DOCTORAL THESIS

Evangelical Third Place Cafés that Facilitate Gospel Conversations

Foster, Keith

Award date:
2023

Awarding institution:
University of Roehampton

Evangelical Third Place Cafés that Facilitate Gospel Conversations

by

Keith Foster BA (Hons), MA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

D.Th

Department of Humanities

Roehampton University

2023

Abstract

For many years, cafés have been renowned for being places of community connectivity and conversation. This research was focussed on two West Midland cafés run by evangelical Christians whose joint objectives were to enhance their local sense of community, whilst also seeking opportunities to share their Christian faith. I wanted to understand to what extent the cafés achieved these objectives, yet additionally, I wanted to understand what sort of *gathered community* each café created, as the hosts and patrons interacted, particularly around matters of faith.

Fieldwork was conducted over a period of fifteen months between September 2018 and February 2020, using observations during my frequent visits to the cafés, and semi-structured interviews with the café managers, plus a selection of the café hosts and patrons.

This research found that both evangelical cafés were important hubs of social capital that also created a platform for faith-sharing with a broad range of people by meeting a need for personal and community connectivity. Additionally, the cafés provided an environment where psychological barriers between the evangelical hosts and local patrons, be they imagined or real, were diluted as the cafés become authentic third place communities. The fieldwork also revealed that the physical layout of the cafés and faith-based literature within them, encouraged faith-based discussions and enquiry, with the cafés becoming places of faith journey and exploration. The fieldwork, specifically in one of the cafés, revealed it to be a gathered faith community, a new locus of spirituality, which was characterised by prayer, Bible-based discussion, social connection and conversations centred around Jesus.

Theologically, the research findings and insights provide an alternative approach to community mission, compared to the more traditional approaches adopted by some within the evangelical tradition, where “proclamation” over “dialogue”, and “crisis conversion” over faith journey is preferred.

Contents

Tables

Figures

Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of six years of research. Within this time, I have received and appreciated the support of many people who encouraged me to “keep going”, including through the restrictions of the Covid 19 pandemic and all the challenges that brought.

I would like to personally thank my wife, Lesley, in addition to my two daughters, Becky and Rachel, for their love and support throughout.

Thanks and appreciation go to my supervisors, Dr John Moxon and Dr Andrew Rogers, whose meticulous analysis of my thesis structure and research approach, helped me to sharpen and develop the final thesis.

I would also like to thank the managers and staff of The Friendship and The Welcome Café’s that were subject to my research and frequent visits. Equally, thanks go to their host organisations, Phoenix Church and Gateway Church for granting permission for this research to be carried out.

Above all, I thank God for His sustaining power throughout this “labour of love”.

I dedicate this research to all of those churches, in whatever tradition, who desire to share their faith in Christ, yet do so in the very heart of their communities.

Ethics Statement

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference HUM 18/036 in the Department of Humanities and was approved under procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 31/10/18 (cf. Appendix C).

Abbreviations

ARCS – Action Research Church and Society

CAP – Christian's Against Poverty

CAoP – Christian Action on Poverty

CIF – Christocentric Incarnational Framework

FBO's – Faith Based Organisations

FCC – Fellowship of the Churches of Christ

FIEC – Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches

ICRC – Inner Cities Religious Council

ONS – Office for National Statistics

RGMT – Research Group in Ministerial Theology

SCC – Secular Spiritual Capital

TAR – Theological Action Research

1 Chapter One: Introduction

The Purpose of this thesis is to present my research into two West Midland cafés run by evangelical Christians that were seeking to provide a community hub for local people, whilst at the same time seeking opportunities to share their Christian faith. I wanted to know to what extent the cafés contributed to a local sense of community and how they facilitated faith-based conversations. Linked to these two overarching questions, I also wanted to know:

- To what extent did the café environment help the café hosts and patrons develop a mutual understanding of each other as they engaged in dialogue?
- To what extent did the café host team *members* communicate their Christian identity?
- To what extent did the physical café *layout* communicate the Christian hosts' identity?
- To what extent were the cafés manifesting Christian community?

These two cafés run by evangelical Christians, presented a unique and somewhat unusual approach to evangelical mission involving open conversation in a "third place" (Oldenburg:1999), with the cafés having both an individual and community focus. Traditionally within some parts of the evangelical movement, the emphasis is placed on "salvation" over activities or projects that simply provide a service. Linked to the importance of "saving souls", the method of overt faith-based "proclamation" is often emphasised over faith-based "conversation". Additionally, visible "crisis conversion" is often emphasised over "faith-journey". These two cafés provided a unique environment that brought the evangelical hosts and café patrons together in close dialogue. Having initial conversations with the managers of both cafés, it became clear that both wanted their cafés to be places that provided opportunities for faith-sharing, but equally desired that their cafés became important community hubs. This thesis presents the results of that research.

By way of introduction, I first highlight some of the tensions that exist amongst some evangelicals when it comes to achieving a balance between sharing their faith and serving the community. Following some brief definitions, I then give an overview of the researched communities, concluding this introductory chapter with an outline of the thesis.

For many evangelical Christians the sharing of their faith with others is an important if not central tenet of their faith (Bebbington, 1989:5-14; Smith, 2021). This can take the form of obvious acts of evangelism such as street preaching, handing out Christian leaflets, or offering courses designed for those desiring to find out more about the Christian faith, amongst other methods. This almost always has "conversion" as its goal. Although there are debates within evangelicalism around what constitutes "real conversion", most favour the idea of a *crisis experience* as opposed to the vaguer notion of *spiritual journey* (Warner, 1996; Worthen, 2019). This in turn, tends to go hand in hand with a concern to maintain traditional forms of church and understandings of membership over and against what some consider to be more contextually relevant but perhaps looser forms of Christian community (cf. McLaren, 2006; DeYoung and Kluck, 2009).[1]

Although such evangelistic outreach has remained central, many evangelical churches have nevertheless also developed practical projects within their local communities. Although genuine in many ways, this work has almost always carried a secondary aim of creating faith-sharing opportunities (Wier, 2013).

However, the challenge of holding these two objectives together has historically been the cause of much debate amongst some evangelicals[2] (Shaw, 2021). Whilst some seek to achieve a balance (Stott, 2003), others have often pitched the two objectives against each other (Chester, 2007), with those preferring "proclamation" to social action without faith-sharing, which they consider 'conversion-free religious social work' (Warner, 1996:101).

In practice, however, relatively little research has been carried out into evangelical community engagement (Wier, 2013). That which has been undertaken, has often focussed on evangelical projects centred around declared or manifest needs, such as poverty and homelessness, social isolation, mental health etc. (Cloke, Beaumont and Williams, 2013). This has caused some to question the ethics of evangelising

[1] Alternative churches based within schools, community centres etc.
[2] I use the term "some evangelicals" in several places throughout this thesis to reflect the breadth of belief amongst evangelicals on various biblical and theological matters. Whilst the Bebbington quadrilateral captures four central facets of evangelical belief and emphasis, during my professional practice as an evangelical church pastor, it was my experience that many members of the church held a broad range of views on a number of matters.

the “needy” in this way, seeing this as a potential abuse of relational power (Cloke, Beaumont and Williams, 2013:32).

Additionally, whilst the input of faith-based organisations (FBOs) into local community projects has been welcomed by local and central governments (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006:1; Schneider, 2016:1), suspicions and tensions can arise when the faith-sharing motivations of FBOs become visible (Baker, Chris and Skinner, 2005:5). Negative media and even academic portrayals of evangelicals as religious fundamentalists can also fuel such suspicions (cf. Stott, 2003:18-22; Strhan, 2019; Carolyn Baker, 2021). Such portrayals can ultimately impact the willingness of evangelicals to self-identify as Christians (Strhan, 2019).

All these tensions and critiques threaten to make research into this area very complex. It was important, therefore, that the two cafés provided an opportunity to observe evangelical dual-purpose projects of relative simplicity and relative neutrality (Oldenburg,1999:2)

One important simplification that helped mitigate the ethical problems noted above, was that the cafés did not present themselves in a specific needs-based way. As public spaces open to all (Habermas, 1964), anyone with enough leisure time could come into the cafés without the implication of any specific need, whether material, social or spiritual. The importance of this sense of neutrality for the relationships between hosts and patrons has been emphasised by several sociologists who point out that it mitigates the power relationships typical of workplaces or needs-based services (Oldenburg, 1999; Platz, 2012; Manzo, 2014).

The management of both cafés expressed identical objectives, to create a community café:

- that enhanced a local sense of community,
- that was conducive to faith-sharing.

I wanted to understand to what extent these objectives were understood and achieved by the café host teams, and also how the patrons viewed these joint objectives. Additionally, I wanted to find out what relational dynamics and tensions were developed as the hosts and patrons interacted, and what sort of communities developed within the cafés, specifically around faith discussion and enquiry.

Additionally, as a research project within practical theology, I was keen to listen to and analyse the conversations and interactions between the hosts and patrons, to discern what new insights this might reveal theologically.

Within my twenty years of experience as a serving minister within two evangelical churches, I found churches to be generally very good at providing services such as food banks and job clubs in response to the measured needs within local communities. Often this was in response to the emphasis on the importance of helping the "needy" and "marginalised" as an expression of "Kingdom service" (Sheppard, 1983). However, I found many churches struggled to develop community-based initiatives that were relevant to a broader range of people beyond those with obvious needs. Whilst church-based[3] projects exist that are designed to draw a broader demographic to faith,[4] I wanted to find out how evangelicals engaged with the public at a more pre-ecclesial stage via community-based projects that had a broad demographic appeal. My early investigations revealed this to be a neglected field of research. It is this broad demographic I am referring to throughout this thesis when I use the term "café patrons". When I use the term "café hosts", I am referring to the café teams of staff and volunteers that work in the cafés. The term "host organisations" is used for the two evangelical churches that own the cafés.

The research was conducted using quantitative and qualitative research methods (questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and participant/non-participant observation) over a period of fifteen months between November 2018 and February 2020, interviewing twenty-four people from amongst the café hosts and patrons. The host organisations and their cafés have been given pseudonyms for protection of their identities. I identify them as Gateway Church[5] with its associated café, The Welcome Café, and Phoenix Church[6] with its associated café, The Friendship Café. I researched these two specific cafés as both were within an evangelical tradition and

[3] The term church-based is used throughout this thesis to simply refer to projects physically located within church buildings.
[4] Many churches run such projects as Messy Church and parent and toddler groups that attract a broad range of people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. Additionally, Alpha courses also attract a broad demographic of people – but these are often church-based.

[5] Gateway Church is affiliated to the Fellowship of the Churches of Christ (FCC) - https://the-fcc.org/about/ - accessed May 2022.
[6] Phoenix Church is affiliated to the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) - https://fiec.org.uk/ - accessed May 2022.

expressed identical objectives. Additionally, by researching two cafes, this enabled me to compare and contrast them.

1.1 Definitions

Within this thesis, the term *evangelical* is used with reference to Bebbington's classic *quadrilateral* of evangelical identity (1989:2-17) comprising of: conversionism (the evidence of a life being converted to and transformed by Christ), biblicism (the centrality of the Bible to inform everyday life), crucicentrism (the centrality of the cross to the evangelical faith), and activism (the importance of faith being shared and accompanied by acts of mercy). These four facets informed the approach of Gateway and Phoenix Church to local mission, including their cafés.

The term *Gospel* or *faith-based conversations* is used in the sense of the café hosts seeking to talk about their faith with the café patrons. The hosts deemed such conversations to be important methods of communicating what they believed, with a desire to see the lives of the café patrons converted to the Christian faith, which they defined as believing in and following Jesus.

The term *Missio Dei* is a Latin phrase meaning *God's Mission.* McPhee traces the beginnings of this to Barth, who at a Brandenburg missionary conference in1932, spoke of mission as an 'activity of God' (2001:6). This term emphasises mission to be Gods' initiative, who then calls the Church to participate in His ongoing work. This was important to both host organisations because they adopted explicit theology based on Barth's insight.

The term *social capital* in general terms refers to a "local sense of community belonging and well-being". This has many facets that will be dealt with specifically in chapter three, but in general considers the social, economic, and I suggest, spiritual aspects within a community as important contributors to the "health and wellbeing" of the overall community. This includes how each individual both senses and sees their place within it. This is not solely a consideration for the large urban cities but is deemed an important measure by central and local government for all communities. The enhancement of social capital is an important facet of government policy (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006; FaithAction Report, 2017), and whilst not always expressed in such terms, is used by many churches as a way to involve

themselves in conversations and projects aimed at improving their local community (Baker and Miles-Watson, 2008).

The term “third place” is a sociological term for those home from home establishments found within local communities. Such outlets as cafés, bars, and hairdressers, amongst others, are considered by Oldenburg (1999) as “third places”, after the first place of home, and the second place of work. “Café Ethnography” is the study of the physical and human factors within cafés. A number of these factors impact the sense in which a café can be considered to be a third place. Such factors as furniture layout, lighting, positioning of coffee producing machinery, and the attitudes and approach of the café staff and volunteer team, all contribute to the overall third place “signature” of such a venue. I consider these aspects in chapter four, with chapter five assessing to what extent both cafés fulfilled the qualities of “third-place”.

An important theological term within this thesis is the word “incarnation”. I use this beyond the traditional sense of the Bible’s description of “God becoming flesh” in the form of Jesus. Within this research, it is used firstly, in a more extended sense to communicate my understanding of Christ’s ongoing work in the world, by His Spirit. Secondly, I use incarnation in reference to Christians as the “body of Christ”, in partnership with God, actively seeking to carry out His work in the world. It is this dual understanding that underpins my Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF) that I detail in chapter two.

The analysis of the café host and patron interviews was considered through what I call a *four voices* analytical tool. I explain this in more detail in chapter two; but effectively, the four voices (formal, normative, espoused and operant) represent various theological perspectives that when brought in dialogue together help to, ‘discover renewed theology and practice’ (Watkins, 2020:41).

The *formal* voice is, ‘articulated in academic theology and (the) wider thinking of the academy’ (2020:39). Within this thesis, the formal voice is identified within the theological and sociological academic scholars that inform various chapters.

The *normative* voice is, ‘expressed in the established Christian tradition, in its various understandings of scripture, church teaching, liturgy and so forth’ (2020:39). The Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC) and Fellowship of the

Churches of Christ (FCC) provide the normative voice for their network of churches. When Phoenix and Gateway church affiliated to their respective organisations, they had to subscribe to the associated statement of faith and particular theological distinctives. Whilst these objectives differ in specific details within the FIEC and FCC,[7] the broad tenets of Bebbington's quadrilateral remain as core values. This included an assumption as evangelical churches, that conversionism was central to their operation. Phoenix and Gateway Church then express their theological understanding in their own normative voice, communicating this through their statements of faith, constitutions, church notices, sermons and other forms of media.

The *espoused* theological voices are those "theologies" owned and expressed by the café hosts and patrons, captured within my interviews and observations during the research. The *operant* voice is inferred from what actually happens "in practice" within the cafés, where the hosts and patrons interact. This operant voice is often misaligned with normative or espoused views (Watkins, 2020:46-48).

Having generally defined and located these "voices", chapter two details the interdependency of each voice on the others, as 'theology that only properly exists in the conversation *between* the voices' (Watkins, 2020:46). Indeed, my own narration of the thesis and analysis of the interview transcripts within the fieldwork chapters, contributed to this theological dialogue. The important role I played in orchestrating which voices "spoke" and "when" are detailed in chapter two, which considers the potential influence of my own theological understanding.

1.2 The Researched Communities

The geographical areas of both cafés were quite different, one was based within an affluent area of Birmingham (The Welcome Café) and the other (The Friendship Café) was located within an area of Coventry with high levels of deprivation. This said, it is important to emphasise that deprivation measures people and not location, as a recent local government report stated:

> A geographical area itself is not deprived: it is the circumstances and lifestyles of the people living there that affect its deprivation score. It is

[7] The FIEC have specific distinctives around women in leadership and same-sex relationships – and is informed within the Conservative evangelical tradition: https://fiec.org.uk/who-we-are/beliefs, the FCC focus less on distinctives, and more on Christian unity and what they see as God's mission: https://the-fcc.org/about/. Missio Dei is 'normative' to the FCC group of churches but not a central teaching of the FIEC.

> important to remember that not everyone living in a deprived area is deprived –and that not all deprived people live in deprived areas (Coventry City Council, 2015).

This is an important consideration as it can be easy for researchers and churches alike to categorise whole geographical areas as “poor” or “middle class”. An area may be classed as being deprived because it has higher than average levels of unemployment or educational attainment. This may additionally impact housing and health, with such statistics used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as a measure of deprivation.[8] To classify whole areas as deprived is naïve, as even the most affluent areas have levels of deprivation. Equally, areas considered deprived have many people residing within them who are not considered poor or deprived. Many young professionals can reside in such areas where the cost of housing makes these locations attractive for those desiring to enter the property market. Both The Friendship and The Welcome Café were intentional in their desire to provide a community café for a broad, local range of people.

Phoenix church was established in 1937 out of a national evangelistic tent campaign (Watts, 2017) and has been the subject of specific research by Andrew Hardy regarding the impact of a Missio Dei theology in motivating its members to local mission (Hardy, 2021). As a former serving minister within Phoenix church, I have had significant insights into Hardy’s research, which details how Phoenix church developed its local mission strategy, including The Friendship Café. Phoenix Church was an independent evangelical church until 2012, when it then joined the FIEC. The management and volunteer team of The Friendship Café included both graduates and current students at a Bible college whose three-year course of study had a Missio Dei emphasis. Thus, the café had a strong and consistent ethos of local mission in addition to its core evangelical values. The café was funded through Phoenix church’s training academy that was set up in September 2015. This training academy trained and equipped Christian leaders from within the evangelical tradition and used the funds to support and initiate community projects such as The Friendship Café.

The Gateway church was established out of a home church in 1984 and is now affiliated to the FCC network of churches, also informed by the evangelical tradition.

[8] https://www.ons.gov.uk/

The church met in its local community centre which was managed by a separate charitable trust. This trust was originally set up by Gateway Church in 1986 to oversee community projects but was asked to take on the running of the whole community site in 1996. The Welcome Café was established within the community centre in 2009, originally being run by volunteers from the church. Today the café is still managed by the trust but is run by both paid and volunteer staff. The Bible college which was instrumental in the missional influence of Phoenix church and subsequently The Friendship Café, was located within this community centre and also influenced the management and missional ethos of both Gateway church and The Welcome Café.

1.3 Outline of Thesis

This Practical Theology thesis, including this introductory chapter, comprises seven chapters. Chapter two starts with a summary of my own theological journey, and my methodological stances (§2.1). Next, I set out my Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF), a theological framework within which I reflect on the distinct modus operandi of the cafés, which, as noted above (§1) preferred open conversation over dogmatic proclamation. For this, I adapt the scheme of Root (2014) by changing its emphasis on the cross to incarnation. This will allow a better description of a journeying missionality grounded in ‘presence’, ‘partnership’ and ‘community’, and a means of sharing my findings with stakeholders.

I then detail an approach inspired by Critical Realism that gives special attention to the experiences of ordinary people and places these in conversation with formal academic and theological discourse.

Chapter two then moves on to detail the quantitative and qualitative methods used within the research process, including the use of the four voices as an analytical tool with which I analysed the host and patron interviews and interactions, with these espoused and operant voices in “conversation” with the formal and normative voices of the academy and host organisations respectively. I conclude the chapter with a section detailing my own reflexive positionality.

In chapter three I frame the thesis between the broader considerations of “better community” (social capital) and evangelical “proclamation”. I draw on Chris Baker’s concepts of spiritual and religious capital which introduce the idea of faith-based

organisations contributing to the sense of community well-being. Baker's work focuses primarily on finding the common ground alongside other secular community stakeholders, defining this in terms of "progressive localism". Engaging with Cloke (2013) and Morisy (2004), amongst others, the chapter then considers evangelical community engagement. I then draw on the work of Warner (1996, 2007), Stott (2003) Shaw (2021) and Smith (2021) amongst others, as chapter three moves on to consider the debate amongst some evangelicals that pitches social action and faith-sharing against each other. This includes theoretical tensions around evangelical conversionism, where outward evidence of conversion is emphasised against what some consider to be a more progressive spiritual journey. Strhan's research into a London-based conservative evangelical church (2019), provides insights into reticence amongst some evangelicals when it comes to identifying as Christians and sharing their faith. This includes considerations into how such reticence might be "fuelled" through extreme media and negative academic portrayals of evangelicals (cf. Theos, 2013; Carolyn Baker, 2021). This was a helpful source as I sought to discover to what extent such reticence and tensions might be present within the café hosts and how the patrons perceived such motivations. The chapter concludes with a summary of Missio Dei as a theological challenge to the "proclaiming into", traditional approach that many evangelical churches adopt when it comes to sharing their faith, with the potential to mitigate against some of the earlier expressed tensions that some evangelicals feel.

In chapter four I introduce the sociological fields of third place and café ethnography. Oldenburg's classic work (1999) provides a standard of third-place qualities against which the two cafés within this research were compared and contrasted. Café ethnography details important sociological factors specific to cafés. Waxman (2006), Manzo (2014) and Foster (2020) provide helpful physical and human factors of café ethnography against which The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés were assessed, with findings brought out in chapter five. Chapter four also brings in considerations around the theology of place. Engaging with Inge (2003), Hjalmarson (2015), Mueller (2015), Pears (2015) and Hovland (2016) amongst others, this section considers the sacred/secular divide and evangelical "place-making", bringing in the challenge of God at work in "everyday places" and not just those places that might be considered to be more sacred or spiritual. Within this chapter, engaging with DeYoung and Kluck

(2009), and Watkins and Shepherd (2014), I also consider the tensions that exist across the Christian tradition concerning definitions of what constitutes an authentic church gathering. These formal voices provided a helpful reference against which the two cafés were analysed concerning their capacity to be “blessed places” where people can gather to discuss and potentially experience faith encounters.

Chapters five and six comprise the fieldwork chapters of this thesis. Chapter five assesses how and to what extent The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés each fulfilled the stated objectives of their associated management teams, to create a local place that enhances the sense of community whilst doing so with a faith-sharing, conversionist motivation. This chapter provides an overview of each café, analysing them against the academic conversation partners from chapters three and four. Each café is analysed in turn, providing both a comparison and a contrast. Chapter five initially considers each café’s contribution to the local sense of “better community”, including how their physical and sociological aspects contributed to this. The chapter then moves on to consider how each of the host teams approached faith-sharing and communicated their evangelical identity, revealing a significant difference in the overall approach of the two cafés. Chapter five then considers the café patron’s responses to the host faith-sharing objectives.

Moving beyond the café management objectives, chapter six brings out several themes that emerged out of the research. These themes of *journey*, *spiritual place* and *gathered faith community* were drawn out of my analysis of the interview transcripts, and observations of the café hosts and patrons as they interacted. Drawing upon the work of Elliott (1991), Jamieson (2003), Morisy (2004), Watkins and Shepherd (2014), and Rumsey (2017) amongst others, this chapter reveals insights that provide a challenge to the normative and espoused understanding of the evangelical hosts and associated organisations about what faith-engagement and faith-community might look like. Chapter seven concludes the thesis as it summarises this project’s contribution to knowledge and practice.

In order for these insights to be observed, analysed, and drawn out, it was important that the theological methodology that underpins this thesis facilitated analysis and theological reflection. Additionally, appropriate research methods needed to be identified in the construction of the practical research design. The next chapter details the research methodology and methods used within this process.

2 Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Methods

The management of the two West Midland cafés both expressed that they wanted their cafés to become important community hubs whilst also providing an environment for faith-based conversations. This chapter details the methodology and methods I used to research the extent to which these objectives were being achieved. The chapter is divided into two parts: Part one (§2.1-2.1.2) details my research methodology starting with a summary of my own methodological stances, followed by an explanation of my Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF). This CIF is not a tool for data analysis but rather is used to reconfigure classic theological themes to aid reflection on the café distinctives, in addition to providing a way of communicating theological insights to religious stakeholders. A significant conversation partner that informed my CIF is Andrew Root, whose work, *Christopraxis, A Practical Theology of the Cross* (2014), sees the essential significance of both the human and divine encounter within a practical theological research project. Framed within Café ethnography, I then go on to detail my critical realist approach that valued the 'concrete and lived experiences', and the 'ordinary voices' of the hosts and patrons within the cafés.

