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Melting the Matrices:
Structure, Anti-Structure, and the Emerging Conversation

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Abstract

This thesis investigates two cases of Christian churches, which as a part of their mission seek to accommodate people who would otherwise not be interested in church. One of these communities consider themselves a part of the global 'emerging church' movement, and the other does not. I argue that both communities are employing what I call 'de-compartmentalization' strategy in order to adopt a pragmatic relationship with social and political issues. Furthermore I discuss the case of the emerging church community as an example of 'paraliminal community'; a concept I develop from the work of Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One – How Is Church Popular Culture?	1
Chapter Two – Theorizing the Emerging Conversation	9
Chapter Three – Research Methods	35
Chapter Four – Setting the Scene: Hamilton A and Hamilton B	47
Chapter Five – Decompartmentalization Strategy	64
Chapter Six – Paraliminal Community	94
Chapter Seven – Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research	121
Works Cited	132
Appendix A – Phone Script (Pastor)	135
Appendix B – Phone Script (Member)	136
Appendix C – Consent Form	137
Appendix D – Thank You Letter	139
Appendix E – Question Guides	140
Appendix F – Interviewee Profiles	149
Appendix G – Research Ethics Board Approval	152
Appendix H – Research Ethics Board Application	154

Chapter One – How is Church Popular Culture?

The drop in attendance of Christian churches in North America is “old news” to most people. Churches, and especially mainline and evangelical churches, are experiencing increasingly dwindling attendance in Canada¹. Fifty years ago to suggest that Christianity would have to scramble to become more “relevant” would have been laughable, but that is precisely the kind of discussion being held by church leadership groups the nation over.

At a time like this, why would I bother studying church – especially as *popular* culture? This is an obvious question, which deserves some attention before I continue. Fran Martin defines popular culture as “the everyday culture ‘of the people’, in opposition to high culture, mass culture, or hegemonic culture” (Martin 2003: 216 *glossary*). If we accept this definition, I would argue that failing to consider church in the study of popular culture is a serious oversight. According to the Statistics Canada General Social Survey conducted in 2001, 20% of Canadians attend church every week. Compared to the 2.57 million, (roughly 8% of Canadians,) who watch “Desperate Housewives” every week, church still has a formidable reach for a set of institutions in decline. Reginald Bibby points out that protestant congregations actually have not declined between 1975 and 2000, and that even Catholic attendance has recently started to rise among young people (Bibby 2006). While church has been written off by many as

¹ This is both a popular notion and a fact. According to Statistics Canada the number of people claiming to be protestant dropped 8.2 % from 1991 to 2001 (<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/tables/canada/cdamajor.cfm>), and by denomination, the majority of mainline and evangelical churches saw losses over that same time span (<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Analytic/companion/rel/tables/canada/cdaprot.cfm>).

irrelevant to modern life, evidently it is still a part of many lives, and even as it shrinks in some circles it grows in vitality in others. In terms of popular, everyday, cultural practice, “church” (and the practices surrounding church) has an incredible presence in the lives of many people.

Reginald W. Bibby (1993) gives a history of “religion” in Canada, particularly charting the decline of traditional church congregations in his book *Unknown Gods* (Bibby 1993). He questions the strategies of Canadian churches, and states that often there is no real strategy to speak of, evangelical or otherwise. In his conclusion he makes a series of recommendations and suggestions for the Canadian Church to maximize its potential. Many of these recommendations center around the targeting of specific people and groups – the current norm would be to target everyone and tailor to none specifically. Instead, Bibby would have the Church engage the culture to appeal to the needs and desires of Canadians (Bibby 1993: 288-290). This is a strategy based on a marketing model, and Bibby tells Canadian churches to repeatedly ask themselves “What business are we in?” (Bibby 1993: 283). Perhaps if church is not considered culturally relevant, it is because it has failed to systematically win that relevance by appealing to the population.

Particularly pertinent to my study is Bibby’s suggestion to re-examine the benefit of having a permanent building or facility for worship services.

A good case can be made – and probably has been since the first religious group was formed – for not having any permanent physical facilities at all. Of course we can readily recite the reasons church buildings are necessary, which boil down to needing a place to hold activities. Yet, given the role that facilities seem to play in literally grounding congregations, turning them inward and contributing to means-end inversion, an equally convincing case can be made for dispensing almost altogether with physical facilities (Bibby 1993: 303).

Bibby makes this recommendation based mainly on the increased potential for flexibility and creativity.

In the fourteen years since Bibby made these recommendations there has been a shift in mentality for many coming out of specifically evangelical circles. The most notable example is the *emerging church*, a broad and varied movement (which will be fully discussed in Chapter Two). The emerging church is most often discussed as coming out of American evangelicalism, but it is a global movement that is cross-traditional and cross-denominational. Some within this movement seem to have embraced postmodern capitalism, the “cultural logic” identified and lamented by Fredric Jameson (1991), employing cultural codes, collages of styles, and liturgical pastiche, in order to become an alternative and specific choice, just as Bibby suggests. While I have yet to discover a church community that is not at least somewhat grounded in a physical facility, there is a trend within the emerging church to meet in places of leisure, rather than a dedicated sanctuary. This has not been uncommon in the past – for reasons of convenience and lack of funds churches have often met in places such as high school auditoriums and community centers. This recent trend is much more intentional about the use of space, often choosing locations such as cafes, pubs and bars, dance clubs, and movie theaters. I should note that while these two phenomena are most closely associated with the emerging church, they are not limited to church communities who identify with that movement.

The two churches that I studied for this project have both expressed an aim to attract people who are disinterested in traditional forms of church. That is one of the

defining features of both communities, and digging deeper I found that these churches are largely populated by people who have developed a distaste for church because of their previous experiences, and have come to reject the kinds of communities that they came from. The leadership of both communities also describe similar experiences, and though they have all held positions of leadership in primarily evangelical churches in the past, the practices and structures of their current church communities are largely shaped by a desire not to emulate that background and to appeal to others who have been alienated by it.

One of the church communities target a demographic they² call the “emerging global culture”, who are typically university educated, well-traveled, technically proficient, and (popular) culturally savvy. As will be discussed in great detail in the coming pages, this has affected the manner in which they deliver their message, the setting in which they meet, and their choice of city locations.

The other church community has decided to target the people of a small city neighborhood, which is known for being an economically depressed area. This has affected the kinds of programs they run (or lack-thereof), the setting of their worship, the sorts of services they offer, and in general a local community focus (a focus on the needs and desires of the kinds of people who live in that neighborhood).

Both communities studied for this project use leisure spaces for their weekly meetings. One of them holds its meetings in a warehouse that has been renovated into a theater, but perhaps more interestingly, recordings are played of the original service in

² Grammatically, the discussion of communities presents a problem. Is a community a single entity or a collection of individuals that requires one to use the plural when referring to them? In most cases I have elected to use the plural, however the singular is used in a few cases throughout this document.

Famous Players theaters around the greater Toronto area. The majority of its membership experience the service in this fashion. The other community studied for this project owns and operates a café. This café is a community meeting place, and also acts as a venue for art-shows and for local musicians.

While the use of space and the self-positioning as an alternative church are probably the most instantly interesting aspects shared by these two communities, I discovered (and will argue) that these aspects overlay an emphasis from both communities on holistic living, and strategies that I will refer to as *decompartmentalization*. Additionally, the alternative nature of these groups stems from the conscious avoidance and deconstruction of particularly evangelical traditions, language, and structures. This has helped feed the commitment to the decompartmentalization strategy, but has also had an affect on the way these groups operate as institutions, and ultimately as communities. It is these underlying aspects – the decompartmentalization strategies, and the way these groups have re-organized themselves as communities – that have formed the focus of my investigation and analysis for this project.

As already indicated, I have elected to look at two different church communities to examine these phenomena. Both groups exist in the city of Hamilton, Ontario. Hamilton is a city of approximately 500, 000 people, about an hour south-west of Toronto. Hamilton is generally considered a working-class town and is largely driven by two steel mills. The downtown area is generally poor, and not considered a tourist draw as is the case with some large cities. The majority of streets in downtown Hamilton are one-way (either east/west, or north/south). The benefit of this system is that lights can be

timed such that traffic can move more swiftly through the downtown core than would generally be the case for a city of its size. The drawback is that it can make some places in the downtown area difficult to get to, or difficult to park near, and it can be especially frustrating for people visiting from out of town who are not used to the system or familiar with the area. In general, it reinforces the notion that downtown Hamilton is somewhere to move through quickly rather than a destination in and of itself. As one moves south, or “up the hill” Hamilton begins to resemble the suburban cities and towns that comprise and surround the Greater Toronto Area- cleaner, more uniform, and wealthier.

One church community studied for this project is a Salvation Army church-plant in the Beasley neighborhood in downtown Hamilton (which they report is the poorest neighborhood in Hamilton and the third or fourth poorest in all of Canada). For reasons of privacy, I will use the alias “Hamilton A” for this church community. Hamilton A owns a café which it also operates, and they consider the running of this café as a non-profit business a service to the community. Hamilton A consider themselves a part of what is called “the emerging church” which is a cross-denominational movement coming primarily out of evangelicalism. As I will discuss throughout this study, this will (and does) have a profound impact on the doctrine and practice of Hamilton A.

The other church community is one of many “sites” of a large church based in Oakville, Ontario. Oakville is a suburb of Toronto, approximately twenty-five minutes north-east of Hamilton. This is one of the richest areas in the Greater Toronto Area. I will refer to this Church community by the alias “Hamilton B” throughout the study. This church belongs to the Brethren in Christ denomination, which comes out of the Anabaptist tradition. The original “site” is in Oakville, and there are other sites (held in

Famous Players theaters) around the Hamilton/ GTA area, and now extending into the Kitchener/ Waterloo and Guelph area. I will be focusing particularly on the Hamilton site of this church community. (“Hamilton B” will refer to the entire church community, including Oakville, Toronto, Mississauga, etc. when I am referring only to the Hamilton site, I will call it the Hamilton site of Hamilton B.) The Hamilton site of Hamilton B is in the south-eastern quarter of Hamilton which is the more wealthy and suburban setting. The theater where they meet is surrounded by the typical strip-mall plaza stores found all over the Golden Horseshoe. Unlike Hamilton A, Hamilton B do not consider themselves a part of the “emerging church” movement.

The analysis and comparison of these two church communities will serve two clear purposes for this study. First, these communities use very similar language, emphasize similar doctrinal stances, champion similar social issues, and have many similar values. However, they are profoundly different in terms of structure, demographics, and parts of their strategy as well. In many ways these two communities represent the opposite extremes within progressive Christian movements (all within the borders of Hamilton). This study will provide a unique opportunity to get a better picture of the breadth of the phenomena being studied for this project. Secondly, the emerging church has really only been around for ten or fifteen years, and has yet to be thoroughly investigated. Many aspects of the emerging church are new, and many are a re-branding or re-contextualization of previous movements or practices. For this reason studying two groups with similar mind-sets and attempting similar things, one of which considers itself part of the emerging church and one of which does not, will provide a chance to isolate and theorize the emerging church against other progressive Christian churches. I will

begin in Chapter Two by discussing the emerging church and laying the foundation for our discussion of this movement.

Chapter Two – Theorizing the Emerging Conversation

Hamilton A, and to some extent Hamilton B, cannot be properly discussed without examining the movement known as the “emerging church”. This is a cross-denominational movement with broad and varied characteristics. While the churches that would be identified as, or would self identify as emerging church are often vibrant and growing communities, the term itself is so broad as to render it nearly meaningless, “the phrase ‘emerging church’ has become something of a catch-all by-word for ‘new ways of being church’ (Guest & Taylor 2006: 50). The term almost always means that a church attempts to engage the popular notion of postmodernism, and is usually coming out of an evangelical background (of which an emerging church tends to be quite critical). Beyond those two criteria (which themselves may be debatable) nothing goes without saying.

The first question that must be dealt with, before one can even think about “emerging” culture, is in what ways, if any, does the emerging church actually exist? I would argue that the answer to that question is complicated. As I have already stated there is no agreed-upon criteria for what makes a church or an individual “emerging.” There is no emerging organization or governing body. There is a network called *emergent* or *emergent village* in the United States and the United Kingdom, and one in Canada called *resonate* but they are merely collectives associated with the emerging church and function mostly as forums for discussion and as a resource. They have no power or jurisdiction over their membership, and in fact *resonate* has no record of membership. What this means is that there is nothing one can do that would unequivocally identify one’s self with the emerging church or as outside of the emerging church, and neither is

there anyone with the authority to make such a decision. For this reason I see no grounds to describe the emerging church as any kind of unified movement, especially since the practices and motivations of these groups can be so varied.

The term “the emerging conversation” is often used to describe the debates and flow of information that occur, mainly via the internet, globally. At some level I think this is the most accurate way to describe the “emerging” phenomenon. What *is* real is the literature at the heart of the emerging church, and the discussion surrounding it. The following section will review the literature that has started the “conversation” before discussing the ways in which the “emerging church” has been theorized so far.

Brian McLaren is closely associated with *emergent*, a network of friends in the United States, and has written several important emerging church texts, notably *A New Kind of Christian* (2001), *Church on the Other Side* (1999), *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2001). If any organization is most associated with the emerging church, it is ‘emergent’, and if any one author has most shaped the conversation it would be Brian McLaren. McLaren, quite controversially, encourages the church to accept postmodernity, and to operate within the “postmodern matrix” through accepting a “limited relativism” (McLaren 1999) and “a generous orthodoxy” (McLaren 2001). Limited relativism refers to the position that while certain beliefs are fundamental to Christianity, many, if not most positions currently held by the different branches of the Church are in fact peripheral. McLaren boldly declares that there is no “one true Christianity.”

The term “generous orthodoxy” is very similar, “I’m saying little or nothing new, but rather I’m listening to a wider variety of older and newer voices than most people do. I’m trying to take them all seriously, which itself is, perhaps, my chief novelty”

(McLaren 2001: 21). The purpose of *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2001) is to explain all the positive contributions (according to McLaren) that every Christian tradition has to offer, while arguing that none of them alone are completely and absolutely correct.

McLaren is always most critical of conservative evangelicalism, a fact that he himself admits, explaining that he came from this background and has been most hurt by this tradition. This is likely the foundation of the common claim that the emerging church is a self-reflexive critique of evangelicalism, and indeed it is not hard to understand why McLaren would resonate most with others who have become disenchanted with their evangelical backgrounds. One of McLaren's ideas that has been the hardest to swallow for the mainstream evangelicals is the treatment of other religions as conversation "partners." McLaren unpacks this statement by saying, "a generous orthodoxy of the kind explored in this book, while never pitching its tent in the valley of relativism, nevertheless seeks to see members of other religions and non-religions not as enemies but as beloved neighbors, and whenever possible as dialog partners and even collaborators" (McLaren 2001: 35).

Dan Kimball (2003), an emerging church author and practitioner, chronicles his own discovery that the "seeker-sensitive" model of ministry he had been taught had ceased to be effective. Kimball begins *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for the New Generations* (2003) by outlining some common reasons which the "unchurched" reject Christianity: that Christianity is man-made, and that Christians are closed-minded, arrogant, and judgmental. The premise of Kimball's argument is that there has been a widespread cultural and philosophical shift, and the world no longer understands things the way it used to. The new generation is said to be post-Christian and "postmodern,"

Pure modernism held to a single, universal worldview and moral standard, a belief that all knowledge is good and certain, truth is absolute, individualism is valued, and thinking, learning, and beliefs should be determined systematically and logically. Postmodernism, then, holds there is no single universal worldview. All truth is not absolute, community is valued over individualism, and thinking, learning, and beliefs can be determined nonlinearly (Kimball 2003: 49-50).

Kimball's book essentially argues that the complaints of the "unchurched" (listed above) stem directly from the failure of evangelical Christians to develop new models of communication and ministry to engage these "post-Christian", "postmodern" people. Kimball reiterates many of McLaren's ideas, including his willingness to reach out to other religions. The second half of *The Emerging Church* is dedicated to practical suggestions for forming new models of communication and ministry, but one important aspect of the emerging church described by Kimball is a return to religious symbols, and sometimes a Roman Catholic aesthetic (i.e. dim lighting, iconic images, and candles).

"Liquid Church" is a term coined by Pete Ward from the UK. Ward's thesis is two-fold – first that Christians should view Church as a series of relationships and communications rather than a group that necessarily gathers in one place. He cites the writings of the Apostle Paul as precedent for this conception of Church. Paul's use of the word "church" in the epistles refers to various different sizes of gatherings, from a household of people up to everyone who is "in Christ". Ward's second argument is that the evangelical Church has failed to accept that western culture has shifted from one of production to one of consumption, drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's theory of liquid modernity. His suggestion is that churches should engage a culture that forms identity through consumer choices, and this means both specializing and constantly changing. Ward points out how inter-church connections and flow of information are made more

possible by commodification, using worship music as an example (Ward 2002: 47).

Traditionally the church has equated consumption with materialism, and condemned it on this basis. Ward argues that consumption is neither to be celebrated nor condemned. He does not ask the church to play a role in creating a liquid reality, but rather to accept that it is our current reality (and one that has its ups and downs just as solid modernity did). Ward argues that viewing consumption as purely interest in the object is an incomplete analysis of that action. When someone shops he/she is interested in the meaning and symbolism of that object, and that he/she is constructing his/her own identity through those purchases. Ward challenges the church to engage the un-churched on this level, through commodity partially, offering an alternative identity “in Christ” (Ward 2002: Chapter 6).

Steve Taylor (2005) also uses Zigmunt Bauman’s notion of liquid modernity to discuss community in the emerging church. Taylor argues that church communities need to incorporate elements of both *peg community* (through which otherwise disconnected people are focused on a common activity or spectacle) and *ethical community* (which describes a group of committed and *submitted* individuals). Taylor suggests that the former is necessary to remain open and approachable, and the latter necessary for durability and depth. In a chapter of *The Out of Bounds Church* (2005), Taylor discusses how several different forms of emerging church could improve their ability to foster both kinds of community (Taylor 2005: 115-131).

Taylor also touches on an aspect of emerging culture that I have yet to mention, that being the tendency to mix traditional liturgies and images with images and sounds from contemporary commercial culture. This is a practice Taylor calls “DJ-ing” or

“remixing” in reference to the way music DJs mix different records and samples. A common emerging church stereotype, acknowledged by both Taylor and Dan Kimball (2004), is a dark room lit dimly by candles and TV screens. Taylor here describes the significance of this aesthetic and practice,

This is the word made flesh in the postmodern culture. It is the embrace of Christ as the image of God (Colossians 1:15). It is not Christ *or* Culture, but Christ imaged *in* culture. It is a missional engagement that practices both connective expression through images while allowing subversion and resistance (Taylor 2005: 139).

This is a practice that is adopted to varying degrees by both Hamilton A and Hamilton B.³

The preceding does not represent the parameters of the “emerging conversation” but have become significant landmarks in the process, and common touchstones for those engaging in the conversation. This is a starting point for many of the ideas that have followed in the various emerging groups. I view this theory as an artifact in this case, in that it is part of what I am studying. For this reason I have only described the ideas rather than critically analyzing them.

Most likely because the term emerging church has become such a broad descriptor, there has been effort recently to classify different sections or “camps” that fit under the umbrella of “emerging.” John Drane (2006) identifies two kinds of emerging

³ One example of DJ-ing provided by Taylor is an Advent liturgy that incorporates Joan Osborne’s song “One of Us” (Taylor 2005: 145). For extensive examples of DJ-ing liturgies and an expanded discussion of the theories and ideas behind these kinds of practices, see “Postcard 8: Cultural Samplers” from Steve Taylor’s Book *The Out of Bounds Church* (2005), and Dan Kimball’s book *Emerging Worship* (2004).

church. The first is primarily interested in becoming more missional⁴ and in presenting Christianity to a postmodern culture. The second is more skeptical of the existing “establishment” and has as a primary goal tearing down and deconstructing those structures. This second stream Drane specifically associates with the United States. This distinction between the emerging church in America and in the UK is not an uncommon one, and seems to have become a familiar description of the “flavor” of a given emerging group.

Scott Bader-Saye (2006) similarly attempts to categorize the emerging church, himself coming up with three different types – “evangelical pragmatists”, “post-evangelical emergents”, and “mainline missionals”. Evangelical Pragmatists are described as groups interested in a style change, but are interested in neither theological nor ecclesial changes. Bader-Saye identifies this as the least interesting kind of emerging church, and immediately removes them from his discussion on this basis. Underlying Bader-Saye’s brief account of this kind of group is the notion that beyond not being “interesting” he does not view these as authentic examples of emerging church. They are cast as trend-followers that miss the real point of the emerging conversation. This idea is certainly debatable since both Ward and McLaren identify translating the same message into “postmodern” language as a project the church should undertake. However, the groups that Bader-Saye identifies as evangelical pragmatists, he would seem to suggest,

⁴ “Missional” is a word that is often used in emerging literature (as well as by both groups studied in this project) though it is rarely clearly defined, but always implies an outward focus. Dan Kimball (2003) states that the emerging church must measure success *missionally*. He breaks this down being “salt and light” (Matt. 5:13-16), engaging social justice and “caring for the needy”, gaining a positive reputation from outsiders, and living pure and holy lives. This, Kimball suggests, will influence people to follow God (Kimball 2003: 15-16).

are unaware or uninterested in any theoretical grounding to such an action. Separating what one does not like from what one does seems to be largely the point of categorizing the emerging church.

Post-Evangelical emergents are identified closely with Brian McLaren, his church Cedar-Ridge, and the United States in general. According to Bader-Saye, one of the most important features of the post-evangelical emergents is a “spirit of inquiry over doctrine” (Bader-Saye 2006: 13). This is coupled with a sometimes-intense mistrust of institutionalized church. Post-evangelical emergents tend to reject traditional denominations in favor of independent or non-denominational status. This skepticism of institutionalization is illustrated by Bader-Saye’s account of the emergent village’s reaction to having a new national director. Many members were upset with someone holding that position, and eventually the job’s title was changed to “national coordinator” (Bader-Saye 2006: 14). Bader-Saye relays the apparently common criticism that these Post-Evangelical Emergents “poach” from whatever tradition they want in an ad-hoc manner, not submitting themselves to be grounded to any one.

The third category, “mainline missionals”, seems to be most favorably described by Bader-Saye. These are most often associated with the UK and perhaps even the Church of England. They maintain ties to traditional denominations and Bader-Saye describes them as “post-liberal” and most importantly “missional”.

These various categories are perhaps useful in that they identify and attempt to describe different discourses under the larger “emerging” discourse. Members of groups that identify themselves as “emerging” or individuals with blogs *do* talk about the differences between the United States and the United Kingdom, and between the

mainline and the non-denominational, and (no doubt) between the authentic and the followers. But, for the same reason that I argue the emerging conversation can only be looked at as a discourse rather than a unified movement, I argue that these categories do not really help us to segment and separate distinct parts within the emerging church. While there might be some churches that fit nicely under one or the other of these brackets, there are many that feature aspects of more than one (and possibly of none). Surely if there is a willfully blurred line between what is emerging and what is not, there can be no solid walls within the emerging church. And what would be the purpose of imagining them?

Bader-Saye's stated objective is to "get a handle on a 'fuzzy' conversation" by first of all classifying and categorizing emerging churches, and secondly, to "adding to" and "guiding" the conversation. It is the "guiding" part that reveals why he needs to categorize. If the existing "emerging" conversation only accumulates ideas with no criteria for rejecting any, it is certainly difficult to guide. By categorizing the emerging church, Bader-Saye is attempting to trim those categories that don't interest him. The remaining categories can be scrutinized by the imaginary criteria he has set up for them. This attempt ignores something that is fundamental to the emerging church – that by its very nature it defies classification and limitation in any official sense. In another attempt to classify different varieties of emerging church Scot McKnight discusses the emerging church in terms of "themes",

Following are five themes that characterize the emerging movement. I see them as streams flowing into the emerging lake. No one says the emerging movement is the only group of Christians doing these things, but together they crystallize into the emerging movement (McKnight 2007: 36).

McKnight's themes are Prophetic, Postmodern, Praxis-Oriented, Post-Evangelical, and Political. While his language of fluidity makes these "streams" a more accurate and helpful way to discuss the emerging movement, ultimately he also uses this discussion as a means by which to separate the people he agrees with from the people he does not agree with.

Bader-Saye is by far not the only one to have taken up the project of "guiding" the conversation, or making recommendations for the future of the emerging church. In fact much of the academic literature on the subject focuses on this very task. Gladys Ganiel (2006) studied two Northern Ireland emerging groups, *Zero28* and *ikon*, which are both based in Belfast. Ganiel describes how these emerging groups are situated particularly within evangelicalism in Northern Ireland. On an international level they react against evangelicalism's tendency to focus on personal morality at the expense of social justice; international in the sense that this is not unique to the emerging conversation in Northern Ireland. *Locally* they focus on reversing their own role, as evangelicals, in the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

Ganiel's findings illuminate an important concern in the study of emerging churches. Even if we accept that deconstructing evangelicalism is important to a certain kind of emerging church, the critiques, the doctrinal amendments (or removals), and the practices that flow from them are particular and often have meaning only in their specific contexts. Ganiel describes an event at a *zero28* that included a communion "parody" during which participants were administered chocolate cake and champagne. She reports that some *zero28* members were offended, not because it made a mockery of communion,

but because they had missed the satirical intention of the demonstration and thought that zero28 was backsliding into a Protestant view of the sacraments.

Towards the end of her study Ganiel makes the following suggestion,

Engaging theologically with post-modernity is a task that the UK and American leaders have set themselves, and this requires addressing issues like truth and the validity of other religions. Critics of the emerging church say that these are questions that the movement has not answered adequately or definitively. The onus is on the emerging church to respond to such critics. Whether the emerging church in Northern Ireland has a distinct contribution to make in this area remains to be seen (Ganiel 2006: 46).

Whether Ganiel is right or wrong about what the emerging church needs to do (to be a better church presumably) is not the concern of this study. However, Ganiel's statement reveals an unwillingness on her part to conceive of a new way to talk about what is happening in emerging circles. Instead, she forces the conversation into the familiar mould of a unified entity that acts as one and can be held accountable to respond to criticisms leveled at it.

Alan Jamieson (2006) attempts to carve out a term from "emerging" (which he acknowledges means next to nothing, and can be claimed by just about any church) that means something specific and denotes legitimacy. He uses Kester Brewin's distinction between *emerging* and *emergent*. Chief among the principals that constitute "emergence" is "bottom-up" and "organic" development, as opposed to "dictatorial" leadership, or a complete absence of leadership. In this respect Jamieson's work follows Bader-Saye's project of classifying what is legitimate and worth talking about as dismissing all that does not fit into this classification. Not surprisingly many of Jamieson's conclusions are

prescriptive. He suggests that “post-churches” should draw from two different sources, what he calls “dual parentage”.

