

Go and Make Disciples of *All Classes*

A theological reflection on the working-class gap among
evangelical churches in the North-East.

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Abstract

This paper examines the demographical gap of the working class among evangelical churches in the UK, and specifically in North-East of England. While an ecclesial and missiological issue across many denominations, I will ground these broad concerns into a very personal study, being as I am a church planter in that region.

Employing Jane Leach's 5 Steps of *Practical Theology as Attention* I will, in addition to attending to the ecumenical voices in the discussion, study the history and ethnography of the North-East to create a picture of my church plant's intended mission field, understood through a survey of Bourdieu's sociological constructs *habitus* and *field*. I will then contrast this picture with St Paul's Corinthian correspondence to ascertain how the great apostle approached ecclesiastical division.

I conclude that if "[love] does not insist on its own way" (1 Corinthians 13:5), then neither should the middle-class: the 'dominant-class' of Bourdieuvian language. An enormous provocation, and one which far exceeds the scope of this dissertation, but I do make some brief conclusory remarks on how I might equip my church plant to not 'insist on its own [middle-class] way' in disciple-making, growth strategy, and communication of the gospel.

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Introduction

Justification

In my former role as Pastoral Staff for Grace Church Nottingham, (a city centre, charismatic, evangelical church,) I had the great joy and privilege of pioneering a Wednesday service, aimed specifically at those who had come to church through one of our Compassion Ministries (Grace Church Nottingham, 2021). Many of these were from backgrounds of generational worklessness, homelessness, and other deprivation, and found our regular Sunday services irreconcilably alien after coming to faith in Jesus. Thus, we developed a midweek service with Sunday's preacher preaching a shorter message pithy worship songs that caught the spiritual attention of broken hearts, and a free meal for all who attended. These unique services slowly impacted our philosophies of ministry on a Sunday, and we were thrilled to see the congregational membrane become increasingly porous as members slipped between services.

Yet, there was a gap in class in our church. Those whose membership predated our Wednesday service were predominantly middle-class. Those who had joined because of our Compassion ministries were usually ““underclass”” (Todd, 2015, 341). But where were the working-class? A great void gaped. Was this due to a lack of evangelism into the working-class sections of Nottingham? Or was this due to an ecclesiology that unconsciously created a culture impenetrable to the indigenous tradespeople, shopworkers, and hairdressers of that city? I never found out.

In September 2020, my wife and I moved to the East End of Newcastle to plant a new church from our home. We love the city, and we felt missionally called by God to the North-East, and, as such, for the many indigenous working-class there to meet their saviour. Post-industrialist Newcastle had not avoided the working-class gap we observed in Nottingham: Byassee (2020, 103-114) reports church growth among the middle- and the criminal-classes, but little in-between. Indeed, this seems a national issue ecumenically, as Clark-King (2004, 20) comments:

Class seldom gets a mention in theological writings. There is, of course, a great deal written about the ‘bias for the poor’ of liberation theology...However, class as a category for thinking about people is decidedly unfashionable. It seems that many people in the UK today assume that class distinctions no longer have any real existence or validity. We are all ‘middle class’.

How can we fill this gap? Of course, many middle-class, upper-class, criminal-class, etc. must also receive the gospel; but where in our current missiology and ecclesiology are we failing to make ‘disciples of all *classes*’ (Matthew 28:19)¹?

To explore this phenomenon, there are numerous directions one could follow; in this dissertation, I would like to explore how one might plant and build² a church that not only evangelises the working-classes but keeps and discipled them in ways that are socially and culturally relevant to the North-East’s working-class. For we must build churches where *all classes* feel welcome, alongside one another; too familiar are we with the narrative Williams & Brown (2022, 7) lay out:

[Working-class people] encountered Jesus, started to read their Bible excitedly and got baptised with joy, but soon found that their ways of thinking don’t quite fit in with those around them, and the gap between them and their new friends is just too large – not spiritually, but in every other way. It can feel so overwhelming that it seems insurmountable, so they often leave, feeling that Christianity isn’t for them.

Methodology and Structure

Methodologically, I turn to Practical Theology, for it creates space to tie together the disparate subjects this topic touches: ecclesiology and missiology, yes, but sociology, demography, and history

¹ All references from the ESV.

² C.f. 1 Corinthians 3:6,10

too. How can one talk of class ecclesialogically without grasping first what class means societally?
“Practical theology is committed to the concrete and lived” (Root, 2014, 8), and so is this paper.

To determine which model of practical theology I would use, I initially drew inspiration from an informal chat I had with David Wilkinson – an example of some of the issues faced in this paper, being both a *middle-class* scholar, and born to generationally *working-class* mining folk – who suggested the problem was cyclical. The Welsh revivals, the Great Awakening, the Pentecostal movement, these all found deep roots amid the working-classes. Yet, Wilkinson noted, these unschooled saints, including his forbears, longing to study the scriptures and take up roles among the clergy, turned from working-class pursuits to a middle-class lifestyle, and the disparity between the middle-class men and women of faith and the unsaved working-class perpetuated – fulfilling John Wesley’s fear “that a gospel of conversion would yield respectable middle-class people no longer interested in Jesus” (Byassee, 2020, 94).

Thus, I considered Ballard and Pritchard’s (2006) Pastoral Cycle, a spiralised model, “moving on all the time” (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, 86), that would map the shape of this generational issue. However, that model’s endlessness lacked optimism and I sought models which culminated in actionable hope in seemingly hopeless situations, Richard Osmer’s (2008, 4) linear four task model, for example. Ultimately, I settled on Jane Leach’s 5 Steps of *Practical Theology as Attention* (2007):

Step 1 *Attention to the voices*

Step 2 *Attention to the wider issues*

Step 3 *Attention to my own ‘voice’*

Step 4 *Attention to the theological tradition*

Step 5 *Attention to the mission of the Church*

Leach’s (2007, 24) work stood apart for me as it asks specifically in a sub-question in Step 1, “Whose voices are absent?” In a dissertation seeking the unfound, this seemed to me to be a crucial

question; for Leach, everything is subservient to, and culminates in, mission. Moreover, unlike the four-source model (O’Neill, 2018, 13), a familiar counterpart, Leach not only contains a “discrete theological step” (O’Neill, 2018, 167), but also *experience* and *culture* are not given equal footing to *scripture* and *tradition*³.

Chapter Outline

In *Chapter 1* I attend to the voices in the conversation, including those hitherto *not* in the conversation. It is worth noting here that due to the nature of a question about absent voices, I occasionally have to resort to anecdotal evidence; yet as we see, there also are many published voices pleading for the middle-classes to listen to the Christlikeness of the working-class. For example, in my new home of Wallsend, (a working-class suburb east of Newcastle,) I have more to learn than to teach about community and generosity. 5-year olds’ birthday parties are lavishly put on, and *everyone* is invited. Even the humble Greggs stottie, speak of the communality of this culture – where I eat my own sandwich, the stottie is a large bread roll, filled, sliced into six, and shared around the table.

In *Chapter 2* I attend to the wider issues, including defining the term *working-class*. Theologians Williams & Brown (2022, 5) note that it is “hard to define what working-class is”. Historian Selina Todd (2015, 266) argues that since the 1980s we have only known ‘posh and poor’. Journalist Barbara Ellen (2012) suggests we are ashamed, “it’s as if the successful working classes have been silenced, bullied and mocked into dismissing their own origins as irrelevant.” Defining what constitutes working-class, then, and understanding the sociology behind class, is imperative.

³ I mean *tradition* here not as traditional praxis, nor as something of equal weight with scripture, but the church’s cumulative biblical understanding of the last 2000 years. “Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living” (Pelikan, 1984, 65).

Also, in *Chapter 2* I examine working-class history and North-Eastern ethnography to come to grips with the region's perpetual disappointment in the ruling classes.⁴ Why does the self-made grafter, the hard man, the overlooked northerner, who pulled himself up by his bootstraps have little interest in the church or Christ?

In *Chapter 3* I attend to my own voice, role and, indeed, class to better understand what part I have to play. I assess my own motivations, prejudices, and assumptions.

In *Chapter 4*, I attend to the theological tradition of the evangelical church by studying the Corinthian correspondence. In ancient Corinth, posh and poor were rubbing shoulders and rubbing one another up the wrong way - apt for a minister seeking to disciple a socially diverse ekklesia.

Finally, in *Chapter 5: Attention to the Mission of the Church*, I use Leach's (2007, 29) conclusory questions regarding "the calling of the church in this situation" to bring some actionable points in developing a multiclass church; specifically offering suggestions for improving disciple-making among the working-classes. Here, let me make one clear distinction: this paper is not about serving the poor. Many books have been written about the church's role in serving the poor, and indeed I believe it to be a Christ given mandate (Matthew 25:34-36), but this is not a) about 'the poor', for not all working class qualify as those in poverty, or b) about serving material need. Rather, this is an exploration into how 'disciples can be made of *all classes*' (Matthew 28:19).

⁴ In 2014 it was reported that whereas £2500 was being spent per head on public transport in London, a mere £5 per head was spent in the North-East (Jackson 2019, 215); and, whereas in the South relatives or neighbours receive paid care, in the North people are more likely to give up 50 or more hours per week to administer personal care (Dorling, 2013, 158-159).

Chapter 1 – Attention to the Voices

The voices in the conversation

As noted in my introduction, Leach's (2007, 24) model allows the theologian to ascertain a thick description of their chosen problem by asking, "Whose voices are absent or being silenced?" This is a pertinent question to explore a demographic's ecclesiastical absence, and one to which we will return; but Leach (2007, 24) first asks, "Whose voices *are* part of the conversation? What are they saying? What feelings are being expressed?" The chief voice *heard* in my question then, why the working-classes are underrepresented in north-east evangelical churches, is not outside the church, but within it.

Bebbington (1989, 2-17) defines evangelicalism as Biblicist, Conversionist, Activist, and Crucicentrist; helpful distinctions which cross denominational lines. There is much to be admired in evangelicalism, and its refusal to liberalise its theology to 'keep in step' with culture has yielded growth, both at home and abroad; for in the UK *The Times* recently reported that it is only evangelical churches not in decline (Burgess, 2022), and internationally "the growth of evangelical believers in the Third World has accelerated dramatically" (Johnstone, 1996, 35). However, there are problems, a high Biblicism can lead to a mistrust of 'theology' (Scrivener, 2022), and it is also evangelical churches in which the working-class are significantly underrepresented. Williams & Brown (2022, 7-8) report that while only 27% of the UK holds a degree, 81% of evangelical church members are educated at university level, and the latest Talking Jesus Report states "the people who are least likely to know a practising Christian are those who do not have a university or higher education. In fact, the more highly educated a person is, the more likely they are to know a practising Christian" (Jordan-Wolf, 2022, 14). Admittedly, education is not the only marker of class, but we see here that for all the growth in evangelical churches, it majoritively exists amongst an elite minority.