Part two (§2.2-2.2.2) then explains the research design and methods, including the four-voices framework.[9] I conclude the chapter with a section on reflexivity, that gives an account of my positionality within the research project. These four elements of CIF, critical realism, four-voices and reflexivity, each fulfil an important purpose within my overall research design. It will be helpful to give an overview and rationale of how they function together.

[9] I use the four-voices as an analytical tool to help label the different points of view, conversations, and interactions within the cafés.

Pictorially this looks like:

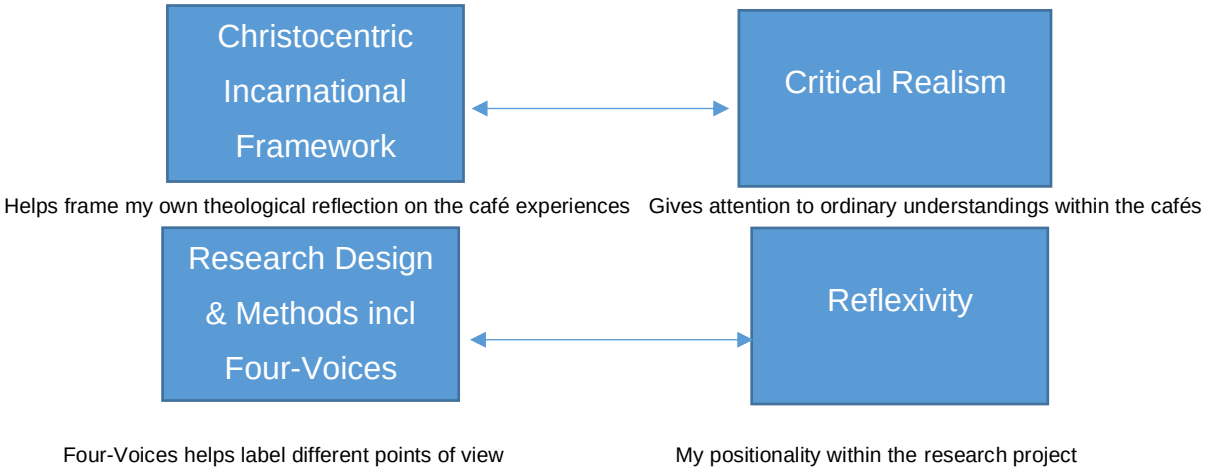

Figure 1 – Research Methodology & Methods Flow

The Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF) represents my own theological framework, within which I reflect upon the café experiences and interactions. This theological "framing" reflects the approach of Root who sees the importance of the theological "voice" within practical theology taking precedence (2014:189). This "theology down" approach, lies in contrast to a "ground up" approach that often starts with the ordinary voices within a research project. Andrew Hardy's research into an evangelical church's adoption of a Missio Dei theology reflects such a ground up approach.[10] This said, each researcher takes their own theological assumptions into a project. This is reflected within Hardy's work as he assumes a fairly uniform reformed theology of FIEC churches.[11] This approach can create a caricatured 'other', whether implicit or explicit. Like Root, I develop a Christocentric framework which captures my own assumptions of how I see God at work within the world including the two cafés, and so I also needed to develop my methodological approach to allow these assumptions to be challenged and developed by the fieldwork discoveries.

In order to achieve this, secondly, like Root, I adopt a critical realist approach (§2.1.2) in order to both mitigate against the assumptions of my theological

[10] Hardy researched the congregation of Phoenix Church (The Friendship Café hosts) assessing the ordinary theology of the everyday church members in his work, *An Ordinary Mission of God Theology, Challenging Missional Church Idealism, Providing Solutions* (2022).
[11] Hardy frequently pitches the Missio Dei developments of Phoenix Church against the FIEC group of churches – where a number would see such an approach as liberal, considering it part of what has been termed the 'missional conversation'.

framework and also to give value to the 'concrete and lived experiences' (Root, 2014:199) and ordinary opinions of the café hosts and patrons.

Finally, following the practical observations and interviews carried out within the cafés, I added a third-stage to my overall research process, using the four-voices framework[12](§2.2.2). This is in contrast to many projects that apply software or a process of coding to their research data in order to identify common themes and phrases.[13] The reason why I used the four-voices to analyse the interview transcripts and observations within the cafés, was in order to maintain the dominance of the theological "voice" within the whole research process.

So, in summary, my overarching research approach commenced with the theological assumptions of my CIF, then secondly through a critical realist approach was open to the everyday experiences of the café hosts and patrons, which thirdly, following the fieldwork, analysed the ordinary opinions of and conversations between the café hosts and patrons using the four-voices. Within fieldwork chapters five and six, I highlight examples where my CIF and the four-voices are more explicit. The next section (§2.1) following a summary of my own theological journey, will detail my specific theological framework comprising my CIF (§2.1.1) and underpinning critical realist approach (§2.1.2) in conversation with Root's work, followed by section 2.2 that details the research design and methods including my use of the four-voices. I conclude the chapter with a section detailing my positional reflexivity as the project researcher (§2.2.2).

2.1 Methodological Stances

As an evangelical Christian, several aspects of evangelical theology and missiology have informed my understanding and approach to this research. From my early years as a Christian, divine encounters and experiences have provided a source of understanding, with subsequent academic and theological insights helping to make sense of these. As an evangelical, *conversionism* was a significant tenet of understanding for me, with my later undergraduate studies providing a systematic theology that enabled me to articulate my own conversion experience and my approach to sharing faith with others. Within my master's studies, missiological

[12] The four-voices is a form of theological action research developed by Watkins, Cameron et al between 2006-2011 – I have adapted its use within this research as an analytical/labelling tool.
[13] Hardy uses a coding approach in the analysis of his fieldwork data.

studies gave insights into and informed my understanding and approach to local mission. Missio Dei, which sees the mission as God's into which He calls the Church to participate, influenced my approach to mission and how I saw God at work in the local community and wider world. Theologically, this placed *incarnation* at the heart of God's strategy within my understanding. The specific *missiological* approach I aligned myself with was Lesslie Newbigin's account of divine/human agency, which sees Christians in partnership with the God of mission, serving and working in the conversionist understanding.

2.1.1 Theological Framework

My Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF) gave me a framework within which I was able to make sense of the interactions within the cafés. I describe the distinctive parts of my CIF below, using Root (2014) as a conversation partner for theological comparison. Figure 2 below (page 29), illustrates the components of my CIF.

Whilst my own theological understanding of conversionism and Missio Dei informed my assumptions behind this research project, Root's Christopraxis methodology has helped shape and develop my underpinning CIF. I will summarise Root's methodological approach, stating how my own framework compares and contrasts. Fundamentally, whereas Root places the cross at the centre of his approach, it is incarnation which lies at the centre of mine.

On a general level, Root gives pre-eminence to the use of theological language, admitting that his methodology, 'has turned from the common tongues of practical theology[14] to explore the theological depths of experience' (2014:189). I share this in common with Root as my incarnational framework is a "theological language framework" through which I view the activity and interactions within the cafés. So, like Root, I also consider 'experience as central' to my practical theological project (2014:189). Root's justification for this approach is that the ministry experiences of people reflect, 'the encounter with the divine being itself', and thus theology is best placed to articulate such experiences (2014:190). Although we shall see below that

[14] Root is referring to the 'common tongues' of social scientific, empirical and philosophical which he suggests can often dominate practical theology at the expense of the theological 'tongue'. Ward also uses Root as an example of a 'doctrinal' approach to practical theology, as opposed to what he refers to as the 'liberal' approach of such practical theologians as Miller-McLemore – Ward in *Introducing Practical Theology, Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church* (2017).

practical *ministry* lies at the heart of Root's approach, he suggests, 'ministry…[still] needs the discourse of the theological to attend to the fullness of the subject' (2014:190). Root underpins his theological approach with a philosophical and social scientific, critical realist perspective in order to, 'place [his] deeply theological perspective squarely within the zone of practical theology' (2014:191). This said, Snyder is critical of Root's use of critical realism, questioning what practical value it adds to Root's methodology (Snyder:2014). Whilst critical realism values the everyday experiences and opinions of people, it needs to be used in conjunction with a form of analysis that draws out such experiences. Within this research project, I achieve this by applying the four-voices as an analytical tool in order to identify and label the various voices in play within the cafés (§2.2.1). I detail my critical realist approach in the next section, outlining its importance to my research, but first I will analyse Root's Christopraxis approach, comparing and contrasting it with my CIF.

Root highlights five key areas of his methodological approach, ministry before theology, hermeneutical Christopraxis, death to life paradigm, ex-nihilo and the Cross (Root, 2014:93-115). Root's emphasis is on the ongoing *ministry* of Jesus (2014:90), defining this as a *Christopraxis.* For Root, it is not what we can *know* about Christ but rather our *experience* of Christ actively 'coming to us' that is central to his methodology. Root gives little attention to the Spirit in his model, perhaps reflecting the emphasis by more conservative evangelicals on biblicism and crucicentrism.[15] Turner suggests a similar Christocentric focus in the New Testament book of Acts, highlighting Luke's progressive emphasis on the activity of 'the Spirit of Jesus' (1996:41-42).

Root follows the approach of Anderson[16] in that, 'Christopraxis is not simply a doctrinal Christological point, but an experiential one' (2014:91). Root is, 'not primarily interested in how people think about Jesus (Christology) but rather how they experience the presence of Jesus' (2014:91). Christ's ongoing ministry is also central within my Christocentric Incarnational Framework, as my research sought to discern to what extent the cafés might be places of divine encounter and discussion.

[15] Such authors as Warner & Shaw comment on the two general emphases within evangelicalism – which depicts either a biblicist and crucicentrism approach of more conservative groups, or a more charismatic evangelical emphasis on conversionism and activism.
[16] Root cites Ray S. Anderson – *The Shape of Practical Theology (2001)* as using Christopraxis as a central theme.

For Root, Christ's activity and ministry is very much ongoing with this 'ministry before theology' being an, 'unveiling of God's self' (Root, 2014:94). Such an approach, 'searches for God's ministry as it comes to humanity in the world' (Root, 2014:97). This was the underpinning assumption of this thesis, as I sought to discern what the "God of incarnation and mission" was actively doing within these cafés. Evangelical discourse about "how God works" can be dominated by doctrinal and epistemological assumptions, however a Christopraxis approach sees "praxis" as central to understanding Christ's ongoing ministry in the world. Root states:

> Jesus's own ministry (Christopraxis) precedes theology (Christology). Christopraxis no doubt is dependent, for its depth of reflection, on thoughts about Christ (Christology), but these very conceptions themselves must bow to the very praxis of Jesus (2014:91).

Thus, for Root, the ministry of Jesus is not a 'past event' but rather, 'the ongoing possibility of God's encounter' (2014:92), It was these ongoing possibilities that I was keen to discern within the cafes as the hosts and patrons interacted.

Root uses a *hermeneutic* Christopraxis in the sense that he sees, 'the action of ministry (as) interpretation' (Root, 2014:99). Thus:

> The practical theologian's primary hermeneutical objective is to discern the movements of God's ministry (as mission), confessing God's ministry is God's being as becoming' (Root, 2014:99).

Thus, for Root, the activity of God in the world needs interpreting, so his Christopraxis methodology becomes a hermeneutical approach. Likewise, I also seek to interpret the ongoing ministry of God, specifically in the two cafés. I draw out explicit examples of this within the fieldwork chapters. This brings both the knowledge of God's activity and the ongoing, lived experience of God's action together, as people engage in day-to-day ministry. This approach seeks to refine and inform an understanding of God's activity in the communities the Church finds itself in as it compares current theological understanding with what can be seen and discerned in practice. Root sees Jesus as the, 'hermeneutic of God's very being' (Root, 2014:101), however, in addition, my framework sees the hosts of both cafés as a 'living hermeneutic', in line with Newbigin's' definition:

> I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible for the gospel to be credible, that

> people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the Gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it (Newbigin, 1989:227).

Thus, within my framework, as well as the ongoing ministry of Jesus, I wanted to understand what part the ministry of the café hosts played in communicating the ongoing and lived reality of Jesus, as they expressed and lived out their faith within these local community places. The research interviews with the hosts were designed to draw out this important aspect in order to ascertain to what extent the café hosts saw themselves in this way. Chapter five details the wide variation in this understanding. Thus, my framework was, 'bound in ontology more than epistemology' for it was, 'through an ontological experience of the Spirit' (Root, 2014:100) that the hosts and patrons encountered God.

If my framework closely matches Root's up to now, it is from this point where my emphasis differs. Root includes a death-to-life paradigm into his methodology, one that seeks to communicate and discern a God who moves into brokenness, a 'wrestling with God' in the very brokenness and pain of everyday life (Root, 2014:105). Root's research was based on ten case studies of individuals who all professed to have had an encounter with Jesus, the vast majority having experienced such within a time of brokenness, either within a personal crisis or whilst serving others in crisis. Experiences of brokenness were not the focus of my research within the cafés. So, whilst "wrestling with God" through stories of brokenness was the experience of some within the cafés, this was not the case for everyone. Fieldwork chapters five and six contain extracts from a number of interviews with patrons where stories of brokenness and pain were shared, yet they also reveal a genuine sense of the cafés providing a spiritual encounter for a number of patrons, not uniquely from a position of brokenness. My framework thus differed from Roots in that brokenness was not the dominant platform of God's activity.

Root continues his methodological definition based upon the assumption that God works *ex-nihilo* or 'out of nothing' (2014:108). Again, emphasising God's ministry from a place of impossibility, for, 'when all is lost, when the impossible has dawned, God's being is revealed' (2014:110). Whilst this was found to be an element causing some café patrons to enquire about faith, this was not the universal motivation.

Root's personal and experiential stories of divine encounter (2014:1-8) that precede his methodological description, all provide examples of such 'brokenness to wholeness', from 'impossible to possible', including his very own tragic experiences and questioning as a child. This has clearly framed his understanding through which he then interprets God's activity in the world. My framework broadens this out as interviews with a varied café host and patron base revealed a much broader experience of life in general.

Root's methodology concludes with the Cross as being the supreme example of "God for us", for, 'God is no more God for us than when God is on the cross' (2014:111). It is the suffering Christ that identifies with us as we suffer. It is clear that suffering and pain are important for Root. He summarises thus:

> We share in Christ and Christ shares in us in and through the cross. Through the human pathos of impossibility, directed to God the Father in the abandoned plea of Jesus on the cross (as event), and the embrace by the Father through the restoration by death in the newness of resurrection, we are invited to share in God by now being in Christ (2014:81).

Root's emphasis is that God's ministry is experienced in 'dead places', places of hopelessness, where people are at the end of their own resources. Root emphasises the cross of Christ as the supreme place of brokenness, where Christ is able to empathise and subsequently engage with people and allow them to encounter him. According to Root, it is within such places that Christ brings 'new life' (2014:113). In contrast to this, my framework emphasises the *incarnation* as an underpinning factor of the ongoing ministry of Jesus. The early chapters in the New Testament gospels[17] see the call of people going about their daily work. Equally, other chapters within the gospels see Jesus meeting and challenging people that on the surface seemed to be self-supporting.[18] It is the incarnate Jesus who calls the fishermen going about their daily work, and who challenges the priorities of the rich young man. The contrast between my research and Root's was also in its context, as Root's work was based within two churches, speaking to five professing Christians from each. The people Root interviewed were all "the other side of the cross", having all had a conversion experience. I wanted to discern how the ongoing, incarnate ministry of Jesus within

[17] Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John
[18] Such chapters as Luke 18 where Jesus encounters the rich young man.

the two cafés was received and understood by the café hosts and patrons who in the main were "this side of the cross".[19]

Thus, to summarise my CIF, I primarily see incarnation as the way God reveals Himself and ministers in the world, both in the life of Jesus, but also providing the central metaphor for His people's engagement with their local community. Secondly, my framework sees this joint, incarnational approach as a visible expression of God's activity in the world, something that can be "read" or "interpreted", thus a living "hermeneutic". The third and final aspect of my framework I refer to as "the *community of faith-enquiry"*, as the patrons and hosts gather and share stories of divine encounter.[20] This 'framework' is not a progressive, logical flow but rather an ongoing interaction that I see taking place within the cafés, illustrated in figure 2 below.

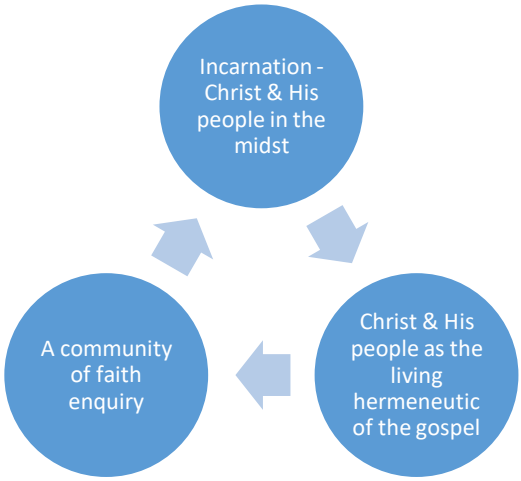

Figure 2 – Christocentric Incarnational Framework

Expressing figure 2 as an ongoing Interaction:

The *Incarnation, Christ and His people in the midst* aspect, represents my theological and missional understanding of the approach to local mission. This considers God's people to be partnering with Him in the local community, including these two West Midland cafés.

Christ and His people as the living hermeneutic of the Gospel; represents my understanding of the café host teams being the presence of Jesus, both individually

[19] By this term I mean that none of the patrons I interviewed professed to have had a conversion experience.
[20] My fieldwork reveals the extent to which the café host/patron communities saw themselves as a gathered community or not.

and as they interact as a team within the café. This interaction, in partnership with the Spirit of Jesus communicates what it means to follow Jesus and to be in partnership with Him in His global mission. The way that the hosts interacted together, within my framework, was an important factor in creating an atmosphere and environment that could be *read* or interpreted (thus a hermeneutic).

A community of faith-enquiry represents the collective interaction between the café hosts and patrons as they gathered together and shared stories, including those around faith and their own spiritual experiences.

In summary, my Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF) sees "incarnation" as an important missional strategy. Building upon this strategy of incarnation, this brings God's people into partnership with the risen Christ and His Spirit as a living 'hermeneutic' of the gospel. Subsequently, this, in partnership with the voices and experiences of the café patrons, has the *potential* to create a new community of faith-enquiry. The fieldwork explored to what extent this was the case.

2.1.2 Critical Realism and Lived Experience

Critical realism gives "value" to the everyday experiences of people, suggesting such experiences can give insight and knowledge, beyond knowledge-based frameworks of academic learning. Critical realism is, 'a secular scientific perspective inasmuch as it does not seek to provide an apologetic for theism' (Root, 2014:191). However, critical realism, 'reinstates ontology over epistemology' (2014:205) and acknowledges that, 'what we can know we know as an imperfect encounter with at least part of reality' (2014:198). In general terms, my critical realist approach gave value to the opinions and experiences of the café hosts and patrons which within my fieldwork chapters I empirically discern and place in conversation with evangelical theories around spiritual experience, conversion and the like.

Within this thesis, I adopt a critical realist approach to the descriptions of spiritual experiences and understanding communicated by the hosts and patrons of the two cafés.[21] Root (2014) uses this approach within his "Christopraxis" methodology,

[21] Archer refers to "three pillars" of critical realism as ontological realism, epistemic relativism and judgemental rationality, in chapter nine of: *Agency and Causal Explanation in Economics* (2020), Rona, Zsolnai (Eds).

seeing an essential aspect of critical realism in its reversal of the dominance of an epistemological approach that purports that only what can be *known* is real:

> Critical realism, however, calls into question this conflation of epistemology that swallows ontology. It does not hold to the equation that what can be known is real but rather asserts that there are brute realities that *are,* whether they are ever cognitively conceived by epistemological frameworks or not (2014:193).

Effectively, critical realism is not convinced by the view that only what can be proven is actually real. Root comments further from a theological, critical realist perspective:

> In addition, practical theology as Christopraxis makes a contribution by claiming, just as the other sciences do, that people have concrete and lived 'experiences' of reality and that many people claim (make sense of) these distinct lived experiences as the event of encounter with divine being. (Thus)…experience (of reality) leads one into epistemological conceptions of what is real and true (2014:199).

The cafés provided an unusual missional setting in that evangelical theories of proclamation, salvation and crisis conversion, amongst others, could be empirically analysed. It was these 'concrete and lived' experiences of the hosts and patrons within the West Midland cafés that this thesis was keen to discover. These experiences provided important insights into matters of faith, beyond the declared teaching and orthodoxy of the evangelical host communities. Thus, the actual research 'methods' (semi-structured interviews, participant observations, questionnaires) and the four-voices analysis, were selected and designed to draw out and analyse these "lived experiences" of those frequenting The Friendship and Welcome Cafés. The interactions between the hosts and patrons within the cafés provided important insights into the collective understanding of matters of faith. This mitigated against the dominance of a purely epistemological framework that Root suggests, 'has hamstrung practical theology from attending to the depth of shared subjective encounter with the divine being' (2014:210).

However, a *critical* realist approach acknowledges that, 'there is no conclusive epistemological foundation that can know reality fully' (2014:223), as they are historically and socially situated. By adopting a critical realist approach within my research, this does not claim to prove the truth or reality of reported faith encounters within the cafés, but rather leaves room for their *possibility,* allowing the varying reports of divine understanding and experience expressed by the café hosts and

patrons to be fully heard. Furthermore, as people have their own spiritual experiences or faith-based conversations or encounters, they build their own understanding, often developing their own language to describe such. Root states:

> Practical theology can and should empirically examine how people are experiencing reality…for all people encounter the stratified nature of reality through their experience. Theology is grounded in critical realism and is always practical because of its emotive experiential immersion in reality (2014:237).

Within this practical theological study, a critical realist approach values everyday experience, yet also makes *rational judgements* about such claimed experiences. Such an approach acknowledges that, 'some epistemologies may be better than others' and, 'are not all equal' (2014:232). Such experiences and claims, including ones of divine encounter need rationally assessing. It is this approach that facilitated my four-voices analysis of the interview transcripts as I searched for common themes within the language of the café hosts and patrons. The café patrons had varying prior exposure to spiritual and faith-based encounters which came out during the research interviews. My desire to capture these experiences and encounters shaped my practical research design and methods, which part two will now detail.

2.2 Research Design and Methods

This section will detail the practical research design and methods used to draw out the various themes, insights, and contribution to knowledge of this thesis. I will first detail the research methods used, including the four voices, and then move on to consider my own influence on the project as the researcher.

2.2.1 Research Process

The research was carried out using questionnaires (see Appendix A), qualitative semi-structured interviews and observations. Research interviews within the cafés were conducted between September 2018 and February 2020 and involved the initial use of questionnaires to gauge general patron opinion about their café's contribution to a sense of community and experiences of faith-based conversations. This phase was immediately followed with selective semi-structured interviews with the café hosts and patrons. Over this same period, I was able to frequent both cafés and observe the interactions between the hosts and patrons. This next section

details how I practically carried out the research, giving the rationale behind my chosen methods. Figure 3 below shows the practical research flow:

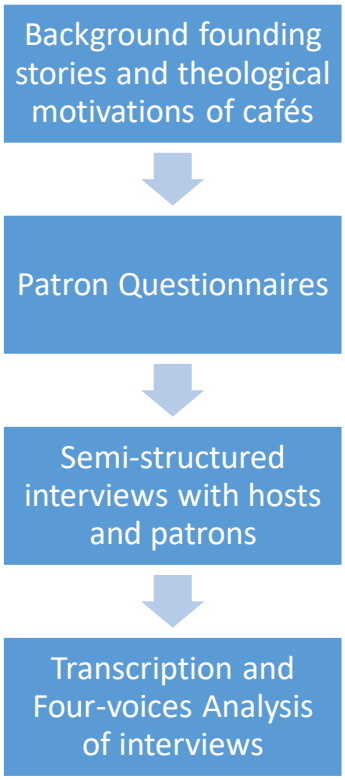

Figure 3 – Research Design and Approach

Primarily, I needed to speak to the management team of both cafés, to find out the founding stories of the cafés they managed. Lesley (The Friendship Café) and Katy (The Welcome Café) provided critical information regarding how their respective cafés started, additionally providing important insights into the objectives of the cafés. The joint objectives of providing a place that enhanced the local sense of community, and a place where faith-based conversations could take place, came out clearly in my conversations and interviews with them.