It is crucial to the sustainability and impact of emergent forms of church that they have two parents. Like the Cistercian monastery they need their mother, whom I describe as the historical Christian Church. They equally need their father, the post-modern cultural milieu in which we increasingly find ourselves. Both parents are essential. From the Mother's side come the scriptures, sacraments, liturgies, orders, theologies, stories, symbols and prayers of generations of Christians and Christian communities. From the Father comes the understanding and ability to move freely within a new cultural context shaped both by global systems – communication, media, currency and politics – and also by new forms of relating that are influenced by the breakdown of family, lessened personal commitment to institutions of all types, increased personal mobility and privatized forms of leisure and living (Jamieson 2006: 66).

Arguably Jamieson's parent analogy betrays a desire to fit new forms of church into a familiar framework. He does not unpack the gendering of the “parentage”. I will not dwell on this point at length, but it is interesting to note that he conceives of tradition as the realm of the female and understanding of the world as male, leaving his own essentializing of gender without scrutiny. This serves to highlight the fact that a study that investigates gender roles in the emerging church is something that is missing in the academic literature thus far.

Jamieson's analysis places a great deal of importance on “sustainability” despite his recognition of “emergence” as a liminal state. His privileging of sustainability and balance is not at all uncommon in “emerging church” criticism. Guest and Taylor (2006) (similarly to Ganiel) attempt to evaluate the successes and failures of two emerging churches based on typical solid church criteria. First, Guest and Taylor clarify that they are not assuming the reality of postmodernism, but simply its importance in the “post-evangelical internal discourse.” Guest and Taylor then pose the problem of the

“postmodern worldview” – since doctrinal conformity is either rejected completely, or at the very least not stressed, it is difficult for a movement that accepts this worldview to maintain its Christianity. The study focuses on discovering what is necessary for an emerging church to become sustainable as a Christian church, but also as an organization which can achieve longevity. From their two case studies they conclude that sustainability is most possible when an emerging church can,

Develop sustainable and meaningful rituals of affiliation and ritualized forms of engagement, do not engage in a flight from modernity to the ultimate exclusion of rhetorical forms (e.g. sermons, talks), offer some special autonomy and therefore a sense of identity set apart from the mainstream church, offer effective and extensive support networks, foster a unique identity that is significantly nurtured by those networks, both relational and virtual, and promote a movement from identity in religious doctrine to identity in practical religious expression... (Guest and Taylor 2006: 61).

Guest and Taylor have made the solid church assumption that “durability” should be a primary objective of any Christian group, so it is not surprising then that they have concluded that the best emerging churches would be the ones that can keep the practices and structures of solid, typical church while at the same time seeming like some kind of alternative choice.

I would argue that both the studies, one by Ganiel and the other by Guest and Taylor, have flawed conclusions, mostly because they make assumptions that do not fit the subjects they study. However, I believe both contribute ideas of theoretical and methodological importance for the study of emerging churches. First of all, Guest and Taylor suggest that what is important is what they refer to as “internal discourse” rather than the reality (or not) of the properties of postmodernism. Though it is an idea that is not developed in their study, and it seems to be employed mostly so that they can

recommend that emerging churches reject postmodernism, it touches on an important point. These texts and ideas, and the conversation itself are only important and only real if and when they are enveloped into the “internal discourse” of a group and from there begin to shape their material practices. The second (and related point) is that emerging church must be studied as individual cases- something both of these studies do. In the case of Guest and Taylor this methodological strength is not maximized. After recognizing that no universal claims can be made from two case studies (on opposite sides of the world) that is exactly what they end up doing in their conclusions. No attempt is made to examine the specific circumstances or the influence of the locale on the practices of their case studies. Ganiel, however, does attempt to illuminate how these Northern Ireland groups have taken various “emerging” ideas into their internal discourse, and how this impacts their doctrine and practices in their specific setting.

Kees De Groot (2006) argues that Pete Ward’s now infamous text *Liquid Church* is guilty of a lazy application of Zygmunt Bauman’s theory of Liquid Modernity. De Groot explains that Bauman never suggests that liquid modernity is a condition to be taken for granted, and has only written about it in order to address its “structural impediments to a just society.” De Groot astutely points out a contradiction in Ward’s argument – that he criticizes “solid church” of “selling out” to consumerism while he encourages “liquid church” to do the same thing. According to De Groot, by failing to engage “liquid modernity” critically, Ward has missed what Bauman’s concept might really have to offer Christianity and new forms of church.

Phillip Harrold similarly investigates the “journey” narrative used by Brian McLaren and Dave Tomlinson, one that Harrold chooses to describe as “deconversion”.

For this task he uses John D. Barbour's "four rubrics of deconversion", those being "intellectual doubt", "moral criticism", "emotionally charged metaphors" and "narratives of disaffiliation." In general, Harrold speaks of the emerging movement as a "turning away" and expresses similar concerns to Bader-Saye about what it will "turn toward" and if this will ever happen. Harrold's investigation is primarily a survey of emerging church authors (their writing, as well as interviews with them), and of some emerging church "bloggers". Harrold goes through each element of the "rubric" and pulls examples from this survey. This exercise, predictably, illustrates Harrold's point that a dominant, and perhaps *the* dominant narrative of the emerging individual is one of "deconversion" and that this "deconversion" process is framed as one of maturation, and "moving past."

Harrold's study identifies several important and common characteristics of the emerging church and its members. The first is a general opposition to "commercial culture" and the mainstream church's concessions to it (Harrold 2006: 82). Discomfort with capitalist culture and the politics that support it are very common and important to many emerging churches. (In my opinion, additional research needs to be conducted, focusing on the countercultural and activist natures of many emerging churches). The second is the notion of "outgrowing" the evangelical tradition, and in general the importance of emerging "discourse" to the movement (Harrold 2006: 83). Jamieson echoes the idea of speaking of "leaving" established forms of church as a further progression on a linear path of faith (referencing Fowler's "faith stages"). The third such characteristic is, ironically, the "trend-consuming" nature of the emerging church (Harrold 2006: 86). Perhaps a less loaded way to describe this phenomenon would be

simply to say that emerging church has a constantly shifting appearance, style and format. Either way it seems to be a fundamental aspect of the emerging church.

Within this rubric of “deconversion” Harrold has, quite succinctly, established a starting point of discussion for several prominent aspects of (at least) the dominant narratives of the emerging church and its participants. Harrold’s work does allude to other possible experiences of the emerging church, but stops short of fully acknowledging those as legitimate emerging experiences.

Harrold notes a difference between generations – that “Boomers” are, if anything, more dramatic and radical than “X’ers” and “Y’ers” because for those younger generations, church has never held the cultural place that it has for boomers. I argue that this difference, rather than exhibiting varying degrees of the same experience, really illustrates two separate experiences. For those who have not ever counted themselves as a “part” of what was happening in evangelicalism, either because of their age or simply because they have never been involved in church in any meaningful way, *their* narrative is much more one of *affiliation* than “disaffiliation”. Jamieson’s (2006) study reinforces the importance of belonging to a community to most participants in emerging church. For many others it could be a narrative of *reaffiliation*. Harrold’s aim, to identify and classify the “post” and “deconverting” nature of the emerging church, is an important part of understanding what is happening. At the same time it is important to pay attention to the intrinsic value placed on *belonging* to many participants in the emerging conversation. Instead of viewing the structures of emerging church necessarily as a slide back to familiarity and capitalist societal bondage it is also useful to look at the desire to be involved in a larger community that is also a common thread in the emerging church. The

very fact that participants in this movement wish to talk about it and view it as united points to an affiliation rather than a simple retreat to individualism.

The emerging church is a new field of study, to say the least. The gaps in the existing literature are wide and many. Perhaps most obviously relevant to this study is the fact that the emerging church and its specific inflections has been studied in the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and even New Zealand. Thus far I have only seen mention of the emerging church's existence in Canada one time in passing, and certainly a fleshed out study of the Canadian emerging church is nowhere to be found. In fact Canada is home to several emerging churches, as well as a thriving network called *resonate*. This study will certainly take up the task of starting the investigation of the difference between Canadian cases and what has been written about the emerging church in the various other nations of the world.

The "disaffiliation" narrative is useful for explaining the experience of many members of the emerging church – perhaps most of all its leadership and its most celebrated authors. I hypothesize that this narrative is not nearly so dominant among lay-members of the emerging church, and most especially among participants aged 30 and younger. It will be important to investigate whether or not there is a gap between the experiences of the different generations, or between leadership and membership. Finally, a fundamental issue that has not been sufficiently investigated is the relationship between the emerging church movement and its countercultural nature, both within consumer culture, and within the evangelical church in general. This nature and this relationship will be at the heart of this study.

The term emerging suggests a period of transition. For this reason, as well the ways that Hamilton A and Hamilton B re-imagine the role of threshold in their worship gatherings, the *liminal* will be an important concept for this study. Arnold van Gennep first used the term “liminal” to describe the in-between stage of a ritual of transition. Van Gennep described this “liminal” (or “threshold”) state as a time when the subject of the ritual is completely without status, and is said to exist “outside of society, and society has no power over them.” It is at this point that the subject stops being what he/she had been, but before he/she has become what he/she will be when the ritual is complete. Van Gennep also extends this term “liminal” to the pilgrimage – The journey itself being the “threshold” between the secular and the sacred.

This concept is of particular relevance to the study of the kinds of worship gathering that are the focus of this project. These groups are manipulating the notion of a separation of sacred and secular. In this sense they are attempting to collapse the stages of initiation, transition, and incorporation. In a sense they remove the threshold altogether. In the case of particularly groups identifying with the “emerging church” liminality relates in at least one other important way. The emerging church has left its former state (institutionalized evangelical “church”) and is now in a state of “emergence”, or transition- a *liminal* state. It is not clear yet exactly what the emerging church will become, but what is clear is that it is, by design, in a state of transition and flux.

Victor Turner famously built on this idea of liminality, sketching in an even more detailed picture of the liminal figure.⁵

⁵ This kind of figure might also be described in terms of the *minority* of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. “We have seen several times that minorities are not necessarily defined by the smallness of their numbers but rather by becoming or a line of fluctuation,

The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions (Turner 1969: 95).

Turner further states that “liminal entities” are often a homogenous group of neophytes, so stripped of any individual characteristics as to be genderless. While in this context he is writing about the period within the ritual or ceremony *before* a transformation is complete, Turner also claims that it is possible to live in a state of liminality.

But traces of the passage quality of the religious life remain in such formulations as 'The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to rest his head.' Transition here becomes a permanent condition. Nowhere has this institutionalization of liminality been more clearly marked and defined than in the monastic and mendicant states in the great world of religions (Turner 1969: 107).

Turner has identified something crucial to the life of a Christian, namely, this idea of a life of transition. The very concept of salvation places the sinner in a state where he or she is saved, but is also *being* saved. The apostle Paul refers to Christian life as a race, even though all things are accomplished in Christ's death and resurrection. This *liminality* requires a certain outsider status of the followers of Christ, and I think this idea of existing in the margins will prove very useful in theorizing groups trying to blend the compartments of life.

in other words, by the gap that separates them from this or that axiom constituting a redundant majority” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 469).

Perhaps Turner's most interesting contribution to van Gennep's discussion of the liminal state is the idea of *communitas*. Turner suggests there are two distinct "models for human interrelatedness". The first is structured community. This includes a hierarchical order or caste system. People have distinct roles and identities, and this kind of society has rules and order. The second model outlined by Turner is either completely unstructured or what he describes as "rudimentally" structured. Turner suggests that this kind of unstructured social bond commonly occurs during a liminal period. Among the main properties of this kind of *communitas* are that they are identified as a group and not as individuals, and that they together submit to the "general authority of ritual elders" (Turner 1969: 96). A feeling of connectedness results when a group experiences a liminal state together, and this is heightened by the fact that they all lower themselves to the state of non-status; non-hierarchical, and individuality de-emphasized.

There are aspects of liminality and to a lesser extent *communitas* that will be useful to apply to the phenomena that are the focus of this study. I am not the first to apply Turner to the emerging church. Notably, Ben Edson (2006) suggests that his own emerging community *Santus1* (based in Manchester, UK), because of the inclusion of liminal individuals, and its engagement with postmodernity is better thought of as *communitas* than community in the geographical sense. Obviously, I relate to this description at some level since I myself will be looking at the liminal aspects of Hamilton A and Hamilton B, but there are some problems with Edson's application of this term which will be highlighted later. In general, because both "liminal" and "*communitas*" have a history of having been invoked rather liberally, at this point I will differentiate

how I will be using this concept from the ways that it has been used by Turner and van Gennep (as well as Edson).

Firstly, both Turner and van Gennep use “liminal” only in the context of ritual. The communities I wish to discuss are at some level de-emphasizing the ritual aspects of worship. Not to say that there are not residual remnants of ritual in these communities, but if anything they are moving towards their near-complete removal. Turner suggests that the *communitas* that results from the liminal period “exists both inside and outside of time”. In contrast, our subjects exist wholly inside time. (An expanded discussion of this to follow in relation to the sacred and profane.) Hamilton A and Hamilton B will both be discussed in terms of their whole lives rather than simply a regular ritual or a singular moment in time.

On the subject of *communitas* there are still more aspects of Turner’s concept that do not fit my purposes. The description of an undifferentiated group who submit to the authority of a shaman-like elder is not one that remotely describes either Hamilton A or Hamilton B. There are two senses in which the concept might be relevant to this study. First, as stated by Edson, the emerging church transcends geography. However, I would argue that it is more helpful to think of this movement as translocal rather than without a locality, because as Edson himself points out the properties of Manchester have played a significant role in shaping *Sanctus1*.

Secondly, unlike Turner, van Gennep, or Edson, when I discuss the “liminal subject” I mean a group, and not an individual. While undoubtedly the lives of the individuals are changed by their involvement, it is less themselves who are in transition as it is the group and the institution (or lack-thereof). This group-aspect of *communitas*

contributes to the relevance of the liminal concept for my purposes, however, the term *communitas* itself will not be employed in my analysis.

Regarding the liminal aspects of emerging church and communities similar to that movement, Turners description of the liminal phase as *margin* provides a helpful link. Because the communities in question have removed the “threshold” to some extent it becomes more helpful to think of them as occupying a marginal state. This means both on the margins of the evangelical community, and indeed outside of mainstream, institutionalized Christianity- but also in the sense most clearly meant by Turner, which is the in-between state, the state of becoming. As an unstructured group, the emerging church and similarly minded groups are in the process of *becoming* something other than that which they once were.

Because of the divergence from my use of “liminal” and its purpose in the work of Turner and van Gennep, I will distinguish my concept as *paraliminal community*. *Para* in the sense that it is “similar to” liminality and flows from that concept, but also in the sense that to be paraliminal is to occupy two of van Gennep’s stages at once- both the transition stage, and the incorporation stage. Essentially, I argue that in the paraliminal state process of transition and access to the sacred become one and the same. Also, this differs from Turner’s description of permanent transition in that it is corporate, and yet de-institutionalized.

To speak about the lifting of the threshold that exists between the “sacred” and the “profane” one must first look at the apparent separation between these two realms. The realms themselves are historical and theoretical. I now turn to Mircea Eliade to discuss

the physical, as well as the temporal divide between the “sacred” and the “profane” in order to set up a discussion of their transcendence.

Mircea Eliade, speaking of religious ritual in general, separates the “sacred” and “profane” in terms of time and space. Eliade describes sacred space as ordered while all space outside of the sacred is chaos (Eliade 1959: 20). The sacred place, which is often marked by a sign or threshold, can be experienced by even the least religious person. Places such as a person’s birth place, Eliade explains, have an “exceptional quality” for anyone. “They are the ‘holy places’ of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life” (Eliade 1959: 24).

Sacred time, however, can only be experienced by the religious person. This time is not historical in that it is cyclical rather than linear- although, in the same way that a place or time can be consecrated, a person can consecrate his or her life through the recognition of the divine in everyday events. This, Eliade suggests, is an archaic view and situates humanity as a part of the divinely created cosmos (Eliade 1959: 162-168). Essentially, everything takes on a sacred meaning in this view. Certainly the latter is reminiscent of Turner’s notion that the *communitas* exists *outside* of time as well as inside. It is this second description of Eliade’s, of time, that is of interest when discussing Hamilton A and Hamilton B. In the consecrated life, the “religious person” exists wholly inside linear time, and is a part of the present moment. This is very similar to Turner’s discussion of “permanent transition” and together they will be very important for my development and re-casting of Turner’s concept “liminal” into the “paraliminal community.”

Because of the way Hamilton A and Hamilton B are attempting to collapse the realms of the secular and sacred, I will be describing these efforts as *decompartmentalization* strategy. The work of Stanley Fish will be of crucial importance for understanding the effects of compartmentalization on these Christian groups. Fish, as part of his argument for a pragmatic view of issues such as affirmative action and free speech laws, asserts that the typical “liberal” view is that there is a perspective outside of religion from which religion’s rationale can be judged- that there is a set of principles that any rational person must agree to, and that everything else (religion included) is a subject to this logic. Here Fish challenges this idea as presented by Daniel O. Conkle,

When he says that “some religions have more truth value than others,” he means that some religions - not fundamentalist ones, presumably – employ modes of reasoning the secular world will be comfortable with; and when he calls for “an evaluation of the substantive positions” a religion may advance so that we can determine whether a particular religion is “right or wrong”, we know that the evaluation will be made according to standards the religion does not acknowledge and that that judgment of right or wrong will be rendered by the discourse to which religion is being asked to defer, the discourse which is the *real* religion. The credo of that religion is openness of mind, but what is called openness is really a device of closure because it rules out in advance forms of thought that are less (more) than dialogic and thinkers who are unwilling to regard their convictions as provisional and in need of a “higher” validation (Fish 1999: 188-189)

Fish goes on to explain how this has aided an attempt to contain religious belief in the private sphere.

In late-twentieth-century America the preferred truths and values of liberalism (autonomy, individual freedom, rational deliberation, civility) are in the first category – they go without saying and no agenda is legitimate unless it defers to them – and the preferred truths and values of Christianity (obedience, respect for authority and tradition, faith, the community of worship) are in the second – it is fine to adhere to them so long as you leave them at home when you enter the marketplace or the voting booth (Fish 1999: 272).

While one could certainly argue, in reference to issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, that religion is far from being banished from politics, Fish describes how religious belief is argued to be an irrational basis for making any but the most inconsequential life decisions. It is this manner of dismissing rationale based on religious belief that Fish here questions,

In short, beliefs emerge historically and in relation to the other beliefs that are already the content of our consciousness. This does not mean that beliefs or the actions that follow from them are irrational but that rationality – the marshalling of evidence, the giving of reasons, the posing of objections, the uncovering and correction of mistakes – is what takes place in light of our beliefs. Belief is prior to rationality; rationality can only unfold in the context of convictions and commitments it neither chooses nor approves (Fish 1999: 284).

Fish calls the world view to which religion is asked to defer “liberalism”, or the discourse of tolerance. This accounts for the subordination of religious belief particularly in those areas that would be considered “moral” issues politically. I would argue that what MacPherson calls “Possessive Individualism” (1962) could be substituted or added to “liberalism” as a discourse by which religious belief is contained.⁶ MacPherson’s

⁶ According to Macpherson the assumptions which “comprise possessive individualism” are represented by the following seven propositions.

1. What makes a man human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others.
2. Freedom from dependence on others means freedom from any relations with others except those relations which the individual enters voluntarily with a view to his own interest.
3. The individual is essentially the proprietor of his own person and capacities, for which he owes nothing to society.
4. Although the individual cannot alienate the whole of his property in his own person, he can alienate his capacity to labour
5. Human society consists of a series of market relations
6. Since freedom from the wills of others is what makes a man human, each individual’s freedom can rightfully be limited only by such obligations and rules as are necessary to ensure the same freedom for others.

model is primarily focused on individual liberties and material possessions. Possessive Individualism is at odds with the commitment to community and de-emphasis on personal possessions advocated in the New Testament, and certainly with groups like Hamilton A and Hamilton B which choose to emphasize this aspect of the early Church tradition. The process Fish introduces here will be employed in my discussion of the compartmentalization of religious belief in Chapter Five, as well as the unique attempts to combat this process as a part of the resistance of communities like Hamilton A and Hamilton B.

In this chapter I have laid the foundation for the theoretical framing of my discussion of the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities in Chapters Five and Six. In Chapter Three I will describe the process through which I investigated these two communities, as well as the logic and justification behind those methodological decisions.

7. Political society is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual's property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded as proprietors themselves (Macpherson 1962: 263-264).

The main sentiment of these propositions is that a person should be free to act in his or her own best interest, without any responsibility to anyone or any thing else (except to ensure that her or she does not take this freedom from anyone else.) It also reflects a "western" scepticism for that which is not earned (Pieper 1965: 35). This rejection of any code that exists outside of the will of the individual (apart from the unofficial code of possessive individualism itself) creates an idea of religious faith and doctrine that is personal, and as a result, private. It also removes a sense of responsibility to a community – something which was of great importance to the early Christian church. I do not wish to critique Macpherson's theory as much as to suggest that it is *this* philosophy that I will argue, building on Fish, contains and shapes Western Christian doctrine and life.

Chapter Three – Research Methods

Chapter Three will outline the research design, as well as briefly providing a rationale for specific decisions. I consider the methodology of this study qualitative ethnography. This Chapter will also include a discussion of some of the strengths and limitations of this approach, a detailed description of my own role as participant-observer, as well as providing an argument as to the sorts of conclusions that can and cannot be reached through this kind of research.

This is, first and foremost, an exploratory study. As I have stated earlier, most of the existing emerging church literature exists to create typographies, evaluate sustainability, and examine the theological implications of emerging church practice and theory. The questions that will focus my research have been largely untouched. Briefly, those are concerned with the language and practice of “decompartmentalization”, the left-leaning political stance, and the notion of resistance and marginal status of these churches.

I was initially interested in the meaning and function of the uses of space and especially language in the two communities that were the focus of this study. As discussed in Chapter Two, the lack of uniformity, even among churches that would consider themselves “emerging”, means that this phenomenon is best studied in its specific contexts. The exploratory nature of this project demands an open structure. The data I am looking for are not easily quantifiable, nor will the sample sizes I will be limited to allow any such quantifiable data to be reliable.

I would describe this study as two *new ethnographies*, which Bruce L. Berg (2001) describes as “a set of highly formal techniques designed to extract cognitive data” (Berg 2001: 134). Berg distinguishes *new ethnography* from the “subjectivist translation” of traditional anthropological ethnography. I will also distinguish my ethnographies from *critical* ethnography. Jim Thomas (1993) describes critical ethnography as conventional ethnography that exists to make value judgments, and discuss possibilities for change rather than simply describing the way things are. “Critical ethnography is conventional ethnography with a political purpose” (Thomas 1993: 4). This project had no such agenda; neither to suggest how these groups *should* conduct themselves, nor to evaluate the motivations of their strategies or the integrity of their attempts to carry them out. The purpose *was* to observe, understand, record, analyze, and finally to explain and contextualize these two communities. The primary means through which these observations occurred was interviews conducted with members of the communities as well as leaders, but I also attended worship gatherings of both groups as a participant observer.

I elected to conduct open-structured “focused interviews”, which is defined by Mason as a “conversation with a purpose” (Mason 1996: 62). The strength of this kind of interview is that it allows the interviewee to speak outside of the expectations of the researcher. More specifically, Berg (2001) outlines three styles of interview: the standardized, the unstandardized, and the semistandardized, the last of which I used for this project.

This type of interview involves the implementation of a number of predetermined questions and/ or special topics. These questions are typically asked of each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order, but the interviewers are allowed the freedom to digress; that is, the

interviewers are permitted (in fact expected) to probe far beyond the answers to their prepared and standardized questions (Berg 2001: 70).

There *were* some areas that I wanted to form, at least part of, the focus of these conversations. Initially those areas were the unique features commonly held by both communities; those were the targeting of people looking for an alternative to typical Christian Church, an emphasis on living holistic (decompartmentalized) lives, a tendency to the political left on issues of social justice, the use of public/ leisure space for worship, and the emphasis on online ways to participate in the community. I was interested in the meaning and significance of these features to the participants in the community, possible connections between these aspects, and finally possible connections to the emerging church. This is why certain questions, and follow-up questions, needed to be scripted. However, as Berg notes, one of the assumptions that leads a researcher *not* to fully script an interview is that he/she recognizes that he/she does not know all of the relevant questions to ask. Due to the exploratory nature of this project, this was certainly the case with me. All questions asked were designed to clarify my understanding of those areas- but because this study was not exactly testing a hypothesis, interviewees were permitted to speak around such issues, and the answers given and the interests of the interviewees largely determined the structure and direction once the interview was underway. The duration of these interviews was approximately one hour, although (at the discretion of the interviewee) these interviews were, at times, lengthened or shortened.

Berg argues, “the research interview is not a natural form of communication” (Berg 2001: 84). For this reason he suggests the researcher view the interview as a self-conscious performance; a technique he calls the *dramaturgical interview*. While Berg perhaps overstates the degree to which the interviewer must read non-verbal cues to pick

up on “defense ceremonies, and even lies” (Berg 2001: 85), as well how much an interviewer should script his/her responses and movements, he does offer some valuable insights into how an interviewer can help the interviewee feel comfortable without shaping what they say.

The Interviewer as Actor: As an actor, you must perform your lines, routines, and movements appropriately. This means that in addition to reciting scripted lines (the interview questions), you must be aware of what the other actor (the interviewee) is doing throughout the interview. You must listen carefully to line cues in order to avoid stepping on the lines of the interviewee (interrupting before the subject has completely answered a question). In addition, as actor, you must remain nonjudgmental regardless of what the interviewee may say. If you want people to openly talk about their feelings and views, you must refrain from making any negative judgments – either verbally or through visual cues. The best way to accomplish this is to accept people for who and what they are; avoid making judgments of their actions, beliefs, or life styles, even in your mind.

The Interviewer as Director: At the same time as you are performing as actor, you must also serve as director. In this capacity, you must be conscious of how you perform lines and move, as well as of the interviewee’s performance. As an interviewer you must reflect on each segment of the interview as if you were outside the performance as an observer. From this vantage point, you must assess the adequacy of your performance (for example, whether you are responding correctly to line cues from the interviewee and whether you are handling avoidance messages appropriately.) This may include demonstrating both verbally and visually that you are empathetic to things the interviewee has said. An approving nod, a brief comment such as “I understand what you mean,” or “I see,” may offer sufficient positive reinforcement (Berg 2001: 92).

I tried to follow Berg’s s various suggestions for allowing and encouraging the interviewees to speak freely and openly. Examples include the use of extended silence and echoing the interviewee’s words when seeking clarification rather than suggesting a possible meaning and asking if this was what he/she meant. Examples of prepared follow up questions would be to ask for specific examples of abstract concepts, and for explanations or definitions of certain words used by the members of the community (i.e.

most often the word “worship”). My initial interviews with members and leaders of both communities revealed a much stronger emphasis on the notion of “authentic community” than I had anticipated. For this reason I probed these areas as much as I could in the initial interviews, and came prepared to ask more questions relating to “community” in the later interviews. In general I agree with Berg that the research interview is an *unnatural* form of communication, in that the role played by the interviewer is counter-intuitive to the instincts of a polite conversant. Berg’s description of the *dramaturgical interview* helped me to curb my instinct to actively engage the issues addressed by the interviewee, and instead focus on facilitating and prompting the thoughts and feeling of the interviewees themselves.

I made my first contact with each group through their respective “senior pastors” or person of the equivalent position. The senior pastors were approached by phone if the community website listed a number, and by email when a phone number was not available. This preliminary contact followed a phone/email script⁷. Briefly, this first call/email explained very briefly what my study is about, established the senior Pastor’s willingness or unwillingness to be personally involved in the study, and finally sought permission for me to attend the first of three worship gatherings that I would be participant-observing during the course of the study. In both cases I was also able to schedule an interview with the senior pastor during this initial correspondence.

Due to the relatively small amount of people I would be able to interview in as thorough a fashion as was necessary, I elected to use a slight variation on the snowball method of sampling (asking each successive participant for a recommendation for the

⁷ See Appendix A for the Pastor Phone Script, and Appendix B for the Member Phone Script

next interviewee) (Jackson 2003: 437). The senior Pastors were asked to suggest a member of their community who could act as a liaison between my self and rest of the community. The reason I required a liaison was because I did not want potential interviewees to feel unnecessarily obliged to participate simply because they had been approached by their Pastor. The use of a liaison seemed to remove that risk of unintended coercion. Once the Pastor had found someone willing to act as the liaison, I would then make an appointment to meet with them and explain the study and what would be asked of them. I then personally asked the liaisons if they wished to be one of the interviewees, and in each case they agreed. The liaisons were then asked to approach another lay-member, and a member of the group's leadership team. Both that lay-member and leader would then recommend a lay-member. In total that would give me two interviews with leaders and three with members of the community⁸.

The interviews with leadership were particularly useful for obtaining information about the intentions of the gathering as well as the philosophical and strategic thoughts behind the way the gathering is run. Intentions are not everything to this study, but they do matter. The leaders were in a unique position to give insight into thought process that guides their decisions, and were also more than able to speak to their own worship experiences and how that has impacted their lives. The interviews with people not in leadership were also important, because while the leaders could tell me how they hope people will engage with their worship service and what they hope people will take away, the participants themselves gave me a good idea of how people actually *are* engaging and what they are taking away from it.

⁸ The number of communities studied has been scaled down from the original project proposed to the Brock University Research Ethics Board.

One of the most obvious benefits to the snowball method of sampling is that it gives an idea of how communities work and fit together (Babbie 1979: 214) as well as offering a way to find a group of people (those who are influential, or deeply involved) which otherwise might have been a little tough to gage from simply attending three gatherings (Jackson 2003: 437). This also limited the danger of me guiding the study by choosing people who I think will speak specifically to the issues of interest to me . The drawbacks of the snowball method are that it is neither random nor is it a representative sample exactly (in terms of covering all demographics included in the gathering). It was likely still the best method because while it does not necessarily represent all demographics proportionally, which would have been difficult in a sample of this size anyway, it did at least ensure that at some level the sample was what the group deems a representation of itself, since the sample was chosen by them (which itself must be taken in to consideration for any conclusions drawn from the study).

For the Hamilton B community, I decided in the end to use a slight variation of the process I just described. Hamilton B has a complicated hierarchical leadership structure that seems very important to the community and the way it functions. For this reason I felt it was necessary to interview more than two members in positions of leadership. (A description of the Hamilton B leadership structure can be found in Chapter 4). In this case the choices for three levels of leadership followed a logical path rather than the snowball sample. The snowball sample here began when I had the “Site Pastor” recommend a “Home Church Leader” as a liaison. From there I had each successive member recommend another lay-member until I had interviewed three lay-members (including the Home-Church Leader who is considered a lay-member).

When I met the various interviewees, they were asked to sign a consent form⁹. The interviews were tape-recorded, and I tried to start recording the interview as soon as possible after initial introductions as participants tended to immediately start talking about either what their particular role in the community was, or how they came to become a member of the community. The interviews loosely followed a questionnaire that I had previously prepared although I was quick to abandon the order or start a new line of questioning altogether as seemed appropriate given the interests of the interviewee¹⁰. One example of the open structure was when I asked a member of Hamilton A to speak about his blog, he said he didn't have anything to say about that topic and that it was not an important part of his life, or participation in Hamilton A, and that he would rather tell me about something else. Apart from the simple courtesy of not pressuring someone to speak about something they do not wish to speak about, in this scenario it was my policy not to compel the interviewee to validate my hunches as to what was an important part of the community. Sometimes I would offer clarification of the question and leave it at that, but I was always receptive to discuss what the interviewees felt was important and was careful never to cut them off to shift to another line of questioning.

I move now to a discussion of the purpose and format of my attendance of the worship services of the various communities.¹¹ Flowing from this will be a discussion of my role as participant observer in general. The way one presents one's self in participant

⁹ See Appendix C

¹⁰ See Appendix E for Question Guides

¹¹ I attended the Hamilton A gathering on 08/13/06, 09/03/06, and 03/18/07. I attended the Oakville site of Hamilton B on 07/23/06 and the Hamilton site of Hamilton B on 11/20/06, and 02/18/07.

observation is of utmost importance, and will be a major focus of the research design for this portion of the study. Raymond Gold has identified four different roles that the field researcher can take up. In brief those are the “complete participant”, the “participant as observer”, the “observer as participant”, and the “complete observer” (Babbie 1979: 209). The complete participant is only known to the people he is studying as a participant. They have no knowledge that he is doing research of any kind. The participant as observer participates, but makes it known that he is also doing research. The observer as participant makes it known that they are only there to observe, and that they involve themselves for this purpose only. Finally, the complete observer only observes and is not involved in any way (Babbie 1979: 210).

The purpose of attending the gatherings was to provide context for my understanding of the interviews, and generally flesh-out my understanding of the communities. For this reason it seemed beneficial to participate rather than simply observe. I took part in any interactive segment of the gatherings I attended; this included singing, praying, and participation in discussion groups.

I always planned to participate in the gatherings, so the choice became whether or not to reveal that I was doing research, and to what extent, if any, I would publicize that fact. Earle R. Babbie notes that theoretically one can get better and more reliable data when the participants in one’s study do not know that you are studying them (Babbie 1979: 210). This is valid to some extent. If people are aware that they are being watched and that their actions are being recorded they are more likely to be conscious of how they would want to be seen. For instance, for my study a person might hold back doing something they think I might not understand. There is always that chance of mistrust of

the academic watching. Even if the people trust the researcher, they will, inevitably, shape their actions to how they would prefer to be documented, if only very slightly.

Even given the benefits of the covert study, I will take a role very close to the “participant as observer.” There are two main reasons for this decision. First of all, the nature of the groups that I am studying will limit the change in behavior. These are, we must remember, evangelical groups. This means that “outsiders” are not only expected, but welcome into their gatherings- this is, after all, something of a mission for the evangelical church body. This is not to say that I would be confused with, or viewed as, a potential convert or “seeker”, but the point is that worship gatherings are used to being viewed, and even scrutinized from the outside. This should limit the affect of my presence, to some degree, since whatever ways people might behave in the presence of an outsider will likely be the norm for such a gathering. I must accept the possibility though, that the leaders of the worship gathering may alter *their* approach in the leading of the service. For the same reasons that I doubt that the non-leader participants will not do this, I think it is unlikely, but it is a risk and potential limitation to conclusions that can be drawn. This is not something I can avoid in any case though, since I will only be attending gatherings where the senior pastor has agreed in advance to meet with me, and this risk shouldn’t really undermine the purpose of my participant observation.

In general, I saw my role as a participant observer was less about becoming invisible as it was an attempt to behave and appear as someone coming to “check out” the community for the first time. The strength of this approach is that it is both allows a freedom of investigation without being intrusive, and at the same time it is relatively honest way to portray myself. This afforded me the opportunity to meet a lot of people

and to ask questions where appropriate. The only drawback is that I likely affected the direction of the “discussion group” I was involved in at the Hamilton A worship gathering. I stand behind this decision however, as I feel participation in such a group is an integral part of the Hamilton A experience, and the risk of shaping the discussion was outweighed by the added perspective gained by having been able to engage the group in that way.

As well as the actual attendance of the worship gatherings I looked at all information and material made available publicly by both groups. This includes the websites of both communities (and the Hamilton A café website as well,) the promotional “welcome” DVD distributed by Hamilton B, books written by Gary¹², as well as the blogs of Hamilton A members. Additionally, Hamilton B posts each of Gary’s sermons on their website, and I used many of these as reference material also. Though I looked at the blogs of several Hamilton A members I did not quote directly, nor did I make mention of any specific posts on any blog.

Analysis of the interviews began as I made excerpted notes of the recorded conversations I had with the interviewees. Themes that commonly arose in these conversations included stories of past bad experiences with church, reasons as to why this current community suits the interviewees better, definitions and thoughts regarding worship, discussions of the buildings and space used by the communities, notions of resistance and what I call *decompartmentalization strategy*, “authentic community”, and technological aspects of the communities (i.e. blogging, podcasts, simulcasts). I excerpted the thoughts and feeling of each interviewee, taking note of similarities and

¹² Gary is the Teaching Pastor of Hamilton B. See Appendix F for Interviewee Profiles.

dissimilarities amongst the members and leadership respective communities, in comparison to the literature surrounding the emerging church, and finally between the two communities. Because the person being interviewed largely determined the direction of the interviews, not every interviewee addressed each of these areas. Again, due to the relatively small number of people interviewed (eleven in total), I did not code and count the responses and positions in these areas since this information would be statistically unreliable and insignificant. I instead focused on the language and discourse used by the interviewees, and often their rationale and explanation of their use of certain words and language. This was done to uncover the richer meanings and nuances, as well as the context of the language; in other words to more completely understand what the interviewees meant. This was not a critical discourse analysis, in that I was not looking at the lexical choices of the interviewees to uncover hidden motives, biases, or meanings that they might have purposely abstracted through language.

In Chapter Three I outlined the process of the interviews and participant observation used to collect data for this project. In Chapter Four I will present full descriptions of both Hamilton A and Hamilton B based on this data, before outlining briefly the major themes that arose from the interviews with members from both groups.

Chapter Four – Setting the Scene: Hamilton A and Hamilton B

The purpose of Chapter Four will be to provide context regarding the two church communities studied for this project. I will provide a brief history of each community, a description of their denominational context, and a description of their appearance, practices, identities, and doctrines.

Hamilton A is a church planted¹³ by the Salvation Army in 2002. They approached Chad¹⁴ (who grew up in the Salvation Army Church) and asked him to start a church in an urban environment. In 2002 the community was launched in Hamilton. For the first two years Hamilton A held their meetings in an older Salvation Army building, which was eventually sold. In 2005 the decision was made to move the community to the Beasley neighborhood in downtown Hamilton. Beasley is currently the fourth or fifth poorest neighborhood in Canada, and this was a large part of the decision to move Hamilton A there.

A storefront building was obtained for the Hamilton A community but instead of making it into a space purely for Christian worship gatherings, it was renovated to function as a café. Chad and the Hamilton A community wanted the space to provide a service to the neighborhood. Beasley does have a lot of pubs and bars, but there is not another inviting “hang out” space for people of all ages. The Hamilton A café fills a need in the local arts community. The café holds regular art shows and displays the work of featured local artists on its walls for a week or two at a time. This gives the artists an

¹³ “Planting” is a common term for a denomination or existing church starting another church community. Chad describes Hamilton A as a church plant, and himself as a “church planter”

¹⁴ See Appendix F for interviewee profiles.

audience, and has also been an effective way for these artists to sell some of their work. The Hamilton A café is one of very few concert venues in the Beasley area, and one of even fewer all-ages concert venues. Oliver, who is in charge of booking, claims that since they began holding concerts on the weekend they have never had trouble booking the space, and that countless local artists actively solicit the opportunity to play there. This has given Hamilton A a good reputation both to the arts community itself, and the Beasley residents, who have not been accustomed to having this kind of clean, beautiful, and comfortable space where they can take part in a vibrant arts scene.

Hamilton A differs from many cafes in that it does not discourage people from staying for long periods of time or from coming in without making a purchase. The café also provides free wireless internet and encourages people to come in and do their work there if they want. The employees of the café are actually volunteers from the Hamilton A “church”. Eventually Oliver was hired by Hamilton A to coordinate and manage the business. As of now Oliver is the only paid café employee, although one other member, Laura, is paid by an outside organization for her role at the Hamilton A café. She works both as a barista and oversees and trains developmentally challenged members of the community to work at the café.

The job of the other baristas is to do all the things that a café needs someone to do (serve coffee, take money, prepare food, clean dishes, sweep the floor and other things of that nature) but in addition the volunteers are expected to be friendly and available for conversation. It is both acceptable and even expected that a volunteer would defer one of the practical duties of the café to sit down and talk to someone who comes in. Oliver claims that sometimes a person will come in to work and will end up spending their entire

“shift” sitting on one of the couches enjoying a coffee and conversing with customers. Obviously a balance is struck and the staff ensures that someone is available to serve customers, and that it is not always the same staff members who are left with the practical duties- but Hamilton A is in a unique situation where many “regulars” are from the church community, and are also volunteers. It is not at all rare for someone who is off duty to jump up if they notice someone wants to make a purchase and the “on-duty” volunteers are otherwise occupied. It is sometimes difficult to know who is actually “working” and who is not.

Chad describes this environment that they provide to the neighborhood as a “third place”.

Third places" [a term coined by Ray Oldenburg in his 1990 book *The Great Good Place*] are informal gathering places where people in a particular community or neighborhood meet to develop friendships, discuss issues, and interact | network with others. They have always been an important way in which the community has developed and retained cohesion and a sense of identity...

...There are essential ingredients to a well-functioning "third place". They must be free or inexpensive to enter and purchase food and drink within. They should be a place where a number of people regularly go on a daily basis. It should be a place where the person feels welcome and comfortable, and where it is easy to enter into conversation. And a person who goes there should be able to expect to find both old and new friends each time she or he goes. (from Hamilton A's website)

Chad believes that “true community” requires a forum for conversation, debate, and fellowship- he draws parallels to the way town squares were once used to congregate and philosophize. Hamilton A is, in this sense, a public place rather than private because people are encouraged to wander in and congregate simply for the sake of doing so, and additionally, without the burden of making a purchase.

The building itself is barely marked on the outside, and blends in well with the old brick buildings that surround it. Driving by, one might not necessarily identify it as a café, but upon approaching the front door from the sidewalk, its identity becomes much clearer. Inside, the ceilings are high with exposed pipes and ducts. Artwork covers the surrounding walls, which due to their height make it look as though it is a ring around the bottom of the room. As I mentioned earlier the artwork changes from week to week- sometimes it is paintings, sometimes photographs. During one of my visits they had iron sculptures that looked like the heads of diesel-powered robots.

The furniture is a mix of patio style tables with chairs, and squares of couches and soft comfortable chairs arranged around coffee tables. These squares of furniture are organized slightly askew from each other. The overall effect of the space is like a restaurant with three or four living rooms carelessly dropped in their midst. Unless the artwork is brightly colored, earth tones pervade the color scheme. The walls are beige and tan, and the furniture and carpets are dull greens, oranges, and browns.

Approaching Hamilton A on a Sunday evening, the sign in the window will read “closed”, but another announces that the Hamilton A worship service begins at 6:30. The closed sign is actually a little deceiving because in the time leading up to the beginning of the meeting as well as the time directly after it ends, the café is open for business. Throughout the service people will be sitting around tables facing all different directions and enjoying coffee and desert, or perhaps even dinner. During the meeting the kitchen closes, primarily so the baristas (who are members of the “church” for the most part) can participate.

The worship meetings themselves sometimes take on the characteristics of a typical church service, with a contemporary worship band (typically lead by a singer with acoustic guitar, backed by a rock band set-up), and followed by a sermon or talk by either Chad or a member of the church community. Other times the meeting is more “issue” based, and revolves around discussion groups or a discussion panel. The first meeting I attended was such an issue-based night. It began with a male member explaining that there would be three discussions facilitated by an expert in that field. The three issues were the Israel/Lebanon war, Human Trafficking, and the AIDS pandemic (specifically in Africa). I took part in the discussion of AIDS in Africa. In general the facilitator offered some opinions and shared many statistics, but the range of opinions was varied, and no viewpoint was thrown out by the group.

The emphasis on issues of social justice is by design. This seems to be a common interest of at least the leadership of Hamilton A. Just one obvious example of this is that the café makes a point only to serve fair-trade coffee, bought relatively locally from the Guelph-based fair-trade importers Planet Bean. Again, as many cafes do now, they also encourage customers to drink from one of their clear, glass mugs, rather than the simpler disposable paper cup option.

Another format the meeting might take is that of “alt worship.” This term itself can describe a wide range of practices, but this tends to involve different stations that can be visited at one’s leisure. These stations either offer something to meditate on, or sometimes a participatory or creative activity.

The population of Hamilton A is certainly at its most diverse during the hours when it is open for business. While Beasley is certainly not a student neighborhood, there

are often students from either McMaster University across downtown, or Mohawk College just south and up the hill, with homework spread across tables, toting backpacks and laptop bags. The free high-speed wireless internet and the trendy atmosphere are certainly a draw to this demographic. However, the Beasley neighborhood is home mainly to lower-income families and there are many homeless people on the streets and in the parks surrounding Hamilton A. Chad claims that many such people are among those that one would find in the café during business hours.

Visitors can easily set themselves up in a corner and work quietly (there is usually music playing at a relatively unobtrusive volume level), but if there is a group congregating in one of the living room spaces I have observed personally that they are generally quick to invite someone in.

The relationship between Hamilton A the missional community, Hamilton A the café, and Hamilton A the church, seems to be a complicated one. For instance, the distinction between church and café has been marked by a slight name difference (the café spells the real name of Hamilton A without vowels...) Until now, (reportedly this will soon be changed), the Hamilton A church has had a different website than the café. The website for the café makes only passing mention of the church that runs and occupies it. Chad suggests that the process of clarifying what the role of each entity is, as well as to what extent they are separate and to what extent the same, is ongoing. At least for now the decision has been made to collapse the two further rather than to maintain their distinct identities.

Hamilton B is a large church based in the Greater Toronto Area, which is part of the Brethren in Christ denomination. Initially this was a single-site (meaning one meeting

place and one congregation) church that met in a high school in Oakville. In the beginning it was pastored by a man no longer with Hamilton B. He planted this church in Oakville because he felt a burden to minister to the upper-class/ high-income community that resides in Oakville, Ontario. The church was at first even named after the neighborhood in Oakville where the group first met. After a few years the first pastor left the church and Hamilton B hired Gary to become the new pastor of the church community.

At this point two important things happened to drastically alter the identity of Hamilton B. First Gary began to build a reputation for himself as a speaker. This happened, in part, because he toured college and university campuses, but word of mouth spread and many people (some of whom already had their own church communities) began visiting Hamilton B just to hear Gary speak. Gary's appeal was threefold- he has a very conversational and humorous delivery that many find attractive, a common thread that runs through his sermons is a strong anti-"religion" and anti-"legalism" message which has been both controversial and compelling for a lot of people, and finally Gary tends to take questions (Q & A) after speaking. One member I spoke with credits his popularity on the campus circuit to his willingness to engage with questions and challenges to his message. Gary's fame became so widespread that Hamilton B for a time was known better by his name than its official name. This soon prompted Gary to change the name of the church to its current name in hopes that this would discourage people from calling it Gary's church.

Along-side Gary's growing notoriety was a change of venue. Instead of meeting in a high school as they had done, they began meeting in a movie theater in Oakville. The

change of venue obviously offered a larger capacity and more space for the influx of newcomers to Hamilton B, and additionally gave the church a more palatable atmosphere and opened up new possibilities for multi-media presentations (something that has since become a trade-mark for Hamilton B). The move only served to increase the profile of the church.

Apart from the Sunday morning service during which Gary preaches and a worship band plays a set of about 5 or 6 songs Hamilton B has a program that they call “Home Church”. Home Church is very similar to a common evangelical program known as “small groups”. A small group generally takes the form of a Bible study, but also can to be an accountability group. Home Church serves these purposes but is more rooted to the Sunday morning service than would be typical. The group is given sermon notes and discussion topics all flowing out of the sermon that was preached at the previous week’s service. Depending on the size of the Home Church, the group will break into smaller groups for prayer or more discussion. Sometimes these smaller groups will have designated leaders as well. A primary purpose of Home Church is to provide an opportunity for Hamilton B members to discuss practical ways they can apply the ideas expressed in the sermon to their own lives. Sometimes specific ideas will be given for this in the sermon itself, but as a rule “application” is the realm of Home Church discussion.

As the name suggests, Home Church meetings are held in the home of one of the members of the community. Hamilton B vehemently emphasizes Home Church to the people who attend their Sunday morning service. It is often said that Home Church is the most important part of being involved in Hamilton B. Since Hamilton B and Gary’s

speaking are attracting people from other church communities, the Hamilton B services are attended by many who would not necessarily consider themselves members. For the last few years Hamilton B has tried to combat this by having a Sunday once a year in which Gary encourages those people who come regularly but have not joined a Home Church, or taken any other steps to further take part in the community, either to join a Home Church and make Hamilton B their community, or stop coming.

Eventually the Hamilton B Sunday service became so well attended that they had to have overflow rooms to accommodate those people who could not get seats in the main theater. By this time Hamilton B was not only drawing people from Oakville but from all over the Greater Toronto Area. There was a particularly large group from Hamilton who came each week. Because of the distance they had to travel to get to Hamilton B, they found that they were more often than not forced to sit in the overflow section and watch the service on a TV screen.

The group from Hamilton approached the leadership of Hamilton B and asked if they could simply have tapes of the services and watch them in Hamilton instead of having to travel all the way to Oakville to do the same thing. Both Gary and Mark expressed their reluctance to allow this at first, as there seemed to be something distasteful about setting up a church that gathered to watch a video of another church (and this is still a criticism that is reportedly brought up regarding Hamilton B from outside of the church.) In the end the Hamilton B leadership could not think of a good reason not to allow the Hamilton group to participate in this way.

The Hamilton site initially met in a high school and watched the video together. To everyone's surprise they soon outgrew this venue, and this is when the Hamilton B

Hamilton site took residence in a Famous Players movie theater. Since that move there have been several other “sites” started all over the Greater Toronto Area. Recently there has been a site started in Kitchener designed to serve the Kitchener/Waterloo/Guelph area. This area is not generally considered to be part of the GTA, and marks the beginning of a new breadth to the reach of Hamilton B.

The Oakville site has since bought a warehouse-style building in an industrial/strip-mall section of Oakville/Mississauga which they have converted into a beautiful and state-of-the-art theater space. The Oakville site holds the “original” service at 10:00 am on Sunday mornings. There is a repeat of the service at 11:00, and then the sermon is immediately put on the website, as well as posted on iTunes as a “podcast”. The other sites are almost all based in Famous Players theaters and show the previous week’s sermon on their screens.

At the Oakville site when one walks inside the front of the building there is a counter where one can help one’s self to free coffee. (Paper cups are provided, although people are encouraged to bring their own mugs.) To the left there is a bookstore, which is also where one can meet Gary after the service. There is a semi-circle hallway that arches around the wall that encloses the auditorium, much like a small arena. Inside the theater there is a stage at the front with two large screens on either side. The walls and seats are darkly colored, not unlike the interior of a movie theater. When a seat is chosen, an usher will offer one a DVD that holds a short presentation about Hamilton B. Before the service begins, screens display digital clocks which count down the seconds to start time accompanied by electronic music that intensifies as it gets closer to zero.

When the count down ends, the lights drop. A series of quotes and images are displayed on the screens, to more music (general dramatic open-picked acoustic guitar or piano arpeggios during this section). When this is over a live band onstage begins playing. The style of music and song selection is not unlike that of Hamilton A's, although the presence of stage lights, the fabulous acoustics of the auditorium, and precision of the musicians add a professional sheen to the presentation which make it a much different experience than Hamilton A. Once the band finishes playing Gary makes his way to the front from backstage. He often wears jeans and, though he wears a microphone headset, maintains a very casual appearance. His style of speaking is warm, and he will often laugh while speaking. Usually after he finishes speaking, two assistants roam the auditorium with wireless mics (like a talk-show) for the question and answer period.

The Hamilton site replicates this experience almost exactly. As has already been mentioned, their meetings are held in a Famous Players movie theater. This theater is just outside of downtown Hamilton and is surrounded by restaurants and strip-mall plazas; a pretty typical surrounding for this kind of theater. Approaching the front of the building it looks the same as it usually would except that there are signs in the doors that notify you that Hamilton B is holding their service this morning. Inside, Hamilton B has seemingly worked hard weekly to place a lot of Hamilton B paraphernalia throughout the large lobby. Down the long corridors that stretch out to the left and right of the front lobby sandwich board signs stand in front of each theater assigning a Hamilton B purpose to each one. (Worship A, Worship B, Nursery, Junior High etc.) There is a table for coffee, as well as a bookstore table.

Inside the theater the house lights are dim, but remain on. Different announcements scroll on a rotation on the screen. Just as it is at the Oakville site, a countdown begins onscreen. When the onscreen countdown ends in Hamilton, a live band at the front of the theater starts playing, and when they finish a video of the previous week's service at the Oakville site begins. Each week that I have attended, the theater has been absolutely packed. Latecomers have to look for single seats in-between groups, and in general the experience is remarkably similar to the experience of actually seeing the Oakville site live. Frank, the site pastor of the Hamilton site of Hamilton B, makes announcements before the sermon and after, and these are the only times at the service where the audience is addressed by a live person.

The leadership structure of Hamilton B is relatively complicated. It is designed not to have one person in charge of everything. For this reason there are two men in equal positions of leadership at the top, (where most communities would have one senior pastor). Mark is the Senior Pastor, and Gary is the teaching Pastor. Mark described himself as the Mother of Hamilton B and Gary as the Father, meaning that Mark is mostly responsible for the "family" (the staff, volunteers, and membership), whereas Gary is responsible for the direction of the church and ministry, as well as for actually speaking. Underneath those two are the "site pastors", who perform most of the daily duties of a pastor at a smaller church. They have direct contact with their congregations, and would be in charge of counseling those who need one-to-one attention. The site pastors are themselves led by the "Community Development Pastor". The site pastors will attempt to visit each Home Church as often as possible, but ultimately these groups are led weekly by volunteer Home Church Leaders. Home Church leaders are

empowered to some extent to shape the direction and style of Home Church meetings, but ultimately they are expected to lead the group through some variation of the discussion questions, or at the very least the topics provided by Gary and the leadership team. Home Church leaders are encouraged to completely abandon this at their discretion, with the understanding that this will be the exception and not the rule.

The anti-religious message common to Gary's preaching is an aspect that has really come to define Hamilton B. There are two very prominent "slogans" associated with the church. "Church for people who aren't into church" and "God hates religion" which used to be on the front page of their website, but has since been replaced by the softer (if slightly less memorable) "Not into religion? Perfect. Neither are we..." The breaking down of rules and systems, as well as a commitment to avoid the "legalism" so common to mainstream evangelical Christianity, are both intrinsic parts of the mission of Hamilton B. The Hamilton B leadership targets mainly university-educated, media-savvy, culturally-savvy people who either have not previously been connected with a Christian church, or have had a previous experience and have been "turned off" as a result. The use of movie clips during the service, for instance, is said to be an attempt to "speak in the language of modern myths" (Mark 08/31/06) rather than to dress up church to make it more appealing and entertaining. Evidently this approach is popular, as Mark reported to me that Hamilton B grows at a rate of 25% a year. Since starting the new sites Hamilton B has drafted a new goal – to have a site within a 30-minute drive of everyone in the GTA, and a Home Church within 10 minutes.

An important difference between Hamilton A and Hamilton B is that Hamilton A identifies itself as part of the emerging church movement. Both of these communities are

committed to “doing church” differently, to avoiding the trappings of legalism, shedding the image of mainstream evangelical Christianity, and to fostering “authentic” community. They have obviously taken drastically different paths to achieving these similar goals, and as will be demonstrated, the anti-institutional stance, and independent/artistic style of the emerging church is a main cause of this divergence. While the leadership and membership of Hamilton B have rooted themselves in something slightly different than the evangelical tradition, the Hamilton A community has remained within it while breaking out of that typical mold at the same time. They have not really left, but (as I will illustrate in Chapters Five and Six) they do occupy a doctrinal space outside of the typical. The undefined and cross-denominational aspect of the emerging church is something that will figure largely into my discussion of particularly Hamilton A. However, It must be noted that many of the more left-leaning or progressive positions held by both groups can be traced back to their respective denominations.

The Brethren in Christ denomination describes itself as being shaped by three different traditions: Anabaptism, Pietism, and Wesleyanism. Quoting from the BiC website,

The theological roots of the Brethren in Christ Church reach back to the Protestant Reformation. At that time, reformers called Anabaptists stressed the importance of a personal responsibility toward one's baptism (believer's baptism), as well as the importance of discipleship, and obedience, the separation of church and state, the practice of non-resistance, and the necessity of community. This Anabaptist strain within our church's “theological DNA” shows itself most particularly in our emphases on the community of faith, to serving compassionately, to living simply, and to pursuing peace...

We Brethren in Christ draw a portion of our identity from certain German believers who, in the seventeenth century, rejected the overly

intellectualized expression of the Christian faith that had become popular within certain segments of the church. The Pietists stressed the importance of genuine conversion and a warm, personal experience of renewed life in Christ. This awakening experience swept through Europe and on to America. For Brethren in Christ, the Christian faith is a relationship with God that is to be enjoyed with the heart, even as it is affirmed with the head...

We Brethren in Christ have also been deeply influenced by the teachings of the eighteenth-century British scholar and preacher, John Wesley. The Wesleyan movement in America - also known as the Holiness movement - emphasizes conversion as a conscious acceptance of God, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and daily growth in holiness. Brethren in Christ value the free gift of salvation in Christ Jesus and the transforming power of the Holy Spirit and we are unashamed in sharing the Good News of the Gospel with others (<http://www.bic-church.org/about/history.asp>).

Certain aspects of Hamilton B which might be considered similar to the emerging church, (such as their de-emphasis of the infallibility of scripture for instance,) come directly from the official stances of the Brethren in Christ. Certainly the Hamilton B website suggests this link, however, the de-emphasis on personal morality does seem like a possible conflict with the Wesleyan background of the Brethren in Christ.

A Wesleyan background is something that the Brethren in Christ and the Salvation Army have in common. On the Salvation Army of Canada website, the following description of “Holiness” as one of the Core Values¹⁵ of the Salvation Army is given;

We are shaped by the Bible and the example of Jesus through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

We acknowledge our total dependency on God. We pray, follow God’s Word and live by faith. Our mission demands that we respond to the lordship of Jesus Christ and remain radically obedient to the leading of the

¹⁵ The Salvation Army’s Core Values are Salvation, Holiness, Intimacy with God, Compassion, Respect, Excellence, Integrity, Relevance, Co-operation, and Celebration (<http://www.salvationarmy.ca/missionandvalues>). Interestingly, Hamilton A has its own set of values, and they are Truth, Justice, Beauty, Community, Authenticity, and Hope (from Hamilton A’s website).

Holy Spirit. We are committed to a disciplined Christian lifestyle and service in Christ's name (<http://www.salvationarmy.ca/missionandvalues>).

The Salvation Army of Canada emphasizes “dependency on God” as well as a disciplined lifestyle, but this suggests that God will *help* one to live a disciplined lifestyle if one is dependant on him.

Neither Hamilton A nor Hamilton B stray significantly from the doctrine of their parent denominations, however, especially in the case of Hamilton A, the emphasis is quite different. For instance, the Salvation Army of Canada lists a number of issue positions on its website (issues range from homosexuality to gambling). As will be illustrated in greater detail in Chapters Five and Six, solid positions are far from a central aspect of the Hamilton A community.

Having given a brief background and description of the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities, I will now sketch out the themes that arose from the interviews and the participant observation I conducted, and explain how they will be broken in to two different discussion Chapters (Chapters Five and Six).

There is a clear element of “resistance” that emerged from my discussions with members and leadership from both communities. This resistance can be classified two ways – First there is the resistance to the typical “church” conventions that each group has attempted to avoid and subvert. This is largely an internal struggle to break old habits and mindsets that have been ingrained for years. The Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities use different language and practical methods to maintain their “new” mindsets. The second site of resistance is against dominant western consumer culture. While Hamilton B frames this more as resistance against “human nature”, Hamilton A envisions themselves as more culturally subversive in this way. Chapter Five will focus

on these themes, and I will employ the work of Stanley Fish to explain and theorize the decompartmentalization strategy used on both sites of resistance. I will also argue why particularly Hamilton A as a part of the emerging church movement may be studied and discussed as an example of counterculture.

Community is a concept of fundamental importance to both groups, which they both articulate in terms of striving for “real” or “authentic” community. The ways which each attempt to achieve this kind of community were common topics of conversation in the interview (especially with the leadership and membership of Hamilton A). The “resistance” aspect contributes to a certain oppositional style, and *subcultural* identity within Christian culture that shapes the way these communities view themselves and function ultimately. There is also a notion that these communities are becoming something different than church has been in the past. This was discussed both as a transition and translation, depending on who I was speaking with. These will be the themes discussed in Chapter Six. Ultimately, I will develop Turner’s concept of the *liminal* and of permanent transition, and Eliade’s concept of the consecrated life to create the term *paraliminal* community. The paraliminal community, I will argue, will be a fruitful way to consider the actions and practice of especially the Hamilton A community as an example of the emerging conversation or the emerging church movement due to their extremely fluid approach to leadership, membership, and institutionalization in general. This will conclude my discussion in Chapter 6.

Chapter Five – Decompartmentalization Strategy

The focus of Chapter Five will be the notion of resistance in relation to the practices of the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities. I will describe resistance on two distinct, yet inter-related sites. The first is resistance to dominant Christian culture. The leadership of both groups have made distinguishing themselves from the typical “church” experience a priority. While Hamilton B boldly declares itself “Church for People Who Aren’t Into Church”, Chad of Hamilton A also suggests his church community exists for people who are not interested in the usual “church” options.

The second plain of resistance is to dominant, western, consumer culture, as well as what MacPherson calls possessive individualism. Both groups, to varying degrees, are constantly in a process of separating themselves from both of these dominant cultures. This chapter will examine in detail the relationship between these groups and the greater western Christian culture and the roots of that resistance. It will then turn to a discussion of the importance of discourse for each group, before finally unpacking what I will call “decompartmentalization strategy” and practice and its role in the resistance on both plains for the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities.

While Hamilton A and Hamilton B come from different backgrounds and the Brethren in Christ (out of which comes the Hamilton B community) would distinguish itself as Anabaptist and therefore separate from Protestantism, my research uncovered that both are drawing people out of mainstream evangelical backgrounds. In keeping with the emerging church trend, this is also the tradition that both groups strive to set themselves apart from. One of the reasons communities like Hamilton A and Hamilton B

would want to disassociate with mainstream evangelicalism is the reputation for hypocrisy that this tradition (along with mainstream organized religion in general) has in the general public outside of Christianity (as well as within to some extent.) The notion of Christians leading a double life, holding one standard at church and another one completely outside of church, is one that forms the basis for many dismissals of the Church, but also many sermons as well. The focus (from the perspective of the Church) has been on issues of “personal morality”, as named by Ganiel (2006).

The purpose of “small groups” (mentioned in Chapter 4) is often to provide a group to whom a person is accountable not to do those things that would be considered against the Christian moral code. Another example of such accountability is software that has been developed for men, one example of which is *X3 Watch*. A man can install this software on his computer and if he visits a site deemed pornographic, it will notify (by email) a group of people he has chosen ahead of time. This provides “accountability” not to visit those sites (<http://x3watch.com/>). This sort of idea is (while perhaps extreme) an example of the kind of measures being taken, within mainstream evangelical churches, to bring a person’s life in line with the values they profess to hold on Sunday morning.

Both the leadership and membership of Hamilton A and Hamilton B speak about a willingness to blend their spiritual lives with the rest of their lives. At some level this is related to the “bringing in line” described above, but the focus and conception are different. As I will later illustrate, the reasons for decompartmentalization seem to have less to do with eliminating vices, and more to do with dissatisfaction with the typical lifestyle of a middle-class North American family- in terms of money-stewardship, consumption, environmental stewardship, treatment of people of other races, cultures,

and religions, and knowledge and treatment of the poor, both in one's own country, but abroad also. These are all still issues of morality, but they are of social significance, rather than predominantly personal.

The result of this shift in emphasis has been a corresponding shift in terms of personal politics. Depending on the group and the person describing them, this could be characterized as either a dis-alignment with the right, or an alignment with the left. I should here point out that neither of my case studies hold any official affiliation with a political party or view-point, but both (though particularly Hamilton A) acknowledge a tendency to the left that is more pronounced than generally would be found in an evangelical church¹⁶. Oliver of Hamilton A summarized, "We wouldn't say we're more liberal... We are more liberal though. [laughs]" (Oliver 10/19/06). While a group that emphasizes personal morality would likely sympathize with typical right-wing policies of anti-abortionism, and anti-gay rights, privileging monogamous, heterosexual marriage, certain censorship measures, particularly when it comes to sexually explicit material, and heavy penalties for crime. A group that emphasizes social justice rather than personal morality would likely care more about issues such as social programs for the poor and homeless, foreign aid, affirmative action (arguable), trade and labor justice and laws regarding preservation of the environment and energy conservation – all issues that are more left leaning than not.

This political polarity shift in the emerging church and in other "progressive" evangelical churches has caused some to suggest that this is a concession or a compromise on the part of Christianity to remain "culturally relevant" and current. This

¹⁶ The Hamilton B community is reluctant to self-identify as political at all, however, on an issue-by-issue basis there is evidence of at least the *disaffiliation* with the right.

has been the cause of a great deal of angst in evangelical circles, as well as many speculations as to where this will lead eventually. One good example of this; in December of 2003, Charles Colson famously wrote an Article in *Christianity Today* called “The Postmodern Crack-Up”, which celebrated the “demise” of what he calls the Postmodern worldview, supported partially by statistics showing that a pro-life stance is on the rise in young people, despite the beliefs of their “Pro-choice (and horrified) parents” (Colson 2003: 72). His argument centered on his assertion that Postmodernists claim there is “no transcendent truth”, a claim that Colson says is a) intellectually impossible to defend, and b) leads to bad decisions. Colson concluded, “It would be the supreme irony – and a terrible tragedy – if we (Christians) found ourselves slipping into postmodernity just when the broader culture has figured out it’s a dead end” (Colson 2003: 72) (my parentheses). Brian McLaren responded to this article with an open letter to Colson on his website, calling out Colson’s misrepresentation of the postmodern worldview (<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/000018.html>). Colson then responded to McLaren’s open letter with a private letter reiterating his position, which McLaren posted (with permission) on his website (<http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/000160.html>). Most recently, in June of 2006 Colson (referencing his 2003 debate with McLaren) wrote another article in “Christianity Today” called *Emerging Confusion*, which largely echoes his argument in *Postmodern Crack-Up*, this time centering his discussion on a “young theologian” who is given a pseudonym, and who Colson claims to have convinced to give up his postmodern worldview (Colson 2006: 72).

A common criticism leveled at the emerging church is that they are flirting with complete relativism. There is concern that when beliefs that have long been considered truth in mainstream Christianity are called into question that it will cause the fundamental belief in absolute truth to eventually unravel. Another common concern is that the emerging church values personal desires, preferences, and feelings over submission to God. To summarize the views of the emerging church doubters, at best it's a classic case of style over substance, and at worst it's complete heresy. In a commentary entitled "Emerging Church: Revival or Return to Darkness?" (understandthetimes/commentary/c29.shtml), Roger Oakland succinctly summarizes the concern, "Things are changing, they say and the 'emerging church' has the answers for our generation. But what will the emerging church emerge into? Could it be a form of Christianity that embraces experience rather than God's Word?" In this commentary Oakland goes author by author through many prominent emerging church books (including Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life*, which most would not consider an example of emerging church literature,) citing Biblical references refuting the claims made by these authors. In his conclusions, Oakland voices the fear that Protestantism will revert to a loose Catholicism,

It appears to me the "Emerging Church" of the present era and the church that emerged after the New Testament was written are one and the same. Remember the words of Paul as recorded in the book of Acts: "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

While Rick Warren, Dan Kimball and Dr. Robert Webber and others may be excited about the "Emerging Church" and the direction it is presently headed, I am concerned the "Emerging Church" may actually be a re-emergence of what has already occurred in church history. If the pattern continues expect to see evangelical Protestants become more and more

Roman Catholic (understandthetimes/commentary/c29.shtml).

Deciding the degree to which the emerging church, and a church like Hamilton B, adhere to fundamental Christian doctrine is outside the scope of this work. This debate is important, however, for two reasons. First, as with any resistance movement (and at this point I am speaking about resistance within evangelicalism/ mainstream Christianity), the emerging church is causing fear and outrage. Secondly, as I will later illustrate, both Hamilton A and Hamilton B speak as much of their “movement” being a “return” or an attempt to recapture practices or beliefs of the early Church that have been lost along the way, as they do of updating or evolving the Church. (When they do speak of updating it tends to be describing language, or modes of communication.) This is important only in-so-much as it is *their* desire to hold to some fixed foundation of Christianity. It is this groundedness in belief, as well as the notion of a “return”, that make the emerging church a counterculture rather than simply an aesthetic or linguistic fad.

In *Resistance Through Rituals* (Clarke et al 1976), Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson note that countercultures tend to be middle-class groups rebelling against their parent culture. They, “tend to construct enclaves within the interstices of dominant culture... Middle-class cultural milieu merge and blur distinctions between ‘necessary’ and ‘free’ time activities” (Clarke et al 1976: 62). As we continue to look at the resistance efforts of Hamilton A and Hamilton B it becomes clear that particularly Hamilton A, as an example of the emerging church, has a close kinship with this description of 1960’s counterculture. This Chapter will continue by illustrating the importance of the blurring of distinctions in the decompartmentalization strategy of both Hamilton A and Hamilton

B, later on in Chapter Six the “interstitial” nature, of Hamilton A particularly, will be the focus.

The resistance to what Hamilton A and Hamilton B would consider failings of many Christian churches starts with the leadership. Chad explained to me that he had held two previous ministry positions with the Salvation Army before he eventually planted Hamilton A. As a Youth Pastor in Barrie, Ontario he inherited a group of only two youth, which under his watch grew to over 300. Chad was heralded as a success in that role, but confesses that he felt like he was “being eaten alive inside” (Chad 09/28/06). He gave two reasons for this; the youth group existed entirely separate from the adult congregation, which made it a failure in his eyes since it lacked the integration of true community. Chad described the church vaguely as a traditional, conservative, Salvation Army Church. He did not agree with how they operated and felt he did not fit. He then took an associate pastor job in a large church in Calgary, Alberta. This church was in the mold of the seeker-sensitive mega-church. Chad described it as holding large and entertaining events to draw people in, and then evangelize to them. Again, Chad expressed a certain admiration for the degree of success the church had with this approach. This church, with a fair amount of consistency, was able to increase its numbers. Even though Chad was pleased with the results of their efforts and his role in them, he felt the same “eaten alive inside” feeling as before. He described feeling alienated because no one inside Christian circles seemed to have similar thoughts and worries, and he became concerned that he might be losing his faith.

This feeling stemmed from a discomfort with the typical “pastor” role, but also from a growing dissatisfaction with many of the conventions of evangelical Christianity.

The kinds of questions Chad has are exactly the kind that make leaders of the mainstream evangelical churches nervous. “I am beginning to wonder if the Bible has any direct doctrinal teaching for us,” Chad mused, later adding “I am becoming increasingly convinced that it doesn’t.” Chad certainly is quick to point out that he doesn’t mean that the Bible is not relevant, but simply that the directions in it need to be contextualized to be properly understood. He was also concerned that I understand that he does believe in truth. While agreeing that Hamilton A was probably an example of emerging church, he qualified this by adding “but if you mean sort-of-universalist, then no” (Chad 09/28/06).

It must be pointed out, however, that Hamilton A is far less likely than most churches to require certain beliefs or mindsets from its membership. Chad claims that being a part of the community is not contingent on agreeing with the official stances of Hamilton A (which are “officially” those of the Salvation Army.) “Not even everyone is a Christian... We have some members that are in to Wicca” (Chad 08/29/06). Here Chad gives one extreme example of an opposing world-view held by Hamilton A membership. One can see how a statement like this, particularly in isolation, would fuel Colson’s critique of the emerging church as subscribing to a kind of relativism.

Both Mark of Hamilton B and Chad of Hamilton A expressed a questioning of the “inerrancy” of Scripture. As is evidenced in Chad’s comment that he is “becoming increasingly convinced” that scripture does not exist for the purpose of supplying doctrine, his attitude towards the bible is in flux. When Mark expressed his views regarding the inerrancy of scripture, he positioned them as a falling more or less in line with his Anabaptist background. “The only inerrant or perfect word God has ever given us is Christ himself... it is only human theologians who have made up the notion of

inerrancy” (Mark 09/21/06). Mark suggested fear has been the motivating factor for many Christians who have adopted this position. “The fear of getting it wrong, the fear of getting into heresy and error, has led us to a real attachment to theological purity and doctrinal inerrancy” (Mark 09/21/06). While Mark expressed his preference for the notion of scripture’s “infallibility” (“it always gets it done”) over the more specific stance of inerrancy as a personal belief, he also articulated several reasons why this position is beneficial. Chief among those reasons is the fact that it “releases the burden” of having to account for the conflicts within scripture. Mark argued that many outside of Christianity are turned off immediately by the unwillingness to “own up” to the confusing and vulnerable aspects of scripture. Doing so lends a certain instant credibility to Hamilton B, in Mark’s opinion. At least one member of Hamilton B (Peter) made a point to express his rejection of the “inerrancy” theory, echoing the statements made by Mark.

Gary of Hamilton B, particularly on the subject of his non-violence stance, expressed a discomfort with his previous church background. He described discovering the Brethren in Christ denomination, and their own beliefs regarding non-violence as a “where have you been all my life? experience”(Gary 10/18/06). However, Gary’s previous experience as a pastor seems much less a story of internal struggle and finding one’s calling than that of Chad. Sean who is a lay-member of Hamilton B, as well as a volunteer Home Church leader, was also a member of Gary’s previous church. He describes Gary developing the (now synonymous with Hamilton B) “Q & A” portion of the Sunday morning service at the old church. He also states that Gary’s trademark speaking style was already firmly in place by the time he left the old church and took his current position at Hamilton B (Sean 12/20/06).

Perhaps what Hamilton B has offered Gary is an opportunity to fully shape a church around what he calls “the irreligious message of Jesus”. Mark suggested,

We probably are different... and at least a lot of Christians have echoed this back to us, we focus on communicating what scripture calls the “good news” or the gospel... on a part of the gospel that is often not talked about... Our purpose statement is to honor God by proclaiming the irreligious message of Jesus and fostering loving communities of fully committed Christ followers (Mark 08/31/06).

Mark used the parable of the prodigal son to illustrate this message. He explained that historically this parable has been seen as a story of redemption for the younger brother, which shows that God can save a person from “self-indulgent sin.”

What’s interesting though... that part of the story isn’t the point of what Jesus is saying. It’s only half of the good news, and it’s the easier half of the good news... The second half of the story is the story of the older brother, which is the point of the story. That’s actually getting at another fundamental problem with the human race- not only do we have in our self centeredness a propensity to self indulge, we also have a propensity to attempt to be our own rescuers, our own self saviors. We try to build systems or create structures that rescue us from our own sin... Our own efforts to self save keep us completely isolated from god’s own saving activity, and make us self righteous in our own eyes, judging other people- ‘if you don’t buy into my system or to my vision, you are to be judged or condemned’... Self indulgence has a way of wrecking your life, but religious, self saving sin actually doesn’t pay that bad of dividends. You actually can go your whole life to your grave that way... its like a vaccination; you get enough of the truth (a dead version) that actually vaccinates you from the full living version when it comes along (Mark 08/31/06).

Telling people that they can “follow Jesus” without having to subscribe to a legalistic system is a focus of Hamilton B, as is reflected in their “purpose statement.” In this sense they have similar values to the emerging church and Hamilton A. There is an

effort to deconstruct the typical stances of Western Christianity. Gary tends to do this using a variety of logical and historical devices. For instance, on June 25, 2006, Gary gave his last talk in a series called “From Christ to Christendom” which was intended to trace the development of the early Church in the first few hundred years following the resurrection and ascension of Christ. This last talk was called “The Plot Twist of Constantine” and was a narrative-style account of how Christianity “over-night” went from being persecuted by Roman rule, to becoming the imposed religion with the conversion of Constantine.

Gary made two main arguments during this talk. First, that the early Church leaders felt compelled to accept Constantine’s military ambition, and conquest-slanted version of Christianity when Christianity (until that point) had been a non-violence movement. Gary argued that we are still experiencing the fall-out from this monumental shift, and that we might now look back to this decision as a mistake. Secondly, Gary suggested that in rushing to declare a solid “creed” or doctrine, dissenting voices were silenced and forgotten, and firm “legalistic” positions were taken on matters that should never have been made the subject of rules.

Another device employed by Gary is to bring historical context to stories or instructions given in the Bible. Often this will reveal an interpretation opposite, or at least somewhat different than the common Christian interpretation. Such a device is an extension of Gary’s notion that one should take the lessons of the Bible as principles (to be taken very seriously and followed), but not as *laws*. It is common to hear Gary implore his congregation to ask “what is the heart lesson of this story?” and to warn “we don’t want to create a new legalism out of this.”

In contrast, Chad is much less a believer in lecture-style teaching. The Hamilton A group, as I have already described, values discussion, dialog, and experience over a top-down delivery of information. Both groups are, in large part, basing their resistance on a re-opening of typically closed debates in evangelical Christianity. They are interested in the application of the current context to the principles articulated in the Bible, but where Gary and Hamilton B would editorialize on the subject from the pulpit, Hamilton A has much different venues through which to address such issues.

Hamilton A holds an event called “Theology Pub” during which members of Hamilton A, along with anyone else who wishes, gather at a local pub for a drink, and to discuss matters relating to Christianity. There is also the discussion component of the Sunday service, as was described in Chapter Four. Finally, a component of the Hamilton A community which has not yet been discussed is the role of blogs, and the practice of blogging. This is a very important practice for many that consider themselves a part of Hamilton A. Members post their thoughts (ranging from trivial to deeply personal) for all to see, and other members make a habit of visiting these blogs and posting responses. This is a common forum for discussion and debate in the Hamilton A community. The emphasis on blogging is characteristic of the emerging church, and is a good example of how the Hamilton A community (both stylistically and functionally) identifies with that movement.

The important difference to establish at this point is that while the Hamilton B community does involve themselves in the “deconstruction” of Christianity it is in order to take the membership on a new logical path that ends up somewhere else, somewhere the leadership of Hamilton B would argue is better suited to living the Christian life.

They have an agenda in that sense, and a *message*; the “irreligious message of Jesus Christ”. While one could not successfully argue that Hamilton A have *no* agenda, or *no* message to speak of, their deconstruction is much less structured to begin with, and is designed to accommodate a plurality of voices and ideas. It is not designed to end up at a predetermined destination.

Both groups use language and discourse very intentionally. There seems to be two reasons for this. In some cases language used typically in Christian circles reflects the assumptions or beliefs that these groups wish to avoid. Discussion of the use of worship music, for example, is done very carefully. Mark, while telling me how a Hamilton B Sunday service runs, used the word “singing” multiple times to describe what happens before the sermon. He used this in place of the more typical shorthand “worship” or “worship music”, or a more accurate description that a band plays a song and the congregation sings along. For similar reason Gary claims, “we don’t, in our church, refer to Sundays as our ‘worship services’”(Gary 10/18/06). Both Mark and Chad while defining worship mentioned that it “isn’t just music”. For this reason language is avoided that equates the two. John made a point to correct himself when he realized he had referred to music as “worship” (John 04/12/07). Mark’s use of “singing” also places the emphasis on the action of the congregation and not the band. This reinforces the notion that this is a participatory experience rather than a performance or entertainment of some kind. The word “church” is used carefully as well. Hamilton B reserves the word “church” for their Home Churches, never describing what happens on Sunday morning, nor the building, as “church”. Similarly, Chad is careful to call their Sunday evening

event a “gathering” rather than church, expressing also that church should be something one *is* rather than something one *goes to*.

The use of the word “gathering” is also an example of linguistic phenomenon that is more prevalent in Hamilton A than Hamilton B. Hamilton A seems to prefer to employ terms and ideas from outside of Christian discourse. The use of “gathering” in place of service is an example of this.¹⁷ Another one is the use of the term “cohort” used to describe their leadership committee, rather than calling them “elders” or choosing a more institutionalized name. Hamilton A will also use language that resists concrete meaning or definition. A great example of this is the way the individual members of the “cohort” are profiled on the Hamilton A “cohort blog” site. Instead of listing the responsibilities of each member the site offers the following sorts of descriptions, “Chad lives in the world of leading, teaching, and missionality,” “Oliver lives in the world of coffee house, networks, and creativity,” “(A Female Leader) lives in the world of friends, special events, and hospitality.”

These descriptions accomplish two different objectives. First, “lives in the world of” is an intentionally vague statement. Chad explained that they did not want to limit the role of these people, or to create the expectation that they are necessarily “in charge” of the “worlds” they live in. They prefer to keep such roles undefined, or at least defined abstractly. Each of these descriptions also lumps some defined roles and jobs (for

¹⁷ While I suggest this is a term from outside of Christian discourse, it is very much a part of emerging church discourse. Dan Kimball (2004) promotes the use of the word “gathering” in place of “service” because, “Most people view a worship service as a place where we go to get service done to us by ‘getting our tanks filled up’ at the service station”(Kimball 2004: 2). This word choice by Chad reveals not only the intentional engagement with the emerging movement, but a desire (through language) to conceptualize their services as participatory rather than consumer oriented.

instance Oliver actually is in charge of the coffee house, and Chad is in charge of teaching and leading) with interests and passions of the members of the cohort.

“Missionality” is a value and a concept too vague for Chad to be “in charge” of.

Likewise, Oliver is an artist, and as part of his role with Hamilton A he does end up being a liaison with the arts community in the neighborhood. The vague descriptions offer much more possibility for cross-over and overlap between “worlds”. This kind of discourse is, again, representative of Hamilton A’s participation in the emerging church and the emerging conversation.

The settings in which Hamilton A and Hamilton B hold their corporate worship services are perhaps the most instantly attention-grabbing aspects of each group. Both hold their meetings in places of leisure, and of commerce for that matter. While Hamilton B certainly cites various reasons of convenience, both groups occupy their café and theater intentionally, as well as strategically. This, I believe, goes beyond a simple attempt at “cultural relevance” in that these kinds of spaces are “cooler” than church buildings. The issue of space, and the corresponding issue of aesthetic style is where I would like to begin my discussion of “decompartmentalization” and its importance to the notion of resistance for both Hamilton A and Hamilton B.

I would argue that Mircea Eliade’s (1959) description of dedicated sacred time and space are in agreement with the dominant way that Christians engage with worship today. The space is usually set apart with a dedicated building. One moves from the everyday world into that place where the divine will be encountered, or at the very least celebrated and meditated on. The services are cyclical in nature through repetition and fixed style – most especially when the service is liturgical, but to some degree any church

community will offer something consistent. Significantly, these churches are viewed as ongoing and not a part of a present moment that will be eclipsed by another. The emphasis is on perfecting the process of worship, both practically (making sure everything runs smoothly), and doctrinally and experientially.

I will argue that both Hamilton A and Hamilton B exhibit properties of Eliade's latter description of the consecrated life. This is at the heart of what I mean by decompartmentalization – the collapsing of the distinction between sacred and profane, and the dissolution of ritual. What replaces it is a life of pilgrimage. Certainly in a theoretical way Hamilton B resembles what I have just described. Hamilton A, however, embodies the notion of the consecrated life in a much more profound, or at least persistent way. I will, starting with the notion of threshold, now describe the role of decompartmentalization in the resistance tactics of each group.

The issue of threshold is complicated in the cases of Hamilton A and Hamilton B. It is true that both have a place where people can count on a meeting every week. When a person walks from the street through the door of Hamilton A's building, and into the café, they go from being outside of a Christian worship service to being inside one. Likewise, when a person moves from the theater parking lot, through the lobby, and in to a specific theater, there is a transition from outside to inside where a service is taking place. In a physical sense the notion of threshold is intact, certainly. However, the meaning and context of the space and the meetings that take place inside them works to undermine this notion of threshold.

First, the example of the Famous Players theater - The Hamilton leadership of Hamilton B speak about having their services in a public space such as a movie theater as

an opportunity to be integrated into the community even at the point of their worship service. Frank mentioned that he thought it was important that Hamilton B maintain the tenant relationship with Famous Players, and that they continue to rely on that relationship. According to Mark, Hamilton B grows at a rate of 25% a year, and most of that growth is educated, suburban, upper-middle class people. The decision not to build, or acquire a building, for the other sites besides Oakville is clearly not one made due to lack of funds.

I inquired as to whether or not the Hamilton site might look into acquiring its own building because there are some inconveniences which accompany the use of the Famous Players theaters. For example, when I attended a Hamilton site service on 11/20/06 we were told we would have to exit immediately following the end of the service. We were also asked not to congregate inside the building because the theater would be showing matinees of *Casino Royale* at that point, and needed the space for those lining up to get into the theater. Sure enough as I, and the hundreds of others who attended the service, streamed out of “church” we had to squeeze past the James Bond faithful who were lined up and ready to enter the theater. The book tables and coffee stations which were present and operational, as I had entered, had already disappeared- which means that “tear-down” was taking place while the service was happening.

The Hamilton site leader Frank cited similar examples as useful for forcing their service to exist in the real world, and not in a protected environment. He also mentioned that even the business relationships they have with the theater they see as an opportunity to blend their worship with everyday life. For instance, in renting the space, Hamilton B has been a valuable and regular customer for the Famous Players theaters in what has

been a relatively lean and disappointing year at the box office. Hamilton B views this as taking part in, and at some level, serving the community.

Finally, and most importantly, it is seen as advantageous to meet at a public landmark sure to be known by all, such as a movie theater. This, for instance, makes it possible for a member of Hamilton B to casually mention the time and place of the service to someone, and they will know exactly where to find it. Not only will they know where to find it, they will more than likely *know* it. This was clearly articulated by Gary,

Places of commerce, such as movie theaters put a lot of energy into- first of all choosing a location that's good for traffic and is visible, and then secondly they put effort into advertising the location they have chosen, saying this is where we are. So we can say the Hamilton [site of Hamilton A] meets in the Ancastor [specific] Movie Theater, and anyone can go online and find out where that is (Gary 10/18/06).

Sean, Peter, and John all expressed feeling that people uncomfortable or unfamiliar with typical churches, might not feel the same way about the theater space. Peter suggested it would de-emphasize the common worry for new churchgoers that they will not “know what to do” or how to behave. Sean described the theater as a neutral and “safe” place for people to enter or re-enter a church community, and also hypothesized that the theater environment might be less likely to attract people who would be looking for a “religious” institution. These giant multiplexes, while they might have been a sensory overload when they first started appearing, are now familiar to most people living in the suburban GTA. There is an instant familiarity with the space that grant's ownership to the newcomer as much as the Hamilton B insider. If anything, it is the Hamilton B community who are the guests in the space and are already erasing their tracks even as their service is happening. In a sense it removes the issue of separation – one does not

cross a threshold from the outside world into church- it is the same place one sees a movie on a Friday night. The strange and unfamiliar are brought in to the outside world.

Hamilton A's cafe offers a similar familiarity to someone coming in to a Sunday evening service. This functions differently, in part, because it is the Hamilton A community who own the building, and who operate the café. The Hamilton A community has dissolved their threshold through their successful attempt to make their building and space a part of the Beasley community landscape. Rather than being set apart, Hamilton A is integrated – situated in the historical present as well as existing as an everyday part of the neighborhood. The constant change of the interior environment (a new art show at each week), of the format of the worship service, of the weekly events and programs, and in general the sense of impermanence that surrounds each of these things all contribute to the linear rather than cyclical nature of the Hamilton A. Certainly it is not a rare thing for a church building to house community events, but Hamilton A has become wall-space for local artists, a stage for local musicians, a hangout for the kids that live nearby. The space has several other identities as well – and it serves all of these purposes just as much as it is a place for a Christian church to hold its meetings. The surrounding community is swept into that building, and occupies the space. The significance is that to the Hamilton A community there is no difference or distinction between those who come in to watch a movie, or those who come in because their band is playing there, those who come in to get coffee and a Greek salad, and those who come in because they like to come to a Christian worship service.

This was articulated in two different ways by members of Hamilton A. I asked Keith what the difference was between people who are members of the church and those

who just come to get coffee. He seemed genuinely not to understand what I meant. He described Hamilton A as simply varying degrees of involvement. Laura considered the café and church as separate. She admitted that this is not the way most people in the community (including leadership) think of it, but for her the church was just another thing that happens to occupy the space. In fact, for the most part she only spoke to me about the café, and the good *it* does in the community.

The way worship is conceptualized, and perhaps more broadly what is considered “Christian activity”, by both Hamilton A and Hamilton B also produces the decompartmentalization I am describing. Both Chad, and Mark and Gary made a point to express that what happens in the worship service on Sunday is not the extent of worship, nor is it the most important aspect of worship.

When I asked Mark about worship, he asked himself the rhetorical question “How do we live holistic lives of worship all the time?” He mused that it was not simply not sinning, before answering “Express hearts of compassion, mercy and justice” (Mark 09/21/06). He suggested there is a difference between giving one’s self to God while “typing at my typewriter” or “doing my gardening at home” and a more intentional “heightened” worship. Finally he settled on the following definition of worship, “all of life – and *particularly* when one expresses mercy and justice” (Mark 09/21/06). When asked to define worship, Gary responded,

Service offered to God. My understanding of the New Testament word for worship is that it can be translated ‘service’. At least one of them can... I would see worship as honoring God by serving his agenda, which is usually serving other people. So it’s a mixture of honor and service. So I see worship as what we are doing, or not doing, in every day of our lives (Gary 10/18/06).

Gary's teaching often addresses the issue of living "holistically". In a sermon series entitled "Organic: Worshipping the Creator by Saving Creation" (05/21/06, 05/28/06, and 06/04/06) Gary argued that many Christians have adopted a Gnostic world view; meaning that Christians consider the "spirit" and the "flesh" separate, and privilege the spirit at the expense of the flesh. This, according to Gary, is a chief reason why some Christians might not view preserving the environment as an important issue; the physical world being nothing more than an obstacle to becoming fully spirit. Gary argued that the realm of the spiritual and the realm of the physical must not be separated in this way. Along a similar line of reasoning Gary, in a sermon entitled "Sex and Intimacy" (02/18/07), claimed that sex should exist in the context of a person's spiritual life, and that the typical Christian view is that this should be compartmentalized, and kept in the private/ personal sphere.

Chad goes a step further than Mark, Gary, and the leadership of Hamilton B in his discussion of what worship is.

Worship is the act of giving ourselves to God. Its way beyond music and sermons and worship gatherings and prayer. It's the way that we live our lives.

Worship in terms of the "act" of worshipping is actually a pagan thing... I would say that discipleship and worship are very connected. And both of those appear to me to be awareness of who Jesus is. If I was aware every moment of the day who Jesus is, and what he has done, what he is about, and what he says... my life would be different. That is full discipleship (Chad 08/29/06).

He states adamantly that Hamilton A could do away with its Sunday evening worship gathering (which is the only official time that the majority of Hamilton A members would ever be in one place) and that the church would not suffer. "I wish the church could

become less a place you go, and more a thing you are, and that would be worship” (Chad 08/29/06).

Many people considered (by Chad) to be core members of Hamilton A never attend the Sunday service or do so infrequently. To say the least there is a de-emphasis on the importance of this kind of corporate worship. Ian stated that for him worship was simply a recognition of God’s glory, and that for him that is easier to do in quieter and more reflective moments. For him, he said, in some ways the Hamilton A worship service was not altogether conducive for that kind of recognition.

Though the worship *service* is de-emphasized, some attention will now be placed on that weekly component of the Hamilton A programming. Although Chad has not followed through on his boast that he *could* do away with the Sunday service without the community suffering any ill-effects, the nature of those services as well as Hamilton A environment exhibit a loose and changing structure. As I have already described, the Sunday night service often takes the form of a discussion night, or some sort of creative activity rather than music followed by a sermon. This largely reflects Chad’s belief that discussion, interactivity, and variety are better ways to learn and consider ideas than straight lecture. Oliver explained that they are trying to craft a participatory experience rather than have their members engage as “consumers” (meaning that they should not come just to receive something, or be passively entertained) - this makes “church” a part of their artistic and creative endeavors, and a part of their theoretical and intellectual pursuits.

Alt-worship might consist of readings and meditations, or it might consist of a digital segment where there is some sort of power point that’s got pictures and words that are supposed to lead you through a meditation, or there might be... I remember one time there was a set of Christmas lights

and there were twist-ties and pipe cleaners and we were just supposed to make an installation, just to focus on the creator and be creative...

[...]

Engaging... trying to make people active in what's happening. It's more about not letting people consume what we are talking about. We don't want to have a consumer mentality. We want to have an active community. When things become too... consumer... even if everyone was coming, it's almost like you would want to totally change it (Oliver 10/19/06).

Chad wished to express that this is not merely a cosmetic change, quipping tantalizingly, "We are not just redecorating the house... we knocked down the house, we might be using some of the bricks from the old house, but that house didn't work for us anymore" (Chad 08/29/06).

Chad and the leadership team are in agreement that people who have come from a church background seem to have the most trouble understanding and accepting the way things are done at Hamilton A. Chad explains that they continue to expect that Hamilton A exists to meet their needs, when in fact it exists to give them an opportunity to meet the needs of the community. In this sense Hamilton A takes the notion of the participatory experience of worship a step farther even than Hamilton B. There is very little explicitly spelled out or provided for the members of Hamilton A. Most activities or segments of the services are something for one to do, or talk about, rather than listen to or watch.

Each person I have interviewed about Hamilton A has spoken about worship as something that happens throughout his or her everyday life as much, if not more so, than occurs during the time set aside for worship on Sunday evenings. Chad talked about worship as being an attitude of sacrifice or service along with an imitation of the example of Christ. This is what he means when he talks about becoming "more missional", which is a primary goal of Hamilton A. Ian explained to me that since coming to the Hamilton

A, “church” bleeds in to the rest of his life- at work, at home, and wherever he happens to be. In the middle of our interview a boy and his friends stopped over and said hello. Ian gave me an apologetic look, but proceeded to ask about the boy’s family and how his friends were doing. Afterwards, he offered that this was an example of what he was talking about. Having time to talk to someone who wants someone to talk to, for him, is an act of worship.

Keith, when asked to give an example of when and how he worships paused for a while and then explained that usually he is an aggressive and impatient driver. He considered those times when he lets another car ahead of him in traffic an act of worship – this being an example of a choice to humble himself, to show “love” to someone, and to sacrifice his own best interest *for God*. Ian mentioned that he thought that life constantly offered opportunities for worship, which he considers to be times when one can recognize God’s glory, and that in some ways the Hamilton A worship gathering is a little busy to allow for that kind of recognition.

While both Hamilton A and Hamilton B leadership suggest that “sacrifice” is, or can be, a defining feature of worship, Hamilton A’s leadership are much less concerned about putting parameters on what qualifies and what does not.

Chad speaks of the blending and blurring of his church into the various other realms of life as well as into the physical community and the historical present, what I am referring to as de-compartmentalization, as a return to the more holistic nature of the early Church. He would stop short of saying that they have at some level re-claimed or recreated the original essence of the Church but acknowledges that it probably bears more similarities to the early Church than other typical evangelical churches would. This

is important only because it is significant that Hamilton A, at least partially, views this as some sort of return to an ideal. Hamilton B similarly views itself as going back to the heart of things, before “religion” and “legalism” had over-run Christianity.

The decompartmentalization strategies of both Hamilton A and Hamilton B are aimed at combating this process of the subordination of the Christian world-view described by Stanley Fish (1999), who argues that people with religious beliefs are expected to defer to a system of logic grounded outside of their own world view, in Western culture. The use of public and leisure space is, at least in part, an effort to assist those who are part of the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities to think about their lives “holistically.” Even in that weekly time set aside for worship and spirituality takes place in an integrated environment, with the threshold removed (or at least de-emphasized.) For those participating in this worship, it is a reminder that “worship”, as conceptualized by the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities, is in large part the decisions and actions carried out in the everyday world. In this sense even the physical and practical aspects of the various programs and actions of both Hamilton A and Hamilton B work hand in hand with the rethinking of, and careful use of, language to form a discursive reworking of Western, Christian Church. They hope that in reinforcing, at every level, that the spiritual, the physical, the religious, the domestic, the leisure, and the career segments of life are all one and the same, that their members will think about certain issues differently.

Hamilton A, at least corporately, goes one step further in their attempts to manifest this mindset. Chad, as well as Oliver and Keith, spoke of moving into the

neighborhood as being a crucial step in their participation in the Hamilton A community.

Oliver articulated that most clearly,

It's hard... I'm probably wearing something made by someone who shouldn't have made it. It's just that total lifestyle permeating justice that... everything matters. We have to keep moving towards that. I think once people start moving into the neighborhood... that's when I would see it (Oliver 10/19/06).

I asked Chad, as I asked each interviewee for this study, if his world-view had ever come into conflict with his common sense. Chad responded by recalling the difficult decision to move his family from the wealthier Ancastor area to Beasley. Chad has been criticized for bringing his wife and children into a dangerous area with a higher crime rate. Oliver, while explaining his decision to move into Beasley, described having concerns about the quality of schools in the area and admitted that his garage is currently covered in graffiti and that he has found used condoms behind his house. Even still, both men expressed this as something they considered of fundamental importance, especially as leadership, if they are to fully realize their goals as "Hamilton A".

Oliver, Keith, and Chad's decision to live in the area manifestly represents a clear example of the "de-compartmentalization" I mentioned earlier. The commitment to community that the members of Hamilton A see as fundamental to living out their Christian beliefs is seriously at odds with the propositions of possessive individualism, that I argue the Christian beliefs of the members of Hamilton A would be expected to defer to.

The countercultural aspect of Hamilton A and Hamilton B is not so much the fact of a church owning and running a coffee shop, or renting a theater, or any of the worship practices that encourage and stress decompartmentalization – this simply allows for the

intersection and collision of beliefs and world views. The privatization of religious belief that is theorized by Fish does not seem to keep those beliefs from forming the rational basis for many personal life decisions – who one has sex with and when, whether or not one uses drugs, and if one will have an abortion or approve of someone else having one, these have all been considered by many to be moral issues for which Christianity is up to the task of addressing. On the other hand, decisions like where one will live, what kind of job one will have, who one will be friends with and why, and how one will spend leisure time- for these, Christianity is often considered irrelevant and a person looks else where for a rational basis for making these decisions.

All members and leadership at Hamilton A have expressed the struggle it is to maintain and complete this decompartmentalization. Oliver particularly explained his dissatisfaction with the disconnect between the beliefs of the leadership team regarding social justice, and the measures taken to live these out. Ian, while explaining to me how his political views and practices have changed since coming to Hamilton A explained that the nature of the Hamilton A community constantly reminded him that his responsibility was not just to himself. This would be an example of the intended result of decompartmentalization. In Ian's case, this led him to stop voting conservative, though this was never explicitly encouraged *or* discouraged by the Hamilton A leadership. Chad very concisely summed up the struggle when he said, "if I was aware every moment of the day who Jesus is... my life would be different" (Chad 08/29/06). The structure (or lack thereof) is intended to create this awareness.

Fish uses an example of a white supremacist who comes to reject his world view when he discovers that his white supremacist group would consider his daughter, who has

a cleft palette, a deviant. Fish explains this sort of conflict of beliefs might never be recognized if it is never forced, and that the outcome can be unpredictable, but that ultimately it comes from within the various beliefs held by the individual and not from without. The leadership and membership of Hamilton A are consistently producing and forcing these intersections, and for most they recognize which of their Christian beliefs that will remain fixed. While it might seem as though an integration into secular life would be a dilution of a religious movement, as has been the worry regarding the emerging church in the mainstream evangelical circles, at least for Hamilton A that does not appear to be the way they would view it. As I stated earlier, one of the concepts that is associated with the emerging church is that of cultural relevance. Critics from within the evangelical community see this as compromising to fit in with the secular world. Chad, when describing the five “values” of the Hamilton A community, suggests that to him, relevance is authenticity and consistency. At least conceptually this is a fundamentalist movement that is at the same time countercultural.

The point of Fish’s story about the white supremacist is that it was not a “principle” that produced his decision, but rather his mind and heart were changed in an unpredictable fashion when two realms of his life, heretofore kept separate in his mind, intersected. The result was the realization of his deepest values, now separated from superfluous logic and laws. While I argue that this is precisely the aim of Hamilton B’s appeal to do away with the constraints of religion, to replace legalism with relationship, and to discuss “heart-lessons” instead of principles, I also would argue that it is more relentlessly embodied in the open structure of Hamilton A.

An intrinsic aspect of Hamilton B's multi-site church is the uniformity of the experience. Gary is seen and heard each week by every participating member of every church site. (At the time of writing Hamilton B has just set a new church record for overall attendance in a single week with over four thousand people.) In their individual Home Churches they will all (theoretically) work through the same discussion questions in the same order, and end by discussing the same suggested applications.

In contrast, at many Hamilton A worship gatherings the various members in attendance will have very different experiences. They will not all discuss the same issues, they will not all meditate at the same stations, and they will not *necessarily* all have contact with Chad. I recognize that the activities are still chosen for a reason, and the discussion topics are chosen for a reason, and are presented in a certain context – and possibly with a preferred reading, in Hamilton A as well as Hamilton B. However, the degree to which the Hamilton A leadership maintains control of these different circumstances and contexts is far less. There is a much more developed system of checks and balances at Hamilton B to ensure that things are running as they should- Site pastors visit Home Churches and meet regularly with Home Church leaders for this purpose.

This unwillingness to impose structure and to self-define will be central to my discussion of these groups as communities in Chapter Six. As I spoke with Chad about many of these issues, his answers were often qualified with “yes and no”, “maybe”, “we’re not sure yet”, “we are still figuring that out”, and many times “this is just my opinion; we don’t have a stance on that.” He admitted that there are drawbacks to the way the Hamilton A community operates. People can sometimes get confused, and sometimes

fall through the cracks, but as he reminisced about the system he left behind he resolved,
“I’ll take this any day” (Chad 09/28/06).

Chapter Six – Paraliminal Community

The notion of community received considerable attention in all the interviews with members from both Hamilton A and Hamilton B. Both groups use words like “authentic”, “true”, “real”, and “genuine” to set the community they wish to foster apart from what is available in other churches. The purpose of this chapter will be to describe the very different approaches to community that Hamilton A and Hamilton B have undertaken, which I briefly touched on in Chapter 4, before examining the implications of these differences. In this Chapter I will outline the concept *paraliminal community* to describe the unique challenge of preservation faced by Hamilton A and the emerging church on the whole.

The leadership of Hamilton A has a much more traditional idea of what “community” means, geographically speaking. The Beasley neighborhood only includes a square of a few city blocks in downtown Hamilton. In the case of Hamilton B the whole city of Hamilton is just one part of what they consider to be their targeted “community”. Mark calls the area within the scope of Hamilton B’s community “the GTA/ Hamilton corridor” (Mark 09/21/06). However, Hamilton B has recently started a site in the “Tri City Area”, serving the cities of Kitchener, Waterloo, and Guelph, Ontario. These cities (all over an hour drive from any of the other sites in the Hamilton B community) are certainly outside of the GTA/ Hamilton corridor, marking a clear expansion of an already large target area. Additionally, through the “podcast” option provided on the Hamilton B website, various student groups have started in universities all over the province, basing themselves on the teaching of Gary.

Mark terms the kind of geographic area covered by Hamilton B, a “macro-community”. Mark suggests that this kind of macro-community is a normal part of a commuter culture, such as the one largely housed by the greater Toronto area.

Within 50 minutes... 45, 50 minutes, [are] close to seven million people... If you want to have an impact in Canada, the Toronto Hub, and this whole Golden Horseshoe is influentially like combining New York and L.A. together in one city – in terms of population base, economic engine, and infrastructure and influence... If we can get this message into the blood stream, get people talking about it; it’s a good place then for it to bleed out to other places for people to consider it (Mark 09/21/06).

We realized that the larger sub-urban areas function as a macro-community in a way that’s different than a local community- and so people move around... they change jobs... but they share the same sports teams. They share the same sense of urban identity, but they are pretty fluid in terms of where they might live. They might live in Burlington, they might live in Brampton, they might live in downtown. On top of that, the person they work with, the person in the cubicle next to them are probably their friends- and they probably live all over the place. The chances of them being best friends with the person down the street, or the neighbor next-door is minimal. The chances of someone being friends with someone at work are very high, but they could live anywhere. So we realized – having a church in one big location, where everyone has to drive in is actually fighting the flow of how people do relationships in a large suburban setting (Mark 09/21/06).

Mark explained that instead of providing simply different service times, they needed to provide different service locations. This allows people to invite their friends, and “journey together”. “This is exactly what has happened” (Mark 09/21/06).

The difference in the way community is conceptualized geographically can perhaps be explained by the difference in demographic targeting. While Hamilton A does not speak in terms of target demographics in the same way that Hamilton B does, their expressed mission is to serve the community they dwell in. They specifically made a choice to be in Beasley, in large part because of its need. This is a marked contrast to the

demographic targeted by Hamilton B. Mark several times described to me what he called “the emerging global culture”, which is the group Hamilton B is most directly aimed towards.

They are networked through the internet, they will likely have some form of university education, their mythology is... Lord of the Rings, Star Wars... the movies [are] where their mythology comes from. They have a global mindset – it’s a culture that is worried about things like AIDS and the environment. This emerging global culture is fueled... well the internet is a huge motivation for this, but also travel. The fact that flying is so easy and accessible... International organizations are moving people all around- its clearly emerging. We are trying to translate the message of Jesus to the emerging global culture (Mark 09/21/06).

Gary added, “we are trying to appeal to someone who is [a] thoughtful, educated, urban, spiritual seeker; someone who is already asking questions” (Gary 10/18/06).

When Mark states that people in urban centers live in “Macro-communities” this is true of the demographic he describes above. Not surprisingly the Hamilton site of Hamilton B does not have a strong presence in the downtown area. Frank explains that the location of the theater where the Hamilton site meets on Sundays is situated in an area that is impossible to reach from downtown unless someone has a car. As with any city, people who live and work downtown often rely on public transit rather than keeping a car. The downtown area served by Hamilton B simply does not function the same way that the “emerging global culture” does. It really is a neighborhood in the traditional sense. For this reason the emphasis on their building and that space makes sense in the context of their mission, while it would not for the Hamilton B community. The centering of Hamilton A and the de-centering of Hamilton B would seem to be a direct result of this difference of mission.

Here we see an aspect unique to Hamilton A, i.e. one not shared with Hamilton B. The Hamilton B community and leadership *are* the emerging global culture that they target. When Mark says that they are “translating” the message of Jesus, he means that they are articulating it in the language of the culture that they themselves occupy. Gary explained, “We use movie clips in sermon illustrations because I like movies. No one said that’s what we have to do. We use techno music during the offering because I like dance music and I used to be a DJ” (Gary 10/18/06). In contrast the leadership of Hamilton A, as well as each of the members I spoke with, are not lifetime residents of Beasley. The occupation of this neighborhood is a migration. This creates the unique distinction between those who live in the neighborhood, always have, and who have in some way become connected to Hamilton A (either through the church or the café), and those who either commute from out of town, or another neighborhood, or have recently moved to the area for the purpose of becoming involved in Hamilton A. It is the difference between those who Hamilton A exists to serve, and those who have chosen to serve *through* the Hamilton A community.

As I mentioned in Chapter Five, when I asked Keith about this distinction he seemed genuinely not to understand what I meant. Chad recognized the issue raised by the question I was asking, but it is clear that this is a distinction that Hamilton A wishes not to emphasize, or perhaps more accurately that they wish to erase/ remove or at least blur. I will discuss the ways through which this is attempted when I detail the blurred lines surrounding membership in the Hamilton A community.

The flavor of the Hamilton B community is very much shaped by the way Hamilton B targets those who are unhappy with the more typical “church” options

available to them. I have already discussed at length the slogans used by Hamilton B (“church for people who aren’t into church”, “god hates religion”, “not into religion? Perfect. Neither are we...”)) which clearly aim to catch the interest of people who have a negative opinion of church. On Feb. 21, 2007, I attended the Hamilton sit service and sat in the theater B, which is the “overflow” room. While theater A has a live band play, the overflow shows a series of commercial-style clips made by Hamilton B. These clips cycle through with announcement bulletins mixed in between mimicking the pre-show loops used before movies.

One of these clips shows a couple meeting with a Pastor to become members of his church; he outlined several rules and conventions of the church as the couple looked more and more confused. This clip ended with the tag line “If we ever get this complicated, feel free never to come back.” Another clip featured a very awkward young man door-to-door evangelizing. He encounters a young woman who asks him several questions which he tries to deflect. The man can barely contain his excitement when he discovers the young woman is single, and his manner is very exaggerated social awkwardness. The tag line of this clip is “[Hamilton B]. We like questions. Really. We Do.” Finally, before the service started another clip was introduced from a series called “what’s the worst that could happen?” aimed at convincing people that attending their services and Home Churches will not be an uncomfortable experience. This one features a couple discussing the fact that they have not been to church in a long time, the woman stating “we don’t even own a bible. Do you think they’ll know?” When they enter the building an alarm goes off and a voice can be heard repeating the word “evil”. The couple are thrown into a cell that contains other unsavory looking people.

Mark explains, “We have grown a lot by people who are connected to a church in some way... coming, hearing the message. They might be disenfranchised, they might be frustrated, they might be angry, they might be sitting on the sidelines... go Christmas and Easter... That would be where most – the vast majority of our people have come from. Now having said that, we have (compared to most churches) a sizable group of people that have no church background” (Mark 08/31/06). John reiterated Mark’s claim that Hamilton B can primarily be broken into those who have past church experience and are “damaged goods”, and those who have never been involved in church, and added a third category of people who are drawn to the “style” (John 04/12/07). Of the member of Hamilton B that I spoke with, who did not hold paid leadership positions, only Peter placed himself in the “damaged goods” category, while both Sean and John had extensive experience with church, and likely best fit into John’s third category.

This is a clear tactic by Hamilton B to target those who might consider themselves on the margins, or as outsiders in spiritual circles. The way these clips function is to present an exaggerated stereotype of church – not Hamilton B, but some *other* church. The message is clear – you probably do not like this, neither do we. You might think church is usually silly, and we do too. Hamilton B is, at the point of first contact, establishing an identity *with* those who have left church or who never went to church. Mark stated regarding these devices, “For people who maybe don’t like religion its like... Wow! You mean... you believe in God and you don’t like religion either” (Mark 08/31/06)? John suggested that this alternative identity was an important part of affiliation. He touched on this in the context of discussing the extent to which he feels he is in community with other Hamilton B sites,

It's really quite unimportant to us... It is to me anyway. It's also quite unimportant to me if I am with another person who is also a Christian, who also... who has the same philosophies that doesn't go to [Hamilton B]. As a [Hamilton B] community though, we see ourselves as a collective, we just have the same vision and focus. And we like people who say 'hey, I can resonate with that, I want to join as part of that process' whether it's officially or not... (John 04/12/07).

John established that for him, Hamilton B is bound by a common mindset rather than geography (micro *or* macro in his case)¹⁸.

The Hamilton A leadership similarly distinguishes what they do, and what they are, as something different than typical "church". "We are a church... targeted... well, I don't know if targeted is the right word... but targeted to people who may be looking for truth, but are not interested in traditional forms of church" (Chad 08/29/06). When I asked Chad about the lack of typical programs at Hamilton A, as well as his refusal to fill the usual role of "senior pastor", he suggested that those things are only a problem for "the church people." Here Chad creates a separate category for those who have come from a strong church background. In truth, I did not talk to anyone at Hamilton A who did not have at least some church background, but none of those people were satisfied with the model of church that they had come from. Interestingly, even though Chad himself grew up in church, attended bible school, and has only held jobs with churches, the term "church people" is one that describes someone other than "us."

Chad here attempted to break down the dynamic of his group.

¹⁸ Steve Taylor (2005) notes that house churches (a common practice of many *emerging* churches) tend towards this sort of homogeneity, and as a model for church do not easily allow for "peg communities", (communities based around a central focus that draw the participation of otherwise disconnected people) (Taylor 2005: 116-118). Sean acknowledged that the current Hamilton B model, while working well for commitment-based "ethical community" in Home Church, causes more relaxed and casual socializing to require extra effort to achieve (Sean 12/20/06).

We have everything from- because of the neighborhood we are in, we have a lot of... crazy people, and you know, I mean literally crazy people – they have mental health issues. They live in this neighborhood. We have a lot of poor folks, homeless folks, and we also have a whole bunch of artsy-fartsies- some of whom have church experience, some of whom don't. We have a lot of young families. We have a lot of university students, and... we have some folks who are what I would describe as Christian hangers-on. They've been around the church far too long, and they kind of came to the church plant because it was a romantic, new thing to do. But now the churchiness has started to rear its head- so where all along it's been fine that we don't have programs, we don't have small groups... We don't have that kind of stuff because we want to organically be friends and be missional... Now some of them are like... we've walked forward not having hierarchy and how we've done things is fine- now its like they want a pastor... so were just now getting into... how do we deal with this, what do we do here (Chad 08/29/06)?

There are some folks who come to our church who have church experience. For a lot of them they have a hard time not being into that, because that's what they've done. We have a lot of newer folks joining our church who are not that way. There is definitely a pocket of people who are insular and definitely still... consuming the product of the church. There are a bunch of people who are really... basically still figuring out who Jesus is and what he actually says... and then there is a bunch of people who are desperate to follow him and want to be missional, and need the encouragement of the community here to help them (Chad 08/29/06).

Chad outlines the struggle the community has to maintain its fluidity. The natural tendency would seem to be to slip into the typical structures associated with church. While he speaks about the “church folks” with frustration evident in his voice, they are a part of the community – something Chad would not deny. His description of the different kinds of people who are involved in Hamilton A was actually part of an answer to a question I asked about the different degrees to which a person can participate in Hamilton A. As is evidenced in his answer, Chad has classifications for different “kinds” of Hamilton A members, however there is no difference in the “status” of someone in the “people who are desperate to follow him and want to be missional” (a group I assume

Chad would consider himself a part of), and the “church folks.” The people he sees as missing the point of the Hamilton A mission are as much members as the ones who “get it.” As Ian put it, “if you are here, you are in” (Ian 10/18/06).

“It’s all about community” is a consistent refrain when Chad is speaking about his church. I asked him about the fact that it is often nearly impossible to come to a Hamilton A service without meeting and talking to several people as well as sharing one’s thoughts about controversial issues. (The former might not be so rare for any church, but the latter certainly is in my own experience.)

We try to be a friendly, loving family rather than a seeker sensitive – slip in anonymously, slip back out if you want... It’s also partially based on the fact that we are a small coffee house. It’s just the way it’s designed. Rather than sitting in the back and facing the front, there is no back. We’re facing each other. So even when people are singing and interacting with worship for instance, they are singing to each other, which makes it uncomfortable for a lot of people (08/29/06).

Chad recognizes that they lose a little “approachability” but this is not intentional, and they do their best to limit the intimidation factor.

The relationship between leadership and membership is a defining part of both communities. Hamilton B’s leadership structure is very solid and defined. Everyone has a title, and in my interviews I was able to cross verify that everyone knew his/her own role, and what everyone else’s role was. There was very little variation in these answers. As I outlined in Chapter Five, this is not the case with Hamilton A. Leadership roles are described in terms of what “world” a person lives in, with the exception of the practical duties regarding the café. There is an intrinsic link between this lack of definition, the hazy borders of membership, and the constant change of the Hamilton A worship practices and programs.

A lot of churches have a set plan six months in advance – ‘here’s the topics, here’s the passages, here’s the lay-out and the calendar.’ That doesn’t work for us. The reason it doesn’t work for us is that the vibe of our community today is different than tomorrow; which is why for us, believe it or not, people’s blogs play a huge role in what we teach. Because we are following each other, we are keeping up in community with each other all the time. Therefore getting that... kind of the pulse of where we are at as a community is more like... we can kind of plan a month, but sometimes not even really... Church is led in community. So one of our little slogans is ‘preaching by the people, for the people (Chad 08/29/06).

There are two important issues raised in Chad’s words; the first relates to planning, and the second to leadership. Regarding the issue of planning ahead, Chad summarized, “We plan as little as we can get away with” (Chad 09/28/06). This commitment to spontaneity was reiterated by Oliver, “We have the bare minimum of policies” (Oliver 10/18/06). Chad here connects that commitment to the desire to see a church “led in community.” By leaving their calendar open to some extent, the Hamilton A community makes room for more voices to guide their practices. The page of blog links provides a forum for this to take place. This establishes a clear link between the Hamilton A community’s decision not to streamline their operation and the participatory worship experiences I argued contribute to the de-compartmentalization strategy employed by Hamilton A in Chapter Five.

In contrast, Hamilton B is much more committed to efficiency than to spontaneity. While there is a board to which Gary and Mark are responsible, in terms of decision making, that falls to Mark and Gary ultimately. My understanding is that the board would only step in if there were serious questions about the leadership of Mark and Gary. The decisions regarding direction of programs and teaching fall to those two men.

Mark suggested that if site pastors had ideas or problems with teaching direction or sermon series they could meet with Gary and he would consider their thoughts, but that generally Gary's judgment is considered "pretty good". Once those decisions are finally made, they are carried out, and the hypothetical "months in advance" planning described by Chad is alive and well at Hamilton B. Gary describes his position as having greater "influence" rather than greater control, "I wouldn't want to be falsely modest and say I am on a par with everyone else. I would certainly have more influence" (Gary 10/18/06).

When I asked Chad about what the Hamilton A community thought about various issues, he was very careful not to speak as "we" referring to the whole community. In cases of opinion, preference, even on "fundamental" Christian issues, Chad would offer his personal opinion, but refused to speak for the community. (Typically he would suggest "some of us do, and some of don't" to any such question directed to the community on the whole.) Certainly I would not suggest that there is *any* church, or organization for that matter, all act and think as one, but it certainly is unusual for a leader take each voice of the community into account to such a large extent that he would not summarize the voice of the majority.

Interestingly, Oliver articulated the leadership style of Hamilton A as being not yet fully formed and, in fact, an area of struggle with the Hamilton A community's parent denomination the Salvation Army,

There [are] two sides of it. From [Hamilton A]... the cohort is supposed to be equal leadership. We don't vote on things, we are supposed to come to a consensus. And it is supposed to be that the cohort is leading the church, the cohort is not just supporting the pastor's ideas. In the Salvation Army it's run the opposite... the pastor runs the church and has final say on anything if he needs it... we would like it to be more like cohort, and some weeks it is, and some weeks it's not (Oliver 10/19/06).

Oliver made these statements, which on the one hand suggest a community that has not reached the realization of its vision, but on the other hand might possibly reveal Stanley Fish's pragmatism that I argue is behind their de-compartmentalization strategy. The Hamilton A community abides by its core values, which might manifest themselves in different ways according to different circumstances. The membership of Hamilton A quite obviously relates to Chad as a leader. The fact that they, in *principle*, wish to de-emphasize his role as lead pastor does not over-ride that in every situation. Oliver's words also serve to illustrate the open and changing relationship of Hamilton A to the Salvation Army.

I had interviewees from both groups talk about things they did not agree with, or would change about their respective church communities, however these were more often than not solicited in the case of Hamilton B. Both leadership and members of Hamilton A spoke about their community, church, and café as though they were still items up for discussion – still being formed. For the most part they could also recite the opposing views, and the logic behind those who held opposite opinions from themselves. Some differences of opinion were focused around the structure of the worship service, the personal consumption of alcohol (not a church issue except for the fact that the “theology pub” takes place in a pub, obviously...), the extent to which the church has become a “student community” and the recent naming of a young (university aged) woman as a member of the “cohort” over various older, long-time members, and the personal duties of Chad. These all came up fairly matter-of-factly in the course of the interviews, and

while the interviewees seemed to have opinions on these “debates” they did not seem to be divisive issues for the most part.

As I have already documented, Chad claims that members of the Hamilton A community are not required to conform to any list of beliefs, claiming that many would not necessarily describe themselves as Christians. Chad also does not believe in making members “pay their dues” so-to-speak before allowing them to participate. Keith told me that four weeks after coming to Hamilton A for the first time he was asked to preach at the Hamilton A worship gathering. This is an extreme example of an inclusive attitude towards participation and even leadership. Again, the inclusion of a multitude of voices is perhaps best exemplified by the use of blogs in the community. Anyone who wants can start a blog and have it linked to the Hamilton A community website. Other members (leadership included) will visit these blogs and make comments – and as Chad mentioned, the leadership will take the kinds of questions and feelings raised in blog posts into consideration when thinking about what kind of corporate worship service to have, or what kind of teaching or discussion would be appropriate for the time.

Chad does not believe it is necessary to have complete control over the messages or even programs carried out through the Hamilton A community. The first time I met him he told me that Hamilton A didn’t currently have a “small group” program (which usually means a group bible study or accountability group), and that he was glad and didn’t see the need for them. (Oliver later clarified “He thinks they are the worst invention on the earth”.) Two weeks later when I attended the Hamilton A community’s worship gathering another member announced that he was starting a small group. This is not a problem to Chad, and he later stated that he prefers his community to feel

empowered to take initiative rather than to have control over everything that happens. This is the kind of thing that would simply never happen, nor would it be encouraged, with a leadership structure as dense as the one in the Hamilton B community.

Chad admits that there are pros and cons to this way of doing things - One of which is that the church community he pastors (at least for a while) will have a program that he does not believe in. Chad told me a story of a gay man who had written him an email asking if he and his boyfriend would be welcome at the community. Chad wrote back saying that he would *like* to give him an unqualified “yes”, but that the truth was there would be some in the community who have no problem with homosexuality at all and would not hesitate to welcome a gay couple, that others may not agree with that choice of lifestyle but would also receive a gay couple into the community with open arms, and still others who would probably be against their inclusion in the community. Just the same as when he spoke with me, Chad would not (and could not) speak on behalf of his whole community, even in an instance when he might have liked to pretend that he could.

The size of the community is at least one determining factor in this aspect of Hamilton A. Perhaps Gary and Mark would not be able to speak or act so unilaterally if they came in daily contact with each and every member of their community, and lived in the same neighborhood. It would certainly be tough for Hamilton A to ignore the multiplicity of opinions they have since it is such a small community. But this is also a philosophical decision, and Chad is not blind to its drawbacks. When I asked how he handles the fact that he can’t control what his “flock” will hear, or consider, he suggests that he is fine with this, not because he does not believe in truth, but that because they are

a small community who all know each other well, if someone teaches something “heretical”, “that gets worked out in community.” By “worked out” he means talked about rather than silenced. Regarding the issue of speakers Chad suggests that he will not endorse someone to speak in an “authoritative voice” without feeling comfortable with that person- so in this sense the Hamilton A meetings are not simply an open-mic “free-for-all.”

Of course, there are benefits that the Hamilton A community would agree exist due to the way the leadership allow the community to run. Ian credits the inclusive view of membership for what he described as a closer, more intimate, and ultimately authentic sense of community than he had experienced in other churches. People evidently are not worried about “fitting’ in as much as other churches because of the lack of defined membership. People with controversial opinions, which might be silenced or at least dismissed by other church communities are not only accepted and heard, but given a voice in the community. Not having to come to an official stance on many issues has arguably prevented strong differences of opinion from becoming major issues between members of the community.

Chad is quick to point out that the official stance of the leadership is agreement with the doctrine of the Salvation Army, and that that does not change. However, membership in the community does not require agreement with those principles, as was made evident through Oliver’s comments about leadership style, the way the Hamilton A leadership engages those stances *does* change, even if the stances themselves do not. This creates a relationship between Hamilton A and the Salvation Army that is difficult to define. Chad maintains that as a church community they are on very good terms with

their parent denomination. While Chad recognizes that there is a possibility that Hamilton A may one day choose to leave the Salvation Army denomination (that the two entities are not necessarily one and the same), his qualification was that he “can’t imagine” the circumstances under which that would ever happen (Chad 09/28/06).

As I expressed earlier, one of the most important by-products of the un-defined nature of the Hamilton A community relates to the de-emphasis of the distinction between the “servers” and the “served”. One possibility in a scenario such as the Hamilton a church-plant, is that there ends up being a community of people who are bound together by a desire to serve a certain *other* community deemed to be in need, or less fortunate. That *other* community might be seen as something different entirely- A community of people bound together by geography and a willingness to receive the goodwill and the services provided by the first community (that exists to serve them.) The scenario I have just described could easily be a way to explain what is happening at Hamilton A (perhaps adding a third group who are interested in Hamilton A because of its unique characteristics as a church.) Significantly, this is not something that is accepted as a given by the leadership, or the membership. The overwhelming trend among those I have had contact with is to talk about all three groups as one and the same, or at the very least to talk about the challenge of making all three groups one and the same. Keith, who himself moved from Toronto to live in the community, is perhaps the most extreme example of the former, as I have already documented earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Five.

Oliver, who is very vocal about the areas where he feels the community falls short of its goals, is the one who made the clearest distinction between “church” people and

“neighborhood” people. His assessment was that they are just now “starting to see” those two communities blend. He cited a recent concert at the Hamilton A café of a woman who was of great interest to the Hamilton A arts community. Oliver said that to his surprise and pleasure, “neighborhood” people came to the concert in large numbers and seemed to enjoy it as much as anyone did. Oliver suggested the mixing of these two groups was beneficial for both,

If you can get the hipsters to be able to come down off the mountain and hangout at [Hamilton A], and you are able to get the neighborhood people who live in this neighborhood and don’t just hang out down town, those two groups of people can sort of inspire the best on the other. A lot of hipster, artsy people have a lot of lip-service to social justice, but might not ever do anything about it. If you bring them into this space in a neighborhood that has a lot of need for social justice, that they might actually start putting their actions and their money where their mouth is. We have a lot of people who know there needs to be social justice, because they live in this neighborhood and have a lot of need for justice. So they understand that, but they have no sense of beauty or hope... and so I think the artistic side, and the justice side... they blend (Oliver 10/19/06).

Aside from growing common ground, in terms of interests, the lack of role definition is an important way that the Hamilton A community attempts to avoid settling into two distinct groups. The difference between “serving” and “hanging out” is often quite minimal, and the notion that what Hamilton A offers is an “opportunity to serve” the community is one that extends to “neighborhood people” as well. Long-time residents of the area are involved in every aspect of Hamilton A, with the exception of the leadership “cohort”.

An analysis of Hamilton A hinges on a discussion regarding the extent to which the community is “emerging” and the extent to which it is refusing to take form. Chad, especially, gives reasons to believe both are true. Stating that they are “emerging” in that

they have not yet arrived, Chad moments later described the Hamilton A community in such a way as to suggest they will *never* arrive, “we are kind of like a bull-rider... if you want to stay on a bull, you re-adjust your butt on the seat sometimes. Not so we can maintain, but so that we can ride long distances” (Chad 09/28/06). Chad here describes the transition of the Hamilton A community as continuous, and not ever ending in stability. To extend Chad’s analogy, the transition lasts as long as the “ride”.

One of the significant aspects of the decompartmentalization discussed in Chapter Five, is the de-emphasis of *ritual*. For this reason the language and theory of ritual, what might seem like a natural place to turn to discuss this phenomenon, will not be entirely sufficient. For instance, the *communitas* concept, as put forth by Turner, describes an “undifferentiated group” which surrenders its will to a leader. As tempting as it might be to think of the emerging church as a form of *communitas*, in the case of Hamilton A (as well as Hamilton B), it falls apart quickly. These are groups that have bound together in a common attempt to leave mainstream Christianity and *become* something else. In so doing they have placed themselves on the margins and become “outsiders” of Christian culture. However, in both groups the emphasis is placed on the personal within the context of community. In the case of Hamilton A the use of blogs is a perfect example of this. It may be “all about community”, but in this community each member gets to have his/her own little space, essentially carved out of the community webspace (since they are linked to it.) In this space they address the community from a place that they control the look and format of, and they touch on any subject they want. The *conversation* is the point of this exercise, but it is not at the expense of individual identity.

While I have noted that the Hamilton B community employs a much more “top-down” structure, this is certainly neither an example of group submission to authority. The whole premise of Gary’s style of teaching is that the group he is addressing is a group that thinks critically. He provides a new paradigm each week for the group to either accept or reject, and then if they accept it, to apply in their lives in new ways. It is a model of personal control where one may consent to being convinced.

There are two ways that one might discuss Hamilton A in relation to what van Gennep and Turner call the *liminal*. The first way relates to threshold, or in the case of Hamilton A, the de-emphasis of threshold. In the ritual model of worship or pilgrimage, the subject begins in the realm of the secular and then either crosses a threshold into the sacred, or one makes a journey from his/her everyday space to a space that is considered sacred. When Chad tells me that it is as sacred for him to push his kids on the swing as it is to pray in church, he dissolves these components, and in effect explodes the framework we might use to discuss and analyze the process of encountering the divine. However, the process itself has not been dissolved. The fact that the spatial and the temporal thresholds have been lifted does not erase the need, in the minds of the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities, for intentionality. There is *still* a process. Whether it is a matter of choosing to recognize the divine in everyday events, or whether it is a matter of choosing to show justice and mercy in a given context, worship and/or encountering the sacred is not something that either Hamilton A or Hamilton B would say just happens. Particularly in the case of Hamilton A, I need a new way to talk about the concept of threshold, and I need something apart from Turner’s notion of *liminality* to discuss this process.

The other way that *liminality* relates to especially Hamilton A and the emerging church is the context of transition. Turner discusses rites of passage, such as the process of being ritually accepted into adulthood, or the marriage ceremony, during which two people are transformed from single entities to being one married couple, as *liminal* periods and spaces. The liminal period is the time in-between the former status and the eventual status (after the transformation has taken place.) At the risk of mixing metaphors, I would like to discuss Hamilton A, as an example of an emerging church, in terms of this kind of liminality. These people who have left (some literally, and some more theoretically) the evangelical Christian church, have not in their minds left Christianity, but they are in the process of changing their relationship to Christianity, and their relationship to “church”. As a loosely defined group, they have left a long-standing structure, or model, of church, and in a very real way have ceased to be that. Everything about the state of the Hamilton A community, and most especially the language, suggest that this is a group that is experiencing this kind of transition. However, there is an important difference between the transition that is occurring at Hamilton B and that being experienced by Hamilton A. The current Hamilton B process could be characterized as a “fine-tuning”. While much of the Hamilton B story seems to describe the accidental birth of a “mega-church”, the current reality is certainly a leadership with a clear vision of where they want their church to go in the future. Gary suggests that the Hamilton B leadership would naturally theorize and plan, but the rapid growth has caused them to be adaptable by necessity, explaining, “life has gotten ahead of our theories” (Gary 10/18/06).

When Gary came to become the pastor of Hamilton B, it began a focus for Hamilton B towards not repeating the patterns of many evangelical churches. Those aspects of church, and of the communication of the Christian message which Gary and the Hamilton B leadership felt were in need of rethinking, were deconstructed with an eye towards reconstructing something “better.” Now they are a church of over 4000 people, growing at a rate of 25% a year that is aiming at changing the culture by bringing the “irreligious message of Jesus” to primarily the “emerging global culture”, as represented in the Hamilton GTA corridor. This macro-community is desirable to them because it represents the cultural and economic “hub” of Canada. Hamilton B will attempt to set up a Church site within 30 minutes of everyone in this area, and to have a home church within 10 minutes.

In contrast, Chad does not give the impression that his community is particularly closing in on stability. The bottom-up approach exemplified by the use of blogs in the Hamilton A community nearly ensures that it will not ever reach that point. Indeed, the permanence of Hamilton A itself is not something that is taken as a given by Chad. He is clear that he does not think the community could sustain becoming much bigger than it already is. If it hits the point of “critical mass”, most options are “on the table” so-to-speak, but it would almost certainly mean the breaking of the current community, and would definitely not involve up-sizing in any way. Chad says that he is unsure whether he would stay or whether he would leave and start something else.

Rather than discussing Hamilton A as being in a “liminal” state or as *communitas*, I suggest it is better described as a *paraliminal community*. As I briefly outlined in chapter two, *paraliminal* describes the state of occupying both Arnold van Gennep’s

“transition” stage and “incorporation” stage. To explain in the language of the pilgrimage, the Hamilton A community, as a part of its participation in the emerging church, has collapsed the notions of the journey and the arrival at the sacred site. The result of the decompartmentalization strategy, which includes the blending of worship and spiritual with the everyday, and integration of the community’s home base (the café building) into the surrounding neighborhood, is that instead of crossing a threshold from one’s everyday life in the profane world into the sacred space, the sacred occupies the same space as the everyday. Perhaps more accurately in the case of Hamilton A, the community is encouraged to move into the *margins* and to encounter the sacred in community there. In this sense the pilgrimage *is* the destination. As a paraliminal community, Hamilton A fosters an environment and mindset of constant journey, but just as importantly they pursue a constant *arrival*. This is an ongoing occupation of both stages.¹⁹

In the case of the emerging church as a movement, and the Hamilton A community’s participation in it, the church necessarily adopts a constant state of transition. I will remind the reader of Guest and Taylor’s recommendations to the emerging church,

¹⁹ Another theoretical framework that could be explored in the future is Antonio Negri’s (1997) concept *multitudo*. “So that it seems that the *multitudo* can be a political subject only as an idea of reason or as a product of the imagination. By contrast, concretely, the *multitudo* us a continuous and contradictory mixture of passions and situations – and then, across a new dislocation, and accumulation of will and reason, which, as such, constitute institutions... All in all, the formation of the political subject is postulated as a tendency in an indefinite interweaving of subjective intersections. From this point of view, plurality has an advantage over unity. Reason, thought, would like the *multitudo* to be presented as a single soul...” (Negri 1997: 233). The plurality and lack of solid borders around the *multitudo* might make it a fruitful lens through which to investigate a group like Hamilton A, though it is outside the scope of this project.

Develop sustainable and meaningful rituals of affiliation and ritualized forms of engagement, do not engage in a flight from modernity to the ultimate exclusion of rhetorical forms (eg sermons, talks), offer some special autonomy and therefore a sense of identity set apart from the mainstream church, offer effective and extensive support networks, foster a unique identity that is significantly nurtured by those networks, both relational and virtual, and promote a movement from identity in religious doctrine to identity in practical religious expression... (Guest and Taylor 2006: 61).

Ironically, Guest and Taylor's recommendations for the emerging church to achieve "durability" miss the fact that if the emerging church ever were to finally take form and achieve that "sustainability" (read "permanence") it would cease to be what it is.

Hamilton A as an entity has soft borders. It is an idea applied to a neighborhood, and it will constantly flirt with evaporation. The kinds of systems described by Guest and Taylor are very much in line with what the Hamilton B community has sought to put in place, (and has achieved by all accounts). The "ritualized forms of engagement" (Sunday morning at the theater), and "identity set apart from mainstream church". These are the same systems that Chad has described as the "churchiness" creeping back in to his community.

The kind of institutionalization, or even organization, embraced by Hamilton B (and recommended to for the emerging church by Guest and Taylor) is at odds with the notion of "organic community." Chad considers himself a church "planter"; that word "plant" suggests contrivance. Hamilton A did not spring up out of the Beasley neighborhood without Chad and the Salvation Army intentionally placing it there. However, solid parameters are not placed around community. The impermanence of the various events and practices of the Hamilton A community create a state of flux that is continuous. The separation of the community from the café allows that manifestation of

the community's "missional" attitude to be simply the current project of a group of people, (maintained only as long as it is useful.) For this community (as an example of emerging church) becoming paraliminal, allows the group to avoid being hailed back into recognizable church structures as well as avoiding becoming an exclusive community.

The process of "becoming" is continuous, and only in participating in the endless process is the goal actually reached – entering the realm of the *marginal*, the realm of the *transition*, and remaining there without status and *without solid form* achieves two things. First, it maintains a recognition of linear time and being in the present moment, thus preventing the various practices from becoming ritualized. Second, it allows a manner of ongoing pilgrimage to take place in an integrated setting. For this reason, relationships become the focus of the community, and the café run by Hamilton A becomes simply a project of that one part of a greater network, one that extends into the community, rather than something that a church exists *for*.

When Turner suggests that Christianity makes possible a state of permanent transition and permanent liminality it is in an *institutionalized* form, "what was in tribal society principally a set of transitional qualities 'betwixt and between' defined states of culture, and society has become itself an institutionalized state" (Turner 1969: 107). In Turner's view this return to structure is inevitable,

There is a dialectic here, for the immediacy of *communitas* gives way to the mediacy of structure, while, in *rites de passage*, men are released from structure into *communitas* only to return to structure revitalized by their experience on *communitas*...

...*Communitas* cannot stand alone if the material and organizational needs of human beings are to be adequately met. Maximization of *communitas* provokes mazimixation of structure, which in turn produces revolutionary strivings for renewed *communitas* (Turner 1969: 129).

This is the very heart of the struggle that stands before Hamilton A at the moment, (which Chad frames as a resistance to “churchiness”). Hamilton B has embraced “mediacy”. While the message of Hamilton B is irreligious, anti-legalism, and community is offered (primarily through Home Church), the engagement with that message, and that community are, by design, *mediated*. There is a firm hierarchy among the leadership, and this is necessary to ensure the efficiency, clarity, and effectiveness of the mediated experience they provide. The *immediacy* of the paraliminal community of Hamilton A is maintained by its community-led and directed mentality; unlike *communitas*, the paraliminal community does not crave despotic leadership.

I argue that the members of the Hamilton A community do exhibit some traits of the *liminal personae*, however, this manifests itself in the context of their association, participation, and identification with the paraliminal community. Unlike *communitas*, which describes a group drawn together by a common period of transition and a common absence of status, the members of Hamilton A are drawn into this liminal state as they begin to associate with the paraliminal community. Turner’s oft cited words in this case seem to describe the group, as a church community, rather than the individual,

The attributes of the liminal *personae* (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space (Turner 1969: 95).

Is it a church? Is it a coffee shop? Is it Salvation Army? Is it evangelical? Is it a secular group of friends? Is it emerging? If one imagines these possible classifications as a cluster of circles, the Hamilton A community exists in the thin sliver of overlap between all of them, and far from the center of any. Chad speaks about Hamilton A as

“organic community” in that it is based on friendships and social connections that are loose and changing. What makes it different from the countless other “organic communities” that exist all over Hamilton is that it has a name, a purpose, and someone started it intentionally. What makes Hamilton A different from a church community is that they have a pragmatic approach to their organization around relationships rather than common principles. While the people who populate the community may have liminal characteristics and may have been drawn into Hamilton A because of their own dissatisfaction with typical church, it is through their identification with the paraliminal community that there is any transition. Because of the emphasis on relationship, there is also an emphasis on the individuality of the membership, rather than on commonly shared principles.

Returning to Guest and Taylor’s recommendations, if Hamilton A has any *real* alternative identity to offer potential participants, it is inextricably linked to its paraliminal qualities. This encompasses both the de-compartmentalization strategy of the Hamilton A community as well as the Hamilton A commitment to fluidity and what Chad terms “organic community”. It is hard to imagine a paraliminal community being anything but fragile. To extend the organic analogy, death must always be the ultimate result- either through submission to institutionalization, or by eventually dissolving. Hamilton A is an example of a church community participating in the emerging conversation, and not necessarily seeking stability and sustainability, but instead seeing itself as one local manifestation, in the present moment, of the emerging movement. To finally arrive – to solidify – would be to relinquish their paraliminal identity, and to *stop* emerging.

The Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities represent very different options for evangelical “leavers.” Hamilton B offers a different tradition, from a different reformation. It also provides solid networks and programs. It certainly offers an alternative identity than that of mainstream evangelical church. This is not to say that this identity is merely cosmetic. The priorities and message of Hamilton B is different than those of the mainstream evangelical church. What it has done though, is set up a parallel institution- and one that takes the form of a very evangelical model- the mega-church. Hamilton A, on the other hand, primarily offers potential. It is a vessel through which a person can potentially engage in a paraliminal lifestyle, framed not as a consumer choice, but as a countercultural network, existing inside the margins rather than on the other side of the threshold.

Chapter Seven - Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Research

The Hamilton A community is a network of people who wish to be a part of Christian community, but not the typical structures associated with “church”. By adopting a paraliminal state, they are able to resist the pull to become a church institution, but also to be an open and accessible part of the Beasley neighborhood. By refusing to take a solid form, this community also resists having the vitality taken out of their participation in the emerging movement.

The emerging church as a counterculture, and as a *subculture* within Christian culture on the whole, represents a unique attempt in the postmodern world, to resist becoming co-opted into dominant Christian culture. In his studies of the United Kingdom Punk movement of the late 1970s, Dick Hebdige (1979) wrote that the mainstream media “incorporated” the budding subculture into mainstream culture, rendering its once meaningful semiotic practices into empty signs of style. Sarah Thornton (1996) in her work *Club Cultures* explained that at least for the rave/ dance culture in the United Kingdom in the 1990’s, the relationship with the media had been significantly more complex than what Hebdige had described with the Punk movement. Rather than describing the media as having had a purely destructive effect, Thornton described the media as having been instrumental in making the rave subculture what it was. By creating a moral panic it, in essence, named and placed the rave scene as an oppositional subculture.

Thornton suggests that “insiders” in the rave culture began to constantly retreat from the known, and publicized “mainstream” version of their movement. She described

how participants could mark their “sub cultural capital” through various means. One example was that mainstream (less than legitimate) participants would buy their music on compilation CDs, while club culture “insiders” preferred to buy their music on white-label 12” vinyl. This “inside knowledge” extended to all manner of social behavior as well. It is through these means that a movement can maintain its vitality and authenticity, and who the *authentic* participants in the movement can distinguish themselves and the legitimate version of the movement from the “fake” or the watered-down.

In other words, subcultural capital maintains its currency (or cultural worth) as long as it flows through channels of communication which are subject to varying degrees of restriction. The inaccessibility can be physical as in the case of carefully circulated flyers or intellectual in the case of indecipherable cultural codes.

In this way a subculture can maintain its exclusivity.

It is not surprising that the Hamilton A functions a little differently to this description by Thornton of subcultural inside knowledge. Since evangelism is still a goal of the community, there is a split in their desire for resistance. Hamilton A cannot afford to be an insular community. Its primary goal, that being to serve the community, requires openness, particularly since most in leadership have come to the area from outside of Hamilton, not to mention outside of Beasley. As was stated several times to me by members of the Hamilton A community, the open and accepting attitude towards *membership* (not just association with the community) is a large reason why so many at Hamilton A claim that this is such an “authentic” community. As Chad expressed to me, it is primarily the people with extensive church background who attend Hamilton A’s worship service, that have the hardest time not becoming insular and extending this accepting attitude to the Beasley community.

This is the source of the split in their desire that I alluded to earlier. It is these “church folks” who Chad suggests are behind the “churchiness” that he is committed not to give in to. This is the major site of resistance, which is exactly what Chad is grappling with when he told me that they are still “figuring out how to deal with it.” Being a paraliminal community is one way Hamilton A has been able to avoid the onslaught of “churchiness.” If there is one thing people who have church experience know how to operate within, it is structures, definitions, and programs. By denying all of these things, Hamilton removes those aspects that might have been manipulated. Though Chad did not make this explicit, his referral to certain people as church “hangers on”, and his comment that some of these people have “been around church too long” seem to suggest that in refusing to provide the typical structures and programs of church, the hope may be that those people who might be looking for these things will eventually move on to another church community that will provide those structures and programs. Like the club cultures described by Thornton, Hamilton A, and emerging church in general, will attract people who do not actually agree with the direction they have taken, and some degree of exclusivity will be necessary to avoid becoming overrun with people who want it to be different than what it is. Chad suggested that some among his community might have been caught up in the romance of a new kind of church, but who never actually subscribed to the fundamental world-view that shaped Hamilton A.

The purpose of this project has not been to make evaluative assessments of the Hamilton A and Hamilton B communities, however, by Chad’s own admission, there are sacrifices made to remain a paraliminal community (undefined, and ever-changing.) There is a certain efficiency lost in this way of being a church. “Do people fall through

the cracks? Sure...” (Chad 09/28/06) Chad explained, although he maintains that this probably happens no matter how efficient a church’s systems are. Because of the open and fluid nature of Hamilton A, it is difficult to even evaluate whether they are achieving their goals.

Hamilton B, in contrast, is incredibly efficient. They know exactly how fast they are growing, and they know that there are growing *fast*. Mark explained that part of their strategy is to have few, but functional, programs. Everything must be simple and efficient, without anything extraneous or confusing. This is also something that is touted by their “If we ever get this complicated, feel free never to come back” advertisement. Hamilton B makes no apologies for the formulaic nature of their community practices. There is a “stick with what works” attitude among the leadership, and certainly clarity is something valued above most other qualities. With such well-defined programs, and such a value placed on simplicity, Hamilton B could never afford to allow the kind of multiplicity of voices that Hamilton A can. While the sheer size of the group would limit this ability anyway, to maintain a streamlined, uniform, clear, and efficient system, strong leadership is a necessity.

The leadership of Hamilton A have chosen an uncertain path for their community, and the cost is stability and control. However, the instability of the paraliminal community’s existence is not simply the unsavory part of a necessary trade-off to maintain integrity (a postmodern solution to the extremely modern problem of preserving the authenticity of a resistance movement), it is the functional center of the Hamilton A community’s holistic and continuous vision of a life of worship.

As with any study, while I have come to conclusions that answer one question, several other questions have emerged. Since the study of particularly the emerging church is recent and generally thin, I have several recommendations for the further study of the emerging conversation.

Chad's comment that people who grew up in Christian culture "don't know how to be normal" underscores an issue I briefly touched on in this study. While Hamilton A goes to great lengths to be an accepting community (and to be *perceived* as an accepting community) attitudes and practices reminiscent of typical Christian churches are not valued. As with any community there is a hierarchy of voices, and this opens up a range of issues to be investigated. As Keith reported, he was asked to preach only a few weeks after meeting Chad. This is obviously not an invitation extended to simply anyone who Chad meets at the Hamilton A café, there was clearly something about Keith that impressed Chad enough that he wanted to include him in a special way in their community. Keith himself suggested that members of the Hamilton A community take on as much responsibility as they decide to take. Chad, however, was unwilling to give anymore than a vague answer when attempting to explain who was asked to address the community in "an authoritative voice". The closest he came was to suggest that he knew when people were "solid". What constituted being "solid" was not something Chad wished to unpack. The ways that the social hierarchies of a community like Hamilton A are organized would certainly be worth further investigation.

The use of blogs in the Hamilton A community, and in the emerging conversation in general, are another unique feature of this movement. Understanding this aspect of this trans-local, countercultural movement will be of crucial importance to understanding it

completely, but it will also be an aspect that should increasingly have implications for many other social movements as virtual networks become more and more a central part of human communication.

Everyone I interviewed at Hamilton A either had a blog, or had at one point in the past. Both Ian and Laura expressed a growing disinterest in the practice of blogging. Laura, at the time of our interview, had just asked Chad to delete her blog from the Hamilton A website list of links. Ian maintained that blogging was something he had done for a while, and that it just was not something he was interested in doing anymore. Laura, although she never phrased it as though she had been upset about the experience, did express a growing distaste for the practice in general. For one thing, she began to feel strange about posting personal thoughts on the internet for all to see and comment on. Laura also described feeling as though blogging was a way become an insider in the community, and that at first it was quite validating to post messages and have people post comments in reply. More and more she described feeling as though it was a quantifiable measure of acceptance, and as she began feeling this way she became increasingly disinterested in posting on her blog. "It was weird to choose whose blogs to pay attention to" (Laura 11/22/06).

Without question, the sample size is far too small in this project to yield any *statistically* significant data, however, it is perhaps interesting that Laura and Ian were the (very slight) minority among the Hamilton A members I spoke with not being young men (men in their 20s-30s). This is not to suggest that Hamilton A is not accepting of people over 40 (they are) or that women are not seen as having an important voice (the opposite appears to be true, and women are certainly involved at the leadership level as well), but

it did cause me to wonder what sorts of things make a blogger successful in the Hamilton A community. Are certain kinds of posts taken more seriously than other kinds of posts? Is language a marker of either familiarity or unfamiliarity with the emerging conversation, and would this in turn affect the amount or the quality of responses one receives to his or her blog? (Oliver felt that the emerging conversation was of special interest to those in leadership). Especially since Chad claims that the content of the blogs of members of the Hamilton A community has a profound effect on the direction of the church and café, the answers to these questions take on even more significance. Surely not everything written by every member of the community can be considered with equal attention. Whose blogs determine the direction of the community, and just how is that determined?

The virtual networks of a group like Hamilton A, as well as a larger network such as “resonate” or “emergent/emergent village” are increasingly becoming an integral part of the lives and communication of people involved in new kinds of church and the emerging conversation. For instance, Chad claims that he believes his community has a global presence, in that other churches, leaders, and individuals are looking to Hamilton A to see what they are doing and waiting to see to what extent the things they try end up succeeding. On this level, I would argue that Sarah Thornton’s notion “subcultural capital” could be developed to examine the social organization of these virtual networks and translocal communities.

Thornton muses on the subject of the subcultural “social logic”, “Interestingly, the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself by what it most emphatically *isn’t*” (Thornton 1996: 105). This statement rings true in considering the Hamilton A

community as well as the emerging church in general. Especially the words of Chad reflect this attitude, he is not sure how he would classify his role at Hamilton A, but he is absolutely *not* a “senior pastor”. He could not summarize in a sentence exactly what Hamilton A is, but it is most certainly *not* a typical evangelical church. The kind of community they are trying to foster is complicated to explain, but they do *not* aim to be an insular group of “church folks”. Brian McLaren’s “A Generous Orthodoxy” seems to suggest that he is almost everything *except* that which he has been. This oppositional stance of the emerging church is well known and well documented, but there is a degree of inside knowledge required to know what is “too close” to evangelical tradition to be something that would be encouraged or celebrated by an emerging church such as Hamilton A. Likewise, having a background knowledge of various church traditions would be a minimum requirement for understanding and fully appreciating the ways a group like Hamilton A resists and subverts those traditions.

There are two relatively unique aspects of the emerging church that have not been taken into account with Thornton’s model. This is not necessarily a youth subculture, and I would imagine, although this is not yet supported by empirical research, that this would mean that certain visual-style aspects would be less dramatic and “spectacular” than a culture that is predominantly youth-oriented. The second aspect is the virtual nature of this greater network of the emerging conversation, and on a different scale the use of blogs as a form of communication even in a micro-community like Hamilton A. My own preliminary research has begun to reveal that, not surprisingly, in a virtual environment cultural participants employ much different means of marking their social status than in face-to-face situations. For instance, visual markers such as dress and appearance, as well

as audio cues like speech inflection are completely removed from such situations.

Language, and lexical choice, become much more important ways for a person to display his or her inside knowledge.

Thornton also describes how, in the case of club cultures, it is so important to appear *effortless* in the social interactions of a subculture. Again, since this is not a “youth culture” in the same way that a club culture is, it is debatable how relevant this observation would be towards an analysis of the emerging church in the first place; However, it is necessary to recognize that this will function very differently on a blog, for instance, than it would in person. A blog is a carefully prepared and completely controlled environment. In general, writing is a much less spontaneous by nature activity than speaking is, in that something written carelessly or in haste can generally be taken back (before posting it) in a way that speech never can. The ability to carefully construct one’s blog is well known by participants and even the appearance of spontaneity can be simulated. For this reason effortlessness is de-emphasized as a marker of status or inside knowledge in virtual communities, and in some cases the opposite is true in that displaying the effort expended to acquire this inside knowledge is valued. Further research into these areas is necessary for a full understanding of the phenomenon.

In Fish’s description of the ways a person’s beliefs intersect and collide, he perhaps does not emphasize enough the role of desires and self image in the process. Since the emerging conversation is something that carries a certain cultural cachet in some corners of Christian culture, the role of trends, and the appeal of being current, cannot be ignored when investigating the practices and beliefs of the emerging church (or any counter culture for that matter.) At some level there is a two-way relationship

between style and belief that must be looked at. Not only will this investigation provide a more complete understanding of the emerging church, but those findings might well be valuable toward the understanding of other countercultures based on some kind of fundamental belief or moral stance.

There is an aspect of the Hamilton B community that might also require further study. When Mark talks about “macro-community” it is a theoretical concept, and primarily an attempt to explain why his community works. It would be interesting to look closer at the kinds of connections that are maintained through Hamilton B across the Greater Toronto Area. Do co-workers discuss issues raised by Hamilton B sermons though they have attended different sites? Are extended families united through participation in the same church despite living more than an hour’s drive from the places each attend their respective worship services? There are several issues related to “macro-community”, commuter culture, and Hamilton B’s own unique trans-local community supported by the internet and “pod-casts”.

Emerging church and other new forms of church are young fields of study. I have identified these as the most pressing issues for the further study of these phenomena, most crucial to a more complete understanding of them. Finally, one of the most exciting aspects of the study of the emerging church is its potential as a gateway to the theoretical framing of counterculture in general. Victor Turner (1969) himself discussed the liminal aspects of 1960’s counterculture, considering it an example of *existential* or *spontaneous* *communitas*, which would eventually succumb once again to structure (Turner 1969: 132). For technological, as well as philosophical reasons, the emerging church’s translocal, and paraliminal qualities would not have been possible within the modern

mindset of 1960's counterculture. Certainly it will be interesting to see if supported by the emerging conversation, members of a paraliminal community such as Hamilton A will be able and willing to take part in successive *immediate* paraliminal communities and moments. Beginning, perhaps, with the emerging church, this will be an exciting and appropriate time in history to re-examine the notion of counterculture, and organization of belief-based communities.

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Appendix A

Phone Script: (Pastor)

My name is Matt Masters, and I am an MA student in Brock's Popular Culture program. I am writing my thesis (called 'Melting the Matrices') on worship practice and strategy, particularly focusing on the ways that the practice of worship impacts the daily life and practice of worshippers, as well as their spiritual lives. With your permission I would like to include your Church in this study. If you wish to participate, I will attend your worship meeting three times, I will ask you for a one hour interview, and I will ask for your recommendation for **a church member who will act as a liaison and recommend for me some other members of your congregation who might be interested in participating in this study, and who I will later ask for interviews also.** I will be asking you and your church members questions about worship style and strategy, as well as questions about how worship and spirituality fit into your daily lives. **These interviews will be audio taped for my reference during the study. The names of yourself, your church, and your parishioners will all be kept confidential in the written study.** Before any interviews take place I will give you the opportunity to give your formal consent, and I ask for your verbal consent to attend a first meeting, and to meet with you to discuss your participation in the study. Are you interested in participating, and do you have any questions for me?

This study has been reviewed by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (**File # 05-325**). If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550 ext. 3035 or reb@brocku.ca. **My Thesis Supervisor is Rosemary Hale, Dean of Humanities. Brock University, Schmon Tower 1110, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St Catherines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1. ext. 4562**

Appendix B

Phone Script: (Member)

My name is Matt Masters, and I am an MA student in Brock's Popular Culture program. I am writing my thesis (called 'Melting the Matrices') on worship practice and strategy, particularly focusing on the ways that the practice of worship impacts the daily life and practice of worshippers, as well as their spiritual lives. You have been recommended by (**liaison**) as someone who might be interested in participating in this study. Your senior Pastor has granted me an interview as well as permission to include your Church in this study. If you wish to participate, I will ask you for a one hour interview, and I will ask for your recommendation for one other member who I will later ask for an interview also. I will be asking you questions about worship style and strategy, as well as questions about how worship and spirituality fit into your daily life. **This interview will be audio taped for my reference during the study. The names of yourself, your church, and your parishioners will all be kept confidential in the written study.** Before the interview takes place I will give you the opportunity to give your formal consent. Are you interested in participating, and do you have any questions for me?

This study has been reviewed by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (**File # 05-325**). If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550 ext. 3035 or reb@brocku.ca. **My Thesis Supervisor is Rosemary Hale, Dean of Humanities. Brock University, Schmon Tower 1110, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St Catherines, Ontario, Canada l2s 3a1. ext. 4562**

Appendix C

Consent Form:

This interview is part of a Brock University MA thesis project called ‘Melting the Matrices’ that is focusing on different modes of worship and how their relationship with a worshipper’s daily life and spiritual life. This interview will not be reanalysed or used for study beyond this project with the possible exception of my own review of this project. The audio recording of this interview will be viewed only by myself (Matt Masters) and my thesis advisor, Dean Rosemary Hale.

As a participant, you will be asked to grant an interview that will be audio taped. Participation will take approximately one hour of your time. The possible benefit of this study is that it may lead to a wider public understanding of the worship practices and strategies of your church, as well as a deeper understanding of the relationship between secular and sacred. Given the focus of this study, I will be asking you some questions about your daily life. Please feel free not to answer any question you do not want to answer, for any reason. Likewise, if you decide during the interview that you do not wish to participate in the study, feel free to end the interview at any time. After the interview, should you wish to remove yourself from the study, you have two weeks from the time of the interview to be removed. At this time I will destroy the tape, any notes I have taken, and you will not be mentioned in any way in the written study.

The results of this research will be included in my M.A. Thesis. Upon completing the thesis I will contact you by mail with details of how you can receive a copy of the study.

Neither yourself nor your church will be named in this study. You will be described by age-range and gender, and will be given a pseudonym in the written study. As I have stated above, no one besides me and my advisor will hear the recordings of your interview. This study has been reviewed by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB file # 05-325). If you have any questions of concerns about this study, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550 ext. 3035 or reb@brocku.ca.

Rosemary Hale, Dean of Humanities. Brock University, Schmon Tower 1110, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St Catherines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1. ext. 4562. Matt Masters, 289-242-7211. All data (audio tapes and notes) will be stored by me at my residence and kept confidential. They will be destroyed by May 1, 2007.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

- I have received verbal explanation of the study being conducted
- I understand that my participation in this study will involve an interview that will last approximately one hour.

- I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary, that I am under no obligation to answer any question I consider invasive or inappropriate, and that I may withdraw at any time during the interview or any time in the following two weeks.
- I understand that there are no foreseeable risks associated with my participation in the study.
- I understand there will be no payment for my participation.
- I understand that I may ask questions at any point during the research process.
- I do / do not consent to the interview being recorded
- I understand that any recordings made of the interview will be destroyed after the study is complete.

Signature of Participant: _____
Date: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____
Date: _____

Appendix D

REB (file #)

Thank You Letter:

Dear (Participant),

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for granting me an interview and participating in my study. I really appreciate both your involvement, and that of your church community. I would like to invite you to have a look at my thesis, now that it is finished. If you are interested, please contact me at mastersmatt@hotmail.com or at 289-242-7211.

Best,

Matt Masters

Appendix E

Question Guide for Hamilton A Leadership

- 1) What is your name and title?
- 2) Can you briefly describe Hamilton A and its purpose... (mission/vision)
- 3) How long have you been with the Hamilton A?
- 4) Can you describe your role with Hamilton A?
- 5) Give me a sense of the kinds of things that go on here on a weekly basis...
- 6) From my understanding, Hamilton A functions as both a coffee house and the home base for a church community. Is this accurate, and could you explain how this works?
- 7) Do you see these as separate entities?
- 8) Is there any kind of intentional dynamic created by having your Sunday worship service held in a café environment?
- 9) Have you considered leaving the Café open for business throughout the service?
- 10) What do you mean by sacred spaces, and how does that figure in to the Hamilton A community? (Holy Land?)
- 11) If the Hamilton A (building) is sacred space, is it always a sacred space? what makes it sacred?
- 12) Is it a strategy to create an environment that appeals to a certain demographic?
- 13) Is style important to what you do?

- 14) Could you tell me a little about your leadership team and how that functions
(both in terms of the coffee shop and the church community)?
- 15) What does membership mean to the Hamilton A?
- 16) Is there a teaching/ preaching element to Hamilton A? Who does that?
- 17) To what extent does the teaching and programs at your church apply to the daily
lives of your congregation? Explain how, if so...
- 18) Does this make you more or less political? How so? (politics specifics? Are you a
member/ do you support a political party or view point?
- 19) Does Hamilton A fit harmoniously within western culture?
- 20) What is Hamilton A's role in the community? (responsibility?)
- 21) What is "Resonate" and what does being a part of it mean to the Hamilton A?
- 22) How would you define worship?
- 23) How often do you worship?
- 24) Could you describe some of those experiences and actions?
- 25) On your web site you talk about connections between your worship and your
everyday life. Could you elaborate on this? Examples?
- 26) Are you attempting to produce a certain result by making these connections
explicit?
- 27) What is the purpose and function to the variety of your worship gatherings?
- 28) Can you speak to the specific function of some of the variety of ways that your
group worships?
- 29) Can you maybe tell me about a moment at a Hamilton A gathering that represents
what worship means to you well?

- 30) Has your world view ever been in conflict with your instinct or common sense?
- 31) Are there aspects of typical church that you wish to avoid specifically? damaging?
- 32) What is the role of the bible in your congregation? Your relationship to it?
- 33) Does every aspect of your church/life have a biblical rational?
- 34) In your opinion, does every minute life decision matter?
- 35) What can someone find at your church that they might not find at another church?
- 36) Is that a fundamental issue for you or a matter of preference/taste?
- 37) Have you been involved in a church before you came to this one?
- 38) Can you tell me a bit about that experience?

Questions Guide for Hamilton A Member

Preliminary

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) Tell me a little about yourself?
- 3) What do you do right now? (school? work?)
- 4) Could you speak a little to your goals in that area, and a little down the road?

Main

- 1) Could you briefly describe the Hamilton A and its purpose?
- 2) How long have you been in the community?
- 3) How did you come to it?
- 4) Could you describe your role? How you fit/function? (What does it mean to you?)

- 5) Could you talk a bit about what goes on here? (get specifics)
- 6) How, and how often, does Hamilton A figure into your daily routine?
- 7) What does membership mean?
- 8) Why do you choose to come here, and not somewhere else?
- 9) How would you define worship?
- 10) How often would you say you worship, and when? specific moment?
- 11) Could you describe some of those experiences and actions?
- 12) What do you hope for on any given Sunday night at Hamilton A?
- 13) What about any other night?
- 14) Could you tell me about a moment at this weeks service that stands out to you,
and why?
- 15) Could you tell me a bit about the leadership structure here, and how that
functions?
- 16) What is Chad's role in your opinion?
- 17) What do you stand for, and what does Hamilton A stand for?
- 18) Is Hamilton A political in your opinion?
- 19) If you were to sum up your political stances or world view, how would you do
that?
- 20) What things have brought you to that place?
- 21) Has your worldview ever been in conflict with your instinct or common sense?
- 22) What do you know about the leadership structure and decision making at
Hamilton A, and how do you feel about it?
- 23) Have you been involved with church before this one?

- 24) Can you talk a little about that?
- 25) Are there aspects of typical church that you wish to avoid specifically?
negative/damaging?
- 26) Does Hamilton A address these?
- 27) What is the role of the bible in your life?
- 28) Do you have a biblical rationale for most things?
- 29) In your opinion does every minute life decision matter?

Question Guide for Hamilton B Leadership

- 1) What is your name and title?
- 2) Can you briefly describe the Hamilton B and its purpose?
- 3) How long have you been with Hamilton B? □
- 4) Can you describe your role with Hamilton B
- 5) Is there any kind of intentional dynamic created by having your worship service held in a theater-style environment?
- 6) Do you believe in sacred space? What makes a space sacred?
- 7) What is a Home Church? What is the role of Home Church in Hamilton B?
- 8) Is it a strategy to create an environment that appeals to a certain demographic?
- 9) Is “style” important to what you do?
- 10) What is the purpose of the slogans “God hates religion” and “Church for people who aren’t into church”?
- 11) Is there a connection between worship and everyday life?

- 12) Is postmodernity a meaningful concept to you, and if so, what is the significance to Hamilton B?
- 13) Do you relate to the terms “emerging church” and “liquid church”?
- 14) What is the rationale behind having the same message at every Hamilton B site?
- 15) Are you comfortable with being the (or with [Gary] being the) face of Hamilton B?
- 16) Do you find that members adjust or relate easily to the way your leadership structure works?
- 17) What is the role of community for Hamilton B?
- 18) How are decisions made regarding doctrine and policy?
- 19) How much of this doctrine and how many of these policies are your members expected to adhere to or agree with?
- 20) How important is teaching to Hamilton B? Who is responsible for coming up with sermon series ideas?
- 21) I have noticed a tendency in your preaching to re-examine dominant readings of biblical text through the lens of historical context, and sometimes through an examination of the original greek or Hebrew... is this an important part of your teaching, and is this a skill that you try and pass on to your congregation? Is it crucial?
- 22) To what extent does the teaching and programs at Hamilton B apply to the daily lives of the members?
- 23) How do you hope for your members to engage with the teaching?
- 24) Is there a political aspect to Hamilton B?

- 25) Do you preach non-violence?
- 26) Does Hamilton B fit harmoniously within Western culture?
- 27) What is Hamilton B's role in the community?
- 28) Has your world-view ever been in conflict with your common sense?
- 29) Are there aspects of typical church you wish to avoid specifically?
- 30) What is the role of the Bible in the Hamilton B community?
- 31) Does every aspect of the community have a biblical rationale?
- 32) In your opinion does every minute life decision matter?
- 33) What can someone find at Hamilton B that he/she might not find at another church?
- 34) Is the above a fundamental issue for you? Or is it a matter of preference or taste?
- 35) Have you been involved in another church before you came to this one?
- 36) Can you tell me a bit about that experience?
- 37) What is the BiC, and what does being a part of that mean to Hamilton B?

Question Guide for Hamilton B Member

Preliminary

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) Tell me a little about yourself?
- 3) What do you do right now? (school? work?)
- 4) Could you speak a little to your goals in that area, and a little down the road?

Main

- 5) Could you briefly describe the Hamilton B and its purpose?
- 6) How long have you been in the community?
- 7) How did you come to it?
- 8) Could you describe your role? how you fit/function? (What does it mean to you?)
- 9) Could you talk a bit about what goes on week to week? (get specifics)
- 10) How, and how often, does the Hamilton B figure into your daily routine?
- 11) What does membership mean?
- 12) Why do you choose to come here, and not somewhere else?
- 13) How would you define worship?
- 14) How often would you say you worship, and when? specific moment?
- 15) Could you describe some of those experiences and actions?
- 16) What do you hope for on any given Sunday morning at Hamilton B?
- 17) What about any other night?
- 18) Could you tell me about a moment at this weeks service that stands out to you,
and why?
- 19) Could you tell me a bit about the leadership structure here, and how that
functions?
- 20) What are Mark, Gary and Frank's roles in your opinion?
- 21) What do you stand for, and what does Hamilton B stand for?
- 22) Is Hamilton B political in your opinion?
- 23) If you were to sum up your political stances or world view, how would you do
that?
- 24) What things have brought you to that place?

- 25) Has your worldview ever been in conflict with your instinct or common sense?
- 26) What do you know about the leadership structure and decision making at Hamilton B, and how do you feel about it?
- 27) Have you been involved with church before this one?
- 28) Can you talk a little about that?
- 29) Are there aspects of typical church that you wish to avoid specifically?
negative/damaging?
- 30) Does the Hamilton B community address these?
- 31) What is the role of the bible in your life?
- 32) Do you have a biblical rationale for most things?
- 33) In your opinion does every minute life decision matter?

Appendix F

Interviewee Profiles

The following are brief profiles of the interview participants for this study. The interviewees were offered anonymity, so I have invented names for them.

Hamilton A

Chad – Chad is a married Caucasian male in his early thirties. Chad is the lead pastor at Hamilton A. I spoke with Chad twice: once on Tuesday, August 29, 2006, and again on Thursday September 28, 2006.

Oliver – Oliver is a married Caucasian male in his early thirties. Oliver runs the Hamilton A café. He has worked at Hamilton A since March 2006. I spoke with Oliver on Thursday October 19, 2006.

Keith – Keith is a single Asian male in his mid-twenties who is originally from Detroit. Keith is working on a post-graduate degree at a bible school in Toronto, and hopes to have a career in ministry. He volunteers as a barista at Hamilton A, and has both preached and lead worship at the Sunday evening service. I spoke with Keith on Friday September 15, 2006. Keith also acted as my liaison with the Hamilton A community.

Ian – Ian is a married Caucasian male in his fifties. Ian works as an I.T. Manager, and volunteers as a barista at Hamilton A. I spoke with Ian on Wednesday October 18, 2006.

Laura – Laura is a single Caucasian female in her early twenties. Laura is working on a B.A. part time, and works as a barista and job coach for the developmentally challenged at Hamilton A. I spoke with Laura twice: once on Wednesday November 15, 2006, and again on Wednesday November 22, 2006.

Hamilton B

Mark – Mark is a married Caucasian male in his early forties. Mark is the senior pastor of Hamilton B. I spoke with Mark twice: once on Thursday August 31, 2006, and again on Thursday September 21, 2006.

Gary – Gary is a married Caucasian male in his early forties. Gary is an author, and the teaching pastor at Hamilton B. I spoke with Gary on Wednesday October 18, 2006.

Frank – Frank is a married Caucasian male in his late forties. Frank is the lead pastor at the Hamilton B Hamilton site. I spoke with Frank on Thursday December 7, 2006.

Sean – Sean is a married Caucasian male in his fifties. Sean works for the Christian organization The Navigators, and is involved in university campus ministry. He is a member and volunteer Home Church leader for Hamilton B. I spoke with Sean on

Wednesday December 20, 2006. Sean also acted as my liaison with the Hamilton B community.

Peter – Peter is a Caucasian male in his early thirties. Peter works as an electrician, and is a member and volunteer Home Church leader for Hamilton B. I spoke with Peter on Tuesday February 20, 2007.

John – John is a Caucasian male in his early fifties. John works as a general manager, and is a member and volunteer Home Church leader for Hamilton B, I spoke with John on Thursday, April 12, 2007.

Appendix G

DATE: July 18, 2006

FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Rosemary Hale, Communications, Popular Culture and Film
Matthew Masters

FILE: 05-325 MASTERS

TITLE: Worship and the Compartmentalization of Christian Faith

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified; however, please ensure that the liaison person does not hold any position of leadership/authority in the congregation and does not disclose personal contact information without prior approval.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of July 18, 2006 to October 1, 2006 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application.**

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be

monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form ***Continuing Review/Final Report*** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb

Brenda Brewster, Research Ethics Assistant □ Office of Research Ethics, MC

D250A □ Brock University □ Office of Research Services □ 500 Glenridge Avenue □ St.

Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1 □ phone: (905)688-5550, ext. 3035 fax:

(905)688-0748 □ email:

reb@brocku.ca □ <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/ethics/humanethics/> □



Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB)
Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants

Please refer to the documents “Brock University Research Ethics Guidelines” which can be found at <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/>, prior to completion and submission of this application. If you have questions about or require assistance with the completion of this form, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035, or reb@brocku.ca.

Return your completed application and all accompanying material in triplicate to the Research Ethics Officer in MacKenzie Chown D266. Please ensure all necessary items are attached prior to submission, otherwise your application will not be processed (see checklist below). *No research with human participants shall commence prior to receiving approval from the research ethics board.*

Original Copy + 2 additional copies of the following DOCUMENTS	✓ if applicable
Recruitment Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Letter of invitation• Verbal script• Telephone script• Advertisements (newspapers, posters, experimetrix)• Electronic correspondence guide	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Consent Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consent form• Assent form for minors• Parental/3rd party consent• Transcriber confidentiality agreement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Data Gathering Instruments <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questionnaires• Interview guides• Tests	<input type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Feedback Letter	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Letter of Approval for research from cooperating organizations, school board(s), or other institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any previously approved protocol to which you refer	<input type="checkbox"/>

SIGNATURES

Principal Investigator:

Please indicate that you have read and fully understand all ethics obligations by checking the box beside each statement.

- ☒ I have read Section III:8 of Brock University's Faculty Handbook pertaining to Research Ethics and agree to comply with the policies and procedures outlined therein.
- ☒ I will report any serious adverse events (SAE) to the Research Ethics Board (REB).
- ☒ Any additions or changes in research procedures after approval has been granted will be submitted to the REB.
- ☒ I agree to request a renewal of approval for any project continuing beyond the expected date of completion or for more than one year.
- ☒ I will submit a final report to the Office of Research Services once the research has been completed.
- ☒ I take full responsibility in ensuring that all other investigators involved in this research follow the protocol as outlined in the application.

Signature _____ Date: _____

Co-Investigators:

Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Faculty Supervisor:

Please indicate that you have read and fully understand the obligations as faculty supervisor listed below by checking the box beside each statement.

- ☐ I agree to provide the proper supervision of this study to ensure that the rights and welfare of all human participants are protected.
- ☐ I will ensure a request for renewal of a proposal is submitted if the study continues beyond the expected date of completion or for more than one year.
- ☐ I will ensure that a final report is submitted to the Office of Research Services.
- ☐ I have read and approved the application and proposal.

Signature _____ Date: _____

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Title of the Research Project: Melting the Matrices

2. Investigator Information:

	Name	Rank (e.g., faculty, student, visiting professor)	Dept./Address	Phone No.	E-Mail
Principal Investigator	Matthew Masters	Student	Communications, Popular Culture and Film: Brock University Scotia Bank Hall 308 500 Glenridge Avenue St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S-3A1	289-242-7211	mastersmatt@hotmail.com

Co-Investigator(s)					
Faculty Supervisor(s)	Rosemary Hale	Dean	Brock University Schmon Tower 1110 500 Glenridge Avenue, St Catherines, Ontario, Canada l2s 3a1	905-688-5550 ext.4562	rhale@brocku.ca

3. **Proposed Date (dd/mm/yyyy)** (a) of commencement: when ethics review is complete completion:10/01/2006 (b) of

4. **Indicate the location(s)** where the research will be conducted:

Brock University ☐
Community Site ☐ Specify
School Board ☐ Specify
Hospital ☐ Specify
Other ☒ Specify At the site of the worship gatherings, or in the home of the interviewee if he/she would prefer. This si in the interest in making the interviewee as comfortable as possible.

5. **Other Ethics Clearance/Permission:**

(a) Is this a multi-centered study? ☐ Yes ☒ No
(b) Has any other University Research Ethics Board approved this research? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If **YES**, there is no need to provide further details about the protocol **at this time**, provided that **all** of the following information is provided:

Title of the project approved elsewhere:
Name of the Other Institution:
Name of the Other Board:
Date of the Decision:
A contact name and phone number for the other Board:

Please provide a copy of the application to the other institution together with all accompanying materials as well as a copy of the clearance certificate / approval.

If **NO**, will any other Research Ethics Board be asked for approval? ☐ Yes ☒ No
Specify University/College

(d) Has any other person(s) or institutions granted permission to conduct this research? ☐ Yes ☒ No
Specify (e.g., school boards, community organizations, proprietors)

6. **Level of the Research:**

☐ Undergraduate ☒ Masters Thesis/Project ☐ Ph.D.
☐ Post Doctorate ☐ Faculty Research ☐ Administration
☐ Course Assignment (specify) ☐ Other (specify)

7. **Funding of the Project:**

(a) Is this project currently being funded ☐ Yes ☒ No
(b) If No, is funding being sought ☐ Yes ☒ No

If Applicable:

(c) Period of Funding (dd/mm/yyyy):

From:

To:

(d) Agency or Sponsor (funded or applied for)

☐ CIHR

☐ NSERC

☐ SSHRC

☐ Other (specify):

8. Conflict of Interest:

(a) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits related to this study - for example: a financial remuneration, patent and ownership, employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options (Do not include conference and travel expense coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally). ☐ Yes ☒ No

(ii) if Yes, please describe the benefits below.

N/A

(b) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s).

N/A

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

9. Rationale:

Describe the purpose and background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypothesis(es)/research question(s) to be examined.

I am looking at evangelical, charismatic, Christian worship gatherings that make use of space and time generally reserved for leisure, work, and domestic parts of people's lives. I am interested in looking at this as an attempt/strategy to blend one's spiritual life with these other parts of daily life. Employing as case studies two gatherings that take this different approach to worship and two that take a more typical approach, I will investigate the relationship between worship practices and the blending or separation of secular and sacred. **Some questions I hope to answer are, In what ways and to what extent do these strategies alter the mindset and practices of the worshippers? How do the worshippers engage and relate with the strategies of their leadership? I am also interested in how these worshippers who are specifically seeking a "blended" life stand on political and social justice issues. Will these deviate markedly from the stances of the more typical worshippers I interview, or from the statistical norm for evangelical Christians in North America?**

10. Methods:

Are any of the following procedures or methods involved in this study? Check **all** that apply.

☐ Questionnaire (mail)

☐ Focus Groups

☐ Non-invasive physical

☐ Questionnaire (email/web)

☐ Journals

measurement (e.g., exercise, heart rate, blood pressure)

☐ Questionnaire (in person)

☒ Audio/video taping

☐ Analysis of human tissue, body

☐ Interview(s) (telephone)

☒ Unobtrusive observations

- ☒ Interview(s) (in person)
☐ Secondary Data
☐ Computer-administered tasks

[] Invasive physiological measurements (e.g., ventipuncture, muscle biopsies) fluids, etc.
[] Other: (specify)

Describe sequentially, and in detail, all procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, questionnaires, physical assessments, physiological tests, time requirements, etc.) **Attach a copy of all questionnaire(s), interview guides, or other test instruments.**

I will attend each gathering three times, and field notes will be taken. **The purpose of the unobtrusive observation will be to give me some background and detailed context for the interviews I will conduct. Since the worship practice and strategy is the focus of these interviews I believe this unobtrusive observation will be crucial for this study and my understanding and analysis.** I will seek permission from the head pastor, and will leave to his/her discretion whether or not he/she will make a point to inform the congregation of my presence. It is my opinion that The observation will be more intrusive the more attention is called to my presence. It certainly will not ever be confidential or secret information that I am taking field notes while observing the gathering, but I will leave it up to the head pastor to decide if it is best to make a point to alert the congregation to my presence. I feel that this will strike an acceptable balance between “unobtrusiveness” and full disclosure. I will conduct relatively unstructured interviews with willing participants. These interviews will be **audio taped** with permission of the interviewees. The interviews will be approximately one hour long.

11. Professional Expertise/Qualifications:

Does this procedure require professional expertise/recognized qualifications? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If YES, specify: N/A

Do you, your supervisor, or any members of your research team have the professional expertise/recognized qualifications required? ☐ Yes ☐ No

12. Participants:

Describe the number of participants and any required demographics characteristics (e.g., age, gender).

There will be twenty people interviewed. Eight of these will be people in leadership positions, the rest will be members of the church or gathering. The sample will start with the senior pastor (or leader) and proceed with a snowball sample, so no other demographics will be specified (besides the participants being adults).

13. **Recruitment:**

Describe how and from what sources the participants will be recruited, including any relationship between the investigator(s), sponsor(s) and participant(s) (e.g., family member, instructor-student; manager-employee).

Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

I will contact the first leader by phone and ask if he/she would like to participate and allow me to study his/her group. He/She will be asked to recommend a liaison with the researcher (someone who is deeply involved with the group and ho may, or may not himself/herself participate in the study). The liaison will suggest a member of the congregation who is involved in leadership at some level, as well as a lay member, to participate in the study. The liaison will be asked to contact those members and ask their permission to pass their contact information on to the researcher. Those members will follow the same process, should they choose to participate. The snowball sample will proceed from there. Unless personally introduced by the recommender, all participants will be approached

by phone.

14. **Compensation:** **Yes** **No**
- (a) Will participants receive compensation for participation? [] [x]
- (b) If yes, please provide details.

N/A

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

15. **Possible Risks:**

1. Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

- a) Physical risks (including any bodily contact, physical stress, or administration of any substance)? [] **Yes** [x] **No**
- b) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset, emotional stress)? [] **Yes** [x] **No**
- c) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy, and / or reputation)? [] **Yes** [x] **No**
- d) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those that the participants might encounter in their everyday life? [] **Yes** [x] **No**
- e) Is there any deception involved? [] **Yes** [x] **No**
- f) Is there potential for participants to feel coerced into contributing to this research (e.g., because of regular contact between them and the researcher)? [] **Yes** [x] **No**

2. If you answered **Yes** to any of 1a – 1f above, please explain the risk.

The potential participants will be approached by the liaison and myself.

I will explain the kinds of questions that will be asked before the interview begins. (Consent form wording will also be changed and clarified, and will not suggest that I will not be asking any personal questions). I will inform the participants that they are free decline participation before or at any time during the interview if they choose. I will ask the participants if there are any lines of questioning that I mentioned they they would prefer not to address. Should an interviewee become upset during the course of an interview, I will remind him/her that they can stop the interview at any time, and that all records will be destroyed if the choose. If he/she agrees to continue, I will switch to a "lighter" line of questioning until the interviewee is comfortable enough to continue. The potential risks to the participants will be managed by their anonymity.

3. Describe how the risks will be managed (include the availability of appropriate medical or clinical expertise, qualified persons). Give an explanation as to why less risky alternative approaches could not be used.

N/A

16. **Possible Benefits:**

Discuss any potential direct benefits to the participants from their involvement in the project. Comment on the (potential) benefits to the scientific community/society that would justify involvement of participants in this study.

Leadership particularly may wish to be aware of any relationship between worship discourse and the compartmentalization of Christian life. Also, since this study investigates the way certain worship strategies function, this will no doubt be of interest to them also. This study focuses on an under-researched relationship between worship practices and everyday life.

SECTION D – THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

17. The Consent Process:

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain informed consent. Include a description of who will be obtaining the informed consent. If there will be no written consent form, explain why not.

For information about the required elements in the letter of invitation and the consent form, as well as samples, please refer to: http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/Certification&Polices/Certification&Polices_App_Guidelines.html

If applicable, attach a copy of the Letter of Invitation, the Consent Form, the content of any telephone script and any other material that will be utilized in the informed consent process.

The senior pastors will be contacted by phone and I will tell them about the study. I will at that point ask for verbal permission to attend the first gathering and to meet with them regarding their participation in the study. When I meet with the pastors I will give them the consent form to sign if they wish to participate in the study. The pastors will be asked for recommendations for two other members, and from there I will use a snowball sample. Each participant will be contacted first by phone, and when we meet they will be given the consent form. (Phone scripts and consent forms for pastors and members included.)

18. Consent by an authorized party:

If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternative source of consent, including any permission form to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternative consent.

N/A

19. Alternatives to prior individual consent:

If obtaining individual participant consent prior to commencement of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process.

I will ask consent from the pastors to attend the gatherings. If this is not granted, I shall select a different gathering, beginning the consent process over again. (script attached)

20. Feedback to Participants:

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the project. Include, for example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, and access to the results of the research. Also, describe the method and timing for delivering the feedback.

The completed study will be made available to participants by request, and each participant will be sent a thank you letter.

21. **Participant withdrawal:**

- a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Outline the procedures that will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

Participants will be told prior to interviews that they can terminate the interview and their involvement at any time during the interview and have until August 21, 2006 to withdraw their interviews from the study. This is stated on the consent form.

- b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences that withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have on participant compensation.

The recordings will be destroyed and those participants removed from the study. There will be no consequences.

SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Confidentiality: information revealed by participants that holds the expectation of privacy (this means that all data collected will not be shared with anyone except the researchers listed on this application).

Anonymity: information revealed by participants will not have any distinctive character or recognition factor, such that information can be matched to individual participants (any information collected using audio-taping, video recording, or interview cannot be considered anonymous).

22. Given the definitions above,

- a) Will the data be treated as confidential? [x] Yes [] No
- b) Are the data anonymous? [x] Yes [] No
- c) State who will have access to the data.

The researcher (Matt Masters) and my advisor, Dean Rosemary Hale

- (d) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Names of both the churches and the participants will be confidential. Basic demographic info will be used to describe the participants (age range/gender). The congregation will not be aware of who was interviewed unless those participants make this public themselves- For this reason it is very unlikely that other congregation members will be able to identify a participants words based on age and gender information.

- e) If participant anonymity and/or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details, how all participants will be advised that data will not be anonymous or confidential.
- f) Explain how written records, video/audio tapes, and questionnaires will be secured, and provide details of their final disposal or storage (including for how long they will be secured and the disposal method to be used).

I will store the video tapes in a locked desk drawer at my home, as well as notes taken during participant observation. Tapes will be taped over when the study is completed. **Transcripts and field notes will be shredded. Names and contact information will also be shredded in this process.**

SECTION F -- SECONDARY USE OF DATA

23. a) Is it your intention to reanalyze the data for purposes other than described in this application? []

Yes [x] No

- b) Is it your intention to allow the study and data to be reanalyzed by colleagues, students, or other researchers outside of the original research purposes? If this is the case, explain how you will allow your participants the opportunity to choose to participate in a study where their data would be distributed to others (state how you will contact participants to obtain their re-consent)

no

- c) If there are no plans to reanalyze the data for secondary purposes and yet, you wish to keep the data indefinitely, please explain why.

If I decide to conduct a similar study using different cases I may wish to be reminded of my analysis of the interviews from this project. I do not consider this a reanalysis, but simply a re-examination of a past study for my own self-evaluation and revision. This will be from transcripts only.

SECTION G -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH

24. Annual Review and Serious Adverse Events (SAE):

- a) Minimum review requires the completion of a "Renewal/Project Completed" form at least annually. Indicate whether any additional monitoring or review would be appropriate for this project. No

It is the investigator's responsibility to notify the REB using the "Renewal/Project Completed" form, when the project is completed, or if it is cancelled. <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/Forms/Forms.html>

***Serious adverse events** (unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) **must be reported** to the Research Ethics Officer and the REB Chair, **as soon as possible** and in any event, no more than 3 days subsequent to their occurrence.

25. COMMENTS

If you experience any problems or have any questions about the Ethics Review Process at Brock University, please feel free to contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext 3035, or reb@brocku.ca