Looking beyond evangelicalism, Tearfund reported that irrespective of denomination, churchgoing fell through 'social grades' A-E from 22%-8% (Ashworth & Farthing, 2007, 12), and Chester (2012, 11-

12) laments that the urbanisation brought about by the Industrial Revolution left the parochial system of the Church of England perpetually under-resourced in working-class areas. Self-confessed working-class Pentecostal Darren Edwards (2013, 43-44) endorses the high-context⁵ traditions of the Catholic church; activities such as christening or candle lighting are popular among working-class attendees, but Edwards reports the teaching became the stumbling block – not the gospel teachings itself, but the comprehension of what was being taught.

Returning to evangelical churches, (Chester, 2012, 9) laments their regular proximity to “the ‘nice’ areas of town and...middle-class [leadership]”. Even though church buildings may be found in less salubrious areas, nominally reaching the unchurched corners of the city, the evangelicals themselves will not live there. Instead, it seems the inadvertent creators of the megachurch were Henry Ford and Alexander Graham Bell, for “in a modern city, aided by a car or telephone, a man can ignore his neighbours and choose his friends at will” (Newbigin, 1963, 57). (In Chapters 3 and 5, I will explore this further as I discuss where I am situated, and how this impacts church strategy.)

The absent voices

Having determined which voices *are* in the conversation, let us return to Leach’s (2007, 24) crucial counterquestion, “Whose voices are absent or being silenced?”, and the answer is clear: the working-class, both inside and outside the church. Natalie Williams relates how middle-class people have responded to her work promoting socio-economic ecclesiastical diversity, “I have been told countless times I shouldn’t be making a big deal about class issues, because they *don’t really exist anymore*...no one from a working-class background has asked me if class still matters” (Williams & Brown, 2022, 5, emphasis mine). Not only are working-class voices like Williams’ absent, but they are *being silenced* by the ecclesiastical majority, the middle-class. Evans & Mellon (2017, 2-4) estimate

⁵ Low-context cultures prioritise what is *said* – language and linguistics are king – whereas high-contexts prioritise what is *done* (McCullough, 2017, 142).

that 60% of the UK identifies as being working-class – and has done for nearly 40 years. They write (2017, 14-15):

Working class identity remains widespread in Britain. Even though only a minority of people are engaged in working class occupations, a majority of us still think of ourselves as working class...Those with a working-class identity are particularly likely to think that class differences and barriers remain important...social class still has resonance for people, we are clearly not 'all middle class now'.

And while Evans & Mellon (2017, 9) admit that some of those who still identify as working-class are university graduates and in professions not traditionally associated with the working class (see Chapter 2), social divides still exist.⁶ If working-class voices are absent or silenced in our churches, the UK's majority voice is absent from this discussion.

This is not a new issue. Seventy years ago, Anglican minister Roger Lloyd (1952, 54) acknowledged that the artisan⁷ class:

constitutes by far the toughest identifiable core of resistance to the gospel today. Up to the present no dents at all have been made in its surface...until some more effective way of appealing to the artisan has been found there will be no real revival of religion in this country...No amount of success elsewhere will compensate the Church for failure here.

Later, Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1975, 110) likened colonial evangelicals' perceived inflexibility and past failure to speak against the slave trade with British evangelicals' failure among the working-class:

The impression has gained currency that to be a Christian, and more especially an evangelical, means that we are...advocates of the status quo. I believe that this largely

⁶ One recent example is the huge wealth disparity in deaths during the Covid-19 pandemic (Office for National Statistics, 2020).

⁷ An arcane term for skilled worker (Todd, 2015, 30).

accounts for our failure in this country to make contact with the so-called working-classes.

Christianity in this country has become a middle-class movement.

Ten years later the Archbishop's Commission for Urban Priority Areas (1985) said, "The Church of England's most enduring problem of the city has been its relationship with the working-class".

Working class voices have been and remain absent from our churches, evangelical or otherwise, and Leach's next question helps us begin to understand why.

The mediated voices

Leach's (2007, 24) final question of Step 1, "Whose voices are being mediated by someone else – how does that nuance them?" is of great value. We have already seen through Williams' own experience that middle-class voices inadvertently silence working-class ones, but more than this, I believe and will demonstrate that middle-class Christianity mediates working-class Christianity, rendering it ostensibly oxymoronic. It is through this mediation that the UK evangelical church has succumbed to the misbelief that middle-class values are Christian values.

John Bennington (1973, 15-16) found that where 71% of working-class interviewees believed that 'salvation came through Jesus Christ', only 59% of middle-class persons believed the same⁸.

Undoubtedly these figures would be considerably lower today, but the crucial part of Bennington's research was that after joining a church (which we read from Bennington's contemporary Lloyd-Jones (above) was a 'middle-class movement'), only 2.5% of working-class converts kept both their faith *and* their culture – either they fell away from their faith, or they received a 'class transplant'.

Edwards (2013, 10) interprets this data to startling effect by inverting it, "of the 97% of working-class people that join the church, the majority become pretty much indistinguishable from the class that they mix with – they become middle-class to fit in with the norms of church life."

⁸ This statistic alone should give us pause, because it perhaps shows us that the middle-classing of society has led to the downfall of Christianity in UK, when fewer middle-class believe in Christ's salvation.

Of course, the gospel should bring about change in people's lives as converts adhere to Christ and manifest fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). This remains true of the working class; for example, sober living, education, family values, none of these are contrary to the gospel. Commenting on evangelical history, Bebbington (1989, 12) writes,

There was a natural tendency for converted characters to gain skills, find regular employment and so rise out of the lowest ranks of society, Evangelical religion, as many commented at the time, was itself an avenue of upward social mobility.

This social mobility is inoffensive to the gospel. It is not sinful to be one class or another. We are who we are by the grace of God (1 Corinthians 15:10). It becomes problematic when the dominant culture in the church is assumed to be wholly positive and synonymous with Christian culture, and other cultures assumed to be the only ones with negative aspects. For example, working-class culture and middle-class culture have different financial priorities, as Williams & Brown (2022, 29) relate:

I recall the time a mature Christian friend was showing me his expensive, newly installed bathroom (to him, a wise investment) while at the same time deriding people who live in a modest flat and buy a huge flat-screen television (to him, a foolish waste of money). Many of us can fail to notice the irony in our own attitudes...

Jenkins (2020) argues likewise that the church looks more sternly on sins more traditionally associated with the working-class, "drinking, smoking, gambling, and matters of personal sexual morality", than those among the middle-class, "tax evasion, amassing large sums of money, the owning of multiple houses and buying privileged positions in education and society for one's children". Chester (2012, 35) names this mediation of working-class Christianity by middle-class Christianity "imbalanced mutual adaptation", for the middle-class as the dominant class (see notes on Bourdieu, Chapter 2) has not adapted to working-class values and enforced only its own impure version of Christianity.

However, there are working-class values that do intersect positively with Christian values and to which middle-class Christians could adapt. Edwards (2013, 108) asserts that middle-class Christians can learn from the working-class the “awesome and Godly trait...say what they want and mean what they say”. Edwards (2013, 108-109) concedes that more grace must be learned amongst his working-class peers, and that when one has been wronged, a public slanging match is not how Jesus commands we resolve our conflicts (Matthew 18:15); but is it not better to confront your persecutor than to succumb to the “slander, gossip, conceit and disorder” (2 Corinthians 12:20) found among middle-class churches? Edwards (2013, 74-75) also argues working-class Christians are better equipped to endure suffering. Where a middle-class Christian’s faith might be blown off course by the hardships of life, the working-class Christian has no illusions that life is fraught with pain and disappointment, yet Edwards’ testimony is that his life is happier as a Christian. Ecclesiastically too, Edwards (2013, 119-120) purports that the rowdiness of modern Pentecostalism was birthed amongst the boisterous working class.⁹ Finally, Edwards (2013, 38-39) paints a beautiful picture of community loyalty amongst the working class:

In my lifetime I have often realised how loyal I am to my friends and family – how patriotic I am towards them and my country too. To say that I would take a bullet for a close friend or family member is an easy thing to do when you haven’t got a gun to your head, but more often than not my friends and I would find ourselves in pub-fights sometimes taking the brunt of the action for one another over as little as a pint of beer – spilt by an innocent passerby. Once upon a time in the lower classes of the UK, we would find that a whole community would work in manual jobs in the same place, relying on each other to get a job done, and then taking a break together – playing games and eating with one another. This total reliance on each other for the weekly wage, community and social interaction would cause relationships to grow closer between workers than between even that of husband and

⁹ While I enjoy Edwards’ passion for contribution led worship, I prefer 1 Corinthians 14:26 for proof!

wife...The same is true today, the only difference being that in many cases the work is different or non-existent.

Returning to finance, a study from the Queen Mary University revealed that “low-status” people were more generous than “high-status” (Malito, 2018). A pastor friend of mine who hails from a working-class background encouraged me to frame it like this: When a friend asks middle-class me to go to the pub, and I check my Monzo app on my smartphone and I discover that I only have pennies left of my allotted twenty pounds spending money, I say, “sorry, I haven’t got any money”; this is untrue as I have £60,000 of my £200,000 house paid off, inheritance money earmarked for an extension, several hundred in saving accounts and a couple of hundred more in my current account. Whereas someone from the working-class might also say, “I have no money,” and they would mean they have just the tenner in their back pocket, but might well say, “but I’ll buy you a pint”; this may be living hand to mouth, but it sounds much more like the generosity Jesus prescribes (Luke 6:38, 12:32-34, 21:1-4).

The voices of the working-class are mediated in the church, such that their sins are demonised, and their strengths are ignored. We must reverse this trend. Let us adopt a balanced mutual adaptation, as Chester (2012, 35) entreats us; not only because missionally the lower classes might be put off, feeling “unable to attend, because their social conditions militated against” (Chester, 2012, 12), nor merely because these pejoratives are not fit for a gospel that tears down the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14), but for the middle-class’ own sake, that they might become more like Christ as they listen to voices of the working-class.

Chapter 2 – Attention to the Wider Issues

In the first chapter, we found that middle-class Christians voices silence and mediate working-class Christian voices; now Leach (2007, 25) encourages the theologian to attend to disciplines other than theology to understand the “trends in culture” and “wider issues” at play. This is well, for the silencing and mediating of working-class voices is not exclusive to the church.

But how do we define ‘working-class’? And what in the past shapes a working-class identity in the present? And what is the working-class experience in the North-East? In answer, I turn to sociology, history, and ethnography.