To ascertain the general demographic of the geographical areas of Phoenix Church and Gateway Church, ONS data was utilised. General census data is compiled by the Office for National Statistics every 10 years, with the last census being conducted in 2011. As the research for this project was carried out between 2018-20, this dated information was augmented through speaking to the café hosts and patrons. Understanding how the evangelical host churches and their cafés were established, was ascertained through informal conversations and semi-structured

interviews and discussions (Thomas, 2013:194). These conversations included recollections of founding stories from various members and friends of the churches, as well as the café host teams.

At the time of research, I was the minister of Phoenix Church and so had opportunity to learn the founding stories of this church. In the case of Phoenix Church, founding background research was assisted greatly by the production in 2017 of a book by Watts detailing the history of the founding movement of the church. Many long-standing members willingly contributed their stories of the "journey" of Phoenix Church. This allowed a detailed assessment of the background of Phoenix Church to be carried out, adding my own chapters of experience since taking up the pastorate of Phoenix in 2009.

The Gateway Church founding stories were established through informal discussions with the café management and hosts, in addition to my connections with a number of Gateway Church members and friends who frequented the café and community building within which it was situated. The background stories to how the cafés came to be developed, were obtained through interviews with the café management team This gave insights into the theological understanding and assumptions of both evangelical host communities that saw conversionism, incarnation and Missio Dei as a core strand of their missiological approach. I analyse these interviews in fieldwork chapter five, where I compare the declared objectives of the café management teams with the actual understanding and practice of their café teams. Following my discussions with the managers of each café, I then interviewed several members of the host teams of each café to assess their understanding of the café's objectives.

Understanding the general opinions of the patrons that frequented the cafés was achieved through the design and use of questionnaires (Thomas, 2013:207). The questionnaires were necessarily short and were completed face to face with the patrons, allowing further semi-structured interviews and questions to immediately follow. The questionnaires were designed to obtain general data about the patrons being interviewed: Sex, Age range, Household income bracket, etc. The questionnaire was also designed to identify the regular patrons of the café, those attending for over six months. The questionnaire had further general questions that were divided into two main categories: Community well-being and attitude to the faith community within the café. The answers to these questions (see Appendix A) also

provided a basis and reference for my semi-structured interviews with the café patrons. Following the signing of a consent form (see Appendix B) that outlined my research, my approach was to complete the questionnaire whilst sat with the café patron, moving immediately onto the semi-structured interviews.

As the research was aimed at assessing the interactions between the hosts and patrons within the cafés, additional questions needed to be designed to draw out the opinions and experiences of the hosts and patrons. Thus, further research was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews (Thomas, 2013:194) and observations (Thomas, 2013:220). The interviews were designed to draw out host and patron understanding of the café's contribution to a local sense of community, and attitudes to faith-based conversations or communication that had taken place, either with them, or that they had witnessed. This enabled much thicker description and explanation of host and patron experiences to be expressed. These interviews were recorded in order to be transcribed into a format that could be analysed for common themes. This part of the process saw twenty-four people interviewed across the two cafés (See Table 1 below), interviewing twelve people within The Friendship Café and twelve people within The Welcome Café. The ratio of interviews between hosts and patrons was four staff and eight patrons in each café:

No.	Café	Name/Role
1	Friendship	Lesley/Manager
2	Friendship	Josie/Patron
3	Friendship	Lucy/Patron
4	Friendship	Ruth/Patron
5	Friendship	Mary/Patron
6	Friendship	Mike/Patron
7	Friendship	Luke/host
8	Friendship	Julie/host
9	Friendship	Rami/Patron
10	Friendship	Joanne/Patron
11	Friendship	Alison/Patron
12	Friendship	Molly/host
1	Welcome	Katy/Manager
2	Welcome	Claire/Patron
3	Welcome	Sarah/Patron
4	Welcome	Zoe/Patron
5	Welcome	Lisa/host
6	Welcome	Abbie/host
7	Welcome	Dave/Patron
8	Welcome	Janice/Patron
9	Welcome	Fiona/Patron
10	Welcome	Janine/Patron
11	Welcome	Jodie/Patron
12	Welcome	Logan/host

Table 1 – Café Host and Patron Interviewees

Within the semi-structured interviews, the first five minutes comprised of explaining my research in a little more detail to the interviewee. For café hosts, this involved explaining the purpose of the research and what I hoped to find out about the impact of evangelical third places on the local sense of community, and also how faith-sharing objectives were communicated and carried out. For café patrons, I gave

them a similar research summary, but initially asked them to tell me their 'general opinion' about the café. I then wanted to understand how the hosts and patrons felt about the two café management objectives. The two key questions asked were:

- The management have two broad aims, firstly that this café enhances the sense of local community – how do you think it is doing regarding this?
- The management team would also love everyone who attends the café to know, love and follow Jesus like they do – how does that make you feel?

The semi-structured approach to questioning also ensured that those interviewed had enough guidance to focus their answers within the themes of community enhancement and faith-sharing objectives, whilst also allowing other themes to emerge and be analysed.

Augmenting this was my capacity to frequent both cafés as a 'participant as observer' (within The Friendship Café) and an 'observer as participant' (within The Welcome Café). My involvement with The Friendship Café as the minister of Phoenix church allowed me to access the operation and interactions between hosts and patrons, in addition to other café host meetings and discussions. My observer-as-participant role within The Welcome Café meant that I was able to observe without having an identified role within the organisation myself. This differential had to be considered as any perceived role may well have impacted the research and associated interviews. This was mitigated using anonymous questionnaires and coded identification of hosts and patrons. Frequent café visits allowed anecdotal conversations between hosts and patrons to be observed.

The fourth and final stage of this mixed research methods approach was to transcribe the semi-structured interviews and then to analyse them. Having carried out the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the research, I needed to find a reflective approach that allowed the interpretation of the interaction between the café hosts and patrons. Fieldwork chapter six details the emerging themes, but it was my own evaluation that was critical in helping to facilitate this. Whilst research software exists that allows the import and review of interview transcripts, I sensed that the theological interactions within these cafés were somewhat more complex than identifying common words, and so needed a more reflective process in order to evaluate what was actually going on within The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés.

Derived from my core research questions which considered the extent to which each café contributed to a sense of local community and facilitated faith-based conversations, as summarised in the thesis introduction (§1), I was also keen to understand:

- To what extent did the café environment help the café hosts and patrons develop a mutual understanding of each other as they engaged in dialogue?
- To what extent did the café host team members communicate their Christian identity?
- To what extent did the physical café layout communicate the Christian hosts' identity?
- To what extent did faith-based discussions take place in the cafés?
- To what extent were the cafés manifesting Christian community?

Within this chapter introduction, I illustrated my overall *Research Methodology and Methods flow* in figure 1, which included my CIF (§2.1.1), critical realism (§2.1.2), and reflexivity (§2.2.2). Additionally, my research methods included the use of the four-voices as an analytical tool to help label the different points of view expressed by the hosts and patrons within the cafés.

These four voices are defined by Watkins as:

> The operant voice, embodied in the practices themselves; the espoused voice, found in the practitioners' own theological articulation of their practices; the normative voice, expressed in the established Christian tradition, in its various understandings of scripture, church teaching, liturgy and so forth; and the formal voice, articulated in academic theology and wider thinking of the academy (2020:39).

The use of the term *four voices* originated from the Action Research Church and Society (ARCS) team from 2006-2011, (Watkins, 2020:ix). This four-voices approach traditionally comes within what is termed Theological Action Research (TAR) which:

> Is a partnership between an insider and an outsider team to undertake research and conversations answering theological questions about faithful practice in order to renew both theology and practice in the service of God's mission (Cameron et al., 2010:63).

This approach 'discloses theology through conversation' and seeks to challenge the often-entrenched positions and understandings of the conversation participants. Additionally, the four voices approach seeks to inform the theological academy with

new insights. Whilst this approach seeks to be academically rigorous, it is also opened to encounter the unexpected. The term *four voices* has been recently and helpfully clarified by Watkins in her latest work, *Disclosing Church, An Ecclesiology Learned From Conversations In Practice* (2020). Watkins has now articulated what I had, during my research, seen as a helpful reflective process for discerning and assessing the various voices and interplay between the café hosts and patrons, a process that could help me within this practical theological research project to:

> Explore what happens to our reading and practice of 'church' when we allow the voices and experiences of faith-full people – including those who might be seen as on the edges of church – to shape our thinking as authentic witnesses to the working of the Holy Spirit in the world (2020:1).

Within this research, the full TAR approach has not been adopted 'per se'. Rather, I use the four-voices as a tool to identify and label the theological language of the café hosts and patrons, with the fieldwork chapters of this research revealing this. In chapter one I identified the general 'location' of these voices,[22] though cautioned against the assumption that any one group, be that the evangelical magisterium,[23] host organisations, or café hosts or patrons, 'owned' any of the voices exclusively. This adapted use of the four-voices is widespread within practical theology and highlights the importance of applying this framework to suit the research being undertaken (Dunlop:2021). Watkins own preference is to use the voices implicitly as a 'hidden framework' (2020:41), however this can make identification of the location of each voice difficult. In order to counter this, I have in several places within my fieldwork chapters, highlighted a specific voice where it is more prominent. Dunlop highlights how this variation between the more implicit, implied use of the four-voices and explicit use has in some cases, totally separated out the formal, normative, espoused and operant voices (2021:298). Within my research, I sought to achieve a balance between these extremes. This also meant being aware of any rescripting of café host and patron responses. Hardy openly uses a rescripting approach in his research and acknowledges the potential for this to "skew" the reader's interpretation of the conversations (2022:34-38).

[22] Section 1.1 Definitions.
[23] I use the term evangelical magisterium to refer to the varied schools of evangelical scholars.

Using the four voices provided a helpful way of evaluating the discussions between the café hosts and patrons. This said, the use of the four voices as a reflective tool is still developmental as Watkins puts it:

> Over time, we identified with more confidence four 'places' or sources where we felt we were 'hearing' important theological wisdom about what we were seeing and thinking. Our conversations across our various personalities, traditions and experiences interweaved these theological sources – sometimes with some knotting and jarring – leading us to recognise that it was in this coming together of these 'voices' that fresh learning was gained and 'moments of disclosure' encountered (2020:41).

Critically, it was the ongoing interaction *between* the voices that provided the rich theological insights. It was important that no one, single voice had the "casting vote" or dominance. The collective voices, each allowed to "speak" with an ongoing interaction and dialogue encouraged, provided rich insights into these café host and patron encounters. Watkins, commenting on the four voices states:

> Our assumption is that the voices already belonged to one another and are intrinsically inter-related; our task is to discern the complex interrelations of the various authorities within the conversation so as to discover renewed theology and practice (2020:41).

The opinions and expressed understanding of the café hosts and patrons were a critical part of the data analysis, informing the contribution to new knowledge and insights, detailed in chapter seven. This all said, the four voices approach is not without its problems and challenges. Watkins brings out several challenges to be aware of:

> The relation of the voices to one another; the problem of the operant as 'voice'; and the asymmetry of authorities between the four voices, with particular attention to the question of the normative (2020:43).

These tensions needed to be kept in mind throughout the research and subsequent research evaluation. Watkins' preference is to view the voices as being in 'occasional harmony' and interaction (2020:45), with none dominating the conversation. In practice, this presents a challenge; the very production of a thesis can place the initiative in the hands of the author – thus the need for the researcher to be aware of their own influence within the project. Watkins, speaking of the four voices, states:

> The voices are not discrete entities. Indeed, there is a real sense in which they are not separate voices at all; rather, they refer in a short-hand way to the manner in which the one voice worth hearing – that of the Triune God – is heard (2020:45).

Clarifying the value of the integrated voices further:

> Theology does not (ever) exist in just one of the voices. As 'faith seeking understanding', theology only properly exists in the conversation *between* the voices – a conversation which can be more or less dissonant, or harmonious, but which is always multi-voiced. What concerns the theological action researcher is not so much the 'content' of the different voices but rather the insight that is gained through sitting with all in open, listening conversation. These insights are recognised in what we came to call moments of 'disclosure' or 'epiphany' (2020:46).

The fieldwork chapters, five and six, reveal some of these moments of 'epiphany' revealing an eclectic mix of theological voices within the two cafés. This research approach was designed to discern the espoused and operant voices expressed within the conversations and interactions between the café hosts and patrons as they articulated and practically demonstrated their own understanding of community, faith and spirituality. Within the fieldwork chapters, these are analysed against the formal and normative voices from the theological academy and within evangelical studies. The four voices analysis was applied to the entire assemblage of conversational transcripts and observations as participants ranged over matters of community, faith, spirituality and much else besides. The technique was particularly well-suited to characterising processes of faith-based conversation, being ideal for a research project based within cafés that provided a platform for such conversations to take place.[24] Ward highlights the importance of such approaches as the four voices within practical theology, categorising this as 'lived theology' (2017:62). Commenting on the four-voices, Ward states:

> The four theological voices approach situates the expressed or espoused theology of ordinary believers in a more nuanced web of theological expression. It suggests that theological expression is not limited to speech but

[24] In the context of third places, Oldenburg (1999) highlights 'conversation' as a key characteristic found in such places, where opinions about a wide range of matters are often shared. I will deal with this in more detail in chapter four.

> can also be found in actions. This kind of operant theology can be implicit, and ordinary believers may not be aware that it exists….so instead of isolating ordinary theology as distinct and separate from more academic or formal kinds of theology, the four-voices approach looks for the interrelationship of theological forms of expression that exist around communities and religious practice (2017:63).

This said, interpreting and evaluating the actual operant *practice* within the cafés, against the other espoused, normative and formal voices, was a challenge. Watkins acknowledges this, stating:

> Fundamentally, the paradox of the operant voice cannot be resolved…the operant voice with its unresolved paradox of articulating the 'mute' (*surdus*) voice of embodied theology, pulls theology in four voices consistently back to the lived realities of practice (2020:47-48).

Indeed, allowing all of the voices to speak within the research needed a disciplined approach of re-listening to the interviews and re-reading the associated transcripts, with each voice in view. This was not about identifying the dominant voice, the one with authority *over* the others, but rather as, 'different kinds of authority' (2020:49). The two fieldwork chapters draw out the rich themes and interactions between these voices that emerged. So, when I use the term 'four-voices', it is referring to their capacity to facilitate and help interpret the broader theological dialogue expressed by the espoused and operant voices of the café host and patrons, comparing this to the normative voice of the host organisations that was occasionally reflected in the language of the café hosts. Additionally, allowing the formal voice of the evangelical "academy" to be challenged. The analysed dialogue allowed me to identify themes beyond the café management core objectives of "better community" and "faith-sharing", which I draw out in chapter six.

Theologically reflecting upon this, perhaps this is not unrelated to the biblical story within the New Testament book of Acts; where Peter is given a vision that will challenge his scriptural worldview informed by Torah. Peter is subsequently called to engage with a new community, the Gentile community represented by Cornelius. Following both his experience and research (Acts 10:9-48), Peter is then called to present his findings to the wider church (Acts 11:1-18). Peter was informed by his tradition and interpretation of scripture. However, his willingness to enter into dialogue with Cornelius and seek to allow this conversation to re-interpret his

theological understanding of who was ‘in or out’, subsequently informed his practice and his wider Jewish tradition.

The use of the four-voice framework within this research, sought to do the same amongst the evangelical host and café patron community as it challenged their theological and spiritual understanding. Ann Morisy captures this challenge when she states:

> Truth is relational, in other words our journey towards truth relies on encounter with others – especially an encounter with those who are different from us (2004:ix).

The research methodology and methods of this project were designed to draw out these differences.

2.2.2 Reflexivity

As the minister of Phoenix Church, my role within The Friendship Café was one of a ‘participant as observer’ (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994) with an “insider” view, as I was occasionally seen helping out within the café. All of the hosts and some of the patrons were also aware of my wider role as the church minister. My role within The Welcome Café, solely as a researcher, was one of ‘observer as participant’ (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994), as I was an “outsider”, having no responsibility to practically serve within the café. However, I made the hosts and patrons aware that I was a researcher, and so was not a ‘complete observer’ (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). The observations conducted throughout the research period allowed me to build a broader picture of patron and host interaction. This “positioning” was an important aspect of my research self-awareness (Thomas, 2013:144), as perceptions of my role within both cafés could impact both patron and host response to research questioning. On this point, Swinton and Mowat comment:

> A key dynamic within the process of qualitative research is *reflexivity.* …Reflexivity is perhaps *the* most crucial dimension of the qualitative research process. We would argue that reflexivity is crucial for every dimension of the qualitative research process from the selection of the question, the choosing of the methods and the writing of the final report. Simply put: reflexivity is the process of critical self-reflection carried out by the researcher throughout the research process that enables her to monitor and respond to her contribution to the proceedings (2006:59).

My reflexivity was not only an important self-consideration regarding my practical influence within the research, but also theologically. My own theological assumptions and methodology detailed in section 2.1 had the potential to significantly influence my understanding and interpretation of the research project. These assumptions formed a central part of my theological methodology as I wondered to what extent Phoenix and Gateway Churches, and their respective café host teams saw themselves as being the very presence of Christ within their local communities. In early discussions, both café managers had expressed a Missio Dei understanding of mission. Additionally, both expressed a conversionist motivation behind the cafés that they ran.

It was important that I did not allow my own theological methodological approach to be assumed to be held by the café host teams. Whilst my own approach to mission was informed by a conversionist and Missio Dei understanding, I could not assume this was the same in the café hosts. As I interviewed hosts and patrons, identifying, and recognising myself as a co-creator of the café encounters helped me shape questions and resist temptations to steer their thinking. Additionally, I needed to be sensitive to the 'reading' of the interview situation, how my own approach had the potential to impact the direction of the conversation. Swinton and Mowat state:

> The way in which a researcher responds, the follow-up questions asked, the researcher's intonation, their eye contact and body language will profoundly impact the way in which that story is heard and recorded by the researcher…Sensitivity towards and awareness of the complex dynamics of the interview situation is crucial if this co-narration is not to turn into colonisation (2006:61).

As a known participant observer within the Friendship Café, both patrons and hosts might have felt obliged to give answers they thought I wanted to hear, be that on "better community" or "impact on faith". This was mitigated with the careful design of the semi-structured questions, encouraging a conversational approach. In comparing the research outcomes of the two cafés, similar themes are seen to emerge in spite of my varied role and identity within each. Additionally, my regular participant and non-participant observations gave opportunity to see the various emerging themes from the interviews being played out to a greater or lesser extent.

Gaining a balance within this research was a challenge, as any assumptions that I brought to the process might prejudice the outcomes, or subdue specific voices, and

thus distort the evaluation of the interviews and related transcripts. In addition to having a balanced approach to research within this thesis; as a piece of research within practical theology, it was important, as Swinton and Mowat advise, for the research to:

> Locate itself within the diversity of human experience, making its home in the complex web of relationships and experiences that form the fabric of all that we know (2006:3).

This was not an easy task, as an openness to what the research revealed was essential in order for this to inform the many and varied groups and individuals that might be considered stakeholders in the outcomes. This included my own personal interest as both researcher and, in relation to The Friendship Café, the minister of Phoenix Church. Again, Swinton and Mowat inform:

> Practical Theology…is dedicated to enabling the faithful performance of the gospel and to exploring and taking seriously the complex dynamics of the human encounter with God (2006:4).

This was a particular challenge for the evangelical hosts whose opinions could have dominated the discourse. It was important as the hosts and patrons interacted and engaged with each other, to allow the "human encounters with God" to be heard. This practical theological research project needed to take all of the "actors" and their voices seriously. Quoting Stanley Hauerwas,[25] Swinton and Mowat write:

> One of the things that liberal democratic society has encouraged Christians to believe about what they believe is that what it means to be a Christian is primarily belief!... This is a deep misunderstanding about how Christianity works. Of course, we believe that God is God, and we are not and that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit…but this is not a set of propositions…rather (it is) embedded in a community of practices that make those beliefs themselves work and give us a community by which we are shaped. (Christian) belief has to be performed…but unfortunately Christians so often want to make Christianity a text rather than a performance (2006:4).

This locates this research, not simply within the café host communities and their theology and practice, but equally within the "practices of the world" where it is important to, 'explore the interplay between these two sets of practices' (Swinton and Mowat, 2006:7). However, in order to give attention to these "practices", I needed to

[25] Original source no longer available

be aware of my role as researcher, how I coordinated the research including which "voices" spoke and when.

Idestrom and Kaufman, in *What Really Matters, Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography* (2018), speak about the researcher as "Gamemaker" (2018:173). This role, according to Idestrom and Kaufman, requires the possession of important self-awareness on the part of the researcher in understanding their vital role in "orchestrating" the interaction and inclusion of the various voices within an ethnographic research project, for:

> The researcher has the power to decide which voices to bring into the research process and at the same time to decide which roles they are allowed to play (2018:173).

The Gamemaker coordinates various theological voices within the research process leading to an emergent normativity that:

> Emerges from the encounter between different voices in a conversation that is facilitated and directed by the researcher as Gamemaker, who is then in the position to grant various roles and priorities to these different voices. Yet (crucially) the Gamemaker cannot control either the outcome of the conversation or the (new) normativity that emerges from it (2018:175).

It was this very interaction between the various café host and patron voices that I sought to assess and understand as "Gamemaker" within this research project. For:

> It is precisely in the very interaction and juxtaposing of the different voices that a new understanding emerges (2018:177).

This understanding was a key part of my self-awareness as I designed the practical research approach and carried out my fieldwork within the two cafés.

3 Chapter Three: Between Social Capital and Proclamation

This thesis is located within the broader considerations of social capital and evangelical proclamation. In the first section of this chapter, I provide a summary of social capital theory engaging with Bourdieu, Putnam, Coleman, and Power & Willmott. Drawing on the work of Chris Baker, I then consider how faith-based organisations (FBOs) have sought to enter into what I am calling a "better community" dialogue with other local community stakeholders. This dialogue often leads to the provision of local projects designed to practically enhance community services, additionally impacting a sense of connectivity and belonging for people within the community.[26] Engaging with Cloke, Sheppard and Morisy, I then move on to consider how community-based projects designed to meet a specific community need have by and large been used by evangelical churches to position themselves as important community stakeholders. Drawing on the work of Stott, Warner, Shaw and Smith, the chapter then introduces the debate within evangelicalism which sees a number of evangelicals emphasising the importance of proclamation of their faith over and against what they see as a liberal social gospel. I then consider a further debate within evangelicalism where some emphasise the importance of visible measures of conversion, in contrast to others who speak of a spiritual journey of faith (Warner, 2007; Worthen, 2019). I then draw upon Strhan's research within a conservative evangelical church in London (2019), which provides insights into tensions that some evangelical Christians can feel as they are pressured to share their faith by their church leaders and affiliated organisations. Within an extensive engagement with Strhan, I additionally consider how negative media and academic portrayals of evangelicals can create a reticence within them to self-identify as such. The chapter concludes with a summary of a Missio Dei approach to mission, considering to what extent this mitigates the tensions that can be present where dual objectives of better community and proclamation exist.

[26] Projects such as debt advice centres and youth clubs, amongst others, are typical examples of projects that community stakeholder groups might identify as important initiatives that not only make a visible difference to the community but increase people's perceptions of community investment and subsequent well-being.

3.1 Social Capital - Background Rationale

How people feel about where they live, their sense of belonging and local connection, is the focus of social capital or better community. Central and local government policy makers see the development of social capital as pivotal in the creation of local communities and the general well-being of people within them (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2006). The leading early thinkers regarding social capital were Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam (Gauntlett, 2011), each of which present a unique perspective of this much debated term and related social concept. Gauntlett summarises Bourdieu's position regarding social capital as, '[the way] in which society is reproduced, and how the dominant classes retain their position', ensuring that, 'the wrong sort of people don't enter their networks' (Bourdieu, 1986). So, in this way, social capital could be perceived by many, particular those who might consider themselves to be within a social underclass, to be a cultural mechanism of networking employed by the higher social classes to maintain and advance themselves within their social network.

Coleman offers a broader definition of social capital over and above simply the protection of the elite classes, in the sense that he sees its value in all communities, be it amongst the elite or marginalised as a 'resource based on trust and shared values, [that] develops from the weaving-together of people in communities' (1988:96). For Coleman, social capital is a localised, non-transferrable community resource specific to each community. This resource is not only shaped by the local cultural norms and values but also used as a capital asset which an individual, if so motivated, could put to great affect for community and personal gain, be that in economic development or in relation to one's own skills and expertise.

A more popular writer on the subject, Putnam, expands the definitions of Bourdieu and Coleman by offering a much broader application to social capital. In his landmark article *Bowling Alone* (2001) Putnam suggests a direct causal effect between the decline in social and civic engagement in the USA and the decline of society, democracy, and quality of life in general (Sobel, 2002:140). According to Putnam, the decline in social networking, membership of local groups and religious organisations in preference for people 'bowling alone', has had broad implications across education, general measured outcomes, and a sense of community and belonging. Sobel is critical of Putnam's analysis, suggesting that Putnam confuses

cause and effect and offers only a positive view of social capital with its increase related to positive enhanced outcomes (2002:140-141).

Power and Willmott define social capital in relation to two main categories, namely bonding and bridging (2007:6). *Bonding* social capital being that level of social interaction on an intense, personal level that is seen in local relationships, such as known people and proximity of reliable friends and babysitters. Meanwhile *bridging* capital represents a much broader membership and connection with local groups such as schools and children's centres. Power and Willmott suggest that bonding and bridging capital are essential in forming people's sense of community and belonging, an important consideration for local policy makers and stakeholder groups (2007:6). Speaking of bonding capital, Morisy states how this, 'involves strong allegiances between people, and through this commitment to each other support and solidarity can be carried' (2004:48). However, Morisy also suggests bridging capital, 'leads to a broadening of people's identities because it requires journeying out to engage with the stranger' (2004:50). Chapter five reveals these two categories of bonding and bridging capital to be key factors in the development and contribution to a local sense of community within both *The Friendship* and *The Welcome Café* and their respective communities.

3.2 Introducing Theology to the Conversation

The language of social capital has emerged within both secular social scientific and theological academic circles. The social scientists have until recent years, dominated the discourse, with the early pioneering thinkers including Bourdieu and Coleman. More recently, theologians have entered the conversation (e.g., Chris Baker), seeking to evaluate the Church's role in the development of a better community. This conversation between social science and theology around social capital and the development of a better city is an encouraging one.

A 2006 research paper produced by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *Faith as Social Capital, Connecting or Dividing?* encouragingly highlighted the growing interest of the UK government in social capital and the role of faith communities (2006:1) and researches the level of cooperation between the secular and faith-based academies. Such cooperation is seen as part of a larger initiative around the input of faith communities into public policy, landmarked with the establishment of

the Inner Cities Religious Council (ICRC) in 1992[27] (2006:1). One of the early conclusions of the paper was that:

> It is clear, therefore, that the UK government has identified 'Faith communities' as potentially key 'containers' of social capital in achieving its targets for urban regeneration, social inclusion and community cohesion (2006:2).

Other UK local government and faith-based joint initiatives have also been formed to develop projects of mutual community benefit.[28] Whilst this can be celebrated, such broad faith-group acceptance is usually based upon multi-faith, non-judgemental partnerships. Baker identifies the challenge of faith-based communities engaging with what he terms 'non-religious partners' (2005:4). In order to describe this engagement, Baker introduces the concepts of *religious* and *spiritual* capital, defining how:

> these terms highlight the overlapping, yet distinctive ways in which faith communities engage with mainly secular understandings of regeneration, civil society and urban renaissance (2005:4).

Baker goes on to suggest that spiritual and religious capital provide the "why" and the "what" regarding the contribution of the faith-based communities to a local urban social capital. Baker defines this in the sense of spiritual capital being the religious and theological *motivation* behind such contribution, why they do what they do. The spiritual "why" capital motivations of faith-based communities can vary. These may include:

- Desiring to increase their own profile within a community,
- Wanting to be more visible to attract people to their services and associated church programme.

The spiritual capital motivation of Phoenix and Gateway Church was made clear in my interviews with the café managers, who stated identical motivations to develop a place that enhanced a sense of local community, yet one that also provided opportunities to share their faith and see the café patrons converted to follow Jesus.

[27] Various government initiatives have been established with the same aims, as well as interfaith initiatives welcomed by central and local government, i.e. The Interfaith Network.
[28] Projects such as The Local Government Association and FaithAction group set up to promote health and well-being - https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/working-faith-groups-prom-6ff.pdf - accessed April 2022.

The religious “what” capital that Baker speaks of, refers to the many ways in which faith-based organisations contribute to social capital – what they practically do. Faith-based organisations are involved with a whole array of projects, many of which are designed to meet specific community needs. The uniqueness of this research is that it focuses on two café projects that are not manifestly needs-based, an important factor as the evangelical host organisations desired to engage with a broad community demographic.

Whilst a number of a faith-based organisation’s “why’s” and “what’s” may align with local government objectives, such as creating a safer more coherent community, Baker acknowledges that, ‘others are more distinctive and can create dissonance and discomfort’ (2005:5). It is this faith-sharing aspect of the evangelical host communities’ ‘why’ that strongly inform the basis of this research project, subsequently considering how the local community and other interested stakeholders might view such motivations. Faith-sharing objectives can create suspicions and tensions between local community and faith-based groups, a point acknowledged by the Local Government Association and FaithAction report (2017) that stated the importance of ‘address[ing] the barriers that can exist between public services and faith groups’ (2017:2).

This said, there is increasing reference to what has been termed *progressive localism* (Baker, 2014), a “meeting ground” within what some are referring to as a *post-secular* society where faith is no longer assumed to be operating within its own sacred sphere but is increasingly being identified as having a valuable contribution to make. This includes local government recognising the value of faith-based organisations in the bettering of local communities, as they are not only often geographically positioned within the community, but also able to mobilise volunteers in the delivery of agreed projects. This inclusion of faith-based organisations within community wide discussions is encouraging, though is generally done on the basis that discussions and agendas will be around better community ‘without proselytising’ (Local Government Association, 2017:25).

Schneider states that faith communities, ‘have been central to the U.S. social welfare, health, human services and education systems from their beginnings’ (2016:1). He identifies the ebb and flow of faith-based organisations as they include their ‘religious elements’ in government-sponsored contracts (2016:6) dependent

upon the government in office at any one time. Schneider outlines the potential of social capital in the form of "added value" where an individual, say from a specific faith-based organisation, with a specific skillset or expertise may be able to negotiate and straddle across all the interested community stakeholders as they each identify the valuable contribution made by that individual (2016:11). This aligns itself with Coleman's earlier definition of a local community asset.

What faith-based organisations do in the community (what Baker refers to as religious capital), is a crucial factor that influences government and community stakeholders' inclusion of faith-based organisations within the local community discussions. However, the faith based 'why's' and specific motivations also need to be considered. Part of this research sought to ask how a host community from an evangelical tradition, possessing a clear faith-sharing objective,[29] might seek to enter and maintain itself within the local community conversation in a way that does not compromise its faith position and conversionist motivations.

Another important concept that has been introduced as potentially key in the negotiation between religious and secular spaces is that of *secular spiritual capital (*Baker and Miles-Watson, 2008). Seen as a valuable tool in the ongoing negotiation of community and public spaces for the common good, the paper defines secular spiritual capital (SCC) as:

> the set of individual and corporate/community values and actions produced by the dynamic interaction between spiritual and social capital within secular fields of activity (2008:7).

Baker and Miles-Watson refer to Swinton's work on secular spirituality which has an underlying assumption that spirituality is universal and so in that sense is not simply the possession of the church, thus, 'we all have spiritual needs' (Swinton, 2001:23). This sees spirituality as the overriding characteristic which by some may be expressed through religion. The identification of common values and objectives is important in order to create a platform of discussion for both the faith-based hosts and people within the local community. The spiritual 'why' capital motivation of the faith-based community can often align, according to Baker and Miles-Watson, with the secular spiritual capital of other community stakeholders who also seek the well-

[29] For the evangelical community, this is largely expressed in terms around the good news about the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus.

being of the local community and whom may be driven by equivalent ethical and moral values. By way of further definition in this context:

> Secular spiritual capital in these contexts refers to those values, visions and ethical systems that motivate engagement with social capital (2008:20).

Baker's and Swinton's definitions are based upon common community stakeholder objectives and largely ignore the tensions that can be introduced when the faith-sharing motivations of FBOs become visible. The ongoing challenge for the evangelical host communities of this research project was to be willing to look for such common ground alongside their faith-sharing objectives. The café's contribution to the local sense of social capital was a crucial factor within this research and within the café patron's perceptions of the host teams. As the cafés provided welcome third places that enhanced their local communities, this created a good platform for faith-based conversations too.

3.3 Evangelical Community Engagement

Development of practical projects that improve a sense of local community is encouraged by many church traditions that appeal to a number of Bible texts which encourage such involvement.[30] Additionally, scholars across the Christian tradition encourage the involvement of Christians in bettering their local communities.[31] As churches seek to become involved in their local communities, they often see needs-based projects as an important method by which they can do so. Sheppard highlights how such work amongst the marginalised is seen as a duty of the Church and indeed even suggests that there is a 'divine bias' toward them:

> Bias to the poor sounds like a statement of political preference. My experience has been that some of the most central teaching of orthodox Christianity lead me to this position….from Jesus's theme of the Kingdom of God, the calling to the Church to be Catholic, reaching across all human divisions and the doctrine of the incarnation; they lead me to claim that there is a divine bias to the poor, which should be reflected both in the Church and in the secular world (1983:48).

[30] Such passages as Jeremiah chapter 29, verses 4-7, speak about 'seeking the peace and prosperity of the city' – and are used to encourage Christian's to apply this in their local community context.
[31] This thesis bibliography contains several such titles: i.e. 'What makes a Good City?' (Graham/Lowe).

Whilst church engagement within its local community is an important consideration, there is a danger that the church simply becomes a private provider of social and community services. This can position it perceptually, alongside local government stakeholders creating a client/service provider level of relationship. Cloke cautions against this, commenting on the opportunities for Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) to participate as they, 'occupy the vacuum of welfare space left behind by retreating central and local government activity' (2013:8). Cloke highlights the danger of FBO autonomy being eroded by various contractual 'strings' as they partner with local authorities (2013:9):

> We need to be extremely careful not to assume that the locally contextualised practices of FBO welfare and caring activities merely mirror the neoliberal environment in which those contexts are set (2013:11).

Cloke is cautioning against a compromised approach that in the light of reduced government spending, can lead to the church being identified as simply a provider of needs-based services absorbed into the local culture. Pears and Cloke see the danger of this approach by faith communities, as potentially a naïve acceptance with the structures of society, maintaining or even increasing the marginalisation of the poor (2016:1). Their stated preference is to see local missional development moving away from an expansion strategy to one of 'encounter with the other' (2016:5), allowing the church to remain involved without losing its faith-based identity. This will very much depend upon the funding behind a specific community initiative. In my professional experience developing faith-based community projects, the source of funding often determined the parameters of the project operation. Most government funded initiatives are expected to meet specified and measurable outcomes that do not include faith-based objectives.[32]

Within what they term the post-secular city, Chris Baker and Justin Beaumont highlight the development and the concept of a public space. Moving away from secularism, the post secular city, 'has to negotiate and make space for the re-emergence of public expressions of religion and spirituality' (2011:33). One such cause, according to Baker and Beaumont, is the increasing and changing cultural

[32] Within my 20 years serving within evangelical churches, I was involved in initiatives supported by government funding, such as job clubs and education projects – each one had very specific outcomes that had to be reported on, none of which included faith-based motivations.

landscape caused by the global immigration of religious communities from the South (2011:33), These new “theistic colonies” provide great opportunity for FBOs to enter the community conversation, helping to provide valuable insights into the cultural and spiritual motivations that shape groups that possess a theistic worldview. Whilst Baker and Beaumont emphasise acceptance of ‘expressions of religion and spirituality’ within the post-secular city, Graham and Lowe, speaking predominantly from within an Anglican context, bring the challenge as to whether, ‘The Urban Church [is] fit for purpose’ (2009:129). Whilst they refute negative media representation of the Church being totally out of touch and disconnected from public life, Graham and Lowe call for a significant ‘reinvention’ of the Anglican Church’s engagement with ‘the city’, specifically in its involvement with welfare reform (2009:130).

Cloke, Beaumont and Williams (2013) provide some helpful case studies, considering the varying approaches of a number of FBOs in the delivery of community projects. Several projects are compared and contrasted regarding their approach to managing the tension between urban social activity and faith proclamation. One such example is the distinct approaches of two faith-based organisations to poverty (2013:25-46). The study compares the approaches of Christians Against Poverty (CAP) with that of Church Action on Poverty (CAoP). Whilst each were founded upon a similar faith-based motivation, and each operate within the public square successfully, they function at different levels. CAP works on an individual basis, whilst CAoP works principally at a community wide strategic level. CAP ‘has a clear commitment to evangelism’ whilst CAoP works primarily from a standpoint of ‘justice’ challenging ‘the unjust laws decreed by government’ (2013:44). CAP has received heavy criticism for its overt and unashamed faith sharing motivations and activities. The organisation Advice UK terminated CAP’s six-year membership stating that CAP’s underpinning motivations had become ‘incompatible with the constitutional requirements that advice should be impartial…with no strings attached’ (2013:32). The prayer offered by some CAP debt counsellors during debt consultations was critiqued by Advice UK as representing a form of ‘emotional fee’ for the vulnerable people seeking debt advice (2013:32).

Cloke et al compare other projects with distinct approaches to the delivery of drug addiction (2013:47) and youth provision (2013:111), amongst other projects. Such

comparisons raise the whole question of the appropriateness of evangelism within projects where clients are materially needy or psychologically vulnerable. *Communities, Churches and Social Capital in Northern Ireland (*Bacon, 2003*)* provides case studies of several FBOs delivering welfare-based services. These projects included community support programmes, health programmes, youth projects, educational and training programmes (2003:10), yet all focused solely on the objective of improving the local community, to the omission of faith-sharing objectives. Ann Morisy cautions against a "needs provision alone" approach to community engagement:

> Honest thinking and reflecting are essential to prevent a culture developing in the Church of unexamined involvement in community ministry. Failure to critique the growing community involvement by churches not only risks 'boom and bust': it could obscure some exceedingly graceful dynamics that can flow from embracing a struggle for the well-being of our neighbour, and it can also risk betraying the primary task of the Church: that of helping people to discover the scope for relationship with God through Jesus (2004:23).

Morisy goes on to state:

> In the intensely materialistic times in which we live, it is both easier, and in the world's terms more commendable, to develop provision for homeless people than it is to help people embrace faith and become church. The two are not mutually exclusive (2004:24).

Additionally, Morisy goes on to caution how needs-based community projects can create an imbalance in relational power between the Church with the giving initiative, and the grateful recipients within the community, thus:

> When a church or project gets caught up in a needs meeting perspective, it puts the church and the congregation in a position of superiority. Those 'out there' are the ones in need, whilst those within the church have the capacity to help (2004:27).

The challenge for the café host communities within this thesis, was to understand how they might contribute to local social capital whilst maintaining a faith-sharing objective. The relatively neutral café environment also helped dilute obvious initiative and related power that projects based around needs provision might leverage.

Gaining a balance between providing much needed community projects and faith-proclamation provides an ongoing challenge for evangelical churches that hold conversionism as a high value. Additionally, a number of evangelicals debate the

nature and method of conversion to the Christian faith, with some speaking more of a 'faith journey' as opposed to a crisis event that may lead to a sudden, dramatic conversion. The next section will consider these debates within evangelicalism.

3.4 Evangelicals and Proclamation

Within many evangelical churches, in addition to seeking to enhance the local sense of community, the desire to see people converted is an important motivation for their local community involvement. These two objectives have historically been the cause of debate amongst some evangelicals who have prioritised one against the other. Within *Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001, Studies in Evangelical History and Thought,* Warner traces the theological and sociological emphases within the broad evangelical movement of churches and denominations. Amongst such emphases is the consideration of the place of social action. Commenting on the historical debate within evangelicalism, Warner states:

> Earlier in the twentieth century many evangelicals accepted a false dichotomy - social gospel or evangelism. However, Lausanne 1974[33] both affirmed and gave new impetus to an emphasis upon holistic mission in which evangelism and social action function as integral partners in the mission of the church and in expressing the Kingdom of God (2007:110).

Warner goes on to state:

> If it could have been claimed in the mid-twentieth century that evangelicals were indifferent to social action, the same charge could not reasonably be made at the century's end (2007:111).

Warner cites the development of large evangelical charitable organisations that are 'unambiguously committed to social action', as evidence of the evangelical redressing of the earlier twentieth century conversionist over-emphasis. Having said this, Warner goes on to state, 'it is [now] evangelism that evangelicals are finding harder to accomplish effectively' (2007:111). Within his earlier work, when Warner was at the heart of the evangelical tradition, he highlighted the challenge evangelicals face in balancing the two objectives:

[33] The Lausanne 1974 conference is one of a number of evangelical Christian conferences that have taken place over the years where such topics as social action and evangelism (amongst others) have been discussed, clarified, and subsequently communicated through statements of faith and theological emphasis.

> It is no longer contentious for evangelicals to insist on the vital importance of social action, but the Achilles' heel of the recovery of an evangelical social conscience has been a loss of urgency in evangelism….While [evangelicals] still exist who will always remain dismissive of all social action, other evangelicals have been heard in recent years to suggest not merely that social action and evangelism are both needed, but more controversially that social action and evangelism are really one and the same (1996:74).

Warner challenged this notion, stating the need for evangelicals to, 'refute strenuously all misguided attempts to conflate' these two aspects (1996:75). His earlier work went on to criticise those within the evangelical movement whom he said were, 'drifting imperceptibly towards a kind of conversion-free religious social work' (1996:101).

Within *Evangelical Truth, A Personal plea for unity and faithfulness* (2003), quoting the 1982 Grand Rapids Report, Stott summarises the relationship between social action and evangelism in three ways. Firstly, that social action is a *consequence* of evangelism, 'because converts manifest their new life in service' (2003:121). Here, Stott is pointing to how true conversion of an individual leads to concern about 'the other'. Secondly that social action is 'a *bridge* to evangelism', opening up permissions for the evangelical 'to be heard' (2003:121). Whilst Stott is suggesting that acts of kindness lead to opportunities to communicate one's faith, Cloke's concern regarding evangelism of the vulnerable (§3.3) challenges this approach. Thirdly, Stott highlights that social action is a *partner* of evangelism, in that 'good news and good works go hand in hand' (2003:122).

Shaw concurs with Warner that the Lausanne Congress in 1974, (which was strongly influenced by Stott), went a significant way to emphasising the importance of social action and the balance between this and faith proclamation (2021:15), however, he cautions:

> Evangelicals have continued to debate into the twenty-first century the extent to which they should engage in social action. For some, the urgency of the task of evangelism means there is no time to devote to projects of social concern. To others, social action has become the essence of the gospel and a priority matter. There are also those who hold the view that faithfulness to Christ means taking equally seriously both evangelism and the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, or the parable of the Good Samaritan (2021:15).

These observations by Warner, Stott and Shaw reveal the ongoing tensions, challenges and issues that some evangelicals feel and face in their attempts to achieve a balance between making a valuable contribution to their local community whilst maintaining a clear, faith-sharing objective. Again, Shaw states:

> Not all evangelicals have been convinced. One prominent leader declared in 2016:[34] "The temptation is strong for believers to jump into the cultural fray as self-righteous, socio-political reformers and condescending moralizers…those activities are not to be the Christian's chief priorities…The Church will really change society for the better only when individual believers make their chief concern their own spiritual maturity" (2021:16).

Shaw celebrates how social action and proclamation were historically clear facets of evangelical identity. Tracing such activity from the early Church through to the late twentieth century, Shaw offers this as a challenge to the twenty-first century evangelical Church to rediscover the priority of both. Within this thesis, I wanted to research community projects that brought these two aspects together. However, it was specifically the host evangelical communities' understanding and emphasis on conversionism that motivated them to develop these community cafés as places to engage with the local community on matters of faith.

In addition to debates within evangelicalism around objectives of social action and evangelism, there are also polarised views amongst some evangelicals concerning the *evidence* of *conversion*, or in other words, how one can tell whether someone is a Christian or not (Warner,1996:101, 2007:16; Worthen, 2019:172). This debate ranges from those who insist on a tangible, crisis experience of conversion, to those that promote a more gradual journey to the Christian faith. This too can create tensions amongst those evangelicals who feel the pressure from within their organisation to measure the success of community facing projects or initiatives. Warner highlighted this conflict within his earlier 1996 joint-authored book with Calver, stating:

> In emphasising the fact that the majority of conversions take place over a period of time rather than instantaneously, [some evangelicals] run the risk of overstating their case. The danger is that we end up so stressing the 'journey into faith' that we fail to preach with clarity and persuasive forcefulness the absolute necessary of coming to faith and

[34] Shaw is quoting J MacArthur from 'Christian Duty in a pagan culture' – located: http://www.gty.org.uk/resources/articles/A122/christian-duty-in-a-pagan-culture, accessed 27/12/2016

> the full assurance that is found in becoming a new creation in Christ (1996:101).

Within his later 2007 work, Warner points out the traditional evangelical position and understanding of conversionism:

> Conversionism is a classic evangelical emphasis and evangelicals have traditionally been emphatically orientated towards conversion as a crisis decision. Only in recent years have evangelicals become more sympathetic to notions of a conversion process (2007:16).

Worthen challenges what she sees as Bebbington's over-simplification of conversionism, stating:

> I found that Bebbington's bullet points[35] did not always give me the tools that I needed. Even the "born-again experience" – supposedly the essence of evangelicalism – turned out to be less than an ironclad indicator. Some evangelicals have always viewed conversion as an incremental process rather than an instantaneous rebirth (2019:172).

Whilst Worthen does not provide examples to support her claim, the desire to see evidence of visible conversion is important to many evangelicals (Chester, 2007), who often express their faith and identity in terms of who is "in" and who is "out". Within many evangelical churches, this is "measured" by key public milestones such as *believer's baptism,* which is often communicated as an individual's outward, public 'witness' to communicate an internal conversion that has taken place (Jack, 2017). This can extend beyond initial conversion to ongoing inter-evangelical rivalry, where divisions can arise on points of Christian doctrine. Marsden comments:

> One of the characteristics of those who thought of themselves self-consciously as part of an evangelical movement was their deep concern for boundary maintenance (2019:18).

Within his article, *The Ordinary Theology of Evangelicals,* Smith provides a helpful analysis of the 'theological continuities' of British evangelicals, specifically their understanding of and subscription to the Bebbington quadrilateral (2021:31). Drawing on the survey findings from the 21st Century Evangelicals Research Programme of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK, although there are variations in emphasis of belief, the findings reveal that in broad terms, British evangelicals still

[35] Worthen is referring here to the Bebbington quadrilateral conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism.

subscribe to the four tenets of conversionism, activism, crucicentrism and biblicism (2021:39-49). Interestingly, regarding approaches to faith-sharing, Smith states:

> (The data) suggests that the current culture of evangelicalism favours outreach through relationship building, youth work and social action rather than the formerly popular methods of open-air preaching, mass meetings and mission campaigns (2021:47).

Additionally, regarding conversion, Smith highlights how there was a wide range of conversion experiences amongst the evangelicals interviewed, not all framed as a crisis, one-off response (2021:45).

Within my café research, as I witnessed the coming together of the evangelical hosts and the community patrons, I was interested in finding out how these 'gathered communities' might develop a sense of relationship building, belonging and inclusivity. Belonging in third-place terms has a very different emphasis to a sense of belonging within an evangelical faith-community. I deal with factors that contribute to third-place belonging in chapter four, with the fieldwork chapters revealing cafés that manifest a unique gathered community of faith exploration.

This section has depicted the tensions within evangelicalism that often pitch social action against faith proclamation. Additionally, debates around what constitutes true conversion have also been highlighted. The importance of faith-sharing and conversion is often communicated within evangelical meetings as everyday church members are urged to not only demonstrate their faith in practical ways but also to share their faith (Strhan, 2019). Additionally, authors that are popular within some evangelical churches provide what I call a 'normative voice of conversionist expectation', that encourage proclamation alongside social projects.[36] These voices, augmented by church sermons and literature, can create an internalised 'pressure to proclaim', which this chapter will now go on to consider.

3.5 Evangelical Identity and The Pressure to Proclaim

The sociologist of religion, Anna Strhan, researched a conservative evangelical church in London (St John's - a pseudonym), in order to find out how the everyday members of the church saw themselves in relation to the wider city in which they lived and worked. Strhan's research focused on the church member's 'struggle for

[36] Tim Chester is one such author, within his joint work with Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (2007), suggesting projects focusing on social action alone are 'signposts pointing nowhere' (p52).

coherence' in their everyday lives, particularly in the light of the expectations of the leadership of St John's. These expectations were communicated through sermons, bible-studies and church notices, amongst other verbal and non-verbal ways.

In sections 3.2 and 3.3 I drew out the potential suspicions and tensions that can exist as faith-based organisations seek to enter the community conversation around better community – more specifically when the faith-sharing motivations of the FBOs are visible. Strhan captures this challenge to the evangelical community within what she calls a 'de-Christianising British context'. Strhan states:

> The media increasingly present polarizing narratives of conservative[37] evangelicals either as marginalised as their lifestyles come into conflict with universalising processes of modernisation – most often symbolised in conflicts with gay rights groups and antagonistic relations with equalities legislation – or as developing into a rising new Christian Right (2019:3).

This media depiction, Strhan argues, sets the evangelical community against what many see as the progressive city, where broad and varied values are accepted and indeed encouraged. The added value that the church, in general, brings to its local community through the provision of welfare projects is recognised and celebrated. However, tensions are introduced when the conversionist objectives of evangelical communities are visible, with negative media portrayals of evangelical Christians serving to heighten such suspicions. A 2013 Theos report challenged the media portrayals of what many consider to be a Religious Right, highlighting the tendency of the media to focus on minority groups, and exaggerate their influence:

> 'Religious Right' is one of those toxic terms that lurks in the corners of British public debate, often used to mean 'Very Bad Thing' rather than anything more precise. Of late, the term has appeared with increasing frequency in the mainstream press and media, with commentators across the political spectrum speculating (and sometimes simply stating) that a 'US-Style Religious Right' is emerging in Britain (2013:5).

The Theos report goes on to refute such an emergence of a Religious Right in Britain, but equally cautions against complacency:

[37] Strhan's use of the term *conservative* evangelical refers to those groups within evangelicalism that emphasise biblicism and crucicentrism (2019:3).

> [This report] counsels those who have made such accusations to pay closer attention to the evidence, if they seek to prevent the kind of culture war they claim to wish to avoid; while at the same time counselling those Christians inclined towards a narrowly socially-conservative agenda and defensive narrative of 'persecution' to expand both their theological focus and their perspective on what persecution entails (2013:10).

Additionally, negative academic portrayals of fundamentalist evangelical groups and practices can potentially have the same impact. Carolyn Baker, in her emotive book, *Confronting Christofascism, Healing the Evangelical Wound* (2021), sees the increasing influence of evangelical Christians in US politics and life in general, as a threat to democracy. As a former member of an evangelical church, Baker is vitriolic about what she sees as a damaging movement. Referring to the evangelical priority for conversionism, Baker states:

> Evangelical Christianity is by definition imperialistic because it believes one of its primary responsibilities is to "evangelize" or preach the Christian gospel for the purpose of converting others to it (2021:15).

The above media and academic portrayals represent a narrow range of evangelical groups and emphases from within both the UK (Strhan) and the US (Baker). However, the majority of a largely uninitiated population within the UK do not know the difference. Such "broad-brush" depictions of evangelicals can create inaccurate caricatures of what is generally, a diverse movement with varying emphases (Warner, 2007). Within the community Strhan researched, she discovered a number of those she interviewed to have, what she refers to as 'imagined barriers' (2019:4). As some evangelicals develop a self-consciousness about how they are portrayed by negative media and academic coverage, this can create a reticence to self-identify as evangelical. Such imagined barriers can then impact the communication and behaviours of the evangelical community seeking to find their place within the urban city. During her field research Strhan reflected:

> The group's comments about media portrayals of Christianity indicate how the 'generalised other' shaping their identities is an object for their reflection, and that they are sensitive to the kinds of conversation that would re-enforce negative stereotypes (2019:19).

Strhan's research was strongly informed by her observations of the normative theological voice expressed by the leadership of St John's, with much of the recorded conversation reflecting this. A central theme that emerged was how the

church members were encouraged to be ‘speaking subjects’ (2019:83), with this verbal aspect of faith proclamation suggested to be an essential aspect of their identity and mission. Strhan’s observations and interviews with the ‘everyday evangelicals’ within the church also informed her discourse, specifically regarding their engagement with the wider city and local community. Strhan brings out the internalised tension felt by the Christians during her research of St John’s, specifically when it came to the middle-class members of the church sharing their faith with peers and colleagues within their workplaces. Describing such tension, Strhan states:

> Incidences of embarrassment demonstrate a moral fragmentation arising from the conflict between an internalised sense of reserve and propriety demanding that Godtalk be avoided in the workplace and amongst friends, and the countercultural demand addressed to members of the church to practice their faith in a way that is ‘public and unpopular’. [Peoples reticence] indicates an internalisation of a secular cultural norm that faith is ‘personal’ and ‘private’, running in tension with the ideal of ‘public’ speaking encouraged by the church (2019:98).

Strhan’s fieldwork highlighted how this consistent demand for the church members to share their faith created inner tensions. Indeed, Strhan contrasted the ‘pressure to proclaim’ that is felt by the church members, with their own, often reluctance to do so, referring to this conflict as ‘differing moral logics’ that ‘pull in contradictory directions’ (2019:84). I was interested within my research to understand to what extent such pre-conceived ideas of evangelicals in general, were present amongst the café hosts and patrons, and whether their regular interactions might mitigate or dilute such.

Additionally, within the congregation Strhan researched, the members were encouraged to see experiences of rejection of their faith-sharing as an expected part of being ambassadors of Christ and His Kingdom. Strhan identified this as she listened to many sermons and group discussions, with this often being expressed in language of battle and conflict:

> In this context, members of St Johns are encouraged to interpret their struggles to speak as a battle, part of a cosmic spiritual warfare, in which…the world is divided between good and evil (2019:87).

Quoting one sermon on this, Strhan records:

> David (the speaker) described the 'verbal proclamation of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross' as 'warfare, in which we announce verbally the victory of Jesus as we declare the defeat of Satan…no wonder it's so hard'. He said to the congregation: 'We are authorised by Him to go out into battle, proclaiming the truth of the gospel, announcing the victory of Christ', and added, 'You will find opposition, and indeed the more we…plan to proclaim the gospel, my expectation is the more we will see the opposition rise up' (2019:87).

Whilst the emphasis on evangelicals being involved in 'cosmic spiritual warfare' is not a consistent or uniform one across the evangelical movement of churches, where present, this language of cosmic battle, victory, warfare and opposition, can draw significant and psychological battle lines between evangelicals and the communities they are endeavouring to share their faith with. Additionally, this domination of the normative voice within the broader evangelical conversionist discourse, can create a 'them and us' narrative for the everyday evangelical Christian seeking to engage with those they consider as 'not yet believers'. Kraft typifies such an emphasis, stating:

> Many evangelicals act as if that enemy does not exist. In preaching and teaching and our daily lives, we act as if Satan and his forces are not a problem. We go about our business as if the evil in the world is explainable in some way other than that there is an enemy behind it. We emphasize the love part as we should but tend to ignore the context in which that love is expected to flourish—a context of warfare. We live in a battle zone, and we usually do not know what to do about it (2015:15).

Strhan's research highlighted a consistent pressure to proclaim the message of the life, death, resurrection, return and Kingdom of Jesus, with the members of the church encouraged to see such a duty as a privilege :

> The centrality of the idea of conversion throughout the history of evangelicalism has made the duty to preach the gospel to others a privileged duty of the believer (2019:85).

Such conversionist teaching and expectation traditionally lies at the heart of the evangelical tenets of identity and distinctiveness (Bebbington, 1989) and is a familiar theme from many evangelical pulpits. Within her research in St Johns, Strhan includes extracts from several sermons affirming this priority:

> This emphasis was expressed in many sermons in St Johns. In a sermon focusing on a chapter from Luke's gospel, David stated that, 'Christian mission is only Christian mission if it has to it *verbal* content, declaring the possibility of reconciliation with God' (2019:86).

Strhan's research provided a helpful case study against which my fieldwork could be compared as I sought to understand tensions amongst the café host teams who were encouraged by their host organisations to 'do mission'. The extent to which tensions existed within the two cafés researched, is brought out in chapter five. Strhan's work is helpful in that it highlights the struggles and tensions within the everyday members of St Johns who were seeking to make sense of and find their place within the wider city. However, the uniqueness of my fieldwork was that it sought to observe such struggles and tensions within these two West Midland cafés, where evangelical café hosts and patrons were brought into close proximity and dialogue.

3.6 Missio Dei providing a voice of Mediation

Within my research, although both Phoenix Church and Gateway Church are from within the evangelical tradition, both communities had also been exposed to a broader missional theology (Missio Dei)[38] that encouraged closer engagement within their local communities. This exposure to a Missio Dei understanding of the Church's role and place in mission was a significant factor in both churches seeking to embed themselves within their local communities. Andrew Hardy's research into the development of Phoenix Church from a purely attractional church, where the local church is seen as the centre of God's missional programme, to a missional church, traces this transition. Hardy states:

> A new missional cultural capital emerges when we see ourselves as missionaries and ambassadors of God. We can draw on the capital of this new consciousness to vivify our missional efforts in participation with the Spirit. It may mean our lives become increasingly based on becoming conveyors of a form of social and spiritual capital that, like a bank account, people can draw on to get to know our God (2019:39).

This effectively positions the church in the heart of its local community with a revised missional theology, where the church sees itself as being in partnership with the God of mission. This important development then becomes the basis upon which the Church's approach to mission is expressed both verbally, and in many cases in the

[38] A Missio Dei theology seeks to discern the relationship between God, Church and the mission to evangelise the world. The Missio Dei debate falls into three main categories: Divine agency alone (i.e., Hjoedendyk), Human agency alone (i.e., McGavran), and divine/human agency (i.e., Newbigin). Both churches see themselves in divine partnership, joining God on His mission within their local communities and beyond – see Flett, *The Witness of God, The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth and the Nature of Christian Community (2010).*

form of ‘missional’ projects. This said, the core evangelical tenets, including conversionism, remained firmly at the heart of Phoenix Church. Hardy sees this approach as important:

> In order for the church to move beyond seeing itself as a kind of welfare provider, or even simply as an evangelistic body sent to get new converts, it needs to equip its people with this kind of new consciousness (2019:39).

This missiological shift in emphasis within Phoenix Church was critical, as this prepared the way for various community projects, including The Friendship Café. Equally, the Missio Dei understanding of Gateway Church influenced its approach to The Welcome Café. This influenced how both cafés operated within their respective communities and thus created an ideal theological context for a third place project. This was not without its tensions, as Phoenix and Gateway Church attempted to balance the objectives of providing a place of community enhancement and faith proclamation. Andy Wier speaks of this tension in terms of ‘Kingdom Christians’ and ‘Cross Christians’, stating:

> It is tempting to think of these contrasting approaches as mutually exclusive ‘either/or’ positions. Indeed, this is the way they are often presented. However, I think it is more helpful to see them as providing potential correctives to one another (2015:12)

Whilst Strhan’s fieldwork revealed a ‘pressure and tension to proclaim’ within the conservative evangelical congregation she researched (2019:86), my fieldwork within the two cafés revealed a somewhat different dynamic. As the evangelical hosts developed relationships with a broad patron base, this created opportunities for conversation, including matters of faith.

3.7 Chapter Conclusions

Within this chapter, the work of Chris Baker, Cloke, Warner and Strhan, amongst others, has revealed the various positions that faith-based groups, and specifically evangelical churches can occupy; either happy to fulfil the role of developing better community, welfare provider, or pitching themselves against the city, with the need to proclaim into this spiritual battleground. Additionally, debates within evangelicalism around social action versus proclamation, and what constitutes authentic conversion can create inner tensions amongst some evangelicals, impacting how they seek to engage with their local community. This also can impact how they are perceived

within their communities, specifically when conversionist motivations are visible. I have also highlighted how pressures on evangelicals to share their faith coupled with negative media and academic portrayals have the potential to create a reticence to self-identify as such.

The two evangelical West Midland cafés I researched, located in the heart of their communities, provided ideal environments to assess to what extent these dynamics and tensions existed and were manifest. This is drawn out in the fieldwork chapters, however prior to this, the next chapter will consider the sociological and theological aspects of third place, café ethnography and theology of place, assessing to what extent they contributed, not only to a sense of community, but also to the creation of an environment conducive to faith-based conversations between café hosts and patrons.

4 Chapter Four: Third Place, Cafés and the Theology of Place

This chapter is all about “place” and introduces the sociological fields of third place theory and café ethnography, in addition to a theology of place, specifically considering what part these finally play in the development of a sense of community, and an environment conducive to faith-based conversations. Drawing on the work of Oldenburg (1999), Hickman (2012), and Wexler and Oberlander (2017), this chapter initially considers the role of third places regarding how their characteristics create and maintain a conversational environment. The chapter then considers café ethnography, engaging with Waxman (2006), Manzo (2014) and Foster (2020), amongst others, assessing how the physical layout of cafés and the attitudes and behaviours of hosts and patrons impact third-place “signature”. The chapter then considers a theology of place, drawing on the work of Inge (2003), Hjalmarson (2015), Mueller (2015) and Pears (2015), amongst others, including a section on ‘evangelical place making’ (Hovland, 2016). I conclude the chapter by highlighting the debate across the Christian tradition regarding what constitutes an authentic church gathering, engaging with the work of DeYoung and Kluck (2009), and Watkins and Shepherd (2014).

4.1 Third Places: Creating Community Dialogue

The development of a “public space” that is “open to all” has been the focus of sociological studies for many years. Habermas (1989) specifically researched cafés as public spaces, with significant focus on the eighteenth-century British coffee house as a forum for political debate. Others such as Haine (1996) celebrate the communal neutrality of these “places of conversation”.

Oldenburg, within his classic work on third places, *The Great Good Place* (1999), starts by lamenting the disappearing social landscape of many communities. According to Oldenburg, the reduction in local community places, coupled with developments within the socio-economic landscape, has created a commuter culture with disconnected urban sprawls. Oldenburg states:

> Planners and developers have shown a great disdain for those earlier arrangements in which there was life beyond home and work. They have condemned the neighbourhood tavern and disallowed a suburban vision. They have failed to provide modern counterparts of once-familiar gathering places (1999:18).

Whilst Oldenburg is generally referring to the 'problem of [disappearing third] place' within the US (1999:3-19), his observations are equally valid within the UK and the wider "global village". Oldenburg sees a solution in the preservation of local third places that, '…the world over share common and essential features' (1999:20), range from the Arabian coffeehouse, through the Italian taverna, through to the English pub, and possess 'the capacity to serve the human need for communion' (1999:20). The general benefits of such local third places are manifold including "places of escape" from the stresses of everyday life, places that bring people and groups together who may possess varied and differing opinions and beliefs.

Oldenburg's original depiction of the third place has since been challenged on various levels, as being rather simplistic and not representative of the various types of third place that can be found within the broad and varied community settings. Wexland and Oberlander expand on Oldenburg's definitions of the types of establishments (i.e. cafés, pubs) that can be considered third places, distinguishing between communitarian, commercial and digital third places (2017:2). Wexland and Oberlander define communitarian third places as those focused on community services (Libraries, community centres etc), with commercial third places being those that place profit above all else (cafés, restaurants) and digital third places being those virtual communities such as Facebook and Instagram. Wexland and Oberlander therefore challenge the notion that the construct, design and culture of such places is uniform, and as such suggest they cannot be defined by a standard set of characteristics as Oldenburg depicts, stating:

> Most contemporary work on the design and management of third places assumes an over-arching similarity in third place design and…an ideological homogeneity (2017:4).

The connectivity within each of these places will be varied and, according to Wexland and Oberlander, will be driven by different motivations (community focus, profit, attention market). The two West Midland cafés were interesting in that they would fall into Wexland and Oberlander's 'commercial' category yet had community focused objectives, over and above their desire to make profit.

Hickman considers the role of third places in *Deprived Neighbourhoods in Great Britain* (2012) seeing them as important containers that enhance community well-being. Hickman's definition of the third place expands to shops, cafés, community

centres, amongst others, with his findings being largely positive regarding attitudes to and the importance of third places within the six deprived communities he researched. Hickman suggests that third places within deprived communities take on a greater relevance than those within more affluent locations, as they form essential social hubs for many people within these areas that might be subject to isolation, poor health and other issues often associated with areas of deprivation (2012:222). According to Hickman, with deprived areas having a higher than average percentage of unemployed, many residents do not experience social activity and connections that are often associated with the workplace, making the community third place an even more essential hub of social interconnectivity (2012:222). Whilst this may be the case, my research within the two West Midland cafés, one located within a relatively affluent area and other within an area of considered deprivation, revealed that both cafés performed essential although slightly different roles in enhancing the local sense of social capital. Chapter five draws out this comparison. Hickman also highlights various barriers to third place social connection within deprived areas, citing such things as unfriendly regulars, lack of social confidence, disability hampering mobility, and concern about venturing out 'after dark' as barriers to people accessing third places (2012:230-232). The first three barriers are true across many communities, and not just in deprived area, although the barrier of 'after dark' would be more prevalent in areas where high levels of crime might deter people from venturing out.

Pears (2015) highlights the issue of social barriers within deprived areas, stating how such built areas create a stigma and culture of exclusion. Pears is concerned not only with the physicality of place but also with the power dynamics that are often associated within it (2015:16-23). Chapter three highlighted the issue of such power dynamics, specifically within welfare projects where a service provider/client relationship exists (§3.3). Whilst it can be argued that relational power cannot be completely neutralised, the focus of this research on two third place cafés that were *not* welfare projects, mitigated somewhat against such power dynamics.

Whilst the variation in third place (Wexland and Oberlander) and power dynamics within third places is worthy of potential further investigation, it is beyond the scope of this research. For clarity and simplicity, whilst various challenges to Oldenburg's definition of a third-place have been made, Oldenburg's third place characteristics,

specifically thinking about cafés, remain largely intact. It is these characteristics that I use to measure the third place 'signature' of both The Friendship and The Welcome Café.

Within his book, Oldenburg proposes several characteristics of third places, suggesting they are:

- neutral places,
- places of social "levelling",
- places of conversation,
- places that are accessible and accommodating,
- places where "regulars" are found,
- places with a 'playful' atmosphere,
- homes away from home, and
- low profile by design.

The next section will consider and critique these characteristics, considering their relevance to the two West Midland cafés.

4.1.1 Third Place as Neutral Place

The first essential element of the third place, according to Oldenburg, is that it is a *neutral* place. Oldenburg states:

> In order for the city and its neighbourhoods to offer the rich and varied association that is their promise and potential, there must be neutral ground upon which people may gather. There must be places where individual may come and go as they please, in which none are required to play host, and which all feel at home and comfortable. If there is no neutral ground in the neighbourhoods where people live, association outside the home will be impoverished (1999:22).

To what extent this can be achieved is interesting. Within the two cafés researched, the hosts played a significant role in setting the overall atmosphere, layout and social focus of their respective cafés. Whilst not obviously visible, the conversionist objectives of the hosts influenced their approach to conversations with patrons, particularly in The Friendship Café. There is a sense that neutrality could be declared in relation to the patrons frequenting the cafés, as they did not have a specific role or responsibility that may have been expected of them in their homes or places of work. Yet even here, as the patrons became regulars within each café,

they contributed to the overall mood, conversation and "signature" of these places. Speaking specifically about Christian cafés located in retail centres, James Smith questions the neutrality of such third places, highlighting the impact of retail *culture*. Smith states:

> [Cafés run by churches in retail outlets]…are not just neutral containers or discardable conduits for a message. […] what are embraced as merely fresh forms are, in fact, practices that are already oriented to a certain telos, a tacit vision of the good life. […] when we distil the gospel message and embed it in the form of the mall [shopping centre], while we might think we are finding a fresh way for people to encounter Christ, in fact the very form of the practice is already loaded with a way of construing the world. The liturgy of the mall is a heart-level education in consumerism that construes everything as a commodity available to make me happy. When I encounter 'Jesus' in such a liturgy, rather than encountering the living Lord of history, I am implicitly being taught that Jesus is one more commodity available to make me happy (2016:75-77).

Smith places a heavy emphasis on the importance of the geographical location of Christian projects including cafés, suggesting re-locating projects out of the church risks them being identified with the culture of their new location. Theologically, this places the emphasis on the church or project *building* as opposed to the Christians themselves, whom the Apostle Paul describes as the church *body*.[39] In chapters one (§1.2) and three (§3.6), I highlighted the influence of a Missio Dei theology on both The Friendship and The Welcome Café. Missio Dei emphasises the ownership of mission to be God's who then calls His Church into partnership with Him. This understanding of mission motivated both Phoenix and Gateway Church to locate their cafés within the centre of their local communities. Whilst no setting is completely culturally neutral, the third place neutrality Oldenburg speaks of, refers more to the *social* neutrality of such places, in contrast to the first and second places of home and work where family and organisational responsibilities and hierarchies exist.

In contrast to the third place, other places such as railway stations and airports, those places that people tend to "pass through", may be more neutral in this respect;

[39] In Paul's first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul describes them as the body of Christ – 1 Cor 12:27.

places where there is a fluidity and flow of people. Tenescu speaks of a difference between ‘non-space’ and neutral space:

> Globalization is specific of a contemporary society where there are no more reference points, where nothing is any more recognizable and where the loss of references is reflected by the emergence of places seemingly without landmarks, of non-places or heterotopias that people transit and with which they come into contact every day (2014:106).

However, even here, such places can develop a community “signature” and hierarchy of control and influence. The station or airport employees, the regular commuters, will all (over time) form part of the identity and feel of, even these, transient places. Tenescu considers Foucault’s *space other* (heterotopias) which:

> Could be considered as space that has more layers of meaning or relationships to other places than those perceived at surface and those that immediately meet the eye of the viewer. The space other (be it heterotopia, non-place neutral space) is the space of otherness, a space that can be simultaneously physical and mental (2014:107-108).

In simple language, Tenescu suggests that space and place can take on new and varied meanings dependent upon their use and the interactions within them. Oldenburg concurs with this as he emphasises that third place status is not automatic within every bar or coffeehouse but can only be seen in those places with certain characteristics. Whilst Oldenburg suggests neutrality is one such characteristic, I suggest that complete neutrality is not achievable and that in any case, the people frequenting such places strongly determine how far this is achieved. Within my fieldwork, I discovered that the hosts had a major part to play in maintaining the opportunity for discussion, whilst not allowing any one voice or group to dominate the “signature” of their cafés. The perception of neutrality that Oldenburg attributes to third places, is arguably true regarding the voluntary coming together of patrons and hosts, in that the ongoing dialogue and relationship is a two-way negotiation. Hosts provide the place and atmosphere that encourages the patrons to become ‘regulars’, with the patrons themselves contributing to the overall ”signature” and conversation of each third place.

4.1.2 Third Place as a Leveller

A second characteristic of third places, according to Oldenburg, is that they are *levellers*. In reference to the political party of that name (The Levellers), in the period of Charles I, then later Cromwell, Oldenburg states:

> The goal of the party was the abolition of all differences of position or rank that existed among men. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the term came to be applied much more broadly in England, referring to anything "which reduces men to an equality". For example, the newly established coffee houses of that period, one of unprecedented democracy among the English, were commonly referred to as levellers, as were the people who frequented them and who relished the new intimacy made possible by the decay of the old feudal order (1999:23).

Such places became renowned for being places where, 'men discovered one another apart from the classes and ranks that had earlier divided them' (1999:24). This third place 'level ground' is found where there is a sense of relative neutrality, a place where patron responsibilities and identity within their first and second places can be laid aside. Surprisingly, Oldenburg suggests that such places are ones where 'personal problems and moodiness must be set aside' (1999:25). However, my fieldwork revealed the opposite in that the openness of the evangelical host communities to patron's stories of personal struggle, was greatly appreciated. This mitigated against the potential offence of opportunist faith-sharing with some patrons.

4.1.3 Third Place and Conversation

According to Oldenburg, another characteristic that identifies a third place is that *conversation is the main activity* (1999:26).

Oldenburg states:

> 'Neutral ground provides the place, and levelling sets the stage for the cardinal and sustaining activity of third-places everywhere. That activity is conversation (1999:26).

The fieldwork revealed broad and meaningful conversations within both The Friendship and The Welcome cafés. Supporting extracts from the semi-structured interviews with patrons and café hosts, reveal a rich and even somewhat complex tapestry of conversation. My regular observations within each café discovered the same as the café hosts and patrons were brought into close proximity. The ongoing discussions revealed an interwoven dialogue of, not just everyday conversation, but conversation around spiritual journey and personal faith stories too.

Pozos-Brewer, within her research, *Coffee Shops: Exploring Urban Sociability and Social Class in the Intersection of Public and Private Space* (2015), challenges

Oldenburg's concept of third place within the twenty first century. Focussing on five upmarket Coffeehouses in the US, Pozos-Brewer states:

> Coffee shops today, whether they are the big chain stores that began in the second wave of coffee or the independent third wave coffee shops, do not fit with the conception of the third-place that Oldenburg (1989) offers. Instead of being a neutral, completely open place, coffee shops are sites for the reproduction of class inequality. Even though Third-Places are supposed to be accessible to everyone and function as social levellers, these places are still exclusionary and divided along class lines. Coffee shops are taking on the name of "the third-place" and forming themselves based on that idea, however, due to the changes in the meanings and uses of public and private space, the result of the third-place coffee shops is different than what Oldenburg (1989) conceived originally. The concept of the third-place, while still fundamentally being about a place that is between the home and the workplace, has been modified to meet the needs of middle-class city dwellers (2015:88).

This may be an accurate observation of the specific coffee houses that Pozos-Brewer researched and reflects the changing face of coffee-houses in general. However, this does not reflect the type of third place cafés that Oldenburg describes and that this fieldwork discovered. Indeed Oldenburg's earlier quote lamented the failure of some planners and developers to, 'provide modern counterparts of once-familiar gathering places' (1999:18). Pozos-Brewer appears to be describing those establishments that purport to be third places, but which in reality, are not.

A significant factor in Oldenburg's third place theory which was borne out within my own research within The Friendship and Welcome Cafés was the sense of a dynamic community, one that embraced the individual and the contribution they brought; whilst also possessing a corporate and community sense of belonging. The coffee houses in Pozos-Brewer's research contained third place 'pockets', yet with no real sense of community being established in the coffee house overall, as the patrons created their own private places of discussion. Pozos-Brewer captures this in one of her observations, which is worth quoting at length:

> It is Thursday afternoon in the neighbourhood of Chelsea in the borough of Manhattan. Coffee Corner is serving multiple functions - office, social space, waiting room, and classroom, In a corner by the condiment bar, a young woman leans against a pillar with a book and a cup of tea, waiting for a friend On the other end of the bench from her sit an older man and a middle-aged woman, speaking softly in Spanish Just one

> small table width away from them are two young middle-aged Asian men. When they get up to leave, their table is immediately taken by two older white men. In the middle of the room, two tall, long tables with outlets underneath provide space for computers, At the far end of one are two men in their 30s, talking about the characteristics of business partners, One of them has a laptop and is typing as his friend talks, The other end of the table is occupied by a middle-aged woman and a female student, There is a gap about 3 feet wide between the end of that table and the next, An old man, probably in his 80s, with a walker, sits at the table with book and magnifying glass, He chats with anyone who will talk to him and makes comments on the conversation happening between a young gay couple who are sitting next to him, Almost hidden is a bench seat looking out the window onto 8th avenue, Two middle aged female friends chat and watch the people walk past, The last seating area in Coffee Corner is a 4-person bar against the window facing 8th Avenue, It is currently occupied by 2 young men, one talking on the phone and one working on a project in photoshop on his laptop (2015:88).

This scene captured by Pozos-Brewer reflects a more disconnected community, representative of many high street cafés. Pozos-brewer argues that the advances in technology since Oldenburg's original depiction of third place characteristics,[40] reflected by the common use of laptops and mobile phones, has impacted the dynamic within many cafés. Yet whilst technology has indeed changed the social interactions in many places, including cafés, Lukito and Xenia comment:

> With the development of information technology, some characteristics of third places are changed although third places still become an important medium for social interaction (2017:1).

However, whilst "true" third places give the option to retreat into one's own business, they also encourage greater connection, the use of "we" and the sense of "us". When a regular has not been in the café for a week or two, other patrons notice. Conversations may develop as other patrons offer insights into each other's stories, perhaps about a regular's visit to the hospital, preventing them from venturing out. Within conversations, this may lead to the offer of help, visits, or telephone calls. This is a key aspect of third place belonging and community. In her ethnography of a London Street, urban sociologist Suzanne Hall introduces Nick's Café as:

> 'a small meeting place in a large and rapidly changing city'…(yet) to relegate Nick's Caff solely to the status of an eating establishment

[40] Oldenburg's first edition of his classic work was published in 1989, then 1997, and then 1999.

> would be to miss the point because the café space, used by a mix of migrant, local, long-settled and newcomers, provides a base to consider the complexities of belonging in a local place like the Walworth Road (2012:52-53).

This is the standard that Oldenburg is holding up and also laments its disappearance, additionally calling out those places that profess to be providing such third-places of belonging, yet in reality are not.

4.1.4 Third Place as an accessible and accommodating place

A further third place characteristic according to Oldenburg, is that it is accessible and accommodating (1999:32). By this, Oldenburg is describing those places that are open to the community and its social needs, places where one can go and expect to be welcome whatever the time of day. Within both The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés this was evident in diverse ways. For example, within The Friendship Café, as well as offering a broad menu of food items, fresh fruit and vegetables from the local church allotment were also on offer, free of charge. A range of good quality, second-hand clothes were also available for café patrons to take as needed. The Welcome Café was situated within a large community centre, and so the other activities going on in adjacent rooms, such as keep fit classes or carer and toddler groups, gave a wider community appeal.

4.1.5 Third Places and Regulars

Within such places there is an expectation that whatever time one arrives, the familiar faces of other regulars will be seen. Thus, an additional important characteristic of the third place is the regulars themselves (1999:33). It is the regulars that help create the welcome and the atmosphere. In The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés, the regulars played a vital role in affirming the belonging of others, certainly when a familiar, regular patron arrived at the café. The hosts had a vital role in welcoming first-time patrons; however, regular patrons were the most important factor in the ongoing welcome of known patrons as they arrived. This collective, social responsibility helped to blur many of the obvious boundaries between hosts and patrons. Theologically and sociologically, this in essence created a new, gathered community of hosts and patrons with shared responsibility to provide a place of welcome and dialogue. This is not unlike Luke's description of the

early Church gatherings that were identified by specific practices.[41] The fieldwork draws out the extent to which the café hosts and patrons were a community identified by themes of journey, spiritual place and gathered faith community.

4.1.6 Third places creating a playful atmosphere

Oldenburg describes conversations within third places as the 'main activity' (1999:26). Without these rich and varied conversations, such places cease to become third places. This said, considering the depth and quality of such conversations, Oldenburg surprisingly suggests that maintaining a 'playful atmosphere', with no serious conversations (1999:37) is a key characteristic. Oldenburg is speaking about the third place as being an escape from the everyday stresses of life. However, a significant differentiation within The Friendship and Welcome cafés was the hosts' capacity to offer general 'playful' dialogue, yet also having the capacity and awareness to discuss the more complex and personal matters of life and faith. Indeed, in my café observations, it was the development of a safe place of fun, and playful interaction, which created an important platform upon which more meaningful conversations could develop. This is drawn out in a number of interviews with the patrons of both cafés.

4.1.7 Third place as a home away from home

Oldenburg also brings out an underpinning characteristic of genuine third places as being those *homes away from home* (1999:38), places regular patrons feel at home, with a warm welcome, where regulars may be afforded proprietary rights. This might include the use of the café telephone, or the occasional free meal or drink in recognition of their loyalty and commitment. During my observations within The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés, I observed such home-from-home interactions, the capacity to pay the 'next time', or not at all, patrons offering to help out where staff and volunteer shortages were obvious. Indeed, Oldenburg suggests that the third place, for many, can be an escape *from* the family home (1999:39), specifically those where relationships are strained and difficult. In this sense, the third place becomes a place of acceptance and surrogate family. Theologically, this metaphor of family is a common one within the Bible to describe the Church.[42] Many churches

[41] Acts 2:42-47 describes the early Church gatherings as those dedicated to the Apostles teaching, meeting together, communion and prayer.
[42] In Ephesians 2:19 the Apostle Paul uses familial language when describing the Church.

seek to communicate this aspect of their identity within their name, perhaps using terms such as ‘family church’ or ‘community church’. The fieldwork draws out the extent to which the cafés developed this sense of belonging.

4.1.8 Third place as a low-profile place

Another characteristic that Oldenburg suggests is typical of the genuine third place, is that such places are ‘low profile’, and unimpressive by design (1999:36). This is debatable. Whilst the regular third place that maintains a good, frequent, and loyal patron flow may not need to excessively advertise or offer the latest, trendiest seating and technology, there are other physical factors within café third places that significantly contribute to the overall conduciveness to conversation and belonging. Pozos-Brewer also suggests that this characteristic also depends upon the location of the coffee-house (2015:92), with those situated in more upmarket, city locations, needing to reflect the middle-class expectations of the people that live, work or “play” in the locality of the coffee-house. The profile of both The Friendship and The Welcome cafés was conducive to the communities and locations in which they were situated.

4.1.9 Oldenburg – Summary

Developments in urban planning and technology have impacted third place design and function (Pozos-Brewer, 2015). However, Oldenburg’s third place characteristics, by and large remain central to the establishment of a successful third place conducive to conversation and the sense of community. The capacity of The Friendship and The Welcome Café to create such a third place was critical to their objective to provide a place that enhanced a sense of community whilst giving opportunities for faith-based conversations. Third places need to be places of relative neutrality, and places of general social levelling, where specific roles expected in homes and workplaces are laid aside. Additionally, such places provide a place of both “playful” and meaningful conversation for many, whilst being welcoming and accommodating to patron’s requests. These characteristics are key considerations in the development and success of third place cafés. Many factors contribute to this - within the academic study of cafés, this is referred to as *café ethnography*. It is to this important aspect that I will now turn.

4.2 Café Ethnography: Factors that Contribute to Third Place Status

Cafés can be third places, but not all cafés are third places. So, what factors contribute to a café third-place "signature"? Café ethnography seeks to consider this, studying the impact of various sociological and physical factors and their contribution to third place status (Waxman, 2006; Manzo, 2014). Café ethnography identifies two main categories, human and non-human. The human elements are the people factors that contribute to the patron's sense of a place being 'friendly' or 'welcoming'. The non-human elements are the physical factors, such as lighting, layout, cleanliness, amongst other things. I categorise these under four headers: people, product, place, and machinery, considering each one in turn. Chapter five will give practical examples from the fieldwork of the impact of these categories.

4.2.1 People

In my earlier stages of this research, captured in *Whatever Happened to the Rich Young Man? The Church and the New Marginalized* (Foster, 2020); I summarised the importance of the people factor:

> The importance and centrality of having the right people as we seek to develop a community third-place is paramount. One can have the best equipment, trendiest lighting, and widest offering of products; but it is the *people* that will transform a community or high street establishment (be it franchised chain or other), into a loved and local third-place that encourages conversation and staff /volunteer/patron interaction (2020:28).

Specifically, each host contributes to the atmosphere of the café, with the team also possessing an "overall "signature":

> Every person contributes to this "signature" in two ways: as an individual with more or less influence dependent upon their disposition and "position" within the team (be it social or ascribed). Also, to the overall "team "signature". (2020:29).

By the term social influence, I am referring to the individual's impact on the café atmosphere and host team dynamics, through their attitudes, general disposition and personality. Such influence can be 'ascribed' by others depending on their role in the café. For example, a café manager's attitude and opinions will have a strong influence on team morale, café ethos and the overall feel of the café as a third place. Within both The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés, this individual and overall team "signature" was an important factor which contributed to the teams' approach in

carrying out the faith-sharing vision of their respective management teams and host organisations. This people aspect is critical when creating third places, as the hosts teams both individually and collectively help develop an atmosphere conducive to conversation, which is a central characteristic of third places. Additionally, the patrons contribute significantly to the overall atmosphere of such places. Chapter five details this challenge and the related tensions that this created within the host café teams. Within my research, the patron's attitudes to unfamiliar events or activities, revealed a strong sense of ownership of what they saw as, *their* café. Other occasions saw certain groups of patrons starting to dominate the general feel and atmosphere of the cafés. This became a challenge to the café hosts as they sought to provide a place that was conducive to a broad, local demographic.

4.2.2 Product

Within my earlier research, I captured this important aspect of third place provision:

> Having spoken about the people side of things, what about the product? I have mentioned that within our churches we can generally get away with less-than-average refreshments. After all, it is the people we are there for. Yet as we move out into the public sphere, we are entering a whole new world of challenge. When people pay for goods and services, they have different expectations. That coffee that tastes like tea won't do. Although the franchised chains can be socially sterile and impersonal, they generally know how to make good coffee (2020:30).

This is a significant challenge to the local third place, that regarding product can be competing with the large chains that are providing top class coffee produced and served efficiently by professionally trained barista's. Both The Friendship and The Welcome Café's had decent but not 'high-end' coffee-producing machinery. Interestingly, within these two third places, issues around the quality of the product or speed of service, appeared to be one of the trade-offs that the local patrons were willing to make. Specifically, within The Welcome Café, at extra busy times, delays with food orders and slow service seemed to be acceptable trade-offs against what the patrons saw as a home from home environment. The fieldwork chapters contain several comments that reflect this. Although patron concerns about the quality of the product they had received were rarely witnessed during my observations (within either café); on the rare occasion this did happen, such was the familiarity of the relationship between the patron and the host serving, that quick apologies on first name terms, seemed to dissipate any angst or concern.

4.2.3 Place

I will deal with the theology of place within the next section. However, several *physical* factors related to place are brought out by Waxman, as important aspects to consider. Summarising her research, Waxman states:

> The key findings regarding the physical characteristics showed the top five design considerations included: cleanliness, appealing aroma, adequate lighting, comfortable furniture, and a view to the outside. A number of themes emerged related to people, their activities, and their feelings and attitudes regarding the coffee shop. Each coffee shop was found to have a unique social climate and culture related to a sense of belonging, territoriality, ownership, productivity, and personal growth, opportunity for socialization, support and networking, and sense of community. Regarding feelings of community, survey findings from coffee shops patrons showed a positive correlation between length of patronage and their sense of attachment to their community (2006:35).

Waxman brings all of these aspects together under what she terms, *place attachment.* As people gather in place, such ongoing and regular engagement with each other, including the physical environment, creates place attachment, which:

> Can be looked at in a transactional perspective where place attachment is not composed of separate or independent parts, components, dimensions, or factors. The people and place interact together to form the experience (2006:37).

The contribution of café 'artefacts' and the physical layout of the cafés to developing a place conducive to conversation was brought out in several patron interviews. This extended to comparisons with other high-street café's whose design inhibited patron capacity to interact with the wider café community.

Such a sense of attachment then leads to a sense of ownership. This was reflected within the interviews within The Friendship and Welcome cafés. Chapter five reveals this, with the longer attending patrons regularly reflecting this attitude. One such patron commenting within my Welcome Café interviews stated that she felt she had, 'earned her seat'. Waxman observed this within her own research:

> Patrons who participated in this study felt a sense of ownership, sometimes even to the point of entitlement, in the coffee shops they frequented. They had strong preferences for their chosen shop, opinions on how the shop should be run, and some even walked behind the counter to serve themselves. Patrons were sometimes vocal regarding the perceived superiority of their coffee shop over others (2006:46).

Such a local sense of ownership within a third place community can subsequently shape its day-to-day operation. The opinions of the patrons as they are able to confidently share them, might be expressed on such as pricing, menu selection, décor, amongst other things. Within my participant observations within both The Friendship and The Welcome Café's, these conversations were frequently overheard. This went beyond simple responses to the host's asking, "if everything was OK" (often referring to a food order); and ventured into such as opening times or availability of tables.

Additionally, ownership was demonstrated by the café patrons through other behaviours such as adjusting the chairs and seating arrangements to facilitate conversation, acting as hosts to their family or friends they brought along for the first time. Additionally, the patrons demonstrated to new people their 'regular status' and 'attachment to place', by repeating the founding stories and folklore of the café. This aspect was an important factor in the overall 'café story' as the regular patrons saw themselves as embedded in its development.

4.2.4 Machinery

In addition to the layout, lighting and other physical factors brought out by Waxman, Manzo considers the role of coffee producing machinery and its contribution to third-place status and profile. In his article, *Machines, People and Social Interaction in "Third-Wave" Coffeehouses* (2014), Manzo states:

> Humans interact not only with one another, but also with, and conditioned through, the natural and built environment in which sociality takes place, and the objects that those environments comprise (2014:1).

Additionally:

> Part of the third wave "culture," for shops as well as home hobbyists, is equipment. This equipment constitutes not only the built form of the shop's/hobbyist's space but also contributes to the subculture's vernacular and indeed the machines contribute to the aficionado's understanding of the third wave coffee subculture (2014:1).

Manzo's focus was on those "third-wave" coffeehouses as opposed to genuine third place establishments - though a coffeehouse could be both. Third-wave coffee houses are renowned for the quality of their product, which is seen as just as important, if not arguably more so by the artisan coffee populace, as general place

and overall sociable qualities. Such third-wave establishments are judged on the quality of their coffee, thus the difference between a coffee-house by name, and a café that will provide a broader range of products and be more renowned for its “all day breakfast” or lunchtime special.

Manzo’s insights were still contributory factors to consider and assess within this thesis, as both The Friendship and Welcome Cafés had decided to provide a barista style service. The machines used by the two host cafés were both reasonably “low-end” machines, in the sense that they were designed for low to average demand. However, Manzo’s insights into such as the physical location of coffee producing machinery, provided helpful observations regarding how they facilitated barista/patron interaction. Commenting on one of the third-wave coffee houses he visited, Manzo observed:

> (The Machine) not only constitutes a beautiful object for the customers’ inspection and it is not only the site of the “theatre” of drink preparation, but it also and evidently permits and provides a sort of setting itself for the [barista/patron] conversation (2014:8).

In order to emphasise the impact of poorly located machinery on barista/patron interaction, Manzo brings out a helpful comparison by summarising his experience within a coffee house located at an international airport:

> This café seems practically purpose-built to negate social contact between employees and customers and the interest in efficiently whisking travellers off to their departure gates is clear. Two points merit mention here, however: One is that this form is typical of most Starbucks, and not only airport “licenced concept” locations, and the physical and symbolic separation of actors on either side of the bar is recurrently evident not only at most Starbucks but at most “second wave,” chain coffeehouses as well. Second…the place of machines in this separation cannot be underemphasized. They are not only part of the wall; they ARE the wall, and they exemplify the role that artifacts can play in either facilitating or precluding humans’ social engagement with one another (2014:8).

This was an interesting factor in both cafés as I observed the role the coffee machines played in the development of an atmosphere conducive to conversation.

4.3 Theology of Place

It was mentioned in the previous chapter that discussions around better community or social capital, had initially been dominated by sociologists including Bourdieu and

Coleman, amongst others. Chris Baker then provided a quasi-theological voice, introducing the concepts of religious and spiritual capital, with the common meeting ground of discussion considered by Baker, to be secular spiritual capital (§3.2). The initial dominance by sociology and other related disciplines can also be said to be seen within discussions and research into third places. This thesis seeks to contribute a *theological* voice to this discussion, asking to what extent third places might be places of spiritual encounter. In order for spiritual conversation to even commence, there is a great deal of "unlearning" to do with concerning attitudes to place and related culture. Hjalmarson states:

> (Some) Christians today tend to see the prevailing culture as the secular world – a dark and unholy place. In the world we hold secular jobs, attend secular schools, listen to secular music, and watch secular movies. Even though all cultures express religion and spirituality in one form or another, the so-called secular world is often wrongly perceived as disenchanted from the sacred realm: the realm where God and Christian faith reside (2015:43).

This sacred/secular divide has been a long-standing issue. James Thwaites in his challenging book, *The Church Beyond the Congregation*, suggests that the, 'overriding issue within the Western church is that it has been considerably influenced by its Platonic, Greek inheritance which separated the sacred church from the secular world' (1999:36). In *Body and Blood: The Body of Christ in the Life of the Community (2019),* I expanded on this:

> Thwaite's point is that since the transition from a faith influenced by and built upon a Hebraic platform (where God in everyday life, work, and world was the norm) to one increasingly influenced from a Greek platform (that clearly distinguished between the spiritual and the secular) in the church's attempt to define and distinguish itself as a people set apart, the church has become increasingly disconnected from society in general. With both secular society and church "pushing" each other away over the centuries, the gap has understandably widened, thus the need for a re-negotiation of the relationship. Whereas the church within a theistic society was central to the functioning and decision-making of government and community, in what some are now declaring to be a post-Christian society in the Western world, this space and place of influence has been lost (2019:27).

This attitude which exists within parts of Western Christianity, can create a disconnect between what is seen as the secular world and the local Church. Hjalmarson summarises the impact of such theological attitudes:

> What's left is a perceived natural (secular) world devoid of the sacred. This process of de-Godding the world allowed inquirers to see the world as "objective", something neutral, and subject to empirical investigation [thus] we lose the ability to see and hear God at work in ordinary ways around us (2015:44).

This inability to see and hear God at work in ordinary ways around us, includes third places that bring people together in close proximity. As we consider the biblical narratives, this combination of people and place is inseparable. God meets people in place, promises place, and calls people to meet Him in place:

> As we travel with the people of God through Scripture on their redemptive journey, place provides the redemptive setting. Yet whilst these places vary in guise and construct (be it a mountain, tent, temple, or place of nativity), the central focus of the journey is always towards God. God's promise to Moses was that once rescued out of Egypt, the people would come "and worship me on this mountain". The centre piece of tabernacle and temple was not the furniture but the very presence of the Holy One of Israel. The journey of the magi ended in Bethlehem, the place where they could declare, "we . . . have come to worship him" (Hardy and Foster, 2019:72)

Mueller, within his work, *Sacramental Theology and the Third Place* (2015) argues that third places provide an ideal environment to develop a new sacramental place outside of the traditionally recognised buildings associated with mainstream denominations. Commenting on the demise of the Church as a central 'voice', specifically within what he considers to be a spiritual but not necessarily Christian post-secular culture, Mueller states:

> If this is how the community is interpreting the church [in effect no longer relevant], which includes Christianity, we need to reconsider how we connect with people…[particularly in] the third place (2015:86).

Mueller argues for sacramental theology and sacramental living to be an inseparable hallmark of Christians within their local community third places. Mueller calls for Christians to publicly live out their baptism and communion practices that speak of public confession of 'Jesus as Lord' and the celebration of the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus (2015:89), all within local third places. This concurs with my Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF) that sees the ongoing ministry of Jesus occurring in partnership with His people who live as the hermeneutic of the gospel (§2.1.1).

Pears highlights the importance of an awareness of power dynamics that are attached to place, critiquing those who focus more on the place solely being one that is, 'rooted, bounded and secure' (2015:33). Pears comments on how the Bible reveals complex power relationships connected to place:

> 'Where a central concern [of importance] is to understand the relationship between places and power, especially social and ideological expressions of power' (2015:35).

Whilst the concept of power related to place is not a central theme of this research, I touch upon it in chapter six under the theme of *Gathered Faith Community*, engaging with the work of John Elliot.

Hjalmarson laments the disappearance of place with the emergence of the global village and promotion of virtual 'space' (2015), seeing the recovery of this precious commodity as central to rediscovering an intimate missional engagement with the 'local'. Hjalmarson suggests that the super-fast erosion of place for vast social and trading space has created a craving by many to, 'get back to community' (2015:28). Such community spaces that (according to Hjalmarson):

> Allow us to see through new eyes and re-enter the textures and rhythms, colours and tones, beauty, complexity and severity of the places we dwell (2015:28).

Additionally, quoting Meyrowitz, Inge highlights the challenge to the importance of place by our increasing obsession with time, particularly within the Western world:

> Electronic media have combined previously distinct social settings, moving the dividing line between private and public behaviour towards the private, and weakened the relationship between social situations and physical places (2003:12).[43]

As the obsession for speedier travel and connection within the "global village" has accelerated, Inge laments its impact on the 'demise of (meaningful) place' (2003:13). Yet as the Church has theologically grappled with the ideas of *incarnation* and *Kingdom*, this has opened out discussions around God in the world and local place. Hjalmarson commenting on the incarnation, states:

> The incarnation does not mean that God is limited by space and time, it asserts the reality of space and time in the actuality of His relations with

[43] Meyrowitz, J, (1985), *No sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

> us – God can no more contract out of space and time than He can go back on the incarnation (2015:86).

The incarnation declares “God with us” and is captured imaginatively in the *Message* version of the Bible, stating how ‘The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the neighbourhood’ (John 1:14a). Equally, a growing understanding of the Kingdom of God, has challenged the sacred/secular divide. During my research within the two cafés, this aspect of being a Kingdom influence was heard within a number of interviews, with many within the café host teams seeing themselves as ambassadors of such. This was brought out in my earlier research reflections:

> When it comes to describing the Kingdom of God and its progressive influence, the Bible gives us plenty of material directly from the teachings of Jesus himself. In chapter 4 of Mark’s Gospel, Jesus describes the Kingdom as a “grain seed” and a “mustard seed” (Mark 4:26–32). Both of these pictures speak to us about the small but progressive nature of God’s Kingdom: “All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, and then the head, then the full kernel in the head” (Mark 4:28). In the early stages, the growth may seem insignificant; however, the Kingdom influence becomes increasingly visible (Foster, 2020:70).

Chapter six draws out the extent to which a number of patrons in both cafés saw their places as blessed or spiritual places.

4.4 Evangelical Place-Making

Ingie Hovland is an anthropologist with specific interest in Christianity.[44] Hovland considers the subject of *evangelical place-making* - how evangelicals seek to communicate their identity and central tenets as they create place (2016). Hovland highlights several factors, ‘that commonly occur in evangelical place-work’ (2016:331), categorising these into linguistic, material, temporal, personhood, trans local, transcendent and worldly concerns. Whilst Hovland’s ethnographic examples within her paper are more the traditional places associated with religious buildings, for example mission stations, and church halls; several of these factors were observed in The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés.

[44] https://religion.uga.edu/directory/people/ingie-hovland - accessed April 2022

4.4.1 The Importance of the Bible – linguistics and Material Concerns

Hovland's category of linguistics (2016:336) in evangelical place-making is referring to the importance of the message of the Bible being heard. Hovland highlights the emphasis within evangelical places that is placed on such as the location of the pulpit, and the importance of clear acoustics to maximise hearing, amongst other things. Closely linked with this is the importance of evangelical places being 'materially' distinctive in order to communicate their identity and theological priorities (2016:337). Within both cafés, the importance of the Bible was expressed within their visible material design. The Friendship Café had a verse from the Bible displayed behind the counter, with Bibles also displayed on a small bookshelf. The Welcome Café also had a verse from the Bible on display as patrons entered the café. Additionally, the inclusion of selected information around faith and church activity made available in both cafés, was positioned to prompt conversation and enquiry.

4.4.2 The Importance of Special Times

The question of *temporality* is also one raised by Hovland (2016:338), how evangelicals use 'time' as an indicator of their distinctiveness.[45] Both cafés sought to do this in varying ways. The Welcome Café operated on a Sunday yet with a different feel as it was dominated by its associated church (Gateway Church) that met in the same community facility. The Café was frequented by Gateway Church members before and after the church service which was held in the same building. Additionally, free tea and coffee were made available for both church people and regular café patrons, marking Sundays out as a 'special day'. The Friendship Café had an alternative approach in that it closed on Sundays, as those who usually volunteered within it were attending their church (Phoenix Church) worship service and after-church activities. The way that worship in their associated churches respectively impacted the operation of the two cafes, did at least convey the message that Sundays was different and that it was not 'business as usual'. The Friendship Café hosts' consistent prioritisation of worship on Sundays over café 'business as usual' was a notable and visible practice that set their café aside from many others.

[45] This is not an exclusive characteristic of evangelicals – many religious groups mark their identity with special days and events.

4.4.3 The Importance of Evangelical Identity

Hovland uses the term *translocal* to mean the evangelical community's connection with their wider world 'tribe', or the way they use space and place to be reminded of their larger affiliation, be that on a city wide, national, or international level (2016:343). It was not immediately obvious within both The Friendship and The Welcome Café what their larger affiliation was, and whilst this became apparent over time as patrons frequented the cafés, the hosts were careful not to over emphasise this. This echoes the reticence of the evangelicals in Strhan's research (2019), who were conscious of the negative perceptions that church or evangelical association may provoke.

4.4.4 The Importance of Being Different

Hovland's uses the term *transcendence* to speak of the demand within evangelicalism to be 'in the world but not of it' (2016:346). A constant tension of the need to be different to "engage with" but not be "Immersed in" the world. For some evangelicals, this not only involves geographical location such as gathering separately, but also refers to them morally and ethically positioning themselves apart from "the world" through taught and learnt behaviours. This might include acts of generosity, lack of profane language or refusal to engage in gossip, amongst other things. In my interviews with the cafe management and host teams, a number of them emphasised the importance of their individual and collective behaviour and communication being an important 'witness' of their faith.

4.4.5 The Importance of Making a Difference

A further category, according to Hovland, is that of *worldly concerns.* The desire of evangelicals to make a difference, to impact the world around them. This is arguably the major motivation for both of the café host teams and their associated organisations. Both organisations desired to see transformation of place and people. Hovland states:

> Why do evangelicals seek to be 'in' the world while not being 'of' it? Why do they not strive toward withdrawal, toward being 'out' of the world? Part of the answer to this lies in the strong evangelical wish to be, precisely, evangelical. Evangelicals do not counter the world by renouncing it, but by aiming to save it. They often desire to create places that are in some sense converted and act as witnesses (2016:349).

Hjalmarson speaks about the need for the Christian to see themselves as:

> Priests in business offices, driving buses, in medical clinics, in homes and in churches – for place making is culture creating (2015:98).

This theology of a permeating "Kingdom influence" on people and place, was a significant motivation for the café host communities. Rumsey concurs with such an approach:

> The risen Christ…is not only found in the living word and the broken bread, but also grounded in a definite kind of local encounter (2017:3).

Seeing third places as places of spiritual encounter challenges those that might seek to restrict "God encounters" to specific buildings considered to be holy. Members of both café host teams expressed their desire for their café to be a place of faith encounter. Additionally, the desire to see patrons converted to Christianity was a core objective of the café management teams. The host teams' understanding of this objective was broad and varied, with there being a distinct difference between The Friendship and The Welcome Café hosts.

4.5 Authentic Church

Across the various Christian traditions, debate as to what constitutes an authentic church gathering have also ensued. The relevance of traditional church gatherings in both their location and format have come under question (McLaren, 2006; Roxburgh and Boren, 2009).[46] This tension is also captured within Watkin's and Shepherd's research into a Messy Church expression in Croydon (2014) which fundamentally asks, 'Can a community not centred around personal faith…or around Sunday worship....be 'church'?' (2014:93). With the development of more diverse community -based expressions of church, Watkins and Shepherd caution:

> As the movement of Fresh Expressions[47] seems to go on growing in numbers and diversity, these questions are coming into sharper focus; indeed, they may even be seen as contributing to a certain polarisation of positions, which focus on the responses to the questions as to whether this or that Fresh Expressions fulfils 'the criteria' for being 'proper church' (2014:94).

[46] McLaren and Roxburgh are considered key authors in what has been termed the 'missional conversation' – which in general terms questions the relevance of a model of traditional church birthed within Christendom.

[47] Fresh Expressions (FX) is a Church of England network of alternative community-based churches – see: https://freshexpressions.org.uk/

This polarisation is borne out with the emergence of publications defending the 'institution of the Church' against what many see as a dilution of the Christian gathering. DeYoung and Kluck provide one such example in their work, *Why we love the Church, In praise of Institutions and organised Religion* (2009). Here they cite one objective for its publication as being to counter:

> The growing movement among self-proclaimed evangelicals and in the broader culture to get spirituality without religion, to find a relationship without rules, and have God without the Church (2009:13).

DeYoung and Kluck highlight the centrality of the institutional Church in the purposes of God for the world, however imperfect it is perceived to be, and critique what they see as the obsession of some parts of the Christian Church with numerical growth, leading to the development of various community expressions of church to facilitate this. Such an obsession, they conclude, is flawed and, 'alien to the New Testament' (2009:31). DeYoung and Kluck's preference is to exhort the Church to focus on the gospel as its core message of hope for the world (2009:32-35).

Such polarised debates that pitch traditional forms of church against others considered to be more contextual, are unhelpful. Within Watkins and Shepherd's research, they helpfully draw out a number of balanced observations from the Messy Church expression they observed, not only as a place of community and belonging, but also:

> a place where encounter with God is possible if people are prepared to: 'seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us' (2014:100).

The importance of being able to define a church-based project in terms of it being an authentic form of gathered church is seen in such networks as Fresh Expressions, including Café Church.[48] Whilst the six-stage model for creating a Fresh Expressions Church is described as 'non-prescriptive', stage five is about the 'Church taking shape' (Cray, 2012:19), reflecting the importance for some Christians to see familiar characteristics of what they consider to be 'proper church'. The extent to which The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés could be considered to be a 'gathered faith community' is drawn out within chapter six as one of the emerging themes from my interviews with the café hosts and patrons.

[48]See https://freshexpressions.org.uk/

4.6 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted the unique importance and notion of the third place as an environment conducive to conversation, with Oldenburg's suggested characteristics being demonstrated as central to third place creation. Considerations of café ethnography have highlighted the human and non-human elements that help make a café/coffee-shop function as a third place. Additionally, both sociologically and theologically, the importance of place has been under attack with the advent of the global village and virtual place, and an overemphasis on the divide between sacred and secular space. Hovland's study into evangelical place-making provided insights into how some evangelicals use the design and layout of their 'place' to communicate their faith and identity.[49] Ongoing tensions regarding what 'gathered church' should look like have also been highlighted. The next chapter, the first of two fieldwork chapters, assesses the extent to which The Friendship and The Welcome Café were third places, considering how both cafés contributed to the sense of social capital, also assessing the extent to which the host teams and the physical design of each café, communicated their Christian faith and identity.

[49] Many groups, faith and non-faith, use 'place' to communicate their distinctives and identity.

5 Chapter five: Where Community well-being meets Conversionism: A Tale of Two Cafés

This research located in Practical Theology investigates *How evangelical third place cafés facilitate gospel conversations*. This chapter and the next comprise the fieldwork chapters of my thesis.[50] Drawing on the interviews and observations I conducted within The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés, within this chapter I assess to what extent the objectives of the café management teams were achieved. These were to:

- Develop a place that enhanced a local sense of community (social capital), and to
- Develop a place that facilitated gospel conversations.

Dealing with each café in turn, this chapter first considers how each café contributed to the local sense of social capital. The chapter then considers the extent to which the café hosts communicated their Christian faith and evangelical identity, including through the physical layout of their cafés. Finally, the attitudes and reactions of the café patrons to the hosts faith-sharing and identity are analysed.[51] I first detail my fieldwork findings from The Friendship Café, moving on to The Welcome Café, comparing and contrasting the findings that emerge.

Chapter six then assesses key themes that emerged out of the fieldwork, with both chapters informing the core and subsidiary questions of my research previously summarised in §1 and §2.2.1, ultimately informing the research contribution to knowledge, detailed in chapter seven. Additionally, in several places within this chapter and the next, I indicate where my Christocentric Incarnational Framework (CIF) and my analytical four-voices framework are explicitly more visible as I assess the conversations and interactions within the cafés. This in contrast to some practical theologians that prefer to keep their underpinning frameworks 'hidden' and more implicit (Watkins:2020).

[50] In chapter five I use a deductive approach to the fieldwork – assessing the extent to which the café management stated objectives were understood and carried out in both cafés – in chapter six I use an inductive approach from the analysed interview transcripts in order to identify common themes beyond the stated objectives.

[51] Chapter five address my core research and subsidiary questions in §1 related to the café contribution to a sense of community and the café host & café layout contribution to faith-sharing & identity.

5.1 The Friendship Café – Contribution to Social Capital

Chapter three previously highlighted the contribution of FBOs in the development of social capital, with Chris Baker defining this in terms of religious and spiritual capital (§3.2). Chapter four detailed the importance of third-place characteristics (§4.1) and the influence of human and non-human elements of café operation and design in the creation and maintenance of a third place environment (§4.1 and 4.2). This section draws out from the fieldwork the extent to which these factors were evident within The Friendship Café.

Figure 4 – The Friendship Café

The Friendship Café was run by volunteers from Phoenix Church (Coventry) and was located in the centre of an estate area considered within government statistics to be a deprived area. The café operated as a *missional project.* Such projects based upon a Missio Dei theology see an incarnational strategy (see §1.1) as central to engaging with local communities, and so for Phoenix Church and the volunteers at The Friendship Café, the location away from the main church building was an important aspect of their approach to mission. In an interview with Lesley, The Friendship Café manager, she told me how the vision for the café came about:

> Ok, so originally it started as part of some research that I was doing for a degree and at the time I was serving the church and the leadership, and I was overlooking the toddler group at church, and I was really conscious that the toddler group had never really attracted mums from the local estate, that we were trying to reach. We always had maybe one or maybe two but we never got many and so we as a church, were looking at how we could evangelise to those people I suppose and get

> them to church and get them to come to a toddler group that was already there. But I was conscious that they weren't coming - so as part of my research I went over the road to the Estate and started researching with the mums outside the school and in various places, asked, first of all whether they'd heard of toddler group and heard of the church and also then, maybe why they weren't coming.
>
> And so a result of that, I suddenly realised that the make-up of the estate, the main road between the Estate and the church was like a brick wall and people wouldn't come across and it didn't matter, make any difference what we did in the church, we just was not on their radar as to come across the road. So if we as a church wanted to meet those people over the road, *we would have to go to them*[52] and so at that point, I started to really pray and think about what we could do.
>
> I was thinking particularly at the time of maybe a toddler group over there, but then it became clear that the café, which was, at the time was being run by another church was just not being utilised in the day-time and it was minimal use - and so through the fact that I was, actually in a local community forum with another person from Elim, who was involved with the Café, it soon became obvious, really to me. It was a no brainer that we should get involved with what they were already doing and try and share the vision and then also utilise the Café more in that area, for it to become a known place (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Lesley's church was located across a busy road from the estate, and her research with local mums revealed this to be a barrier to people coming to church-based projects. Lesley's course of study had emphasised a Missio Dei, incarnational approach to local mission, and so within her dissertation research, Lesley saw the need for a project that was embedded within the local community, the need to 'go to them'. Lesley was keen for the church to develop a café that would become a "known place". The importance of local place attachment is an important aspect of café third place theory which was brought out in chapter four (§4.2.3).

Josie, a regular café patron, described the café not only in terms of a place that sold good food at affordable prices, but one that also gave a broader sense of community:

> I do recommend people to come over, especially in my little office as well. The other day actually, well it's like most times when I come into the office I'll say, "You should go and get your lunch from there because

[52] Italicised words indicate interviewee emphasis. Note Lesley's emphasis reflecting an incarnational understanding.

> I've just got this jacket potato, cheese and beans and it was like £1.20" or whatever it was, you know and I was like, you just can't beat obviously, the friendliness, the food's lovely, *it's just a nice, I don't know, you feel like you're putting something back into the community by coming here* (Josie, patron, The Friendship Café).

Within The Friendship Café, during one of my interviews, Lucy, a local council youth worker, reflected on the friendly welcome and the community feel that the café gave and had:

> This café…for me, did not seem like a usual café, it was not business focused, it was community and people minded. People took real intention in knowing names and just generally showing an interest where people were in their lives. I was running a youth centre for young people aged 11 to 25, so I thought it would be a great place for our young people to go, great resource, and it was a great way of me seeing how those people connected with the community, because I wanted to also raise the profile of the centre (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

Lucy had a real interest in the community, and it was this aspect of community enhancement that first attracted her to the café.[53] At the beginning of our interview Lucy told me how she first became aware of the café and what first motivated her to go to it:

> I didn't really connect with the *café* until I lost my job in an office, and then I became more working within the local community and connected through a stakeholder meeting. I met the owner of the café at the meeting who invited me across, she was very welcoming and inviting, so I thought 'yes I will, you know, I'll pop in' and, sort of, wanted to connect more with what was on - going on in the area for young people (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

Lucy's attitude reflected the progressive localism (Baker, 2014) and secular spiritual capital theories (Baker and Miles-Watson, 2008) I discussed in chapter three (§3.2), where the contribution of FBOs to the local community is welcomed, and where ethical and moral motivations align. Lucy, as a local community worker, was often heard in the café speaking about her work amongst the local young people. Lucy expressed a desire to create a meaningful community where the young people could feel proud to live. The estate where The Friendship Café was located was generally considered to be a deprived area. The buildings were grey and cramped together,

[53] Informing research subsidiary question: To what extent did the cafés contribute to a sense of community? (§1)

though a number of private build and housing association projects had been developed in more recent years. The police were often patrolling in this area known for high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. A number of professionals like Lucy used the café to come and share about their work with local people, and to also share their desire to see the local community enhanced.

I sensed a similar motivation for Mary, a mental health worker. Mary worked within walking distance of the café and had noticed that several of the people she worked with were often in the café, sat chatting. Mary's desire to enhance the local community experience for her clients, many who struggled socially, was a principal factor for her early connections with The Friendship Café as she saw them engaging in conversation over a coffee or all-day breakfast. When I asked her about her early impression of the café, she said:

> People were friendly and approachable and as helpful as could be with what you wanted. Somewhere also, where people I work with in the community can come in to have a sit down, somewhere they feel safe (Mary, patron, The Friendship Café).

Lucy and Mary often exchanged information and stories about their work. Mary worked at the Mind centre with those struggling with mental health. Whilst the centre carried out excellent work with their clients, Mary saw The Friendship Café as a place where they could feel safe and integrate a little more outside of their own client group. Mary sensed this was an important place for her clients to bond with the wider community. Mary's connection with the café started when the group she worked with started to use the café premises on evenings, to attend cookery classes.

Considering social capital theory and drawing on Power and Wilmott (§3.1), it was evident in these early interviews that The Friendship Café seemed to be having a dual impact of enhancing individual connections (bonding capital) and making connections with other community groups and initiatives (bridging capital). The connection with other local community groups was an important part of the café management strategy to develop strong local relationships. This created a sense of bridging capital as various local groups used the facility outside of normal café operating times. Additionally, The Friendship Café developed into a place of progressive localism (§3.2) as it connected local professionals like Lucy and Mary

with the church host team, who wanted the café to become a local community hub.[54] In this, The Friendship Café was helping local professionals achieve their own goals and ideals regarding community enhancement. Joanne, another café patron who worked locally, expressed a sense of community connection within the café:

> You can't come in without having a chat with someone, which you don't really get that, so it's great I think for people that do need that, are lonely and do want to talk and connect with others, so even if you just want to drop in, get your lunch and go, it just feels, you're made to feel welcome (Joanne, patron, The Friendship Café).

Joanne's observations aligned with the theory of bonding capital (§3.1), which emphasises the importance of individual connections. For Joanne, this was an important aspect of the café's purpose within the local area, that it connected local people together. Speaking about the attitude of the café hosts, Joanne also stated, 'this feels like these people are in it for, you know, making a difference and really wanting to be a part of something'. Whilst Joanne did not articulate what that 'part of something' was, her statement reflected the contribution of The Friendship Café to the local sense of social capital. Molly, a member of the café host team, commented in terms that reflected the bridging element of community connection:

> It's good to see people from the community coming together and talk about stuff, they see this as a real hub to chat about things and share ideas and talk about stuff they are doing (Molly, host, The Friendship Café).

Josie – a regular patron, expressed how the café helped her own sense of belonging within the community:

> It just feels like you belong here. The people make you feel welcome and now the other regulars chat to you as well. I look forward to popping in and catching up with people (Josie, patron, The Friendship Café).

Mike, another regular patron, saw the café as a place he could come and relax, with known people, comfortable surroundings, and a real sense of being a home from home:

> You know, there's no rush for me to get off because there's nobody making me feel intimidated, there's nobody putting pressure on me. I can quite happily sit back and have a cup of coffee and just chill out for a while. And if the centre wasn't open, I know that I would come here so

[54] Progressive localism is used by Baker to define how FBOs contribute to common community aims and objectives held by other local stakeholders – and are seen as a welcome community partner.

> this would be my second home from home, more or less (Mike, patron, The Friendship Café).

This created an interesting dynamic within The Friendship Café between local professionals, some who lived and worked locally, and the broader community. Each expressed the contribution of the café to the sense of community that reflected slightly different aspects of social capital.

In my participant observations, this sense of The Friendship Café being a local community hub extended to other community groups that used the café for their meetings, desiring to increase their own profile within the community. The local housing officer held a surgery at the café one afternoon per week. The local craft and weaving club offered demonstration sessions. Cooking sessions on evenings also expanded the profile of the café and underpinned its place as a key community stakeholder that significantly contributed, if not quickly became, the hub for enhanced social capital and connection.[55]

In addition to their geographical position and location with the community, the *physical* layout of third places has been the focus of much research regarding its impact on patron experience, ownership, loyalty, and a sense of belonging and community (§4.2). In the Friendship Café there were five small tables that when full seated some twenty-two people. On these tables there were typical café-style tablecloths, in addition to children's artwork on the walls reproduced onto tablecloths in picture frames. These pictures, drawn by local children, including children of the café hosts and patrons, were occasionally the subject of conversation. It was these sorts of personal touches displayed that helped create a sense of ownership within The Friendship Café. The coffee producing machinery within the café was small and unobtrusive (Manzo, 2014), maximising the space that was available for tables. The position of the machine meant that as the barista prepared the drinks, they could still engage in conversation with the patron. Luke reflected on this:

> The little café bit where drinks are made, isn't as cut off as it is with named brands of coffee shops so the person that is making the coffee can be seen by the person that is ordering it and they can see exactly what you are doing, conversations can be had that way. When you sit down you can still see the person behind the counter and speak to them (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

[55] Again, informing my research into the impact of the cafés on the sense of community.

Molly reflected on this too

> It's good we can chat to individuals and everyone at the same time, whenever. The layout of the counter and café makes it easy to do being a small place (Molly, host, The Friendship Café)

Josie, a patron, commented:

> I like the fact that it is all open and everyone can see everyone. As soon as you come in, the people serving you are chatty and want to know your latest news (Josie, patron, The Friendship Café).

In chapter four (§4.2), Manzo gave an example of a coffee machine at a busy airport, specifically located to discourage host and patron interaction, as the airport café objectives were to maximise patron throughput. In contrast to Manzo's "busy airport", in The Friendship Café, the coffee machine was located to ensure that it maximised dialogue between hosts and patrons. In addition, several comfortable armchairs were arranged in a semi-circle in one corner. The layout of these chairs was designed to encourage patrons to stay and chat in the café, seeing this as a place to 'get comfortable'. Commenting on this, Luke stated:

> It is all fairly open. There is quite a few seated areas with tables, there is also a little seating area where there is sort of a few chairs in a semi-circle, and that is where a lot of conversations are had amongst people who perhaps don't know each other, but because you're not sitting at a table it doesn't feel as awkward (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

Such characteristics were brought out by Waxman in chapter four (§4.2), as factors that help create a third place environment.

Within my participant observations over an extended 15-month period, the café was rarely full but tended to have a steady stream of regular locals with the occasional unknown visitor. The menu was priced at the lower end of the café market with food ranging from the traditional all-day breakfast through to toasties and a mix of sandwiches. The cuisine was standard, familiar, and freshly made to order. To augment the standard provision, the barista style coffee machine contributed to the sound, smell and feel of the café (Manzo, 2014) with home-made cakes on display to enhance that third place sense of a home from home. These non-human elements were a significant factor in the patron experience. Regarding the layout and general 'feel' of the café, patrons interviewed said:

> I think it's very welcoming, there's no loud music so it is about people. There's no hidden booths or it's not in darkness, it's very open and very

> clear. So, it is-you know the tables are nice and clean. It's just a simple place to have good home cooked food (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).
>
> I like the fact it's quite small, which means that, I don't go to places where it's busy, I don't like crowds and that, so I like the fact that it's small. It's always a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. It's a place you can go, even if you don't feel quite on top of things. You know, the atmosphere makes you feel at ease (Ruth, patron, The Friendship Café).

Ruth, as a local professional, was open about her own struggles, admitting times where she did not feel 'on top of things'. The friendly, relaxed atmosphere of the café helped Ruth 'feel at ease'. This sense of feeling at ease came out in my interview with Ruth, as she was relaxed to speak about her experiences of faith she had encountered in the past.

These statements revealed important aspects of The Friendship Café as a third place, as somewhere that was welcoming, about people, and a place where locals could 'feel at ease'. This seemed significant for the patrons' openness to conversation. Drawing upon Oldenburg's third-place theory, The Friendship Café seemed to provide a:

> Neutral ground upon which people could gather, a place where individuals [could] come and go as they please, in which none [were] required to play host, and in which all [felt] at home and comfortable (1999:22).

The physical factors within the café were designed to encourage host and patron interaction. This came out in the interviews as people commented on a place conducive to conversation and sharing. Lucy noted during one of her visits to the café:

> While I was waiting for my food, somebody had come in who is a little anxious and quite worried about something and the way that the staff dealt with that person I thought…this is just not an ordinary café, this is a place where people feel comfortable to come in and talk openly about what's troubling and worrying them (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

The comfortable atmosphere of the café was just one physical factor that was important to Lucy. Within the café, in addition to the host team, the physical factors such as the seating and lighting (§4.2), were also important contributing factors to the creation of an environment conducive to conversation and a sense of community.

The capacity of a well-run and well-designed third place café to encourage connection is a key factor in achieving a sense of community. Across the broad patron group of mums, carers, professionals, and others, each could find something within The Friendship Café that resonated with their own need for connection. Beyond this, other patrons working locally, recognised the café as a valuable place that contributed to their broader objectives for enhanced community connection. Indeed, the preservation of an environment that appealed to a broad patron base was an important factor in the management's day to day operation of the café. During my interview with Lesley, the café manager, she stated how for a short while a group of mums came every day with their children to 'stay and play', creating a somewhat chaotic atmosphere:

> Their children were running around, and it wasn't creating a good atmosphere for other people to come in and have a decent conversation so we had to take action on that (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

I had observed this challenge over a number of days and was intrigued how Lesley might deal with this dominance of one specific group. Lesley's approach was to speak to the group of mums and appeal to the broader objective for the café to be a place where everyone could feel comfortable. Other patrons were in the café at the time, with one or two others supporting Lesley's approach and commenting on how they had benefitted from its broad community appeal. Lesley's relationship with this group of regular mums had been developed over several months, and so the conversation was able to be conducted in a congenial manner.

Throughout my interviews with the café patrons, words like community, family, friendly, approachable, helpful, and comfortable, frequently emerged in relation to the patron's experiences of the café. These terms reflected the third place and café ethnographic theories of Oldenburg and Waxman, as detailed in chapter four.

5.2 The Friendship Café – Faith-Sharing & Evangelical Identity

This section details the approach of The Friendship Café management team in communicating their faith and evangelical identity, and to what extent these were understood and practiced by the host team. Additionally, this section details the extent to which the café layout communicated the hosts' identity, informing my subsidiary questions in §1. It was clear from my interviews with the managers of both

cafés that their Christian faith was an important aspect of what they wanted to communicate. However, there was a significant difference in the understanding and application of this objective by the host teams of each café. In an interview with Lesley, the manager of The Friendship Café, she emphasised the importance of the café being a place of faith-sharing:

> Some people in church would look at the marginalised as those more needy of the Gospel but actually everybody needs the Gospel – whether they're in work or not. So…as far as we're concerned, whoever walks in the door will be chatted to in the same sort of way…I think the thing is, we've made it quite clear to the volunteers what we're about. So that they come knowing that they're there to talk, they're there to share their faith, if that is appropriate[56] (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Chapter three highlighted the importance of conversionism as one of the central tenets of evangelical faith (§3.4). This priority was something Lesley made 'quite clear' to the volunteers who served on the host team. Additionally, Lesley understood the unique appeal of the café to a broad patron base, expressing the importance of faith-sharing with 'whoever walk(ed) in the door'. Lesley shared how several conversations around faith had taken place in the café:

> People ask "Why are you doing it? Where do you come from?" and straight away we say that we're from the Church down the road - and that opens the conversation straight away into something that people often ask about why we're doing it and we talk about Jesus and our love of Christ. So… it's straight away, we're sharing our faith. Almost within, quite often fifteen, twenty minutes of people coming in. Quite a few people come in, I would say, have had contact with the Church but have also fallen out with the Church and quite often when we start saying that we're from the Church, they start asking questions and they've got questions. I can think of quite a few people that come in who've got questions about their faith and, and obviously they've been hurt by a Church or perhaps some bad incident and so quite often that could be an opener to relight that fire and you know, just that ember that can be there. And then others, I can think of another chap who came and has mental health issues and engages in very little conversation. So… for him… we have to show our faith, because you can't hold a conversation very much. But, yet, for him, not only recently, he came back having had many traumas and all sorts of stuff but he then prayed with somebody and he came back so excited because he said, "I've just prayed with somebody!" and he had got a mustard seed, I would call it a

[56] Lesley's comment reflects the conversionist and activist emphasis of her evangelical tradition.

> mustard seed of faith and he's been allowed to express that. He, he tried to come to Church but he couldn't do Church, it didn't suit him. He got totally overwhelmed by the amount of people that were there and yet for him, café is Church and he is growing in his faith, very mild steps, minor, minor steps… he's growing in his faith. So it's a different place for different people (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Lesley's statement showed a flexible approach to faith-sharing, one that considered the context and story of each patron she was speaking to. The Friendship Café provided what I call a "pre-ecclesial space" where faith-based dialogue could take place. Nevertheless, Lesley used interesting language about the café *being* church too, something I will explore further in chapter six under the theme of *gathered faith community.*[57]

During one of my visits to the café, Lesley brought to my attention a contract of understanding that each volunteer was asked to read and acknowledge concerning the café objectives. These objectives included general health and safety procedures including personal cleanliness and general instructions on timekeeping, attendance, and confidentiality. Surprisingly, there was nothing formally written within the contract about faith-sharing. Lesley told me that the faith-sharing objectives of the café were discussed on an individual basis as people came to volunteer. This approach demonstrated the café hosts' overall emphasis on verbal communication as opposed to printed declarations of their faith. This reliance on verbal communication provided an interesting contrast with The Welcome Café that relied much more on printed communication of their faith and identity.

The Friendship Café host team saw faith-sharing as part of their mission to the local community, which was underpinned by its host organisation, Phoenix Church. The church's weekly bulletin was designed to inform church members of ongoing activity in the café and was used to encourage members to become involved with what they considered to be a 'missional project'. One church bulletin stated:

> We thank God for the witness of The Friendship café in the heart of the local community. Please do encourage Lesley and the team whether it is in prayer or more practical help. Why not pop along and enjoy the company and see what God is up to? (Phoenix Church Bulletin, 17/11/19).

[57] Chapter six will also inform my subsidiary research question that sought to find out the extent the cafés were manifesting Christian community – see §1.

Phoenix Church was the major source of volunteers for the café and thus provided a pool of people that possessed a common understanding of the objectives and values of The Friendship Café. However, the need to carefully manage the balance between faith-sharing and the creation of a third-place community, was evident in the café host team interviews. Lesley stated:

> So, the idea was really based on, we wanted it to be a neutral space where people could come, a safe space where people can come. Those people that get marginalised for different reasons those people who just need somewhere to hang out but we, we needed to be, as I say, a neutral space, where people could come, that actually a safe space - but one where we can express our faith (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Lesley's statement reflected the dual objective to provide a safe, community space, yet one that facilitated gospel conversations. Luke, one of the café volunteers, also demonstrated a clear understanding of the faith-sharing purpose of the café, stating:

> The ultimate goal is to see everyone that comes in come to faith… they, the café management, shared that with me from the beginning (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

It was evident with my conversation with Luke that he had been given a clear brief from the beginning of his volunteering at The Friendship Café, of the importance of seeing café patrons 'come to faith'. Luke's answer emphasised the priority of faith-sharing over other objectives, describing it as the 'ultimate goal'. This reflects the ongoing tensions within evangelicalism where normative voices often pitch proclamation against social action (§3.4). Luke described some examples of faith-sharing that he had witnessed and had been involved with:

> We've had one person who came along quite a lot to the café, they were quite keen, they were usually there before it opens. Then they came along to church through it and they even said something at one point, that they want to come to faith - and they wanted to know God more. So, they have started their journey. There has been a few other people who have come along to church because of it, they haven't necessarily come to faith yet but they are a lot more open to church than they were when I first met them. I think that is just because we have approached them with a non-judgemental attitude…. I've heard stories from other workers who have had faith conversations, quite good ones. I know we've had one story in the past of someone who is like now a full on church goer at Phoenix because of the café, because of

> the relationships that were made here (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

Luke's statement revealed a number of interesting tensions and priorities. Luke highlighted the fact that several of the café patrons had attended Phoenix church. It was interesting that Luke saw attendance at the church as a key measure of the patron's interest in faith, yet he also spoke in terms of *journey*. This statement gave an interesting insight into an evangelical, conversionist approach that sees the need to be able to see tangible and visible evidence of what they express to be *conversion.* For many Christians, church attendance is one such indicator. Chapter three considered how conversion can often be expressed by evangelicals in rather linear terms that emphasise the need for a crisis conversion that leads to an immediate and dramatic change in someone's character or habits (§3.4). The dynamics within The Friendship Café challenged this concept, a theme I deal with in chapter six under the heading of *journey*.

Luke also mentioned the importance of having a *non-judgemental* attitude and how he saw this as a key reason why some of the patrons were open to faith and subsequently came along to the church. Luke's emphasis reflects Strhan's research (§3.5) which highlighted the self-consciousness that some evangelicals feel about being portrayed as judgemental and intolerant.[58]

Luke's statement aligned with the stated goal of The Friendship Café management team, emphasising the importance of faith-sharing. Julie, another volunteer at the café, reflected a similar understanding and approach to Luke:

> So, when Lesley did her research for her dissertation, it became clear that people weren't going to cross that road to come to Phoenix Church and yet there was a perfectly good community café there that they would go into, that they were going into and that, that could become their church, a place where they could meet Christians, in an informal, I guess, a neutral setting and make friends and learn about Christ through the way we interact with them, through our behaviour, maybe the way we deal with their concerns, their questions.[59] So yeah, a place to come and have a chat but also to be influenced in a good way (Julie, host, The Friendship Café).

[58] Luke's concerns reflect reticence of many evangelicals who are encouraged to verbally share their faith yet are reluctant to so, often due to media stereotypes depicting judgmental evangelicals.
[59] Julie's statement reflects my CIF that sees God's people as a living 'hermeneutic' that the café patrons could 'read'.

Similar to Lesley, Julie spoke of the café becoming a church community.[60] Yet, like Luke, Julie was also clear that the focus of the conversations was to be 'about Christ'. Additionally, Julie used language that reflected the café as a neutral place that facilitated conversation, an important third place characteristic of neutrality expressed by Oldenburg (§4.1). Molly, another café volunteer, agreed that the café was a comfortable place for faith-based conversations:

> I see this place as my outlet for mission, for sharing Jesus in the community. Its, yeah, a friendly place where people feel relaxed, and that makes it natural for us to share about our faith. This is why we do this (Molly, host, The Friendship Café).

This common understanding of the café volunteers, that the café was a place to develop conversations about Jesus, was clear. This was also seen in my regular participant observations as I witnessed the café team engaging in faith-based conversations. The general layout of the café was important as it facilitated the capacity for conversations to develop from individual tables to café-wide discussions. Lesley commented on this:

> We have got a more table seated area and we have a more sort of informal sofa area. It's all in the same area, everything, so everyone really hears everyone else's conversations. I think that's a good thing, I mean, not, people can't have quieter conversations if they so require by sitting quietly at a table, and you don't have to spurt everything out but people do eaves drop on conversations and that's for the good, most of the time. Moreso, if Christians are in sight, having conversations, people quite often drop into those conversations - and we can accommodate that quite easily. So, I think the set-out of the café helps. I think certain cafés that were more, had more sort of like booth areas would not accommodate, would not operate the way we do - so I think having quite an open plan space works really well…and also as our serving area for teas and coffee, where the staff are, is very much in the open, so the staff are encouraged to join in the conversations. So…you can be joining in straight across the room, so you can have whole conversation with somebody and quite often, you do find that most of the café join in with you (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Luke reflected on this aspect of the café layout too, how it helped to encourage broader, café-wide conversations:

> It is quite a small Café and sound travels quite far with it…you could be having a conversation with someone who is a Christian in the corner and someone in the other corner could hear what you are saying - and

[60] Chapter 6 - §6.3 details the extent to which this was the case.

> through that we have seen conversations come out of that with people who are not from a faith background - asking “What do you mean by that, why did you say that? (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

The layout of the café facilitated the “passive inclusion” of all of those within the café, should they so wish to listen in to the broader café conversations. Private table conversations were possible, and were more common, yet occasionally developed into a broader café host and patron dialogue. This was more so when the café was less busy, when perhaps only several regular patrons were in. This created opportunities for a form of what I term *passive* evangelism, as hosts could have open conversations about matters of faith, with patrons able to listen in and participate if they so desired.

Having considered how the café hosts communicated their faith and identity, I was also keen to consider the extent to which The Friendship Café as a *place* communicated the host’s faith and evangelical identity.[61] Whilst the café itself projected an image of openness with ‘nothing hidden’, the conversionist agenda and identity of the host team was not immediately obvious. A leaflet advertising a church-based event occasionally appeared on the serving/order counter but equally, other leaflets advertising local community group activities and events were displayed. Literature or artwork with a ‘gospel intentionality’ did not dominate the café. A single bookshelf (Figure 4 below) held a small number of Bibles and faith related books, along with some children’s books. From time to time, patrons were seen with their children, sat in the comfortable chairs reading one of the Bible-based story books. These low key, unobtrusive bookshelves, containing faith-based literature, provided a non-threatening way for the café hosts to communicate their faith and the importance of the Bible. The books, particularly the children’s books, provided a form of subtle faith-enquiry for the patrons who so wished to access them. Watkins in her research into a Messy Church in Croydon, speaks of ‘ecclesiological overflow’ (2014:104). In this, Watkins was specifically speaking about elements of Messy Church finding their way into the homes of those attending. For example, this might be through children’s drawings of Bible scenes, or even as children shared what they had been doing. Occasionally, parents and carers within The Friendship Café asked

[61] Informing the question: To what extent did the physical café layout communicate the hosts’ Christian identity? – see §1.

if they could take a book home that their child was particularly enjoying. This 'overflow' from the café was a frequent occurrence.

Within the café, a solitary picture with a verse of scripture sat on the wall behind the order desk (see figure 5 below). This verse was taken from Psalm 46 and read, 'Be still and know that I am God'. Such communication supported the sense of calm, peace and safety that were expressed in many of the café patron interviews. The presence of Bibles and Bible verses demonstrated the biblicist emphasis typical of many evangelicals (Bebbington:1989, Smith:2021). However, their subtle approach to communicating their identity also demonstrated a transition away from a more normative, traditional 'proclamation' approach of faith-sharing. Hardy's research into Phoenix Church demonstrated how being exposed to a Missio Dei theology impacted many members' awareness and understanding of local mission and their role within it. The focus on a missional strategy of incarnation and the influence of Newbigin as the members of Phoenix Church saw themselves as, 'The hermeneutic of the gospel' (Newbigin,1989:227) had, according to Hardy's research, strongly impacted the missional approach of Phoenix church and its associated community projects. During one of Hardy's interviews with a member of Phoenix Church, he quoted Beverley's reflection in her theological transition:

> Beverley provided similar evidence of her own ordinary espoused theology of Missio Dei, because of the impact of the Acts and Holy Spirit series on her: 'now, I just kind of figure wherever I am, that's my mission field - so whatever I'm doing, um, for example, last year I learned to make jam, for me that was massive, there were all sorts of things associated with it. I think God just showed me it doesn't matter what you do there's a mission in it. There's a mission in jam. I learnt to bake, there's a mission in that, you know. You can give away anything and it's all in the name of Jesus, and that's where I stand. So it doesn't matter what I do, it could be cycling, it could be anything, you know that's what it is really for me'. What was it that was 'massive' for Beverley? It was the realisation that to be a missionary meant that everything she did was a participation in the 'mission of God'. No longer did she think missionaries were those special 'Spirit filled believers', but she was also one in her own right. She, like other members of Phoenix, linked her sense of missionary calling to the Missio Dei (Hardy, RGMT[62] paper:2019).

[62] RGMT – was the Research Group for Ministerial Theology that was held periodically at Roehampton University, where various research papers were presented.

This understanding represented a significant shift for members of Phoenix Church, including the hosts of The Friendship Café. The café team communicated their evangelical identity through both the design and layout of the café (§4.4) and through their relational approach to faith-sharing. The inclusion of Bible-based material within the café reflected the host organisation's emphasis on biblicism, with their conversionist motivations being demonstrated through conversation as they developed relationships with the patrons. Within my conversations with the patrons, some simply referred to the café being run by 'the church' and did not enquire as to the specific distinctives of the church.

Figure 5 – Bookshelf – The Friendship Café

Figure 6 – Framed scripture verse – The Friendship Café

5.3 The Friendship Café - The Patron's Attitudes to Faith-Sharing

This section details the attitudes and reactions of the café patrons to the faith-sharing objectives and identity of the host team. It was interesting during my research to see the interaction between the café hosts and patrons, as the patrons' awareness of the café host's identity became clearer. A number of the patrons were

aware that the café was run 'by the church', but many simply saw the café as a nice, friendly place to come and chat about anything and everything. From time to time these conversations included matters of faith. One patron, commenting on her first experience on being in the café stated:

> This café…for me, did not seem like a usual café, it was not business focused, it was community and people minded. People took real intention in knowing names and just generally showing an interest where people were in their lives, and it felt-it was a very wonderful experience that I took back with me to my office and shared it with colleagues. it made quite an impression (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

Lucy was a local council youth worker who had had several local government roles and so had a keen interest in community cohesion and development. When asked her opinion as to what she thought about The Friendship Café being run by the local evangelical church, she stated:

> most of my life I've been doing-working in local government, I've been sort of very customer…focused within my career, and I thought that sounds like a really interesting dynamic that I'd like to-just see how that runs, that sounds it like it doesn't run as a business, it runs more with people, and I'd like to think I am quite people minded, and that really paves a big-sort of thing for me to go and seek it out and find out more about that, and I was quite excited that it was linked with the church (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

It was clear during my interviews that some of the patron's had witnessed or personally experienced faith-sharing and prayer within the café, whilst others had not. Mary, who really valued the café as a place that enhanced community, expressed a little concern when I asked her how she felt about the faith-sharing objectives of the café team:

> Well, it wouldn't particularly bother me but I'm saying, some people, it would, they may find it offensive or unexpected perhaps (Mary, patron, The Friendship Café).

Mary, as a mental health worker was sensitive to the feelings and emotions of the other café patrons, with a specific interest in those she knew from her work at the local Mind centre. Mary's statement also showed that faith-sharing is seen by some to be intrusive. Chapter three highlighted the suspicions that some organisations can hold toward FBOs, specifically when their faith-sharing motivations become more visible (§3.2-3.3). Josie also commented on the objective of faith-sharing:

> I think it's ok, they aren't really pushy – cos' I think that would be a real turn-off. It is about giving people a choice and allowing them to ask if interested (Josie, patron, The Friendship Café).

Josie used interesting language of the importance of not being 'pushy'. Josie's attitude reflected the attitudes of many people to evangelical Christians, especially if they sense that they are being 'preached at' (§3.5). For Josie, faith was a matter of personal interest and not something to be proclaimed indiscriminately.

Participant observation on many occasions within the café saw several hosts openly discussing broad matters of life in general, including their own espoused evangelical worldview. This was, on occasion, embraced by the café patrons as offers of prayer were taken up. It was evident that each volunteer within this small, friendly café saw the café as a missional outlet and as a place to develop an environment conducive to friendship and sharing. Interviewing the café patrons revealed that this balance between welcoming third place and faith-sharing was an important one to maintain. The patrons communicated the importance of the café being a place of mutual respect where opinions, both faith and non-faith based could be exchanged. The Friendship Café interviews revealed a sense of trade-off, in the sense that the overriding third-place experience provided the arena where opinions on a whole array of matters could be shared and exchanged. This language of trade-off often came out within the interviews:

> I think it's good to have that opportunity to talk about faith, but what I also like is …it's not kind of pushed in people's faces… because that for me, would be, the biggest like turn-off (Joanne, patron, The Friendship Café)

For Joanne, the opportunity to engage with faith was welcomed, but one that should be sensitively approached. Ruth concurred:

> In terms of a place like this, to be able to offer, care, concern, other Christian beliefs, and attributes is a better way than standing up in a pulpit and saying you should do this, you should do that, you should do the other (Ruth, patron, The Friendship Café).

Ruth's response demonstrated her own understanding about faith proclamation, revealing how she saw the café as a place of conversation as opposed to proclamation. During my interview with Ruth, she demonstrated an openness to discussing a broad range of matters, including faith. This development of a place of open conversation reflected Oldenburg's understanding of the social dynamics of

such third places and their capacity to create community talk-shops and areas for exchange of opinions:

> Third-Place regulars are aware of the ecumenical breadth of their associations. One of the good feelings they experience is that stemming from the realisation that they are accepted and liked by people from many different walks of life. