’t felt that I could make before.”

### **Emerging on an ‘Unknown Path’**

Here we see very clearly a fundamental shift in the location of David’s centring authority. Responsibility for his life can no longer be located in significant others – peers, previous authority figures, or God (at least as David previously conceived God). David takes responsibility for his own life and choices; and with that comes a transformed understanding of what his relationship with God might mean. His previous

understanding – that living for God involved attempting to follow a narrow and divinely ordered “set path” – gives way to a new one: that *he* is to set the course for his life within the context of an emergent relationally-constituted journey. Within this paradigmatic shift is highlighted the reason why David, up to this point, has perhaps found it so hard to make major life decisions. Wanting to live for God, while at the same time believing that ‘God’s will’ is a set path somehow already ‘out there’ waiting to be found, David has been paralysed by the fear of somehow making a wrong decision, wandering from the path, and thereby missing ‘God’s will’. We also see clearly how David’s image of the divine is continuing to change and be transformed, and with this comes a transformation in the way that his relationship with God is itself constituted. In India, David’s conceptions of his ‘churchy, English God’ give way to new experiences and images. In 2003, at the end of his extended time in Greece, the same process is happening. “*My sort of God [does this],*” David tells me (i.e. He tells me what to do); the ‘new’ God that David is now encountering does something quite different (i.e. He asks me what *I* want to do).

### **Stories, Senses and the Charismatic Relation**

The central argument of my thesis is that the lives being described here – my own, Dave’s, Lynn’s and now David’s – may be understood as being in charismatic relation with a divine Other. This relationship, rooted in experience, is constituted through the complex interplay of senses and stories, the former consisting of what might be called an ‘extended sensorium’ by which “God and God’s activity in the world” (Lootens 2012:56) are perceived, the latter involving the translation or ‘movement’ of experience from one domain to another through metaphor. In this chapter, we have been exploring David’s experience, and we have been ‘moving’ that experience into another domain, Fowler’s faith-stage framework, in order to highlight and elucidate certain characteristics of that experience, characteristics that Fowler identified through his research into, and analysis of, the lives and experience of many others.

You will recall that one of the critiques of Fowler’s work was that, due to the large numbers of Christians in his research sample, and due to his own positionality as a Christian and as a theologian, Faith Development Theory represents, in fact, a very

*specific* trajectory of faith, namely a Christian one, and more than that, a *male* Christian one. David's experience, and both his and my attraction to Fowler's scheme as an explanatory framework do nothing to challenge these critiques. Fowler's framework *feels* an appropriate one within which to situate David's experience and, perhaps unsurprisingly, it fits.<sup>48</sup> My purpose in using Fowler's scheme here has not been to contribute to debates about the scheme's broader applicability, but rather to employ it as a heuristic tool with which to 'crack open' David's life, whilst at the same time adding some substantive content to the particular direction which a 'journey' of faith, as introduced in the last chapter through an exploration of Dave and Lynn's lives, might take.

I have already noted the overlap between sociological notions of charismatic relationship and Fowler's notion of faith. Weber, Shils and Eisenstadt provide us with a conceptual framework for thinking about charismatic devotion in terms of a relationship of trust and loyalty to that which is "cosmically and socially central" (Shils cited in Eisenstadt 1968:xxvi) within our lives, to which we give allegiance and to which we are responsive. Fowler, in addition to this, gives us a longitudinal map with which we are able to think about how our relations to such "center[s] of value and power" (Fowler 1995:18) might change over time. "Fowler is alone," Schneider writes, "in having provided a theory which at the same time is *developmental* and has faith as its organizing category" (Schneider 1986:229, my italics). He provides us with a conceptual framework that enables us to think about charismatic devotion (in sociological terms), or faith (in Christian terms) as a developmental process.

We have seen how, from very early in David's life, God has been, for him, a significant "center of value and power" (Fowler 1995:18). The latter's significance as a charismatic 'object' – as a locus of freely given devotion that is – deepens at the point that David, wrestling at age eighteen between his love of golf and various church commitments, makes an "adult decision" that God will remain central to his life. What we see after this point, however, is that David is in charismatic relation with a divine

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<sup>48</sup> Of course, Fowler's aim was to develop a theory that could be applied to human experience well beyond the Christian domain, and was certainly not meant to encompass merely *male* experience. Yet it is only as stories of his theory's deep resonance emerge from these *other* domains that it might be convincingly argued that the trajectory Fowler describes can be more broadly applied. As Nelson, Aleshire (1986:199) and Harris (1986) point out, these domains represent fields for further empirical research.

Other who is ‘imaged’ in a particular way, this image being very much shaped by the social and cultural context within which David has grown up. Through his early twenties, the God that David worships, loves and serves is a very “sort of churchy” and “English” type God, something he only becomes aware of when he goes to India and tries to take this God with him. In India, David experiences the deep inadequacy of the image of the divine Other to whom he is devoted. This causes him to enter a period of crisis that begins to separate him from his native sphere of nurture, a process that continues right up to his early visits to Greece.

In Greece, as David begins to experience certain qualities of ‘*relationship*’ with us – carrying with it, perhaps, a particular manifestation of charisma – he finds himself reaching a further, even deeper, point of crisis. The ‘way’ opening before him is relationally constituted, created in large part by Dave, Lynn, myself, and others, and marked by the embodiment of an Abrahamic pattern of faith that conceives life as a transformational ‘journey’ away from the familiar and towards the unknown. David, confronted with the choice to join us in our ‘path’ is in his own words, “shit scared” about taking such a route. At the same time, he experiences a profound psychological and emotional attachment toward ‘home’, the latter represented as it is by a particular paradigm of authority, a respected status amongst his peers, and a tacitly accepted pattern for structuring his economy.

And here we reach the key moment within David’s story, which is probably best appreciated through the metaphors that emerged in our interview. David speaks about ‘setting sail’, about ‘courses’ and ‘pathways’, about ‘routes’ and ‘directions’, about ‘rifts’ and ‘separations’. But at the heart of David’s story, I would suggest, is a quite different image altogether. The key moment is the point at which he is “revealed”, an image suggestive, at least to me, of penetrating ‘light’ on the one hand and ‘exposure’ on the other. There is a sense in which David has been ‘caught out’, exposed as somehow living his life, or constructing *his self*, based upon qualities or values that are not quite *real*: “And it sort of dawned on me in a sense that here I was, thirty, in all sort of manners and in outward appearance a man... within the church seen as somebody of some standing in stature and potential for the future... [But] when the shit hit the fan, when it came down to when I was *revealed*, I wasn’t that person at all. I was a little boy going to Cub Camp who was homesick.”

As the light penetrates, as it ‘dawns’ and the “outward appearance” is stripped away, another David is exposed – not the self that has been built in relation to external authority, the opinions of others, and economic stability (by which standards David has indeed, grown into a ‘man’), but the self that has not really had the opportunity to grow up very much at all (the self which is, in fact, still a ‘boy’). What is this ‘self’? I would suggest that it is, at least in part, the ‘self’ that God sees. That is certainly the way that David interprets it. It is the ‘self’ that, when everything else is stripped away, remains. David experiences the ‘dawning’ of this self as who he *really* is, held in the penetrating gaze of the divine Other. If God, to Dave and Lynn, is a convivial intruder who continually wishes to unsettle and vitalise human lives, to David, this ‘intrusion’ is experienced as a deeply penetrating, almost frighteningly revealing ‘light’ and ‘truth’. The ‘self’ that is caught in the gaze is in no sense an ‘essentialist’ one – pre-determined, bound and unchanging. Rather, it is a ‘self’ caught on a cusp of becoming, invited into a path of growth ‘*in relationship*’ with the one within whose gaze it is caught.

David’s decision to return to Greece that autumn represents his choice to embark upon that path, and to continue to be caught in that gaze. The profundity of such a decision, as we have seen, forbids its coercion. Freely-given recognition, Weber tells us, is at the very heart of the charismatic relation (Weber 1968b:49). David moves into his own space, and makes his own choice. And from that point, his relationship with God starts to be re-formed. At the end of his three-month stay in Greece, David’s conversation with God, as he sits on his bed, signals the falling away of an old paradigm. God is no longer ‘out there’, giving instructions, expecting to be obeyed or waiting to be found. Rather, He is profoundly interested in what is going on in David’s ‘heart’, and He is subtly pushing David towards trusting what is happening there too. It is yet another landmark in David’s relational journey, a journey in which his conception *of* God, and his relationship *with* God, this ‘charismatic relation’, is once more undergoing transformation and change.

## Afterword

One of my purposes in this chapter has been to *push forward* the metaphor of human life following various ‘courses’, ‘pathways’ and ‘ways’ in order to see what fresh light

this sheds upon experiences and understandings of transition. If Fowler is right in suggesting that human life is guided by a dynamic system of images, values and commitments, then we may also presume that this complex network changes over time. David's story, associated as it is with the issue of 'leaving home', represents a particularly dramatic shift in this system. Through a change in those things that had 'centring power' in his life, David experienced a change in trajectory. His life was set on a different course. This transition, I have suggested, bears all the characteristics of a rite of passage. Most specifically, he experienced a separation from a way of life which had been constituted for him within a specific sphere of nurture; he entered a liminal period in which "novel configurations of ideas and relations [arose]" (Turner 1967:97); and he emerged on a new pathway within new and changed relations.

In 2007 David and Carolyn, Dave and Lynn's second daughter, got married; in 2008 they had their first child and in 2011, their second. At the start of 2012 they moved as a young family back to the UK. When I shared a first draft of this chapter with David in early 2014, it caused him to reflect upon where he finds himself now on his path: "What is entailed in moving from stage four to stage five faith?" he pondered. Stage five, in Fowler's scheme, represents a complex, dialectical and multileveled perspective toward life and truth; an acceptance of paradox and mystery; a realisation that one's elegant, rational theories *about* life are inadequate in capturing the deep essence of *life itself*. It tries to avoid fitting reality into its own prior mindset, seeking rather "to let reality speak its own word, regardless of the impact of that word on the security or self-esteem of the knower" (Fowler 1995:185). It tends toward *I-Thou* relationships, in the Buberian sense (Buber 2004[1923]); and begins to recognise and reconcile the unconscious forces at work in its own psyche – not in the sense of taming such forces, but in allowing them to be integrated into the whole. Deeply confident and secure in its own permeable sense of truth, it maintains an openness and vulnerability "to the strange truths of those who are 'other'" (Fowler 1995:198).

Whether or not David is now a stage five person is beyond the scope of this chapter. At the heart of this present chapter has been the issue of 'leaving home'. Since Fowler's theory, like the stage theories it is based on, suggests a progressive development (i.e. the subject journeys upwards, at the right time, through the different stages toward 'maturity') 'leaving home' is obviously conceived as an important part of this process.

Drawing on Ingold (2000a, 2011), I have sought to show how ‘home’ may be conceived not primarily as a location, nor merely a network of relationships, but as a *way of life* constituted within a specific sphere of nurture. Given this framework it is conceivable how a person might, in fact, ‘leave home’ without necessarily presupposing a geographical relocation. For David, this was not the case. His transition entailed a fundamental shift in his location, his way of life, and his core relationships. Also, ‘leaving home’ for David was in no sense a solitary act. It was relationally constituted and entailed becoming part of our ‘extended family’ in Greece. It was within the context of embodied human relationships, most specifically with Dave and me, that David was initially “revealed”, and it was within the context of this relational matrix that he would also continue his journey of faith.

One of the purposes in exploring David’s story here is to give the reader a sense of what charismatic relationship with God means, and of how it is conceived as an open-ended process. One’s experience and understanding of the divine can never be closed off and finalised. The convivial intruder will, if allowed, always break in and unsettle one’s previous conceptions and images, even built as those are upon one’s previous experiences. This is what the ‘journey’ metaphor, with its indeterminate destination and transitional frame, is seeking to convey. You may say that you *know* God, but you are never there. Such knowledge is always being broken up, and in this process, new opportunities open to ‘discover’ the divine ever more deeply, and in places and in ways that could never be imagined or perceived if one simply ‘settled’ where one was. The first step on such a journey is the *setting-off*, and we have been focusing, throughout this thesis, on a variety of different setting-off stories. The charismatic invitation is ‘to set off’, to leave one’s native sphere of nurture, and to embark upon a journey of faith. In this chapter, we have looked at some of the dynamics that happen when such an invitation is taken up; in the following chapter, we look at some of the dynamics that happen when it isn’t.

## Chapter 5

### A Closed Door

*“The holder of charisma seizes the task that is adequate for him... His charismatic claim breaks down if his mission is not recognized by those to whom he feels he has been sent.”*

*Max Weber (Weber 2009a:246)*

#### Introduction

In 2004, Rachel, Dave and Lynn’s eldest daughter, and I got married. Between 2006 and 2008, through following lines of perceived relational ‘openness’, Dave and Lynn found themselves connecting with a young couple from an Evangelical church in the city of Shkodër, northern Albania. The Pastor of this young couple’s church was in hiding due to a blood feud threat, and so this young couple – Ilir and Blerina – had been left temporarily responsible as leaders in the church. In 2009, Rachel and I moved to the UK in order for me to undertake a Masters in Cross-Cultural Research Methods at the University of Sussex. Just before we left, Ilir and Blerina stepped down from their leadership roles and left the church. In 2010, they invited Dave and Lynn to begin renting a house in Shkodër in order actively to help them in ‘creating community’ – something, as we have already seen, at the heart of Dave and Lynn’s ideology. Dave and Lynn took up this invitation, planning, from that point, to spend half their time living in Shkodër, and half their time still living in Thessaloniki.

This chapter tracks Rachel’s and my return to the Balkans at the start of 2011 to commence eighteen months of anthropological fieldwork. As such, its position within the overall structure of my thesis is slightly unusual. In tune with an ethnographic genre, one might expect such an ‘entering the field’ story to appear much sooner, near the start of the thesis, not near the end. This, in fact, was my initial intention, it being one of the first pieces that I wrote upon returning from fieldwork. But there is a logic to its appearing where it does. There are two main narrative threads running through the chapter. In the autumn before our arrival, the Pastor under threat of blood feud was shot



dead. The first thread therefore involves my narration of the complicated political and emotional dynamics Rachel and I encountered upon our arrival back in Shkodër in the wake of this incident. The second thread involves our (Dave's, Lynn's, Rachel's and my own) relationship with Ilir and Blerina, the couple who invited Dave and Lynn to help them with their small church group. It is this second thread that has shunted this chapter further and further back into its present location.

As mentioned at the start of Chapter 3, the relationship with Ilir and Blerina did not develop as Dave and Lynn had hoped. When the latter moved to Shkodër, the former, in various ways, backed off. On the one hand this hindered the research I had initially intended to do in terms of 'transformation' and 'community', but it also raised two related questions. Firstly, why did Ilir and Blerina 'back off'? And secondly, what did this situation reveal about *our own* expectations of what might happen with them in terms of '*relationship*'? In the end, I have been unable conclusively to answer the first question. I have been able to say quite clearly what Ilir and Blerina did *not* want in terms of '*relationship*' with us, but not to answer the question '*why*?' I have, however, been able to explore, and hopefully answer in some depth, the second question. It is from here that my thesis has emerged as a reflexive exploration of our own group's way of being in the world.

This journey has forced me to go back in time: to explore Dave and Lynn's way of life, and ultimately my own, through our life-stories, and to look in depth at the life of David Carter, who *did* experience our and God's 'convivial intrusion' into his life as both vitalising and transformative. I have drawn on Weber and Shils in exploring the charismatic relation, Classen and Howes in terms of conceiving a sensorium that takes sensory experiences of God seriously, I have brought in Fernandez, Lakoff and Johnson, and even Jung and Campbell, in order to understand the power of myth, story and metaphor, I have drawn on Turner's work on liminality and transition, Ingold's work on pathways of becoming, and Fowler's stages of faith framework, all in seeking to elucidate our group's particular way of life and, through that, to give some sense of the hopes and expectations that we carried for Ilir and Blerina when they invited our help in Shkodër. That invitation appeared to us as an 'open door', but by the time Dave and Lynn had moved to Shkodër, that door appeared to have already shut.

## Shkodër

Ermal was killed on a Friday. As far as I remember I only met him once, in 2008. Back then it was a rare thing for Ermal to appear at church, despite the fact that he was the Pastor. In fact, it was rare for him to appear in public at all. His uncle, a policeman, had shot a man dead and, in so doing, had dragged the whole extended household into a long, drawn out blood feud (*gjakmarrja*). Ermal couldn't leave the house because, beyond his four walls, he was constantly under threat. He never knew if, and when, the avenger of blood would demand his life.

Blood feuds continue to be a persistent problem in the north of Albania (Voell 2003; Sadiku 2014). When Edith Durham travelled in that region in the early 1900s, she reported that nearly everywhere she went there was talk of blood (*ghak*) (Durham 2000[1909]:31-32). When a wrongdoing took place (a murder, abduction, or even merely insulting words) then the honour of the whole house (*shpi*), related households (*mehala*), or tribe (*fis*) was blackened. "What profit is life to a man if his honour be not clean?" (ibid.). No price was too great for the cleansing of both personal and tribal honour, and it was only blood that had the efficacy to carry out such cleansing work – "blood can be wiped out only with blood" (ibid.). Furthermore, since "in the mountains the individual is submerged [to the] tribe" (ibid.) the blood taken needn't be that of the actual offender himself. It sufficed that it be *male* blood of the offender's extended house (see also Sadiku 2014:108-109). "In blood-vengeance," Durham writes, "the rules of the game are strictly observed. A man may not be shot for vengeance when he is with a woman nor with a child, nor when he is met in company, nor when *besa* (oath of peace) has been given... There are men who, on account of blood, have never been out alone for years" (Durham 2000:31-32; see also Schwandner-Sievers 2001:97-118). As long as Ermal stayed at home, he was relatively safe. Whenever he went outdoors alone, he was, along with the other men within his broader family, an open target. This is why in 2008, despite having been to Shkodër before, I had never met him.

The church that Ermal led was made up, primarily, of two extended families. It was a Word of Life church (see Coleman 2000) started in the early 1990s, when, with the lifting of the 1967 ban on all forms of religious worship, missionaries of all denominations came flooding into post-communist Albania (see Vickers & Pettiifer 1999[1997]:96-117). At the point that Ermal was forced to go into hiding, the day to

day running of the church passed into the hands of a young man named Ilir, who had been a faithful member of the church since he was a boy. Although Ermal remained the official leader of the church, his housebound state naturally restricted his practical, personal involvement. When we first visited the church in the summer of 2007 Ilir was effectively functioning, in all but name, as the active Pastor – leading the weekly meetings, preaching, organising the worship and so on. In fact, to an observer, the church seemed to be running pretty well under Ilir's hand and in Ermal's absence.

The original reason that we found ourselves in Shkodër was because of Ilir. In 2006, Dave and Lynn were invited to participate in a Christian youth camp in central Albania. Ilir, with his wife Blerina, had brought a group down from Shkodër to the camp. During that week Dave and Lynn got to know Ilir and Blerina, who later invited them to visit them in their hometown. That marked the start of several visits over the next couple of years, in the course of which Dave's relationship with Ilir, in particular, grew stronger. As already discussed, our relational web in the southern Balkans developed over the years through perceiving and going through 'open doors' – emergent relationships with people who seemed, in some way, to want to connect. This certainly appeared to be the case with Ilir and Blerina. Over a couple of years, a connective relational tissue – those initiatives that seem to demonstrate and enact both parties' desire to be involved in one another's lives – between 'us' and Ilir and Blerina grew, culminating with the latter's invitation to Dave and Lynn, in 2010, to begin spending increasingly extended periods of time in Shkodër.

The image that I have of Ermal is very vague. I remember being introduced to him in their church meeting room on the fourth floor of a building next to the *Pedenale*, the attractive pedestrian street that cuts through the centre of Shkodër. I remember he looked like a darker version of an English friend of mine – short cropped hair, perhaps slightly receding, a handsome face, average build. In a sense we mainly got to know Ermal through Ilir, or rather, we saw an *image* of Ermal from Ilir's perspective, through Ilir's lens. Ilir felt, despite the fact that he himself was effectively running the church, he was functioning more like a caretaker than a leader. He hadn't been given the authority to make any real changes or decisions, and was finding his position increasingly frustrating. Ermal, off scene, retained much of the major decision-making, whilst Ilir carried the bulk of practical responsibility.

In the summer of 2009, just before Dave and I visited him, Ilir was reaching a point of crisis. As far as I remember, he and Blerina had discussed their frustrations with Ermal and his wife, Zamira, and were on the brink of laying down their responsibilities and leaving the church. By the time we arrived in Shkodër, however, something unexpected had emerged – Ermal had offered Ilir a more official pastoral ‘position’ in the church. As Ilir explored what this actually involved, however, he came to the conclusion that it meant very little change from the way things were already functioning. Essentially, Ermal would still hold all the strings.

Dave and I stayed with Ilir and Blerina whilst, for several days, they wrestled through their decision. During that time, other local Albanian friends came to visit. I remember one friend in particular speaking quite directly to Ilir, and encouraging him and Blerina to leave the church. Dave and I felt that we shouldn’t tell Ilir what to do. Rather, we tried to provide a forum for him to air his thoughts. Our observation, however, was that one of the reasons that Ilir was finding it so difficult to make the decision was that part of him *enjoyed* being a Pastor in a traditional Evangelical church. It was *hard* to leave. Such a decision required embarking on a far less certain path, a path that perhaps involved abandoning both the status and security of a pastoral role within the already established Evangelical scene in Shkodër.

At this time, Ilir and Blerina had just moved into newly rented accommodation, the completed bottom apartment of a partially finished house near the centre of Shkodër. Upon moving, Ilir felt that he had received a word from the Lord. He had read in the book of Acts how “Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”<sup>49</sup> Despite the fact, as stated above, that Dave and I sought to resist telling Ilir what to do, our preferences inevitably came out. The description of Paul welcoming people in his home aptly reflected our own trajectory of church over the previous years, our ideology of meeting around the table, of environments which facilitated ‘openness’ and ‘*relationship*’, a dialogical sharing of ‘Spirit’ and ‘Life’ around the meal table in preference to more formally organised services and preaching. Dave and I could see the possibility that Ilir could go down the same sort of route, and begin to develop

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<sup>49</sup> Acts 28:30-31 (New King James Version).

something quite *different* in terms of church life and community from the other more traditionally structured Evangelical churches present in the city. There is no doubt that Ilir must have picked up these preferences from us, both at that time and in previous conversations. In short, he finally made up his mind and, to a rather shocked response from Ermal and Zamira, he and Blerina left the church.

## October 2010

*Edith Durham describes how “for all their habits, laws, and customs, the people, as a rule, have but one explanation: ‘It is in the Canon of Lek’ – the law that is said to have been laid down by the chieftain Lek Dukaghin.” She says of Lek himself that little is known, yet his fame among the northern tribes “far exceeds that of Skenderbeg.” “He has left no mark on European history – is a purely local celebrity – but must have been of insistent individuality to have so influenced the people that ‘Lek said so’ obtains far more obedience than the Ten Commandments. The teachings of Islam and of Christianity, the Sheriat and Church law, all have to yield to the Canon of Lek” (Durham 2000[1909]:25).*

Ermal was killed on a Friday, but I only received news of the event two days later. It was early October 2010, and Rachel and I were now living in the south of England, whilst I completed my Masters. We only had a few months left before we returned to the Balkans to commence fieldwork. That week I had spent three days in Dorset playing golf with my dad, and over the weekend we had met with friends in an autumnally sunny Lewes to celebrate my birthday. On Sunday night, once our two-year old son Oliver was tucked up in bed, I checked Facebook and received the following message from Dave, who was then at home in Thessaloniki. The message was sent to both Derek Brown and me.

David Webb 09 October at 18:00

*Hi there,*

*I just thought I'd send a quick note to tell you that Ermal, the Pastor in Shkoder who was under the blood feud was shot dead on the main street of Shkoder yesterday afternoon.*

*Whilst he was not supposed to leave his house there was a sense that the crisis was passing. However it appears he was lulled into a false sense of security and as he walked down the main street it would appear that an assassin was*

*following him and in the crowded pedestrian street he was shot. Chaos prevailed.*

*Ilir happened to be just a few meters away and a few minutes later he was informed it was Ermal... he would have been 33/34 years old.*

*He has a wife and 2 young children.*

*I am waiting to hear any more from Ilir ...*

*Everyone is in shock and disbelief...*

*This is truly awful and we'd appreciate your prayers.*

*I offered to go immediately but at the moment we are waiting to hear...*

*Dave*

When Ilir and Blerina had left the church in the summer of 2009, those faithful to them, both family and friends, had gone with them. Soon afterwards, these people were gathering in Ilir's home and putting pressure upon him to begin leading something new, in other words to start a new church. Our counsel to Ilir at that time had been to hold his ground. If people wanted to come and gather in his home, then that was fine. But our fear, if Ilir set up something more 'official' was twofold. Firstly, that it would be done (or seen to be done) in *opposition* to the church he had just left; secondly, and more importantly from our point of view, we were hoping that Ilir might begin to operate within a new paradigm of what church could be. If he did things too quickly then he was, in our belief, in danger of simply reproducing the same model of church with which he was familiar, a church shaped in almost exactly the way that Ermal's church had been, with all of its inherent frustrations.

Ilir and Blerina's departure had sent shockwaves through the Evangelical church community in Shkodër, and that shock had been especially severe for Ermal and Zamira, who perceived the former's actions as a betrayal of their "right hand."<sup>50</sup> Soon after Ilir and Blerina had left the church, news reached us that Ermal had begun to leave his house more often. Since Ermal's life was still very much under threat, Ilir had expressed his concern to us about him, attributing Ermal's wanderings to increased anxiety and frustration, perhaps engendered – at least in part – by the church split. When I finally spoke to Zamira in January 2011, she put a different angle upon it. After

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<sup>50</sup> Zamira told me as such in a conversation I had with her in January 2011.

the church split, they had prayed and Ermal had got a word (from the Lord) to go out and to reach as many people as possible with the gospel. And so, from that time onwards, he had started to leave the house more often, and not to worry about the threat. “And he reached a lot of people,” Zamira told me.

Back in Lewes in 2010, upon receiving news of Ermal’s death, *I* was left in shock. My Doctoral research proposal was by then complete and, woven into it, was the suggestion of spending significant amounts of time in Shkodër. As mentioned, whilst Rachel and I had been in England Dave and Lynn’s relationship with Ilir and Blerina had grown stronger. “In February this year,” Dave had written in a newsletter in June, “[Ilir and Blerina] asked us to consider a move to Shkodër, to help them. Two weeks ago I was visiting and speaking in the church. Once again they asked us to consider a move and we believe this is [right].” That autumn, Dave and Lynn began renting a house just a stone’s throw from Ilir and Blerina’s house, with the intention of splitting their time between Albania and northern Greece. Our intention, during fieldwork, was to do the same. And then Ermal was shot dead. England, with its golf and its picnics and its trips to the local swimming pool with Oliver, suddenly seemed very safe. It was hard to reconcile this with what had just taken place in another part of the world. It all seemed crazy and chaotic and unpredictable, and not the kind of place *at all* to which I wanted to take my wife and young child.

### **Arriving in Shkodër**

Three months later, however, in January 2011, Rachel, Oliver and I were travelling north from Thessaloniki to Shkodër. I was feeling rough, still trying to shake off flu picked up in the last few days in the UK. Rachel was driving, Oliver tucked in somewhere amongst the luggage. The previous day we had crossed the icy, snow-laced mountains of northern Greece into Albania and, upon my insistence, had stayed a night by the lake in Pogradec. I was nervous, wrestling with a sense of heightened responsibility for my family – watchful of Oliver, fearful of encountering problems on the road. After crossing the high pass beyond Elbasan, we wove our way down into the erratic traffic of Tirana, before navigating our way onto the great coastal plain that opens northward to Lezhe and finally to Shkodër.

As we drove into Shkodër, Dave was waiting on the side of the road to lead us to our house near the city centre. We followed him off the main road into the Muslim quarter, past the 'Israel-Amsterdam' cafe and right at the car wash onto a short gravel track, where we pulled up in front of two large, red metal gates. The property was surrounded by high walls, embedded with shards of broken glass, and topped by chicken wire stretched between steel reinforcement bars. Inside, there was a concrete yard with enough room at one side to park a car, the rest of the yard divided by flowerbeds into two alleyways – space for a small child to ride a bike. Inside the house, it was warm and welcoming. Dave and Lynn had arrived from Greece the previous week and, since then, had kept the wood-burning stove fired up constantly in order to put some heat through the place. Oliver was excited to see his grandparents. After a quick tour, the car was unloaded and we sat down to a dinner which Lynn had prepared – roast chicken garnished with Mediterranean vegetables, laced with whole garlic cloves, and washed down with local red wine.

The next morning was bright and cold and sunny. The lemon trees at the front of the house, laden with fruit, formed a vivid canopy of green and yellow framed against a clear blue sky. Dave and I decided to walk into town. On the way we bumped into Ilir with his younger brother Arian. The latter greeted us enthusiastically with kisses on both cheeks. We walked together with the brothers. As we approached the far end of the *Pedenale*, Arian pointed out the place where Ermal had been shot. "It was a crowded street," he told me, "lots of people around." He explained that Zamira's extended family didn't want to "press charges" against the killer. "They want to keep the feud open and for it not to pass into the hands of the law," he said, "because once it passes into the hands of the law it closes." It was not Zamira who wanted this, Arian explained, but uncles and others in the family. "They are probably putting pressure on her," he added.

That evening, once Oliver was fast asleep, Dave, Lynn, Rachel and I sat down with a glass of wine. Dave suggested that we needed to talk about a few things. Since their arrival in the autumn, he and Lynn had been wrestling through some issues. Their relationship with Ilir and Blerina had clearly not been developing quite as they had hoped.



“I think that what seemed to happen in November time,” Dave began, “was that we got a bit at sort of cross purposes, or I had a couple of strange conversations with Ilir about the fact that we’d moved here, and [quoting Ilir] *‘moved all of our ministry here’* and [we were] *‘making our base here’* and *‘that changed the basis on which we’d come here.’* And then there have been some sort of slightly funny things. Like on Wednesday, when we arrived last week, he gave us this whole list of what’s happening and what’s going on, but makes it impossible for you to...”

“What he’s doing, do you mean?” I asked.

“Well, what’s going on with the church, and what’s going on with the people *in the church.*”

“The things that they want to do,” Lynn added.

“But it doesn’t provide any room for us to...” Dave continued.

“Come with an idea,” Lynn said.

“Come up with an idea,” Dave concluded, “or to be involved, or to express anything. So, in a sense, on Sunday morning, on the back of that, and our having felt just a little bit frustrated, I said I wanted to see him this week to have a bit of a chat. Because he needs to decide whether he wants us to be involved in the direction of the church.”

When Dave and Lynn arrived in Shkodër the previous autumn, Ilir had seemed very distant towards them. This distancing, which continued over the subsequent weeks, caused Dave and Lynn to enter a kind of crisis of purpose, since, if Ilir and Blerina didn’t desire some kind of open, ongoing, dialogical relationship, a significant reason for Dave’s and Lynn’s presence in Shkodër was taken away.

“[At that time] Lynn was saying, ‘What are we doing here?’” Dave said. “‘What on earth are we doing here?’ And you [Lynn] had asked this sort of question two or three times, hadn’t you, on different days? And then you were sitting reading [the Bible] and it says...” Dave reaches for a copy of the Bible, and searches for the passage he has in mind. “It says, *‘Let me tell you what you’re doing here. Let me tell you why you are here. You are here to be salt seasoning that brings out the God flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? Here’s another way to put*

*it. You are here to be light, bringing out the God colours in the world. Keep open house, be generous with your lives. By opening up to others you'll prompt people to open up to God, this generous Father in heaven.*"<sup>51</sup>

"That's a pretty cool scripture isn't it?" Lynn said.

"It's pretty cool," Dave replied.

### **Coffee with Ilir**

Two days later, at Dave's invitation, Ilir came over to our house to have coffee with Dave and me. Dave had converted one of the upstairs rooms into an office, where we sat in three armchairs, huddled around a little electric heater to try and stay warm. After about an hour of discussion concerning the present political situation in Albania, Dave changed the dynamic of conversation. He said that he wanted to speak a little bit about why "we are here" in Shkodër (the 'we', in this case, seeming to refer not just to us English, but also to Ilir and Blerina).

Ilir explained a little why he had been absent for so much of the autumn after Dave and Lynn had arrived. He said that, originally, Dave and Lynn had said that they were going to be in Shkodër for four months of the year, but that this had obviously changed in that they were now planning to spend more time here. In the light of this, he had been trying to work out what relationship with them now meant. He was also trying to understand what Dave and Lynn's "mission" or "ministry" was. He had picked up, in previous conversations, that Dave and Lynn were negative about church, and that they also appeared dismissive of church meetings. He wanted to know if we – Dave, Lynn, Rachel and I – were interested in having "church meetings" or in "creating a society?"

Dave said that during the autumn, since Ilir had been distant and not around, it had forced him and Lynn to get out and meet other people, which, in reflection, was not a bad thing at all. He encouraged Ilir not to organise too many meetings, because in organising other people's lives you left no space for them to take initiatives. He also said that it was good just to meet and to talk openly about these different things,

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<sup>51</sup> The words are taken from Matthew chapter 5 in The Message translation.

comparing our present conversation and different viewpoints to “wrestling” – it was good, in relationship, to “wrestle things through.” Ilir immediately interpreted wrestling as a negative thing, but Dave insisted that it was positive – to wrestle in conversation, in dialogue, in thoughts, in opinions was good and brought maturity.

The conversation began to be cut short as Ilir said that he needed to go and get his car fixed. This was not a bad thing, as it seemed that we *had* begun to wrestle through some things, and it was good to break at this point, allowing space for everything to be digested. I can’t remember whether it was Dave or I who introduced the metaphor of ‘being on a journey together’ at this point – a kind of invitational metaphor that would perhaps allow Ilir to understand something of what we were envisioning our relationship with him might entail. A couple of months later, over a coffee with him and Arian, I tried to expand on this metaphor. I tried to explain the way Dave and Lynn operate – that they see themselves as being on a journey in which ‘*relationship*’ involves ‘walking together’. “The way Dave speaks is that he speaks as a man speaks with his friend as he is walking along the road with him,” I said. “Dave and Lynn don’t have all the answers, but they are discovering a path. And their desire is to connect with people, and to travel together on that journey.”

Back in the upper room, Dave suggested to Ilir that it would be good to meet again over coffee to continue the conversation, to continue to “wrestle through” the things we had begun to talk about. He suggested, perhaps, in two days time, on Friday.

### **Arian on Ermal**

That Friday Ilir phoned to say he was doing something else, so our coffee never happened. The following Thursday, Dave and I cycled into the centre of Shkodër to meet Ilir’s brother, Arian, for a coffee. We waited in the sunshine outside the gym. It was a cold day and my coughing seemed to have got worse again. Arian was late. When Dave called him, he said that he had some jobs to do around town, so would come and meet us in ten minutes. Dave and I walked across to the cafe and ordered a couple of juices.

I told Dave that Rachel and I were thinking of going along to Ermal's church – now being led by his widow, Zamira – on Sunday. The truth was that it was something of a dilemma as to whether or not to go. Dave told me that he had seen one of the other leaders of the church a couple of times in the street, but that this man had appeared to want to avoid Dave. Dave was, undoubtedly, associated with Ilir and was known to have been around in the time before Ilir and Blerina left Ermal's church, as was I. Ilir and Blerina's departure – certainly within one telling of the story – seemed to trigger a series of events (namely Ermal leaving the house more often) that culminated, of course, in Ermal's tragic death. "You need to understand," Dave said, "that maybe they blame us in part for Ermal's death."

The previous evening I had met with Xhon, a young member of Ermal's church, who had come to help us harvest the lemons outside our house. Xhon told me that he had been with Ermal on the day he was killed. Ermal had arranged to have coffee with Xhon in the morning, as the latter had had some issues that Ermal wanted to talk to him about. "We had coffee," Xhon said, "and every ten minutes, he asks me if I'm O.K." They were together for about an hour, and then Ermal wished Xhon goodbye, and went back up to the church office to work. "I'm OK with Xhon now," he was later reported as saying. Ermal spent the rest of the morning on the computer, had a prayer meeting with the other people in the office, and then, at about lunchtime, he headed out. He was shot at one o'clock. Two hours later, Xhon heard the news from his sister, who had also been working in the church office. Xhon was devastated, particularly since he had been with Ermal that morning.

About half an hour later Arian arrived, and ordered a coke. Just as he was settling down to talk to us, he got another call, this time from his fiancée, asking him to go and help her with something. He asked if we minded. I said no. Dave remained quiet. When Arian returned, we asked him how he was getting on. He told us that he hadn't been to the Bible School that week, a school that he, his brother and a number of people from their church group were attending. There was no school on Monday, and he had a lot of work on the other days. I asked him what he had missed. He said that this week's teaching had been on Christ. I asked him what other things they had taught, and he told me that they had taught on evangelism, the differences between the Old and New Testaments and some other things. He appeared unenthusiastic. He went on to tell us

about his work, and some business trips that he had made to the mountains with his boss, a man he described in quite shady terms.

After half an hour, Dave headed home to meet Xhon, who was coming to try and fix our water pump. I asked Arian if he could help me to find out some more about the history of Shkodër. He said he would be happy to do so, and mentioned a professor of his that I could perhaps meet for coffee. I paid for the drinks and we wandered across to the bookshop on the other side of the road, where we found a copy of the book that Arian's professor had written. We strolled down the *Pedenale* and went into a couple of other bookshops. As we got towards the end of the street, I pointed to the place outside the cafe which Arian had shown me before. I asked if that was the place where Ermal was shot. Arian pointed to a cafe sign a few metres further along, "There, just outside the door, as he was going into that cafe." We were soon in front of the cafe door. I looked down at the stone step where Ermal must have been standing. Arian pointed to a car on the far side of the road. "Ermal went across to his car," Arian explained, "and put his computer in there. The assassin came up behind him and shot him three times – once in the foot and then 'inside the body'. His first response was to run. So he ran around to the cafe. It was 1pm and all of the students were out in the street, so he had to go around all the tables. It was crowded. And the guy followed him. And as Ermal got to the door, he shot him again."

By this time we had turned and were making our way back up the street. We were about halfway along, close to the alleyway that led to the building where Ermal's church still met. Arian pointed to the spot we were passing. We were about a hundred metres from the cafe. "Ilir was here," Arian said, "with Joakim. He heard the three shots, and thought it was just someone doing some work. He looked up and saw Ermal run around the side of the cafe, and look straight at him. Ermal was shouting for people to help him, but no one was responding. And so Ermal ran to the cafe. At that point, Ilir said to Joakim that they should get off the street. And so they went into the little supermarket over there. They heard four more shots. And then they came out."

By this time the assassin, Arian explained, was running up the street towards where Joakim and Ilir were standing. A plainclothes policeman shouted to the assassin that he should stop right there, otherwise he would shoot him. The assassin was shouting things like, "Did I kill him? He killed my brother!" He stopped in his tracks at the

policeman's warning. This all happened, Arian explained, right in front of Ilir and Joakim.

Arian and I now reached the end of the pedestrian zone and were approaching the large roundabout near to the cafe where we had been sitting. Arian's phone rang. He excused himself and answered it as we crossed the road. The traffic was everywhere – a chaos. We reached the place where our bikes were parked. I didn't want the conversation to end, as I had so many questions. I bent down to unlock my bike and asked, "And the guy who shot Ermal, what background was he from? Catholic? Muslim?" Arian replied that he was Catholic, from a Catholic village.

"Because it doesn't make any difference, does it?" I said. "The Kanun of Lek is the most important thing?"

"Yes," Arian replied, "because it is written in the Kanun. The Kanun needs to end, because now we have the law. But people still hold to it. Some people use it as an excuse. They want to do something bad, and they say it is because of the Kanun. But not everything written in the Kanun is bad. There are some good things, about family. There is maybe one passage about blood feud, and that is what people take. But even then, they have made it worse than it is written. In the original it says that you can take the life of the person who has committed a crime against you, not just anyone's life in their household."

We had been walking with our bikes, avoiding the trees that lined the pavements, and had reached a point where we were clearly going to go our separate ways. Arian said that he would see me later at our house. He suggested that we could go online to find out some more about local history. He would bring his laptop so that we didn't need to disturb anyone. I said that would be good.

### **Ilir and Blerina on Ermal**

The following day, Rachel and I had arranged to go out for a meal with Ilir and Blerina. At about six o'clock we headed into town – walking up and down the *Pedenale*, browsing the shop windows, asking about the price of jewellery and commenting upon

the beautiful architecture. I called Ilir to find out where they were. He didn't answer, but two minutes later a text arrived saying that they would be another thirty minutes since the Bible School had started late. Rachel and I decided to go for a drink, and Rachel told me about some of the girls that she was getting to know at the gym. At about eight o'clock Ilir and Blerina arrived. We jumped into their car and drove around the corner to a restaurant where we had been with them before. We ordered some pizza, creating some amusement as I attempted to communicate with the waiter in Albanian.

We asked Ilir and Blerina about the Bible School and what they had been doing that week. They said that they had been doing Christology and Soteriology, which I understood as being to do with salvation. Rachel asked them what they were hoping to get out of the Bible School, and they explained that they would have a qualification, a diploma. Knowing Rachel, I realised that her question was meant to be slightly more abstract than this, seeking to elicit more the goals and motivations for doing the Bible School. Nevertheless, Ilir expanded by saying that it would be an advantage for them in the future having a qualification. He said that often, when they were talking to people about Jesus and sharing the gospel with them, people "always asked the question about where and how you *know* these things – in other words, have you studied?" And so, to be able to say that you have studied gives you an authority that people accept, Ilir explained. Even the Muslims, he continued, who had no formal education in the past, were now sending their leaders off for teaching in Iran for six months. And they came back with a qualification, a place of authority from which to speak.

Ilir and Blerina said that they could foresee a time, with the way things were going here in Albania, when the State would only recognise your part in the church if you had some kind of qualification, or had studied in some way. So it was best to do this now rather than leave it until the future when it could be more difficult, or take longer. They explained that the Evangelical churches in Albania were recognised by the State now, that they were no longer just thought of as a cult or something like that. Blerina went on to say that doing the Bible School was hard work sometimes, especially when you were combining it with having another job, as she did. But they had agreed that it was good to do, so the best thing was just to get on with it.

I wanted to introduce talk about the other church – Ermal and Zamira's church – into the conversation, so I mentioned that the last time we were eating in this particular

restaurant we had been together with Zamira's sister and her husband. We talked lightly for a while about the fact that, back then, this couple had started to desire to have a baby – they had delighted over Oliver who, at that time, was just six months old. Now they had two children of their own. There was an element of joy in our speaking. I asked if Ilir and Blerina saw them at all now, and how things were between them. Ilir said yes, they saw them, and things were fine. They didn't have a problem. Ilir added that, generally speaking, they were O.K. with most people in the church, but that there was still a problem with Zamira. "We have tried to bless her in every way, and to offer help if she needs it. But there is a wall there." He waved his hand in front of him. "We have tried to climb it, but it is a wall that I cannot climb anymore." He explained that, since Ermal's death, Zamira had taken on a leadership position in the church, and that she had started coming to meetings with all the other church leaders. "At first," he said, "it was very difficult because if she said something that other people disagreed with, nobody wanted to challenge her. They just lowered their heads. But afterwards, some of the leaders spoke together and said that things couldn't go on this way. They needed to say something." Ilir didn't say whether the situation had changed or not.

"I was there, you know," Ilir said, referring to Ermal's death.

"Yes, I know," I replied.

"Ermal was shot four times when he was getting into his car – once in the leg and three times in the body. There was something wrong with the gun, and the guy had to reload." Ilir indicated the action of reloading with his hands. "So Ermal ran around to the cafe next to *Flo* and tried to get in. It was there he was shot again."

"They say that he was shot in the face," Blerina added. "Well, sort of in the face. And that this is against Kanun Law. It needs to be in the heart. But also Ermal's uncle, the policeman, who originally shot this guy's brother – well, he shot him in the face too. He walked into a cafe and just shot him."

"I thought the reason that he killed him," I said, "was because he was a policeman and he was somehow carrying out his police duty."

"No," Ilir said, "what he did was a crime, and he also is now in hiding. Neither of them followed the rules of Kanun Law." Ilir then explained that they should have announced



something to the victim before shooting him, something like, “*Greetings to...*” and then the name of the dead man.

“And also,” Blerina added, “If the person is not killed after the bullets have been shot, you should leave him. Because *‘the bullets have spared his life.’*”

Reaching into his pocket, Ilir said that he had a photo of Ermal’s killer. “I was there and I had my phone,” he explained, “so I decided to take a photo. I don’t know why I did it. I thought that I would take a video, to record what was happening if necessary. But I didn’t have the video on, so I just took a photo.” He began to search through the pictures, then passed me the phone. There was a picture of a man on his chest on the ground, with his head twisted to one side. He was shouting. Behind him and above him stood another man, presumably the plainclothes policeman, with his foot on the man’s back. He appeared to have something in his hand. Was it a gun? That section of the photo was too dark for me to see. In the background there were two old men, smoking and talking. They looked as if nothing was going on, as if they were just having a chat on the side of the road. They were not looking at the scene that was taking place in front of them. On the ground, close to their feet, lay a black revolver, obviously the weapon the assassin had used.

I took a long time looking at the photo, knowing that I probably wouldn’t see it again. I wanted to remember all the details, to take it all in. I zoomed in so that I could see the parts of it more easily. I navigated my way around, looking at the different faces, observing their expressions. It was a strange photo, the contradictions, the anomalies: the two guys in the background looking as if they were just passing the time of day, the plainclothes policeman with his foot confidently upon the back of this youth, who in turn was squirming on the floor beneath his foot, the gun lying on the ground just behind him, untouched, just lying there in the street. I was struck by how young the killer looked. He was skinny, his hair shortly cropped, but messy. He looked little more than a boy. I commented on this, and asked his age. Ilir agreed that he was young.

“He is twenty years old,” he said. “He was only a boy of fifteen or sixteen when his brother was killed. But he must have heard all about it in the house: his uncles talking about it, every time they had a meal his mother saying something like, ‘Remember your

brother who is now eating dirt.’ He has grown up with this around him.” A little later in the conversation Ilir commented again on the boy’s face. “He doesn’t look like that normally,” he said. “You can see the demons. You can see that it isn’t him.” I wondered when else Ilir had seen him, but didn’t ask.

I asked Ilir what the boy in the picture was shouting.

“He is lying on the ground and he is shouting, “Did I kill him? Did I kill him?” Ilir said.

“In terms of blood feud,” Ilir went on, “the media and others need to start saying some other things about it. They need to get it into people’s minds that the blood feud is a ‘shame’ for everyone, that if you kill another person, it brings shame upon your whole family, and upon your village. This is what they need to start speaking about it, so that it dies out.”

Rachel said that she could understand why the killer did it. “Even if you spoke to him and sought to change his mind, you probably couldn’t do it,” she said, “because it is so ingrained.”

Ilir and Blerina agreed.

The conversation moved on. Rachel asked about the changes that had taken place in Albania since communism. There was talk about border mountain crossings, conversions, and Bibles smuggled into Albania during the communist era. There was talk about spies and missionaries. Rachel asked whether Ilir and Blerina remembered what things were like under communism, and they said that they did a little bit, but they were very young at that time. Ilir remembered when communism fell, and all the streets were filled with people singing and shouting and dancing. He was a young boy at the time, and he was up on his father’s shoulders, and all the people were happy. “Only four people were killed here in Shkodër,” he said. “But after that, the people did some crazy things. They burned the factories and destroyed the machines that they had had to work on under the communist regime. I don’t know what they were thinking... what work they thought they would do after that. Many people were left without any work. But the Italians helped us a lot during that time. They came and they built factories and gave employment for a lot of people. It was a great opportunity for the

Italians because they could get cheap workers for the factories. And the people worked hard, because they could earn one hundred Euros a month, which was more money than they had ever seen before.”

The meal was finishing and I asked if we should get the bill. Ilir had said at the start of the meal that they would pay, and we had already had a tussle about it. Rachel turned to me and whispered, “Did you want to tell them?”

“Oh yes,” I said, turning to Ilir and Blerina. “We were thinking of going to Xhon’s church [Ermal and Zamira’s church] on Sunday.”

Ilir almost immediately responded by saying that he thought it was a good idea. Blerina said that they didn’t have any problem with us doing that.

“We want to see some of the people there, that’s all,” I explained, listing the people we wanted to connect with again.

Ilir said he needed to go to the bathroom. As he went, Blerina said to us, “Do you not think it is better just to meet up with them... for a coffee or something like that?”

“Well, we have tried to be in touch with people,” I replied, “but we’ve not had any response. Rachel has written to several people on Facebook.”

“Maybe they don’t check their Facebook,” Rachel added.

“So we thought that we would just turn up a bit naïvely on Sunday,” I said. “If people are open to us, that’s cool, if not...” I waved my hands nonchalantly.

“Yes, but do you not think that it would be better just to meet them?” Blerina said again, seeming not to have heard what I had just said.

I repeated what I had said before, adding, “We just want to go in a bit naïvely.”

By this time, Ilir was back and he asserted that it was not a problem for us to go. “And it is good that you have Oliver with you,” he added, implying that Oliver would disarm any situation.

“Yes, Oliver is good in all of these situations,” Rachel said. “When he is around it takes away any awkwardness in these kinds of situations.”

Blerina began to speak again, but stopped herself.

“Yes, it’s probably best for us not to know,” I said. “We just want to go in naïvely.” This time, they both seemed to understand, and my comment put an end to any more conversation about it.

I asked if we should get the bill. Ilir paused for a moment before saying, “We can go.”

“You’ve paid it haven’t you?”

“We can go,” he replied.

“You are very sneaky,” I said.

They laughed.

“O.K. next time we will pay for sure. And I will spend the whole evening ‘in the toilet’ to make sure you don’t pay.”

We all laughed.

## **Killing Ermal**

At 5am on Sunday morning, I awoke from a dream.

In the dream, I jumped from a high cliff into the dark waters of a lake beneath. Ermal was with me in the water. He had been shot. A week had gone by, and he was still recovering. But I murdered him by holding him under the water.

Next, I was at home with my parents. I went to the bathroom and prepared to wash. Instead of my own, I had Ermal’s wash bag. No one seemed to have noticed. My dad was there and he was saying how awful it was about Ermal’s death. No one seemed to know that I killed him. I felt awful. I decided that if and when the police came, I would be honest about what I had done. Maybe it was a mistake, an accident.

I was awoken by the sound of the mosque. The early morning call for prayer echoed, hauntingly, through the town and entered in waves through our open window. It was dark outside. It still felt like the middle of the night.

It was a relief to wake and to remember that I didn't kill Ermal.

### **Zamira – Ermal's Widow**

Later, at quarter to ten, with Oliver in his pushchair, we set off from the house to go to Zamira's church. I felt nervous as we approached the building. Rachel told me that she felt nauseous. As we went up to the meeting room, we heard someone on the stairs behind us. It was Zamira's sister's husband. He was, apart from perhaps Zamira, the person whom I was most nervous about seeing, so this seemed like a good chance to corner him on the stairs before the meeting. I waited, and warmly greeted him. He was carrying their youngest child in a car seat. He was surprised to see us, quite warm. He asked how we were. He was, in a sense, no warmer or cooler than he had ever been.

We went into the meeting room and greeted Xhon and his older brother Gezim, before finding ourselves some seats on the back row. A couple of minutes later a tall, attractive lady, perhaps in her early thirties, came over and greeted us. "Hello, welcome. Where are you from? I am Zamira. Have we met before?"

Both Rachel and I responded that we hadn't, which was sort of true because neither of us could picture what she looked like. The time, previously, that I had met Ermal in the church, I think Zamira had probably been with him, but it was such a brief hello that it was difficult to remember whether we had met her or not. Now she was warm and friendly, obviously not associating us with anyone or anything.

After a few minutes, Ermal's brother, a short man with a light face, started the meeting. A young guy started to play guitar and Zamira began to lead some worship, accompanied by another couple of girls singing. It was lively, somewhat out of tune, a few songs to clap along to, interjected at various points by people in the congregation praying out. There was one point when Zamira prayed out at some length. There are particular tones which people have when they pray. For instance, some of the prayers

prayed that day had more of a feel of ‘I am shouting and trying to convince myself, and others, about what I am praying about.’ But there was something different in Zamira’s tone. It had an element of real sincerity about it. It was almost as if, as she prayed, the crowd, the company amongst whom she was praying, disappeared. She wasn’t just praying to create a good, dynamic meeting, or in order to convince others, but it felt as if she were praying from her heart, and that God was listening. There was something quite beautiful about it, even though I could not understand what she was saying.

After the worship, another girl got up to speak about the offering. There was more music as people went up with their gifts. I went and put a small amount in the basket. Next the preacher was introduced, and the lectern brought forwards. The high tone of his voice reminded me of a Georgian friend from Greece, but with Ilir’s delivery. Later, I found out that he was a Pastor from Lezhe who had been visiting quite regularly. He meandered his way towards his point, before reinforcing what he was saying very softly. Everybody bowed their heads to pray and, as I found out later, to think about what they had done wrong.

At the end of the meeting it was our opportunity to break some ice, so we went around seeking out some people. Xhon’s sisters recognised Rachel and Oliver. They came over and were very friendly. Next, we found Zamira’s sister and her husband. She didn’t recognise Rachel initially, but asked, “Who is your husband?” She was quite warm. I said hello and she seemed to recognise me. We both chatted with them briefly, and Rachel continued talking with her. Whilst I was standing there, Zamira came across to talk with me and ask me some questions. I explained that I was doing some research here in Albania, and that we would be spending some of our time here, and some of our time in Greece. She asked if we had been to Albania before (she had obviously seen that we knew certain people in the church). I said, yes, twice before – once when our son was six months old, and once when he was fifteen months. Now he was nearly three. I said that I was sorry to hear about her husband. She said that it was terrible, but that God was doing good things in the church. She said that I probably knew, but it had been a difficult time in the church – there had been a split, which was a shock to them all, especially as it had been their “right hand.”

I was hoping that Zamira didn’t make too many connections. I was hoping that she didn’t make the connection that we were in Albania at the time that Ilir and Blerina

were making the decision to leave the church – that I was party to conversations at that time. *Are we all connected? Did I play a part in Ermal's death? How am I implicated within this story? And how did that cause me to be interacting with Zamira now?* It caused me to want to tread very carefully, to step in humility. It made me slightly awkward about the fact that she was talking so openly with me, and to hope that she didn't feel too exposed later, when she found out that we were connected to Dave and Lynn, to Ilir and Blerina.

Other opportunities had opened up for them, Zamira continued to tell me. There were some families that they had some contact with that had also been victims of blood feud. These families had opened their doors to them, and they were now able to visit them, and have some influence. Before Ermal's death, there had only been a handful of families, but now many doors had opened because they, too, were victims of blood feud.

"You know the pain of it," I said.

As Rachel continued to talk to Zamira, I went in search of Oliver, whom I had been trying to keep an eye on. The balcony doors were open and we were on the third or fourth floor. Rachel explained to Zamira that we were going to be in Greece for the next three weeks, and then we would be back again in Albania. We said goodbye. As we left, Ermal's brother warmly said goodbye. We headed home.

The next day Rachel, Oliver and I set off back to Greece.

## **Divergent Paths**

One reason for describing our arrival back in Shkodër in so much detail is to highlight the complexity of the relational, emotional and political scene into which we were entering. Dave's and Lynn's primary interest in being in Shkodër was Ilir and Blerina, with whom, over the previous years, there had appeared to be an increasing sense of 'relationship' and 'connection'. There is no doubt that Dave and Lynn conceived their move to Shkodër, and their renting of the house near the city centre, as part of this growing relationship. They no doubt envisioned an increasing 'openness' between

themselves and the young Albanian couple. And since Ilir and Blerina appeared to have invited their assistance in ‘creating community’, Dave and Lynn no doubt expected that their own depth of experience in community life and community making would be drawn upon, as together they moved forward into new ways of thinking about and doing ‘church’.

But none of this happened. When it came down to it, Dave and Lynn’s move to Shkodër seemed to initiate exactly the opposite effect from that which they had desired. Looking back, it is perhaps easy to see how the seeds of two very different trajectories of becoming were, in fact, already there. Shortly after Ilir and Blerina left Ermal’s church, they came under pressure from members of their group to ‘set up a new church’. Despite our advice to the contrary, they did, indeed, set off down this particular path. In part, this involved developing a church life that was recognisable, particularly to the State authorities, as a church. One of the primary qualifications for State recognition was having a church building. In other words it was impossible to register as a church without an official church meeting place. With the renting of a meeting place, other familiar elements of church life seemed to fall inevitably into place: Sunday meetings primarily built around musical worship and preaching, prayer meetings, youth meetings etc. In fact, going along to Ilir and Blerina’s church in the early part of 2011, one was struck by just how similar it was, in its basic form, not only to other Evangelical churches within the city, but also to a vast array of Evangelical and Charismatic churches that we also knew in other nations.

None of this, essentially, was a problem to Dave and Lynn, as what they were looking for in their relationship with Ilir and Blerina was a certain vibrancy – a dynamic of Spirit, ‘openness’ and *Life* – that in a sense rendered any particular preferences concerning church form comparatively irrelevant. Of course, the *experience* of this dynamic, if it had happened, would have almost certainly changed the way Ilir and Blerina thought about their faith, and this, in turn, would have, in all likelihood, filtered down into a changed conception of church, relationships *and* community. Much of Dave’s and Lynn’s dilemma in their first months of being in Shkodër was centred on whether to continue to expect this type of relationship – which I have described elsewhere as bearing many characteristics of a *communitas*-type relationship – to develop. From the moment Dave and Lynn began renting the house in Shkodër, in



other words from the time they became more tangibly present in the city, Ilir and Blerina seemed to indicate that this was *not*, in fact, something that they desired. For example, in November 2010, having seen Dave and Lynn established in their new house, Ilir, over the next few weeks, made himself absent. He later attributed this absence to a certain anxiety he was experiencing about Dave and Lynn's move to Shkodër. They were, it seems, almost *too* present, *too* close. Ilir was concerned that Dave and Lynn had moved "all [their] ministry" to Shkodër, and that this was now their central "ministry" base.

His subsequent actions, in relation to Dave and Lynn, can be understood, in this light, as tactical moves in order creatively to manage their presence. Ilir clearly knew the direction in which he wanted to take the church. In a sense, part of that trajectory involved moves toward increasing acceptance within already existing institutions, whether that was the Albanian State or the Albanian Evangelical Alliance. For example, Ilir explained to Rachel and me that one of his and Blerina's primary motivations for registering in a Bible School (meeting several evenings a week) was nothing to do with nurturing their faith, but was to do with the formal qualification that it offered – something which he foresaw might be required of church leaders in the future in order to maintain formal State recognition. By contrast, for Dave and Lynn, with their emphasis upon a charismatic-type authority rooted in personal *experience* and '*relationship*', recognition by formal institutions has always been of secondary importance. In our many years in Greece, we never felt the need to register a church. Part of our apathy concerning this may be explained by the fact that we preferred to stay somewhat 'on the edge' and 'hidden' from the authorities. This, combined with the fact that what we were doing was unrecognisable to the State as 'church' anyway, meant that gaining formal recognition never featured very highly on our agenda.

Again, the fact that institutional recognition was important to Ilir wasn't, in the end, a problem to Dave and Lynn. Ilir's position was different from ours in Greece, and there was a certain foresight in his appraisal of a possible future political environment that would hinder certain expressions of church life *without* such recognition. But since Ilir relationally withdrew the moment Dave and Lynn arrived in Shkodër, there was no forum in which to 'wrestle' these things through. Dave and Lynn were hoping for this kind of forum; they were looking for this kind of earthy, grounded, open dialogical

relationship. But clearly, despite trying to express this to Ilir and Blerina in a number of different ways (for example the invitational journey metaphor), this was not something that Ilir and Blerina seemed to desire, or perhaps even understand. From their perspective, it probably looked like Dave and Lynn wanted to come in and ‘disrupt’ everything they were working so hard to achieve. And there is a certain amount of truth in their perspective. In a very real sense, we *were* looking for a radical re-orientation in Ilir and Blerina’s faith. We were looking for them to embark on doing something new, to set off on a relational journey without knowing quite where it would all lead.

The convivial intruder, if invited in, *does* make a mess. Earlier, we saw how for David Carter this intrusion manifested in a dramatic re-orientation of his life trajectory and involved reaching a threshold at which he felt exposed – a point at which the values by which he had lived and oriented his life thus far were radically brought into question (most importantly, by him). David perceived this as a good thing, but the majority of people, I am pretty sure, would not. “[R]ationalization and rational organization revolutionize ‘from the outside’,” Weber states (Weber 1978[1968]:1117), “whereas charisma, if it has any specific effects at all, manifests its revolutionary power from within, from a central *metanoia* [change] of the followers’ attitudes.” This type of *metanoia* is costly, especially if experienced in adulthood where trajectories of becoming have been long established and deeply invested in, thus forming the comfortable and familiar paths in which we walk. To those quite happy with those paths, the heralds of change will undoubtedly appear as a threat. Turner’s “spring of pure possibility” – his description of *communitas* – with its “openness” and “universalism” may not appear as attractive to others as it did to David Carter. In fact “it may be regarded by the guardians of structure as dangerous and may be hedged around with taboos, and associated with ideas of purity and pollution” (Turner & Turner 1978:250-251; Turner 1974:202). After Dave and Lynn moved to Shkodër, Ilir – despite on the surface remaining polite and friendly – seemed to work hard either to contain them, or to keep them at a guarded distance. At the beginning of 2011 Ilir presented them with a list of things that were *already* happening in the church, the implicit message being that there was no room for them to contribute anything. Dave and my invitation to Ilir to start meeting up regularly for coffee and to “wrestle things through” fell to the ground. It was never taken up.

## Christians as Disciples and the Charismatic Dilemma

In order for a relationship to be charismatic, and for it to bring about the central *metanoia* of which Weber speaks, it must be *freely* entered into. “It is recognition on the part of those subject to authority which is decisive for the validity of charisma,” he writes (Weber 1968b:49). Such recognition is “freely given and guaranteed by what is held to be a ‘sign’ or proof” (ibid.). Throughout this thesis I have been describing Christian faith as just such a relationship – a voluntarily embarked upon charismatic relationship with a divine and supernatural Other. Yet this relationship is also reflected in human relationships, a ‘community’ of people who have embarked upon this similar path, who share this similar orientation, and carry this similar charisma. I experienced this particular expression of charisma when I first came into relationship with Dave and Lynn. At that time, I was *already* following Jesus as my charismatic leader. Over a period of time, I recognised the ‘voice’ of Jesus *drawing* me into relationship with Dave and Lynn (a process I described, in part, in Chapter 3). This was my entry into a particular expression of community. In a similar way, David Carter recognised something life-giving and at the same time deeply challenging for him in being connected with the life of our group. In fact, over the years, our broader community has grown as people have been added to us in this way.

In this respect, our first months in Shkodër were marked, in relation to Ilir and Blerina, by an uncomfortable sense of dilemma. Should we just let go of any expectation that relationship with them might develop beyond the merely formal, guarded and polite? Or should we, as in Dave and my coffee meeting with Ilir, continue to feed in ‘relational challenges’, in other words challenges that indicated that we were looking for our relationships with them to go a little deeper? The sensitivity that we felt centred around the fact that too much of the latter – without any response from Ilir and Blerina – would gradually steer toward coercion (remember David Carter’s feeling of being hit over the head with a baseball bat). ‘*Relationship*’ needed to be voluntarily embarked upon, to have a joy and lightness about it. It needed to be something freely desired. In order for ‘*relationship*’ to develop with Ilir and Blerina they needed to *freely* recognise that there was something valuable for them – something life-giving in fact – in their connection

with Dave and Lynn, and perhaps also with Rachel and me. If they did, then we would no doubt discover something life-giving in our connection with them.

As the months went by it became clear, particularly for Dave and Lynn that relationship with Ilir and Blerina was not going to develop beyond a merely surface relational connection. Dave and Lynn were being held at a safe distance. And so, gradually, they let go of their expectations. Meanwhile, much better relationships were developing with a handful of other people – a gregarious local restaurant owner and his family, a young Muslim couple who had a little daughter the same age as Oliver, and a number of Christians who seemed to fit uneasily within the local Evangelical church scene. In October 2011, ten months into fieldwork, Dave and I drove up to the mountains north of Shkodër for a three-day retreat with three young Albanian men, all of whom had had some connection with local churches in the city. One of the subjects raised by one of the men during those days (under the heading of “personal development”) was that of “discipleship”, and Dave’s comments in the course of that conversation help to further highlight both the charismatic nature of Dave’s own faith, and also something of what his hope had been in terms of his relationship with Ilir.

“I have been thinking a lot about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus,” Dave begins. “And I think it is very interesting, because I think there is a difference between being a Christian and being a disciple. I think that Christians go to church, whereas disciples...”

“Don’t go to church!?” one of the young men chips in, causing general laughter.

“Disciples spend time with Jesus,” Dave continues once the laughter settles down, “or with a representative of Jesus. If you want to put a word on what *we* really are about, it is about discipleship. The place [many of our friends] find difficult is the church, because they feel that there is not a lot of discipleship that goes on in the church. There’s a lot of teaching. We’re the best-taught generation that has ever existed. You can get teaching until it is pouring out your ears. But actually the nature of discipleship is this: *Jesus demonstrated*. When you read the story of the feeding of the five thousand, it is not true to say that Jesus did it. Jesus broke the bread in the beginning, but the disciples went and performed the miracle – which I find fascinating. Jesus broke it and he showed them. He did the miracle, then he said, ‘You go and do the miracle. There are twelve of you, [that’s] about four or five hundred

people each. I've shown you how to do it. Now you go and do it.' I think that's discipleship. It's not a classroom with a whiteboard and a set of different coloured pens... but he *demonstrated*. I want to say to you guys, in terms of your own personal development, you have to learn to spend time with people who are going to *show* you the way, not just *tell* you.

"Let's change the illustration for a minute," Dave continues. "If you want to be a good cook, the best way is not to buy a book, but to get in the kitchen with a person who is a good cook. The way they handle the meat, the way they... they are usually very 'free'. They're not saying, 'What do I do next?' You get alongside them, you stick with them for two or three years and – at the end of that time – you'll be a good cook too. And then you'll find people getting alongside you, wanting to learn the same thing."

Dave's ideas about discipleship come very close to Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of *communities of practice* in which they highlight how people become full participants within social configurations through an embodied relational knowledge (Wenger 1998:4). Lave and Wenger call this mode of learning "legitimate peripheral participation" and they show how it happens among groups as diverse as Yucatec Mayan midwives (Jordan 1989), Liberian tailors and members of Alcoholics Anonymous. The participatory processes that Lave and Wenger describe are not purely cerebral. Rather, they concern "*whole person[s]* acting in the world" (Lave & Wenger 1991:49; emphasis added). Liberian tailors, for instance, do not merely learn factual, codified knowledge; they imbibe manifold ways of 'being' associated with the craft as they spend time alongside seasoned 'masters'. Such integrated processes of learning are therefore as much about "the historical production, transformation, and change of persons" (ibid.:51) as they are about the acquisition of new skills; learning implying "becoming a *different person* with respect to the possibilities enabled by [the] systems of relations" within which any particular person is enmeshed (ibid.:53, emphasis added).

Dave's descriptions of discipleship follow along these same lines – one learns to become a disciple of Jesus through spending time alongside other disciples, who don't just teach you, but "show you the way", as well as allowing you to practise and participate in the process. Dave's critique of the church – and here he is addressing 'church' as his specific audience might know it – is that this situation has been strangely

reversed. ‘Church’ is high on cerebral teaching, but low on relational practice. If we may just come back to Ruel’s (2002[1982]) insights for a moment, we might say that ‘church’ values and shapes “Christians as Believers” – expressing a priority toward correct doctrine and ‘belief’ – whereas Dave’s priority is the shaping of “Christians as Disciples” – a quite different thing altogether. Dave’s critique is that in ‘church’ the teaching of creed and doctrine has taken precedence over the raw, messy and highly relational work of discipleship. In fact, when Dave comments that, “you can get teaching until it is pouring out your ears” he almost certainly has in the back of his mind the fact that Ilir and Blerina, and quite a few people from their church, were at that time spending four long evenings a week in a classroom-based Bible School, whilst, at the same time, appearing to avoid ‘*relationship*’ with us. “Discipleship” – in Dave’s terms – is not about acquiring more religious information, but about a ‘demonstration’ in which the message of the gospel is not just being spoken about, but embodied, and in which that embodiment is then passed on to others.

Dave here is sounding a lot like Tim Ingold (2011:143,159), who argues that the primary way that human beings come to ‘know’ is not through the transferral of a mass of information from one person to another – “an academic model of knowledge production” (ibid.:15) or what Paulo Freire calls a “banking system” (1996[1970]:52-67) – but rather through following, in both body and mind, paths of movement through the lifeworld.

*“Knowledge,” Ingold writes (2000a:145-146), “from a relational point of view, is not merely applied but generated in the course of lived experience, through a series of encounters in which the contribution of other persons is to orient one’s attention – whether by means of revelation, demonstration or ostention – along the same lines as their own, so that one can begin to apprehend the world for oneself in the ways, and from the positions, that they do. In every such encounter, each party enters into the experience of the other and makes that experience his or her own as well. One shares in the process of knowing, rather than taking on a pre-established body of knowledge. Indeed in this education of attention... the growth and development of the person... is to be understood relationally as a movement along a way of life, conceived not as the enactment of a corpus of rules and principles (or a ‘culture’) received from predecessors, but as the negotiation of a path through the world.”*

Compare this with another of Dave’s descriptions of discipleship: “I don’t think it’s a matter of saying to people, ‘You need to become a Christian.’ But actually, it’s more a

matter of people coming alongside you and saying, ‘I really like what you’ve got and I want to walk with you.’ And then on the journey.... one of the things that I was thinking about at the weekend [was]... these two men walked out of Jerusalem on the day that Jesus had been crucified, or the day after. They’re walking on this road to Emmaus, and suddenly a stranger comes and walks with them, and they are talking from the scriptures about all the things that the Prophets said were going to happen. And then they arrive at some place, and they sit down for a meal. And at this table Jesus [the stranger] breaks the bread, and it’s at *that* moment that their eyes are opened and they see Jesus. I think we’ve got to be willing to have people walk with us maybe for some time who don’t understand really who we are or what we are about, but one day we will break some bread, something will happen that is very ordinary, and suddenly their eyes will be opened. And they will realise Jesus changes lives. We let them walk and we reveal Christ to them, and one day their eyes are opened.”

If knowledge is, as Wenger states, at the heart of any community of practice (Wenger 1998:4) here we see very specifically what knowledge Dave conceives as ideally being at the very heart of ‘our’ lives: a knowledge of God through Jesus. It is *this* knowledge that is revealed to those who walk with us, invite us into their homes and share their bread with us. It is not the kind of knowledge that is amassed, stored up and transmitted (Ingold 2011:15). It is not, in other words, the kind of knowledge taught in Bible School. It is, rather, “generated in the course of lived experience” (Ingold 2000a:145-146) and has more to do with the re-orienting of attention (ibid.) than anything ‘gained’. Most importantly in terms of charisma, this knowledge is ‘accessed’ voluntarily through relationship. The story that Dave tells is deeply suggestive of just such a relational paradigm, illustrating not only a specifically charismatic relation, but one that is, most specifically, voluntarily constituted in love and care.

In the original episode, the resurrected Jesus comes and walks with the men, and yet remains a stranger to them. Luke writes that the men “were kept from recognizing him.”<sup>52</sup> Dave parallels this with our own experience of others walking with us “who don’t understand really who we are or what we are about.” And yet an initiative has been taken – not by us, but by others: not “a matter of [us] saying to people, ‘You need to become a Christian’” but rather “people coming alongside... and saying, ‘I really like

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<sup>52</sup> Luke 24:16

what you've got and I want to walk with you.” There is an attraction there. In the original story, the walking and talking is accompanied by a Weberian “sign” or “proof” (Weber 1968b:49) – as the men walk with Jesus their hearts, we are told, were burning within them.<sup>53</sup> Next comes an initiative of care, an initiative that is taken not by Jesus, but by others. As the men approach their home, Jesus continues as if he is not stopping, but the men insist that he stay with them, since it is late in the day. They invite Jesus into their intimate space. And it is here that the miracle happens, which results in a complete re-orientation of their lives. Around the meal table, as Jesus breaks bread, “their eyes [are] opened and they recognize[] him;” at which point he disappears from their sight.<sup>54</sup>

Here we see the charismatic relationship in full force. Remember “it is recognition on the part of those subject to authority,” Weber writes (ibid.), “which is decisive for the validity of charisma.” But here, we also see the character of this particular charismatic leader. At no point does Jesus force himself upon these men. To do so would nullify the very nature of his charisma, and devastate the sacred charismatic relationship. Recognition must be “freely given” (ibid.), and in this case it involves a subtle miracle – the opening of eyes. In terms of Dave and Lynn, the story acts as a powerful illustration of the tentative tight-rope along which they try to walk. “Jesus changes lives,” Dave says. He knows it. It is a comment that emerges easily out of the experience of his own life. And yet, just as he – at age twenty-one – would not be persuaded, so he also must resist imposing this ‘revelation’ upon others. He must, like Jesus, keep walking. And this is what Dave and Lynn seek to do. In Abrahamic style, they continue without knowing quite where the path will lead. Some people join them. Others invite them in. But when neither happens, they try to keep walking, just the same.

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<sup>53</sup> Luke 24:32

<sup>54</sup> Luke 24:31



## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

Within anthropology, there is a long history of debate concerning the usefulness of such categories as ‘religion’ (Tylor 2002[1871]; Frazer 1951[1890-1922]; Durkheim 2002[1915]; Geertz 1993[1973]; Asad 2002[1982], 2003; Lambek 2002) and ‘belief’ (Ruel 2002[1982]; Pina-Cabral 2001; Engelke 2002; Howell 2007; Lindquist & Coleman 2008). Early authors, such as Tylor and Durkheim, sought a universal definition of ‘religion’, thereby initiating the anthropological study of the subject (Lévi-Strauss 1955:428). For the former, ‘religion’ was a “belief in Spiritual Beings” (Tylor 2002:23), for the latter, “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things” (Durkheim 2002:46). Following along similar lines, Clifford Geertz sought to define ‘religion’ as a distinct ‘thing’, something that, for Geertz, concerned “transcendent truths” (Geertz 1993:98). However, critiquing Geertz – and implicitly the assumptions of those that went before him – Talal Asad (2002, 2003) argues that there can be no such thing as a *universal* definition of religion, not merely, Asad states, because the category of “religion” with which Geertz and others were working is the product of a particular way of thinking about the world that wrongly imagines religion as having an “autonomous essence” and of it therefore being a “transhistorical and transcultural phenomenon” (Asad 2002:115-116), but also because ““the basic axiom” underlying what Geertz calls “the religious perspective” is *not* everywhere the same” (ibid.:125; see Stanner 2002[1962]). As with the category of ‘religion’, the analytic usefulness of the category of ‘belief’ has also been brought into question (Lindquist & Coleman 2008; Needham 1972; Ruel 2002[1982]; Engelke 2002), its usefulness being confounded by the fact that ‘belief’ has been used to express such a variety of different concepts and meanings that the analyst must be absolutely explicit about which he or she intends to employ (Lindquist & Coleman 2008:4).

In this thesis, my method has been to leave the categories of ‘religion’ and ‘belief’ to one side, and to allow the analysis to proceed from in-depth explorations of unique and specific human lives. A significant part of that analysis has involved a reflexive

exploration of *my own* life and experience, and the processes by which *my* reality has been, and continues to be, constituted, structured, performed and produced (Lambek 2002:4; Mitchell 2015). My thesis has developed, in this regard, out of a reflexive exploration of Christian experience, one that has taken place within a specific social domain, that of twenty-first century anthropology. Thus, starting with my own experience, I have looked for anthropological, sociological and psychological tools with which to explore that experience. Inhabiting anthropology, I have sought to be sensitive to theories and voices that might assist in describing the social and spiritual landscape within which I and others live, and have lived, over the last twenty years, without unduly reducing that ‘world’ by filtering it through certain perspectives. At the same time, awareness of an audience that might not share my ontological positionality has caused me constantly to see the ‘world’ I am seeking to describe through others’ eyes, causing me to shape the narrative in such a way as to ‘allow’ those other perspectives. I am aware, at times, that my analyses and interpretations teeter between those that are reductionist and those that are not, the result, I believe, of a process of imaginatively seeking to apprehend *my* reality from other points of view (Viveiros de Castro 1998:469).

The reader should be free, in fact, to explain my world away. My aim has not been to *convert* the reader, but to clear a space within anthropology, to speak and write about certain aspects of Christian experience that otherwise might remain hidden. This has involved a tentative balance. If my conversion is conceived as the point at which I entered my fieldsite – the alternative knowledge system (or ‘world’) of Christian faith – then it could be said that my method has been one of ‘deep’ participant observation, an exploration of the Christian ‘world’ through reflexively considering my own participation within it. Since my thesis has been built upon *exploring* that experience, and the experience of others like me, it is almost inevitable that what I have produced will come very close, at times, to the art of Christian ‘witnessing’, which is, in fact, built upon a very similar ‘method’ to ethnography: the communication of what one has experienced – seen, heard, tasted, lived through, ‘witnessed’ etc. – in the ‘field’ (see Howell 2007:383; Stromberg 1993:6,33; Harding 2000:37,44-47,57-59). At the same time, since my ‘field’ is one of intimate relations, with both embodied and disembodied others, I have had to decide at what point to draw the line (Jones 1970:255; Enslin 1994:557-558; Khare 1983; Mascarenhas-Keyes 1987:189; Nakleh 1979:349; Narayan

1993). The fact that I have not told the reader the ‘two words’ that I felt the Spirit whisper to me back in 1998 is deliberate, for the ‘two words’ are indicative of all those aspects of experience that I have left out, intimate aspects that one would only wish to reveal in the context of relationships, and within atmospheres, of “profound trust” (Bakhtin 1986:97).

Perhaps I should not apologise for the apparent overlap between Christian and ethnographic ‘witnessing’ in my project, which is the result of employing a reflexive ‘ontological’ approach based in embodied experience. For it is out of such an approach that my theory has emerged. In chapter 3, we saw how certain Christians appropriate biblical narratives because they provide concrete metaphorical images (Fernandez 1972:43, 1974:123) that both situate the self and metaphorically translate convincing, often sensorial, experiences of the divine from one domain of experience to another (Fernandez 1972:46). Such narratives *feel* appropriate, and are selected, because they adequately translate a subject’s experience of a given social and relational situation. In my theorising I have done the same thing – not within a ‘Christian’ context where biblical narratives would appear to constitute the most acceptable means for that task, but within an anthropological one, laced as that is with a different set of socially acceptable and available narratives and frameworks. Hence, Max Weber’s framework of the charismatic relation has *felt* like an appropriate one in which to situate my descriptions of what relationship with God means, and of how this is experienced, in the lives of those I have described. The employment of a ‘sensorial’ framework, as exemplified in recent anthropological work on the senses, has enabled me – given me permission if you like – to speak and write about certain dimensions of ‘spiritual’ experience that might have otherwise remained hidden or unexplored. And work on metaphor and stories has helped me to understand something of what is going on when we humans ‘move’ or ‘translate’ experiences from one domain to another.

Charles Stewart, questioning the prevailing assumption that those with “strong religious convictions must lose these before they can properly do anthropology” wondered what might be learned “from the studies of committed Christians, Muslims, Hindus or even Wiccans” (Stewart 2001:328). Stewart’s challenge, of course, raises the question of what it means, within each of these contexts, to be “committed”. Situated within a specifically Christian context, my thesis puts forward a simple answer. In the lives

described here, being “committed” entails being in charismatic relation with a divine Other, with Jesus, with God. This charismatic relation opens a ‘world’ that is ‘sensed’ in particular ways and is ‘translated’ or ‘moved’ into different domains through metaphor and story. As a “committed” Christian, as someone who seeks to be in charismatic relation with God, this process of ‘sensing’ and ‘moving’ did not stop at the point that I re-entered anthropology back in 2009. Rather, it has continued to be worked out throughout the whole research process, only now within a new and different social domain. Within this domain, I have sought to present an honest account of Christian experience, and this has involved the translation, or movement, of my own and others’ experience into an alternative set of stories, narratives, metaphors and frameworks than if I were seeking to convey that experience in another context. We pick up what is available to us, and in so doing we continue to constitute our worlds.

The priority of my desire effectively to translate experience has meant that I have, at times, either drawn upon voices not commonly employed within anthropology (e.g. Jung 1990[1959]; Campbell 1968[1949]; Fowler 1995[1981]) or employed anthropological voices in unusual ways, for example my use of Tim Ingold (2000a, 2000b, 2011). As far as the latter is concerned, it could be argued that I have ‘misappropriated’ Ingold’s work on wayfaring, pathways, fields of relationships, spheres of nurture, movement through lifeworlds, perception and processes of knowing, as Ingold is talking, in all these things, about the *materiality* of existence: real rocks, real paths, real relationships. I have employed his insights and applied them also to the *non-material* world: hitting ‘metaphorical’ waypoints, following ‘spiritual’ paths, relationship with a transcendent Other. My justification in using Ingold, however, is twofold.

Firstly, in terms of the senses, the lines between the material and the non-material are not as clearly cut as one might, at first, presume. An extended sensorium perceives and experiences God as real, as another character within one’s field of relationships, creating one’s sphere of nurture. Following Him is experienced as a path, in which one *feels* one’s way along, one *listens* to and is guided by the stories of others (both embodied and transcendent) through which these others are able to share, in a relational context, their own experiences of travelling through the lifeworld, that world encompassing both material and non-material elements. I have for the most part,

throughout my thesis, referred to God as ‘transcendent’, but of course this is only half the story, the other half also being present throughout the text. He is also immanent, present in and through the world, in the very materiality of existence, and, of course, embodied in the lives of others and in one’s own life. Perhaps Ingold, whose writing at times resonates with the voices of certain Christian mystics, has ‘touched’ something of this mystery. Secondly, I have used Ingold because his insights ‘fit’ and help elucidate the kind of experience that I am seeking to translate; they make clearer, I believe, the ‘world’ I am seeking to describe. In this sense, whether or not Ingold is writing about a completely different sphere of experience (even though I am not entirely convinced he is) is beside the point. His voice is one that I have ‘picked up’ in order to describe and elucidate (and indeed, continue to constitute) the ‘world’ I am seeking to describe.

I said that my starting place was to leave both the categories of ‘religion’ *and* ‘belief’ to one side. Through considering a particular Christian ‘world’ as an alternative *knowledge* system, I embarked upon the thesis ‘journey’ by putting *knowing* at the heart of my enquiry. How do we humans come to know the things we know? A reflexive exploration of my own conversion seemed like a good starting place to begin to answer this question in terms of the kind of *knowing* that Christians engage in. What emerged from this exploration was the significant role that the senses, stories and metaphor played within that process. However, what *ultimately* emerged was the fact that at the core of my own experience and understanding of life, certainly as that exists today and since my conversion, is a relationship with God that is entirely charismatic in nature. This relationship, in fact, aligns with certain notions of ‘faith’ and ‘belief’ that have been identified by both Christians and anthropologists: namely, ‘faith’ or ‘belief’ as *trust or confidence in someone or something* (Ruel 2002; Lindquist & Coleman 2008:5; Cox 2009:4; Fowler 1995:11). So having put the general category of ‘belief’ to one side, ‘belief’ in a very specific sense emerged from my reflexive exploration, as it did through the exploration of other lives too. This brings us back to Lindquist and Coleman’s point that the analytic usefulness of the category of ‘belief’, due to its common use in expressing so many different concepts and meanings, is entirely dependent upon the analyst being specific about what meaning he or she is investing in the term when using it (Lindquist & Coleman 2008:4).

Of course, Christians are sometimes referred to, and often refer to themselves, as ‘believers’. But what does this *actually* mean? In continuing to place the category of ‘belief’ to one side, and choosing to look at Christian lives and experience, instead, through the lens of charismatic relationship constituted through the complex interplay of senses, stories and metaphor, we get much closer, I ‘believe’, to what many Christians mean when they describe themselves as ‘believers’. We get behind the category of ‘belief’ and move toward Christians’ experience of living and being in the world. Not to say that it would be appropriate to apply such a framework to *all* Christian experience. My interest, from the start, has been in exploring a particular *type* of Christian experience, a particular *type* of ‘faith’, of which my own is one example. The next step is to go more public – having established a thesis, to float this thesis out on the ocean of human experience and see how much of what I have described resonates with the experience of others. Perhaps it is only in this way that one of the questions raised by the ‘ontological turn’, concerning the incommensurability of ‘worlds’, can be answered. In this regard, I wonder how much of what I have written resonates not only with other Christian experience (or not) but, even more interestingly, with the experience of others who would not associate themselves with Christian things at all.

Certain features of Christian experience, when ‘moved’ into the anthropological domain and into the frameworks I have suggested, become highlighted. In sum, through an analysis of my own conversion, I introduced the complex interplay of three factors (stories, senses and the charismatic relation) in shaping my world, alongside the centrality of ‘the heart’ (as a centre of conceptual understanding, of ‘spiritual’ perception, and of charismatic devotion) within processes of knowing. Next, in turning to look at Dave and Lynn’s lives, I examined how a particular understanding of the charismatic relation (‘openness’ to the intrusions of a divine Other) translates into an experience of life as a transformational ‘journey’ of faith in which one’s perceptions and conceptions are continually open to renewal. This process was exemplified in the life of David Carter who, in displaying an ‘openness’ of ‘heart’ to just such an intrusion, experienced a radical transformation in how his relationship with God (his charismatic relationship with a divine Other) and his relationship with others were constituted. I employed James Fowler’s (1995) faith-stage scheme, not only to analyse David’s life, but also to expand upon the particular direction in which a ‘journey’ of faith might head. Fowler’s descriptions of the different stages adequately describe a trajectory that

is common to the experience of quite a number of Christians I know. Finally, through looking at certain relationships that *didn't* develop in the way that we had hoped, I introduced the charismatic dilemma – a desire for others to experience certain dimensions of *Life* as one has experienced those things oneself, but at the same time, given the charismatic nature of one's own way of being in the world, understanding and experiencing the limits of one's own ability positively to affect, at a deep level, other people's lives.

I have suggested that my work responds and contributes to at least three recent debates within anthropology. Firstly, in contributing an ethnography *from within* an alternative knowledge system of Christian faith, whilst drawing on anthropological work on the senses (Classen 1993; Classen & Howes 1996; Howes 2009) and phenomenological approaches attending to embodied experience (e.g. Csordas 1988, 1994; Desjarlais & Throop 2011; Mitchell 2015), my work presents a *particular* answer to the issues of dealing with alterity as raised by the proponents of the 'ontological turn' (Henare, Holbraad & Wastell 2007; Alberti et al. 2011; Holbraad 2012). In presenting a work that is, I hope, non-intellectually exclusive, deeply ethnographic, highly reflexive and focused upon embodied experience, I have embarked upon a trajectory which is more in line with the critics of this movement, than with the movement itself (Killick 2014; Vigh & Sausdal 2014; Mitchell 2015). However, along with these critics, I agree that the 'ontological' challenges raised by this movement cannot be ignored, most importantly the "political act" of taking seriously "alternative visions of the world" (Killick 2014). Secondly, my work has responded to recent interest, within the anthropology of Christianity, concerning phenomenological experiences of God (Luhmann 2012; Cannell 2014; Stromberg 2014), as well as to how these experiences might be addressed in ethnographic work (Bialecki 2014; Mitchell 2015). In highlighting the role of stories and metaphor, and showing how these provide more concrete images for things that are 'spiritually' sensed (Fernandez 1972, 1974; Classen 1993; Gavrilyuk & Coakley 2012; Lootens 2012), I hope to have introduced a framework by which the 'language' of the Spirit might be more fruitfully explored. This, I believe, opens up a whole new line of enquiry.

Finally, my work has responded to the call for those with "strong religious convictions" (Stewart 2001:328) to practise anthropology without feeling a need to lose those

convictions, as well as to ongoing debates concerning whether secularism (Stewart 2001; Pina-Cabral 2001; Yalçın-Heckmann 2001; Gellner 2001; Kapferer 2001) and/or methodological atheism (Ewing 1994; Engelke 2002; Howell 2007; Bialecki 2014) have constituted a hindrance to anthropological research. I hope to have shown how it is possible to practise anthropology from a standpoint (Howell 2007) other than methodological atheism, and that a high degree of reflexivity is crucial to this task. However, as feminists have long ago made clear (Mies 1983; Haraway 1988; Harding 1987, 1992; Narayan 1993; Enslin 1994), such reflexivity remains crucial not just for some, but for *all* standpoints, and *all* research. I have applied this level of reflexivity to my exploration of Christian experience, particularly as this has related to our group in the Balkans. However, upon the completion of my studies, this level of reflexivity might now be interestingly applied within another sphere. Stewart wondered what anthropology and anthropologists might learn as committed Christians and others began to practise the discipline (Stewart 2001:328). I am perhaps now well positioned to begin to reflect upon another side to Stewart's question: reflexively to explore what committed Christians, such as myself, might learn from practising anthropology.



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