Sociology

In his book, *Urban Harvest*, Roy Joslin (1982, 2-5) claimed that “there is an immense gulf between the Christian church and the working classes in this country”. However, his definition of ‘working-class’ as merely manual labourers or tradespeople, working in “factories, mills, mines, building sites, power stations, dockyards” is limited. For class has less to do occupation than it does with disposition, or *habitus*, which sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 53) defines as:

a system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organise practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

Ostensibly, habitus is our unconscious habit, preference, or action, derived “from the class-specific experiences of socialisation in family and peer groups” (Swartz, 1997, 102) – our predispositions. For Bourdieu (1990, 59), class was defined not by a person’s financial situation, but by shared habitus; a class were those who shared “similar positions in social space” and duly gained “similar dispositions”

and “similar practices” (Bourdieu, 1987, 6). It is also habitus that shapes our purchases as much as money in the bank (Bourdieu, 1984, 375), which helps us to make sense of why a member of the working-class might be predisposed to buy a large television over a wine club subscription (see Chapter 1).

Bourdieu corresponds *habitus* to another term, *field*: “the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates” (Swartz, 1997, 117). Habitus is abstract and subjective; field is the concrete and objective in which habitus brings its unconscious action. For Bourdieu, fields are “arenas of struggle for control over...particular forms of capital: economic, cultural, scientific, or religious” (Swartz, 1997, 122) , and social inequality occurs in fields where these capitals are unequally distributed (Bourdieu, 1984, 244). Moreover, ‘fields of power’, where economic capital and cultural capital intersect, people “draw disproportionately from either cultural or economic resources in their struggle to maintain and enhance their positions in the social order” (Swartz, 1997, 136-137).

Perhaps here we begin to understand why working-class people, with historically little of either capital, “spend and spend and spend” (Todd, 2015, 249) – as TV and radio personality Danny Baker (2012, 112) autobiographically relates, “the idea of having any savings was unimaginable – wasteful even”.

This sense of class being not a financial status, but a habitus within a field, leads Bourdieu (1984, 483) to claim that “class is defined as much by its *being-perceived* as by its *being*”; thus members of a class perceive their “‘sense of...place’ which leads one to exclude oneself from the goods, persons, place and so forth from which one is excluded” (Bourdieu, 1984, 471). Further, Bourdieu (1984, 208) conceives the differences in class tastes as being, not merely different, but in “systematic opposition” (Swartz, 163, 1997) to one another. The dominant-class, (whom Bourdieu (1984, 128) defines as liberal professions, university lecturers, statesmen, CEOs, artists and writers,) define their tastes “by successive negations” (Bourdieu, 1984, 57), i.e. that which is not working-class. And it

goes both ways, “the relationship between the social classes in England hinges on a segregation that is emotionally structured through mutual disdain” (Evans, 2006).

Working-class values are mediated as greedy. Sociologist Ruby Payne (1996, 52) relates that while the middle-class ask of their food whether they liked it or if it was good for them, and the upper-class might ask how it was presented, the working-class ask simply, ‘was there enough’? Knowing there will always be enough, the dominant-class have a taste for *freedom*, “defined in opposition to the working-class taste for *necessity*” (Swartz, 1997, 167-168).

Working-class values are also thus mediated as vulgar. “Dominant-class tastes are legitimated in that they appear to originate from qualities of charisma, knowledge, and aptitude, rather than from distance from necessity” (Swartz, 1997, 169), which, in Bourdieuan language, is “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 4). Thus, the bold personality expressed in working-class clothing (Payne, 1996, 59) is rendered tasteless. Many among the working-class do not aspire to own large houses, but to own large families and friendship networks (Payne, 1996, 59). When the homeownership middle-classes experiences crises, they know they have credit in their bricks and mortar; when the working-class experience crisis, they know they have credit in the community (Edwards, 2013, 35). Regrettably, this symbolic violence has permeated the church as well: “I was, in effect, disciplined into [homeownership] as if I would somehow be more Christlike if I owned property. That’s quite ironic seeing as Jesus didn’t own his own home” (Williams & Brown, 2022, 33).

Bourdieu (1984, 114) initially conceived that struggles over economic and cultural capital were most common in his fields of power, but later added a third – social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Using this chiasmatic field, Savage *et al.* (2013) surveyed people in the UK to define class. To determine social capital, they asked how many people of different occupations respondents knew socially. For cultural capital, they surveyed engagement with “‘highbrow’ [culture]...classical music...stately homes, museums, art galleries, jazz, theatre, and French restaurants”, and with “‘emerging’ [culture]...video games, social networks...internet, playing sport, watching sport...time with

friends...the gym...preferences for rap and rock [music]”. Economic capital was assessed through household income, savings and house value. What they found was that there were not the three classes expected, (upper-, middle-, and working-,) but seven. In descending order:

- Elite. CEOs, directors, barristers. Very high economic capital, high social, but mainly highbrow culturally.
- Established Middle-Class. Electrical engineers, midwives, professionals. High social and economic capital, though little in savings, and high engagement with both ends of culture.
- Technical Middle-Class. Radiographers, pharmacists, pilots. More savings than Established, though smaller incomes, very high social capital, but moderate cultural.
- New Affluent Workers. Electricians, plumbers, retail. Good economic and emerging cultural capital, but low on social and highbrow. “Children of the ‘traditional working class’”.
- Traditional Working-Class. Medical secretaries, cleaners, carers. Low capital on all three counts, though higher savings than those either side of them.
- Emergent Service Workers. Bar staff, health care assistants, musicians. Higher income than traditional working-class, but poor economically otherwise, moderate social capital, but high emerging cultural capital. Another “[child] of the traditional working-class”.
- Precariat. The lowest on all counts.

Clearly, though economic capital and one’s occupation are important in determining class, the situation is more varied and nuanced. Moreover, social class studies are commonly deficient, in that “race is rarely brought into the analysis” (Eddo-Lodge, 2018, 194), and that these classifications are chiefly *White British*. When writers refer to the ‘working-class’, then, more accurately they mean (white) New Affluent Workers, Traditional Working-Class, Emergent Service Workers, and, occasionally, the Precariat. For clarity, I will henceforth use these titles where it is specifically appropriate and pluralise to working-classes when generalising.

Speaking personally, this was of immense value. I believed I was working-class, or, at most, lower-middle. I am the first in my family with a degree, and we grew up, though in a nice house my parents mortgaged, without lots of money on hand – if we went out to celebrate it was at the Sainsbury's café with their 2 for £6 meals. Reviewing this, I am in fact Established Middle-Class. Yes, we had just a couple of thousand in savings, but our house value and my father's income was above average, we had many social contacts (partly through the church,) and, tellingly, we had a rich interest in both emerging and highbrow culture. Though I grew up with much less to spend than many of my peers, I had a wealth of capital in a field of power.

Perhaps in the evangelical church others of the Established Middle-Class, whom the survey found to be the single largest group, are similarly blind to their own class, and thus “consciously or unconsciously” fall into “class racism” (Bourdieu, 1984, 178), which condemns a working-class lifestyle as ignorant, conformist, and fraught with bad choices (Swartz, 1997, 169). How we begin to combat this, I answer in Chapter 5.

For our culture is full of false narratives that believe ‘the poor’ to be “lazy...prefer to live on benefits...addicted to drink and drugs...would not be poor if they learned to manage their money more carefully...[and] brought the economic crisis upon Britain” (Green, 2015, 37-41). Todd (2105, 299) believes this is born out of “a mythology of the 1970s” in which strikes demanding higher pay to combat escalating living costs, was in fact “working-class greed [which] caused the economic downfall of the country”, a mythology accepted and promulgated by historians and politicians alike. At the time of writing, the UK is facing its “biggest rail strike in modern history” (Race, 2022), and the Prime Minister is still pointing to 1970s as a cautionary tale for the workers to not expect too much (Clatworthy, 2022); and while many commuters are sympathetic, some fellow transport workers lean into the greed narrative, “as an ex-union guy...anyone who strikes for money should not only be sacked they should never be employed again” (BBC, 2022). Charlesworth & Williams (2014, 33-39) believe this comes from the media mediating the voices of the poor and working-class, classifying

them as 'other', and creating a 'them and us' culture – easily perpetuated in a society where “70% of us don't even know the names of any of our neighbours”. This othering leads to the depersonalisation, blame, and demonisation of those who 'waste their money' on the Lottery as “a distraction from 'worrying about the heating bills'” (Todd, 2015, 343).

If the church is “to play its part in dispelling these baseless myths” (Green, 2015, 40), we must examine and understand our own class, and the symbolic violence we exude when we 'insist on our own way' (1 Corinthians 13:5).

History

In 1997, the new Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott asserted “we are all middle-class now” (Todd, 2015, 339). The working-class, in New Labour's eyes, was ostensibly gone. Of course, there remained those who could not or would not work who survived on benefits, but since they were not *working*, they were not *working-class*. This group were redefined as “underclass” (Todd, 2015, 341) or in some media and political movements as “skivers” or “scroungers” (Charlesworth & Williams, 2014, 21; Todd, 2015, 350). Whether absorbed into the middle-class or 'underclass', the working-class was told it had disappeared, and its voices were silenced.

Yet, even before the birth of the class-system, through her eponymous Emma's desire to help those in society unable to help themselves, and her bigotry and disdain towards working farmers, Austen (1816, 376) depicts the upper-class silencing the working-class experience. With the conceptual shift in 1910 from 'masters and servants' to 'classes', brought about by 19th century industrialisation and urbanisation, came widespread shock and antipathy among the ruling classes when their maids suddenly demanded respect as well as wages (Todd, 2015, 13-16, 44).

Advances in workers' rights were curtailed by the Great War but picked up in the 1920s when Unions doubled their pre-war membership (Todd, 2015, 16-17, 30-31). However, the General Strike of 1926 proved disastrous for the working-class. While the workers wanted “constitutional change, not

militant or revolutionary action”, Churchill let troops fire on strikers (Todd, 2015, 48, 58); moreover, their voices were silenced, and their existence ignored. To dissuade the working-classes from striking, students, young professionals and society women disguised themselves in workers’ uniforms and jobs, silencing the true voices of the workers (Saltzman, 1994, 105). Even Labour’s first Chancellor of the Exchequer, Philip Snowden (1934, 151), elected 1924, denied the working-class existence: “A general strike could in no circumstances be successful...There is no country in the world which has proportionally such a large middle-class population as Great Britain.” It was in this mockery and derision that the strike failed, and “anything approaching...equality...[was] unconstitutional” (Todd, 2015, 54, 58).

In the 1930s, disdain between classes grew. 14% of the country were registered unemployed, while the middle-class continued to prosper. An unfounded resentment grew against those on benefits, mediated by the dominant-class (Todd, 2015, 62-67); unfounded because two major studies, one private, and one from *The Times*, found that the government’s punitive measures placed on the unemployed made it impossible for them to change their status (Todd, 2015, 71-76).

After WWII “class differences had softened” (Madgwick, Seeds & Williams, 1982, 35), and people considered themselves a collective; rationing continued until 1954 and there was less than 2% unemployment from 1948 to the 1970 (Todd, 2015, 120-121, 152). This was the birth of the meritocracy, workers who previously would never have been considered for managerial roles had the opportunity to earn them on merit (Todd, 2021, 105-106).

In the 1960s, working-class became fashionable. Working-class voices demanded to be heard (Todd, 2015, 236-241), but even then, there were degrees of popularity – the clean cut, lower-middle class Beatles being much more acceptable than Newcastle’s The Animals, an altogether grittier act in look and lyric (Cohen, 2007, 168-169; Fawcett, 2007, 30). Yet, this acceptance was a façade, as John Lennon (1970) bitterly sang at having his voice as a *Working Class Hero* both imposed upon him and silenced:

They hate you if you're clever, and they despise a fool.

The sense of working-class optimism of the 1950s and 1960s was born out of its being the greatest period of social mobility in our history (Todd, 2021, 191; Bourdieu, 1984, 123). The working-class were buying white goods and televisions - but there remained an anxiety. They did not become, as the editor of *The Guardian* incorrectly predicted a "new middle-class" (Hetherington, 1960); they merely became consumerists, who expected higher standing of living than the generation before who had just wanted feeding (Todd, 2015, 252-260). The wealth gap widened again, and unskilled workers still struggled for work. Any commodities were anxiously bought not outright, but 'on the tick' (Todd, 2015, 199-201)¹⁰. The 1960s also saw the birth of the housing estate "originally designed to...look inward...and build community" (Green, 2015, xi). This generation was better off than its parents, and the working-class identity was thought to be eroded (Todd, 2015, 235).

Between 1965-1975, due to rising costs and a Labour government switching focus from workers' to employers' rights, there were an average 2885 strikes per year (Todd, 2015, 275-294). The new consumerist working-class were branded greedy, and "from 1969, successive governments would treat the economic and political power of the working-class as a threat to social democracy" (Todd, 2015, 296). "By the end of 1970s working-class power was rapidly declining" (Todd, 2015, 314), and in politics foreshadowing the 2016 Brexit vote, Margaret Thatcher's government was voted in to restore control to the British people (Todd, 2021, 350). "The bargain that had been struck during the Second World War...hard work in exchange for a living wage and a welfare safety net – came to an end. Unemployment increased, while benefits were cut" (Todd, 2015, 318). Individualism reigned, 'There is no such thing as society', Thatcher said (Todd, 2015, 335). In a politically motivated move against the unions, many mines were closed (Todd, 2015, 323) and tens of thousands in the North-East lost their jobs (Jackson, 2019, 202-203). The once utopian council housing estates were sold off

¹⁰ I possess the receipt of my Grandfather's first hi-fi system, complete with my great-grandfather's guarantor countersignature; apparently, my grandmother was furious when he brought it home!

and rented back to those who needed them at extortionate rates (Green, 2015, 12-14). The class system, which feigned to be replaced by meritocracy thirty years previous, was accepted and reinstated on both sides of aisle, and the narrative was mediated in parliament once more: “there are the employed affluent workers on the one hand and the unemployed no-goods on the other” (Todd, 2015, 333). The age of social mobility was over (Todd, 2021, 247).

Today, ‘Thatcher’s children’¹¹ are encouraged to forget class background “to get on in life” (Todd, 2015 337); and yet, the social gap is wider than ever, and this generation are “more likely to slide down the [socioeconomic] ladder than to ascend it” (Todd, 2021, 299). From 1998-2008, the poorest 10% became poorer, and the wealthiest 10% moved from owning a quarter of the nation’s income to a third (Todd, 2015, 338).

History tells us classlessness is an illusion, and the working-class feel it more acutely than anyone. To return to John Lennon (1970):

You think you’re so clever and classless and free,
But you’re still f*****g peasants as far as I can see.

Ethnography

Finally, we turn from UK wide working-class history and sociology to the North-East’s specific ethnography. Arthur Conan Doyle (1888) claimed, “Northumberland produces men of practical turn...there are no poets...in her records” and, considering the many New Affluent workers in the region, he had a point. *Mens agit molem* – mind moves matter – was Armstrong College’s (now Newcastle University) motto. (Jackson, 2019, 73). The favourite sons of my local Wallsend are ‘Fathers of the Rails’ George and Robert Stephenson. Work was honourable, yet patriarchal; a man was shamed if his wife had to work (Jackson, 2019, 72, 140). Jackson (2019, 25-60) attributes this

¹¹ Those born between 1972 and 1985 (Todd, 2021, 299).

sense of machismo and graft to Northumbria's historic status as the Anglo-Scotch border county, and thus the seat of war.

Yet Methodism had changed the North-East. When Wesley arrived in Newcastle in 1742, he had never seen "so much drunkenness, cursing, and swearing (even from the mouths of little children)" (Idle, 1986, 81); but a century later in 1842 the cleric William Gilly described a local as "a fair specimen of the frank, sensible, well spoken, well-informed Northumbrian peasantry" (Atkinson, 1989, 64-65). However, as the common colliers and dockworkers were converted and educated, so they left their mines and shipyards behind and headed south for white collar jobs (Jackson, 2019, 86-87, 93). Thus, a perceived pattern of a local, hyper masculine working-class (Jackson, 2019, 207-208) and sojourning, effete, 'dominant-class' began (Wilson, 2007, 54). Fawcett (2007, 32) recalls of her university days, "there was a distinct town and gown split with central Newcastle...dominated by a macho working-class drinking culture and [us] students spending our time in Jesmond and other areas outside the city". Today, Green (2015, 31) criticises Newcastle for its gentrified centre and "grinding poverty...on the surrounding estates", but this disparity has always existed: reporting on the late 19th century's precursor to Newcastle's Metro system, Holland (2019, 51) notes "it had become rather fashionable for Newcastle businessmen to commute to work from their elegant homes on the coast...[which] were within easy reach of the city centre".

However, the sense of hard work in the region is stymied by opportunity. "Collieries typically had a life expectancy of 50 to 100 years before new pits had to be sunk" (Jackson, 2019, 126), which meant that mining communities were nomadic. When the mines were closed in the 1980s, the communities became uncharacteristically rooted, which has in turn led to a paradox of Geordies desiring greatly to work, but not to move location to do so (Green, 2015, 32). Green (2015, 14) reported that the demise in industry leads to lack of community, but in the North-East this has not

been the case. Rather, it has led to a fierce loyalty¹², locally and nationally, and a suspiciousness of nonconformity (Jackson, 2019, 168-174). In 2004, when the Labour party offered devolved power by way of a proposed North-East assembly, the region voted unequivocally against; while certainly the other major conurbations had no desire to overpower Newcastle (Jackson, 2007, 203) they also did not consider themselves separate to England (Barlow, 2007, 136-137).

Yet, the region remains economically challenged, with “the lowest incomes and highest unemployment...[and] poorest A-Level results” (Jackson, 2019, 210). Notably, the NHS is an enormous employer for the region (Jackson, 2019, 218), not just among the medical practitioners, whom Savage *et al* (2013) classify as *Established* and *Technical Middle Class*, but the many secretaries and auxiliaries found in their lower classifications, *Traditional Working Class* and *Emergent Service Sector*. The further from London, the greater the financial and political disparity (Todd, 2021, 326), and Newcastle feels the distance. Moreover, where investment has been put into urban redevelopment, the ‘trickledown effect’ has failed, and the surrounding towns left as bereft as before (Usherwood, 2007, 173-174) – a political caution which informs my critique of Keller’s (2012, 160-162) missiological equivalent in the next chapter.

Ultimately, with the border wars long past, the mines closed, and labour globally outsourced, the North-East is a region without a purpose (Jackson, 2019, 219-220) and its working-class voice silenced. The identity of the North-East is working-class, but the work is gone (Todd, 2015, 336) – displaced or dissipated. Many are not illiterate but alliterate (Byassee, 2020, 108). Doyle (1988) was right, it is a land of the practical and not the poetic – what chance do the language loving evangelicals have?

¹² It was working-class loyalty that created the unions (Bennington, 1973, 38).

Chapter 3 – Attention to my Own ‘Voice’

Leach (2007, 26-27) comments that she regularly finds students of her model omit “themselves as part of the situation”, and encourages the theologian to ask, “What is my role?” and “How do I feel?” As I laid out in the introduction, I feel God has called me and my church planting team to make a difference in the spiritual landscape of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, with particular attention being paid to those who are currently de-churched, non-churched or unchurched¹³ - chief among those the swathes of Geordie working-classes who are not in church. However, we also feel called to plant charismatic evangelical churches across the North-East. For I am an evangelical. Yet while I am confessionally convinced of Bebbington’s (1989, 2-17) distilled evangelical values, I am also aware that as an evangelical theologian, I am complicit with those who have ignored the unspoken voices I am now trying to represent. Moreover, while these two missional calls, local and translocal, fall under the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (and classes), looking beneath the surface at the missional literature, it would seem they are at odds with one another.

Keller (2012, 160-161) asserts that the most effective method of planting multiple churches in a region is to focus on city centres inhabited by the ‘young, cultural elites’ such as students and young professionals. This demographic is socially and geographically mobile enough that they might consider relocating with a new church plant and are able to learn scriptural hermeneutics and leadership skills. Keller (2012, 161-162) further believes that this will benefit ‘unreached people groups and the poor’ of the city. However, Jenkins (2022) refutes this model:

The trickledown theory of mission (focus on the rich, powerful, clever and the influential first in order that the effect may trickle down to the lower orders in due course), much loved by English evangelicals, is not only contrary to the grain of Scripture but has demonstrably

¹³ For these terms I am indebted to *Gone But Not Forgotten* (Richter & Francis, 1998).

failed. Rather, the effect of this policy has been to produce a strongly middle-class church, peculiarly ill-suited to ministry among working-class people.

Chester (2012, 13) agrees, and further complains that by overlooking indigenous citizens for people of influence, “it can create an image of an ideal church or churchgoer that is far removed from the experience of working-class people”. This has been my experience of city centre charismatic evangelical churches too. While the poor have been served, and graduates like myself have been sent to other *cities*, surrounding towns have generally been ignored, and unreached people groups including the working classes are forgotten again¹⁴ Missiologist Roland Allen (1912, 19) perceived this failing over a century ago:

There is no particular virtue in attacking a centre or establishing a Church in an important place unless the Church...is a Church possessed of sufficient light to the whole country round.

It is not enough for the Church to be established in a place where many are coming and going unless the people who come and go not only learn the Gospel, but learn it in such a way that they can propagate it. It has often happened that a mission has been established in an important city, and the surrounding country has been left untouched.

Keller’s thesis does not hold up historically either. The Welsh revival was born out of a minister’s frustration at the middle-class nature of the church, and who sought a preacher among the miners – finding Evan Roberts (Evans, 1969, 63). The Great Awakening is littered with stories of the working-class coming to faith; miners bore “white gutters made by their tears which plentifully fell down their black cheeks” (Dallimore, 1970, 263), while “the higher classes in English society were scarcely

¹⁴ One prays the Church of England with its recently adopted Resource Church strategy will succeed where the Free Church has failed, having the parish system already in place to serve working-class communities.

touched by Methodist influence” (Wearmouth, 1945, 263). Furthermore, as a ‘conversionist’ evangelical (see Bebbington, above), I appreciate Paas’ (2016, 97) critique of Keller’s emphasis of cultural transformation over conversion.

There are admirable alternatives to Keller, such as the small, relational, parochial, “micro church” approach espoused by Crowded House (2022). To me, however, this approach feels too inward focussed and parochial to its detriment, failing to both reach working-class locals *and* to plant churches in cities beyond. I certainly wish to emulate their commitment to “move beyond church as a weekly service and become a community who share life and share mission” (Chester & Timmis, 2011, 180), but I believe ecclesiastical history shows us that traditional models of church rhythms can succeed and are indeed preferable.

Brazilian Bishop Pedro Casaldáliga (1978, 211) wrote “the universal word speaks only dialect”. Put another way, whatever your tribe, people, or nationality, God speaks your language (Revelation 5:9). However, I do not speak the local dialect. I am ‘established middle-class’ (see Chapter 2); I neither speak with the local Geordie accent, nor speak the language of the working-classes. There are those who would entreat me to eschew my southern, middle-class roots “and intentionally become downwardly mobile” (Wilson, 2012, 26). This, however, seems problematic to me. No one would take me seriously; as the Sheffield rock group Pulp (1995) express it in their song about someone from the upper classes failing to find a place among the ‘*Common People*’:

But still you’ll never get it right

‘Cause when you’re laid in bed at night

Watching roaches climb the wall

If you called your dad, he could stop it all

Rather, I long for the church to be governed by middle, working, upper – all classes. I do not believe the Great Commission prescribes multitudinous churches segregated by class, rather that there are to be myriad ‘multiclass’ churches; each with multiclass leaders, leading in styles befitting their own

class, because each has something of Christ to bring, both ecclesiastically and missiologically: “to better reach non-believers from different cultures...When someone in that community becomes a believer, church should grow out of their understanding of worship, teaching, and discipleship” (Edwards, 2013, 29-30).

Williams & Brown (2022, 18) purport that to avoid unhealthy churches “full of Christian clones”, we need to “address deep-seated levels of class bias” in our church leadership as well as in the pews.

Lynne Cullens (2019) recounts an ‘amusing’ anecdote told by a clergywoman:

A young woman with a strong working-class accent had phoned...to ask whether she could discuss a strong call she was feeling to ordination.

When the woman arrived, she was wearing leopard-print leggings and UGG boots, and had bleached blonde hair and eyelashes thick with mascara...The woman articulated a passionate personal faith and a sincere and informed vocation to ministry.

Of course, [I didn’t put her through to the diocese]. What would they have made of me sending someone like her through to them?

To combat this bias and promote egalitarian leadership from all classes, we first need disciples from all classes, meaning the middle-class must devote attention to making disciples of the working class. It is in this vein that I examine Leach’s (2007, 26) next question, “Where do I locate myself in relation to the issues emerging?” An engaging subject, not just rhetorically or theologically, but geographically. Bishop of Burnley, Phillip North, said, “in the urban areas and outer estates of our nation...we are withdrawing the preachers. The harvest is rich, but the labourers have been re-deployed to wealthier areas” (ACNS, 2017). According to Green (2015, 16-17), “denominational churches [deem] estate congregations non-viable”. It makes sense, then, that to make disciples of many classes, I should *locate* myself and my church physically amongst people of socio-economic diversity. Yet North (2017) marks someone like me, a church planter in a “student [town] with a

young and upwardly mobile population”, as “complicit in the abandonment of the poor”. A felt barb to a church plant that has attracted more students than locals. Yet, quite apart from North conflating ‘working-class’ with ‘the poor’, I consider the issue more nuanced than mere geography. I live in a working-class suburb of Newcastle, yet that is not enough to grow a multiclass church.

“The primary problem in the [Corinthian] church, and Paul’s main reason for writing...is division” (Wilson, 2021, 15), and we see a similar division in the UK church today. To have a middle-class church for middle-class Christians and a working-class church for the working-class holds no ecclesiastical water for me – I long to build a *multiclass* church. In our understanding of *habitus* in Chapter 2, we learned of the unconscious biases we all carry. There is a reason most church planting is done by the middle-classes, as they are the most socially and geographically mobile class. The working-classes are more likely to remain in the cities, towns, and suburbs in which they have grown up. In a multiclass church the seeming dichotomy of trying to plant a church that both reaches the unconverted working-classes of Newcastle and plants church into the surrounding North-East, is not dichotomous at all – for there exists in a multiclass church both those who will go and those who will stay.

I wholeheartedly believe, therefore, that I must *locate* myself and my church geographically, theologically and ecclesiologicaly amidst the working-classes, even though I am middle-class. In Chapter 4 I explore further what the Corinthian correspondence has to teach us about our praxis, but clearly, we cannot ascribe to the division, classism, and sectarianism that is seemingly promoted in some ecclesiological quarters. We must cease the many testimonies of working-class converts who find no place in the middle-class church (Williams & Brown, 2022, 7).

Leach’s (2007, 26) final question of Step 3 is “What are my instincts about the ‘real’ issues here? Where do these instincts come from?”. This I answer with sadness that I fear evangelical churches do not wish to make the change – or at least, they do not know how to. So much of the conversionism and activism of evangelicalism (see Bebbington, above) is wrapped up in ‘church

growth', as prescribed in *Understanding Church Growth* (McGavran, 1980) and, later, *Churchquake!* (Wagner, 1999). While Goodhew (2015, 7) correctly argues that McGavran "has had little influence outside the evangelical constituency", my experience would tell me that he is wrong to assert that Church Growth has had "diminishing influence of any kind in recent decades". Many of the evangelical leaders I know are constantly measuring 'growth metrics', such as Sunday attendance, annual baptism numbers and finances. While I adhere to this conversionist focus, unchecked it leads to a 'results' mentality that aims for the low-hanging fruit of the middle-class students and young professionals of the cities, and forgoes the slow-yield fruit of the working-classes. Thus, in the face of 'success' it is hard for growing evangelical churches to even want to change, let alone consider how. Yet change we must, and "the onus is on the dominant culture to make space for those who are missing among us" (Williams & Brown, 2022, 30).

Chapter 4 – Attention to Theological Tradition

“This step of the method...asks the practitioner both to consider the explicit [and implicit theologies] present in the situation being examined”, using theological resources appropriate to the practitioner’s tradition, e.g., “liturgies; hymns; practices of the church” (Leach, 2007, 28). As an evangelical, my chief source of tradition is biblicism (see notes on Bebbington, Chapter 1), and thus in this chapter I turn to scripture – specifically the Corinthian correspondence. Witherington (1995, 28) points out that “the diversity of socioeconomic levels and religious and ethnic backgrounds among Corinthian Christians was undoubtedly an underlying cause of several of the issues and problems that Paul addresses in 1 and 2 Corinthians”, and therefore I will exegete 1 Corinthians, referring also to 2 Corinthians and Acts 18. I begin by exploring both Corinth and Paul’s socioeconomic background and Corinth’s ecclesiastical divisions, before expositing Paul’s prescribed solution that we are to consider ourselves “not our own” (6:19)¹⁵.

Ancient Corinth

In Paul’s day, Corinth was a city of division. An ancient Greek city-state, its strategic position as Greece’s Mediterranean gateway (Barnett, 1997, 1-4) led to its being taken in 44BC by the Romans, who turned it into “the most competitive of all cities, even in economic matters” (Witherington, 1995, 11). Roman intruders made up most of the city’s population, but Greeks were still found “living in the ruins” (Witherington, 1995, 6-7), creating a wide socioeconomic gulf. Witherington (1995, 23-24) reports that “Corinth was in essence a freedman’s city”, where many of the top officials were children of former slaves, and the elite of Roman society were absent. However, in line with Bourdieu (see Chapter 2), Witherington (1995, 23) also suggests that “wealth was not the only means to high social status”; with their high cultural and social capital, the dominant-class was a high-achieving middle-class akin to that which dominates the UK evangelical church. Sociologist

¹⁵ Paul’s point in 6:19 is sexual, but his same theology carries throughout.

Rodney Stark (1996, 35) argues that “religion can in fact compensate people for their inability to gain certain things they desire”, and Witherington (1995, 24) suggests that it could be that the social disparity of Corinth “was at the root of the attraction that Christianity had for some Corinthians: This new religion gave them status in their own eyes that they had been unable to obtain in the larger society”. However, Witherington (1995, 24) also points out that there was little status to be gained in a minority cult, and the *koinonia* were more likely to have been formed out the Greek Corinthians displaced in their own city.

The socioeconomic demographic of Corinth is much debated. Sociologically, Stark (1996, 29-36) argues that while traditionally Christianity is reported as “a movement of oppressed people...the religion of slaves”, actually “lower classes were disproportionately *under-represented*”. People will only join a new religion if able to understand the difference and necessity from their current one – thus not the proletariat (Stark, 1996, 36). But what of scriptural evidence? Wuellner (1973, 666) convincingly claims, “no other single verse of the entire New Testament was more influential in shaping popular opinion and exegetical judgement alike on the social origins of early Christianity than 1 Corinthians 1:26”. For some take literally Paul’s proclamation that “not many of [the Corinthians] were wise...powerful [or] of noble birth” and assert that the church in Corinth was made up of the poor (Meggitt, 1998, 179). However, Blomberg (1999, 182-183) claims the division Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 1:11-12 must be sociological as well as theological: for the incestuous man (5:1-13) could only have received such a blind eye if he were an influential patron, and the lawsuits between the brothers (6:1-11) can only have been served among the wealthy. Further, the church was hosted in the house of Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), which Dunn (2008, 62) estimates at being large enough to host forty people, while the poor would share houses or even sleep “in the open air” (Meggitt, 1998, 63). Moreover, the issues of patronage that Paul faced in Corinth (see below) demonstrate the presence of affluence within the church (Witherington, 1995, 371-374). “Far from being a socially depressed group, then, if the Corinthians are typical, the Christians were dominated by a socially pretentious section of the population” (Judge, 1960, 60).

Either way, the church in Corinth was “proud” (1 Corinthians 5:2, NIV), like its city, “where public recognition was often more important than facts” (Witherington, 1995, 8). “The Corinthian correspondence reveals that Paul had to deal with a church overcome by vanity and rent asunder by an overweening desire for honour and distraction” (Garland, 1999, 24).

Paul and the Corinthians

As much as Corinth was a city of division, Paul himself was a man of contradiction. His education “was in the upper one to two percent of the population” (Witherington, 1995, 2). He was unashamedly Jewish (2 Corinthians 11:22), and he was a Roman citizen – meaning his family must have rendered special service to Rome (Witherington, 1995, 3). Yet, he was not aristocratic as he lived outside of Rome, and his artisan wages were the economic basis of his existence (Meggitt, 1998, 79-82). Ultimately, there is no compelling evidence to label Paul with any class (Meggitt, 1998, 96), yet this diverse background “was good preparation for his role as *apostolos*” (Witherington, 1995, 3) to Jews, Greeks, women, men, slaves and free.

However, the Corinthians found these inconsistencies troubling. Paul refused to take payment from them, knowing that they would have felt ownership over Paul had he accepted their patronage (Barnett, 1997, 13), and instead worked as an artisan tentmaker. To the Corinthians, having one’s own trade was even less honourable than begging (Blomberg, 1999, 186). According to Witherington (1995, 20-21):

Well-to-do Romans, like Greeks, often had a low opinion of those who practiced a trade, and many of Paul’s problems in Corinth seem to have been caused by the wealthy and the social climbers among Corinthian Christians who were upset at him for not meeting their expectations for a great orator and teacher. Corinth was a city where an enterprising person could rise quickly in society through the accumulation and judicious use of newfound wealth.

... In a city where social climbing was a major pre-occupation, Paul's deliberate stepping down in apparent status would have been seen by many as disturbing, disgusting, and even provocative.

Perhaps we see a parallel here with the New Affluent Workers, as defined by Savage et al (2013) (see Chapter 2). Both they and the middle classes in 1st century Corinth are disinterested in Paul's humbling Christianity because "religion, in their mind, is supposed to lift people up, not weigh them down with suffering...the world, especially the world of the first century Corinth abominates this kind of humility and ridicules it because it so threatens its own self-seeking outlook" (Garland, 1999, 31-33).

Social Division in Corinth

Commenting on 1 Corinthians 9:22, Barclay (1975, 84) laments:

One of our greatest necessities is to learn the art of getting alongside people; and the trouble so often is that we do not even try.

Indeed, Paul's first sentence is a call to unity, "to be saints together" (1 Corinthians 1:2), which could seem perfunctory were it not paired with his complaint against division in verse 10. But, in his "strongest theological appeal" (Bailey, 2011, 68), against *schismata*, is Paul complaining of divided *opinions* (Fee, 1987, 52-54) or *factions* (Witherington, 1995, 94-97)? Barnett (1997, 10), commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:5-11, notes well the Corinthian extreme segregationist tendencies. Within context both are possible, and for the present study, both are pertinent. Which class's *opinions* are valid? Ought we to break into ecclesiastical *factionalism*? Neither. While the next section answers more fully how Paul proposes we unify ourselves, let us note here that Paul calls the Corinthians to "be united in the same mind" (1 Corinthians 1:10) and *εκκλησιᾶ* (1:12-15). Paul's opposers are few, yet he censures the whole church in joint culpability (Barnett, 1997, 26-27).

However, it is division over food that is perhaps surprisingly most relevant here, as Witherington (1995, 28-29) elucidates:

The basis for the disagreement that arose in Corinth over participation in meals in temples (1 Cor 10) was probably economic as well as one of religious background, since only the relatively well-off were likely to have been regularly confronted with invitations to such meals...

...At Christian fellowship meals the hosts may well have followed normal customs and served wealthy merchants in one room with one kind of food and the poor and slaves elsewhere, probably the atrium, with the leftovers. This may explain Paul's indignation in 1 Cor 11:17-34.

Bailey (2011, 316-317) demonstrates the chiasm that places the focus of vv17-22 on church assembly, and how their practice is *not* the Lord's Supper v20. For at the Lord's Supper, the wealthy were eating "their own portions or perhaps privileged portions that were not made available to the 'have-nots'...thus despising the church by shaming those who have nothing" (Fee, 1987, 534-536). Paul laments that their church meetings, "do more harm than good" (1 Corinthians 11:17, NIV), "they have taken the ultimate act of self-giving and made it an act of self-serving" (Wilson, 2021, 126). It is little wonder then that this section is structured like a warning passage akin to those in Hebrews (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 5:11-14; 12:25) with Paul starting chapter 10 reminding the Corinthians that 'all' were baptised in the Red Sea (10:1), but only two made it to the Promised Land (10:5).

Perhaps Garland (1999, 30) is correct, in asserting that "the Corinthian correspondence reveals they were not yet comfortable in living out the scandal of the cross", but Witherington (1995, 29) is both more generous and insightful to Paul's and, by extension, my position as a multiclass church planter:

social tensions are inherent in any religious group that is missionary in character and seeks to construct strong boundaries between the believer and the world. These two tendencies

pull in opposite direction – the former toward inclusiveness, the latter toward exclusiveness. Paul's dilemma was to create a group with a clear sense of its moral and theological identity while at the same time incorporating a heterogeneous group of people: Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free.

Paul's Solution

If Paul's priority issue is division, his priority solution is grace. 1 Corinthians 1:2 calls for unity; the repetition of "grace" 1:3&4 teaches us how. For grace humbles both posh and poor, it is not owed to the former, nor attainable by the latter. By grace the foolish shames the wise, the weak shames the strong, and that which is not transforms that which is – and none may boast (1 Corinthians 1:27-29; c.f. Ephesians 2:9). 1 Corinthians 4:7 is "Pauline theology in a sentence" (Wilson, 2021, 41):

What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

Paul continues with this theme of humility in the face of grace; indeed, even in dealing with 'the Incestuous Man', Paul spends time correcting pride before incest (1 Corinthians 5:2). In 1 Corinthians 1:22-24 he addresses both the messianic Jews and converted Greeks of Corinth: both had an expectation of who the Christ would be, bringing signs or wisdom, and neither received wholly what they expected. However, Christ is, of course, all the sign and wisdom of God we need, and thus we can extrapolate that each culture in history will have both correct and incorrect assumptions about Christ. Let us humble ourselves, then, and appreciate that all classes can learn a new Christological assumption from their brothers and sisters of another class.

The key text is 1 Cor 9:19-23, where "Paul indicates his *modus operandi*" (Witherington, 1995, 211). Here, he explains his "chameleonlike stance in matters of social relationships" (Fee, 1987, 423): "I have become all things to all people" (9:22). Some practitioners believe this to mandate contextualisation, "being a chav for chavs, or a Jew to the Jews" (Edwards, 2013, 10), but the

preceding context is not mission, but finance (Witherington, 1995, 214-215) and freedom from patronage (Fee, 1987, 426). While certainly “freedom is not [Paul’s] goal: the salvation of others is” (Fee, 1987, 426), Paul’s thrust is to offer himself as an example of freedom.

It is uncertain whether Paul is referencing food or finance freedoms (Fee, 1987, 424-425), but his examples are consistent, for just as Paul refuses payment so the Corinthians are to forgo eating food offered to idols – each has the freedom to do so, but, for the ‘weaker brother’ (1 Corinthians 8:10-13), they ought rather to abstain. Indeed, for the weak the Christlike Paul becomes weak (9:22; c.f. Philippians 2:5-11); Witherington (1995, 213) pertinently explicitises the obverse that Paul does not become strong for the strong, thus we see the dominant should take the condescending impetus in mission (Witherington, 1995, 213).

So how, then, is one of a dominant culture, like the middle-classes, to become weak? For Fee (1987, 429) Paul’s provocation to become “as one outside the law” (9:21) is consummated in 10:23-33 as the Corinthians are exhorted to “eat whatever is set before [them]” (10:27) for the “good of [their] neighbour” (10:24). It is unlikely that working-class food has been offered to idols, so the middle-class must eat like them, and not insist on their own way. In Chapter 5, I explore how we can reconcile Paul’s theology with our ecclesial praxis.

But does this mean I should give up being middle-class, and like Christ in the incarnation, condescend and become that which I was not before? Kenneth Bailey (2011, 256-257) cuts to the heart of the matter:

[Paul] talks about living like a Jew (for Jews) and living like a Gentile (for Gentiles)...But...he is a Jew, *he cannot become a Gentile!* Even in the homily where he is specifically saying “To all people I have become all things”, he affirms limits...After spending forty-seven years in the Arab world, and after acquiring the ability to lecture in four kinds of Arabic, I never said to my Arabic-speaking friends, “We Arabs”.

Yet, Bailey's argument is far too binary. Birthplaces do not change, but nationalities do – and so can one's class. "Let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him" (1 Corinthians 7:17), and none of us are limited to our impermanent social classification. We must not fall into a fatalistic reading of 1 Corinthians 15:10 "by the grace of God I am what I am". Paul is not making an admission of 'this is just the person God made me', but a dynamic statement of the way the Grace of God has radically transformed him. Christ is far less interested in our socioeconomic status, than the state of our sanctification. Discipleship is not defined by class, nor does it require social mobility. Paul exhorts the bondservants to seek freedom if they can, but to "not be concerned" if they cannot, for they are free in Christ (7:21-22). Neither class should seek to become the other to be true disciples. The miracle of the gospel is that bondservants and masters worshipped together.

Paul's focus in the rest of the letter turns more to the misuse of spiritual gifts, but his principles of division still apply. The working-classes cannot say 'because I am not middle-class, I do not belong to the body' (12:16), and the middle-class cannot say to the working-class 'I have no need of you', nor vice versa (12:21). Paul proceeds to "show [the Corinthians] a more excellent way" (12:31b): Love. Christlike love. Love incarnate. Christ himself. The agape. "Agape...a word 'born within the bosom of religion'" (Ainsworth, 1920, 19). The love that gives away, and thinks not on one's own benefit. "Let all things be done for building up" (14:26). "Let all that you do be done in love" (16:14). Much has been said of the "unworthy manner" in which one can come to the Lord's Table (11:27-28). But, in short, it is to come to one's brothers and sisters at our master's table without love that is the unworthy manner. *This* is how we are to examine ourselves: when we come, are we unified, or are we prejudiced? Are we individualist or are we koinonia? We have all sinned, we are all unworthy, but those who persist in unlovingness and judgement cannot come.

In conclusion, Paul uses two metaphors rich for today's church planter (1 Corinthians 3:5-15). We plant, he says, but the Spirit grows the church. I may lay a foundation, but others will build atop. And

what is this foundation? What is this seed? “To know nothing...except Jesus Christ and him crucified”
(2:2). If we build with anything other than Christ Crucified (2:2), the whole thing collapses.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion: Attention to the Mission of the Church

As expressed in Chapter 3, I believe my church's call is to grow into one that makes disciples of all classes. Our desire is not to be a 'working-class church', but a multiclass church. Throughout this conclusory step, then, my priority is not any one class's culture, but disciple-making; for, as Williams & Brown (2022, 129) comment on 1 Corinthians 9:19-23:

We don't need to bend or shape everything around minorities – indeed, compromise, understanding and acceptance are needed on *all* sides – but it is important to wrestle with some difficult questions so that we can make church as accessible as possible to as many as possible.

In this chapter, I build on St Paul's edict in Chapter 4 that we do not insist on our "own way" (1 Corinthians 13:5), by exploring a) how I might equip my church to prefer the *habitus* of others in disciple-making, b) our strategy for growth as a multiclass church, and c) both spoken and unspoken communication of the gospel.

Engaging with Preference in Discipleship

Glory and inoffensiveness, and not self, are Pauline discipleship priorities (c.f. 1 Corinthians 10:31-33); and if we are to imitate him, as he did Christ (11:1), my church and I would do well to examine what preferences we hold that cause an unnecessary barrier to discipling those of differing preference. For if we do not recognise our preferences, we will, perhaps inadvertently, insist on our "own way" (1 Corinthians 13:5), and inevitably show partiality to those most like us. This is the very "class racism" (Bourdieu, 1984, 178) the gospel tears down (Ephesians 2:14), and James 2:2-4 warns us against.

To do this, we must first acknowledge that the working-classes are multifaceted. Savage *et al.* (2013) encourages us to recognise nuance in class classifications; many of the working-class in my mission

field don't look like what many middle-class may consider to be working-class, but are in fact the *practical* North-East's New Affluent Workers (see *Sociology and Ethnography*, Chapter 2) who, like the Ancient Corinthians, consider *poetic* Christianity – weak made strong, life through death – to be counter their culture of graft. A multiclass church's task then, is to stop mediating and silencing the manifold voices of the working-class; to listen and not to assume is the basis of cross-class discipleship. Williams & Brown (2022, 129-130) give example that in evangelical churches reliability is a high priority – serving teams need reliable people – but to assume a working-class church member is uncommitted because they regularly fail to meet their serving commitment maybe unfounded when one “seek[s] to understand” and finds that they are equally burdened and committed to their extensive local family network. A middle-class preference might be to fulfil one's ecclesial duties at the expense of family; to listen, to understand, and not to judge with preference is the hard work of the pastor, but it is crucial to multiclass discipleship. Moreover, while Hebrews 10:25 certainly mandates regular church meetings, Williams & Brown (2022, 81) argue that Sunday attendance is not “the primary measure” of church involvement and cite 1 Corinthians 7:20 as their defence for the view that working-class converts ought not be immediately wrenched from their existing networks into an exclusive Sunday separation. Edwards (2013, 39-40) goes further, suggesting that it is the church hopping, consumerist middle-classes who have more to learn about church loyalty than the working-classes.

As a church plant meeting in our home, we disciple regularly over meals, much as Christ did himself (John 6:1-71; 13:1-30; 21:9-23). Yet Edwards (2013, 63-65) reports a reticence amongst his working-class friends about ‘going to dinner’, whether through nervousness of not knowing the “table etiquette” or financial embarrassment when not able to return the favour. To combat this, Williams & Brown (2022, 66-67) repeat the call to consider preferences other than our own:

With some friends, I know that if we are going to eat together, they would prefer to go to somewhere simple and inexpensive, maybe a fast-food outlet, a café or a pub, rather than invite me into their home or come to mine.

Due to the pandemic, we were forced in our first year to meet in a small, cheap venue in Wallsend, rather than our house as we had intended, and during that time we grew exclusively with local Geordies from the Traditional Working Class, Emergent Service Sector, and Precariat. We moved back into our home after lockdown lifted, which sadly precipitated some of these to move on; moreover, those who remained confessed that had church met in our home to begin with, they would never have come. My church planting preference is home and hearth, with Christ at the centre – yet this was a barrier; thus, we are moving back into a venue soon, sooner than we would have expected to, because a neutral space serves those other than myself.

Yet, we continue with house groups, centred around a meal or social event, and we encourage our leaders to consider preferences other than middle-class ones – Williams & Brown (2022, 69) suggest “pie and peas...and...bingo”! It would also be wrong to label those from the working-classes as inhospitable, “most of my working-class friends would not invite someone over for dinner, but they would have an open door to you at all times” (Williams & Brown 2022, 64).

Strategy for Growth as a Multiclass Church

Chester (2012, 13) laments that while “the gospel often travels along relational lines” is missiologically positive, it is demographically limited. The evangelical church is currently not multiclass, but middle-class, and if Bourdieu is correct that classes are defined in opposition to one another (Swartz, 1997, 167-168), how are we to grow multiclass churches? Our new venue is still in working-class Wallsend, being intentionally local for locals, but with good parking and transport links for commuters; but as Charlesworth & Williams (2017, 124-125) note that even when a church is demographically diverse, integration is far from a given.

Williams & Brown (2022, 18, 138) believe that a lack of working-class leadership limits working-class church growth, claiming that middle-class leaders attract only like-minded people and are biased to promote those with an education. I cannot accept this. Paul, as we saw in Chapter 4, was a man of contradiction: a Jew called to Gentiles, educated yet not aristocratic, and one who calls men like me to imitate him in Christlikeness of universality. Me, a middle-class man from the south of England, highly educated, yet with a desire to proclaim Christ crucified to all classes. It is not enough to stand back and wait for a working-class leader to arise to evangelise those like themselves. Yet, I take seriously Williams & Brown's (2022, 87) caution that those new to a working-class community may be treated with suspicion and therefore must "become part of the community before thinking [they] can transform it".

Edwards (2013, 120-127) believes the key is less who the leaders are, but more how they create a Sunday service with a "working-class liturgy" of "Popular music...Attractive speakers...Larger than life stories...Spiritual freedom". Byassee (135-139), however, critiques the "big splashy first service" model of church planting as off-putting to many demographics, and contra to the spirit of a gospel that seeks not "success", but "'people of peace'".¹⁶ He suggests the incarnational Fresh Expressions model for imitation. Certainly, we must observe the trend, so far unexamined, of the "explosion of entertainment opportunities" in society, whereby "From the 1870s onwards, the music hall and organised sport began to claim working-class allegiance" (Chester, 2012, 12).. In the North-East, until the 19th century, "the chapel was the only regular source of entertainment" (Chester, 2012, 12), but since the early 19th century football has become the major religion (Jackson, 2019, 159-166), and church attendance has dropped as a result (which perhaps correlates with socioeconomic inequality, resulting in anxiety and depression (Todd, 2015, 338)). Byassee claims a Fresh Expressions approach would enable mission to tap into the fields where people already are. Yet, building on Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus*, (that which we do unconsciously,) Smith (2013, 75-98) argues that to de-

¹⁶ See critique of Keller's city first approach in Chapter 3.

intellectualise Christianity, we need to create and inhabit regular church rhythms. So a regular Sunday service, with sung and Eucharistic worship, Biblical preaching, prayers and structure are useful in making all classes unconscious disciples. Fresh Expressions, while laudable evangelistically, run the risk of merely putting a Jesus cherry on a secular mindset's cake. Moreover, if we are to "share in Christ's ministry" (Leach, 2007, 29) let us remember that Jesus certainly met people where they were, at weddings and wells (John 2:1-11; 4:1-45), but still preached in synagogues and kept Jewish festivals (Luke 4:14-44; 22:7-13). Perhaps Edwards' brash, presentational, Pentecostal approach might seem uncouth, but Chester (2013, 58) reports that this ecclesiological praxis "is the branch of Christianity having the greatest impact on people in disadvantaged areas."

For us, we will continue to leverage our opportunities as a small church, and offer a lo-fi service, where all voices are encouraged to be heard; understanding that a neutral venue is preferable to my home, that a certain level of informality is desirable, but regularity provides security. Williams & Brown (2022, 128) do not call for restructured Sunday services, but rather exhort public speakers to drip feed acknowledgement of demographic difference across the ekklesia, much as preachers drip feed practical discipleship into sermons.

For communication is of paramount importance, and that is our final topic. We must adhere to Stackhouse (2019, 11), for whom strategy, liturgy, and all the rest are of moderate importance, but his exhortation to pastors is "simply preach the gospel and see what happens".

Communicating the Gospel to All Classes

We will return to the theme of preaching shortly, but communication on a Sunday begins long before the sermon. Williams & Brown (2022, 58, 127) applaud efforts from churches like mine to welcome people well, but warn that occasionally pleasant middle-class conversation, 'What do you do for a living? Where do you live?', might sound interrogative – like the police – and caution that not everyone has the same political position on topics such as immigration or Brexit. It is important

to find common ground. (I learned working at previous church's foodbank to ask universally answerable questions 'what have you done today?', or 'where have you come from today?'.) Edwards (2013, 44-45, 54-62) advises that national news not as interesting as local stories, and argues (not entirely convincingly) that 'banter', euphemism, and toilet humour are helpful icebreakers, but is quick to point out that this only works if the community is close and interrelated. As anthropologist Gillian Evans (2007, 27-28) relates how she learned to narrow her focus to everyday life:

I realise that the educated and expensive talk of the middle-classes is useless to me with [my working-class friend] Sharon; I no longer need to demonstrate how knowledgeable I am about the world, how broad and diverse my experience of it is and how ambitious I am to get on in life and improve myself. When I resort to such talk I am teased mercilessly about being posh and I quickly learn...I need only to focus on the essential business of everyday life: my family's welfare, our health (conversations about the vagaries of the unruly body predominate), work and ways to get money, housework, the drama of relationships, shopping, sex, and gossip about my own and other people's troubles.... that is all that matters to Sharon.

This narrowing of communication relates to preaching too. Storytelling is crucial, Edwards (2013, 135) claims, but these must be *universal* stories (Williams & Brown, 2022, 43-44), not ones about 'sacrificially' forgoing holidays in order to buy a house! Rooms & Wort (2021, 10) exhort preachers to tell Bible stories with the congregants in it. Tolkien (1997, 384-388) would argue that every story that features "the Consolation of the Happy Ending", which he labels "*Eucatastrophe*", is able to be related to Christ, as, "The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history. The Resurrection is the eucatastrophe...of the Incarnation."

I think both can be valid, but I also do not believe evangelicals have to leave their intellect at the door, to do so would be to insult their congregants' intelligence. While a sermon's purpose is not

equitable with a theology lecture, to disciple well can mean technicality. At those moments the preacher must pay especial heed to their vocabulary, tone, clothing, and definition of success (Williams & Brown, 2022, 52). Certainly, in 1 Corinthians 2:1-2 Paul tells us he chose not to use “lofty speech or wisdom”, but his antithesis is not dumbed down theology, it is “Christ and him crucified”. Straight-talking and humour are powerful gifts for speaking to the working-classes who would prefer you were honest about ‘going to hell’ (Edwards, 2013, 67, 134-135). Moreover, Chester (2012, 68-69) argues that exegetical preaching is preferable as “lofty speech or wisdom” from a person of authority like a pastor, whom some working-class can innately mistrust, is less reputable than the Bible itself. Fee (1987, 432-433), commenting on 1 Corinthians 9:23 tells us that we must not accommodate or adapt our message, but must change the mode of address.

Finally, St Francis is attributed with saying, ‘Preach the gospel at all times. And if necessary, use words’¹⁷. As we have seen, many who identify as working-class people are very intelligent and are rarely illiterate, but for some who are aliterate, biblical literacy is a foreign land. Evangelicals are people of the Word by virtue of being Biblicist, but rather than assume a level of literacy among its congregants that may be missing among the working-classes, we should consider how we might preach the gospel without using words.¹⁸ Furthermore, while I do not ascribe to his elevation of prophecy alongside Scripture, (prophecy should always be subject), I do agree with Edwards (2013, 126-127) that in evangelical churches the sermon has become overstated and can be a barrier to many aliterate working-class. But while some have responded to this challenge by reducing the sermon to a short homily, I prefer to respond by promoting the sacraments. Allen (1912, 121) believed that St. Paul’s lasting success in short missionary trips was due to the fact he taught teachers through Scripture, that they might pass it on, and taught everyone through the sacraments.

¹⁷ Saunders (2017) more accurately reports Francis as saying “All the friars...should preach by their deeds.”

¹⁸ A notion appropriately North-Eastern: stained glass windows, wordless Bible teachers, originated in Sunderland, 674AD.

My experience of baptising the Precariat (see Chapter 2) of Nottingham taught me that it was more than mere memorial, it was a true act of repentant sinners – a fixed moment in time that spoke of their death and resurrection in Christ (Romans 6:1-11). At the Lord’s table, we wordlessly “proclaim the Lord’s death” (1 Corinthians 11:26) and the embodied nature of our faith, as “Jesus gives food, and judgement, to those who murder him by our actions” (Suffield, 2022). Through the sacraments, evangelicals can make disciples by communicating Christ crucified, as they commune with him.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1 I defined evangelical, and identified the working-class gap in their churches’ demographics, before demonstrating that this was an unfair bias, and the working-classes have much to offer the ecumenical community in learning Christlikeness. In Chapter 2, drawing on Bourdieu’s concepts of *field* and *habitus*, I defined class in the UK, examined the history of class and classism over the last century, and finished with a brief study of the ethnographic peculiarities of the North-East.

Chapter 3 was a personal reflection of calling and churchmanship, which led me to ask how St Paul approached church planting amongst the socioeconomically diverse city of Corinth in Chapter 4. His crucial teaching was not to become another class, which is impossible, (though if it happens organically we ought not reject it,) but to prefer the *habitus* of another to win them to Christ. And in this last chapter, I have sought to begin actioning Paul’s mantra in discipleship, strategy, and communication.

Through this personal journey, I hope to have brought awareness of the class gap in our churches, to have shaken the assumed mindset that middle-class values are Christian values, to have enriched a sociological understanding of the breadth of ‘class’, and, through the apostle Paul, to have stirred a desire to put aside one’s own preference and seek another’s. “But awareness is only the beginning.

We need to harness that knowledge and use it to change...the activities and habits of our churches”
(Williams & Brown, 2022, 154).

In this conclusory chapter, I have begun to address some of the praxis of my own church, but I would exhort others who similarly wish to make disciples of many demographics to ask: What are your matrices of discipleship? Then ask yourself whether these need be the matrices for *all* disciples, *all* the time? What does Jesus ask of them? And what is merely an academic barrier erected against those who cannot surmount it?

Anna Ruddick (2020, 5-8) rightly critiques evangelical disciple-making, complaining that post-conversion we expect a straight line of growth and self-motivated study, before more accurately analogising discipleship to boiling an egg – we just watch as it slowly hardens. Working-class disciples do not need programmes, books, or good manners anywhere near as much as they need an attentive discipler. We must listen, shelve our preferences, and preach Christ crucified exclusively, and watch as converts harden into disciples.

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BATMM, MATM, & MADT SUPERVISION RECORD FORM

Module: TMMC1167 - Independent Learning Project (Short) / TMMC1171- Independent Learning Project (Long) / TMMC2157 - Independent Learning Project (Short) / TMMC2161 - Independent Learning Project (Long) / TMMC3017 - Independent Learning Project (Short) / TMMC3021 - Independent Learning Project (Long) / TMMC3032 - Extended Project in Theology, Ministry and Mission / TMMC3042 - Dissertation / THMN49960 Dissertation / THMN45160 Dissertation

Name: dpnz59

Supervisor: Emma Parker

Title: 'Go and Make Disciples of All *Classes*': A Theological Reflection on the Working-Class Gap among Evangelical Churches in the North-East.

This form is retained by the supervisor and completed at the end of each supervision session so that student and supervisor have a clear agreement about what is the next step. At the end of the final supervision, a copy is given to the student to be submitted with the final version of the Dissertation or ILP. Please continue on the reverse.

Date/time: 3rd March 2022

Topics discussed: We discussed the overall shape of the dissertation and the driving force/motivation behind it – essentially looking at how do you grow a church that includes the working-class where 'posh and poor' are rubbing shoulders. Emphasis on 'growing a church' rather than on how to 'evangelise/teach/disciple/lead' the working class – which obviously are all parts of 'growing' a church, but the main question/theme of this dissertation is taking the overarching theme of *growing* a church.

We discussed the different chapters and questioned if the chapter on dpnz59's own voice might actually appear more naturally in the first chapter looking at the 'thick description'.

We also looked at how to focus on the Scriptures – use 1 Corinthians as an example of this or take more of a wider approach and draw from different letters/gospels? dpnz59 is going to read Paul's letters and see if anything in particular jumps out re rich and poor being together in the community.

Plan: Supervision 2 would look at Introduction and the theological reflection tool (voices); supervision 3 would look at the chapters on attention to the wider voices and theology, and supervision 4 would look at attention to the mission of the Church (conclusion).

Proposed action by student: write Introduction and first chapter.

Proposed action by supervisor: read the material

Date/time of next supervision:

Supervisor's initials: ELP

Student's initials: dpnz59

Date/time: 22nd June 2022

Topics discussed:

The dissertation's structure:

Referencing system: Use footnote rather than in-text reference and consistently use the appropriate referencing system. dpnz59 to verify this with Sam Tranter or the academic handbook.

Emphasis on 'growing a church': We discussed that although this dissertation's discussion touches on 'growing a church', it is not primarily concerned with 'church growth' per se, as such, it would be helpful to find an alternative phrase to express the dissertation's focus e.g. 'building a church of all classes'. We agreed that as dpnz59 writes chapter 2 and chapter 3, the discussions in these chapters will progressively inform the vocabulary for a multiclass church which he can then retrospectively use in chapter 1.

dpnz59's own voice: dpnz59 rightly, and insightfully suggested combining Leach's steps 1 & 3 in his discussion in chapter 1. Nevertheless, it might still be worth naming, in the introduction, the fact that he is writing as someone with personal experience (and therefore perspectives) of both the working-class community (which he currently aims to serve, though not his own background) and the theologian (as a postgraduate student of theology) within a theological institution. This is clearly explained in chapter 1, but it might be worth adding a short sentence on this in the introduction.

Proposed action by student:

Consider implementing in-text feedback.

Provide a definition for working-class (in chapter 2) and signpost this in chapter 1.

Focus arguments – although there are very good points made in chapter 1, there is a need to keep them focussed, avoid generalisations and link the key arguments back to the dissertation's question on the working class's missing voice within the church.

Complete and send chapters 1 (new version), 2, & 3 by Friday 15th July.

Proposed action by supervisor:

Read and give feedback on chapters 1 (new version), 2 and 3.

Date/time of next supervision: 19.07.2022 at 11am , postponed (to allow meeting in person rather than on zoom) for 22.07.2022 at 2.30pm

Supervisor's initials: SM

Student's initials: dpnz59

Date/time: 22.07.2022

Topics discussed:

Prior to the meeting, dpnz59 had sent the latest versions of chapter 1, 2 and 3, well in advance. We therefore went through these and noted the following key points:

Chapter 1

- We noted dpnz59's very good signposting
- Good articulation of own voice
- Check reference – pg11, and verify the required referencing system for MA dissertation in general.
- Pg 11 – Signpost the discussion on incarnational ministry of Paul a(1 Corinthians 9) and its implications for dpnz59 and his ministerial context (referring to the discussion in chapter 3)

Chapter 2

- Excellent organisation; This chapter's discussion was organised in three main sections – Sociology, History and Ethnography
- Very helpful and insightful engagement with key texts such as Todd's.
- It would be helpful for dpnz59 to think about mentioning the intersectionality of the class differences and challenges (particularly under history section). A simple mention, rather than an in-depth discussion should suffice. This could make reference to other factors such as geographical location, gender, race, empire, etc. without necessarily going into depth, but recognising their interaction with this dissertation's question.

Chapter 3

- Very good engagement with Witherington, Meggitt, etc.
- Consider making subtitles more specific: e.g. Social division in Corinth; Paul's complex identity, etc...
- See in-text comments

Proposed action by student:

For chapter 3 - Read James Smith's *Imagining the Kingdom* or *You are What You Love*, particularly on his use of Bourdieu's habitus to explain the formation of cultural and theological habits and desires (loves).

Review the structure and consider moving sections that are not specific to this chapter's discussion either to the introductory section or to chapter 4.

Consider moving the discussion on 'issues of discipleship' (e.g. tithing, financial stewardship and purchase decisions) to chapter 4, if dpnz59 feels that it is still key to this chapter's discussion.

Explore Paul's theology of grace in his letter to the Corinthians further. It might be helpful to re-establish Paul's (and the Corinthians') complex and multi-layered identity which helps avoid the false or superficial dichotomies (Jews vs Gentiles, etc.) in the eschatological community.

Proposed action by supervisor:

To be discussed and confirmed with EP.

Date/time of next supervision:

Supervisor's initials: SM

Student's initials: dpnz59

Date/time: 19.08.2022 at 11.30am

Topics discussed:

Chapter 1 which has now been split into two (chapters 1 & 3)

Chapter 5

Proposed action by student:

- Implement in-text feedback, except for those where we had agreed that, on reflection, dpnz59's initial statement was fine as it was.
- Consider maintaining a focus: Address specific points raised in previous chapters. dpnz59 rightly limited (and focussed) your discussion to three main points: Preference, Strategy and Communication. It is important that these three points are highlighted as key areas in subsequent chapter(s).
- Remember to focus on your response to the situation described earlier. As Leach suggests, 'What is the calling of the church in this situation'. Other methods call this section - action or response.

- Clarify if the actions are by you, churches in the evangelical tradition, or the Church in general. This is something you did really well, but not constantly.
- Include 'theological reflection' in the title to indicate the main method used in this dissertation.
- Send final draft before deadline and submit the completed dissertation by 2nd September
- Final draft sent on 30th August and approved by SM on 31st August.

Proposed action by supervisor:

Date/time of next supervision: N/A

Supervisor's initials: SM

Student's initials: dpnz59

Date/time:

Topics discussed:

Proposed action by student:

Proposed action by supervisor:

Date/time of next supervision:

Supervisor's initials:

Student's initials:

Date/time:

Topics discussed:

Proposed action by student:

Proposed action by supervisor:

Date/time of next supervision:

Supervisor's initials:

Student's initials: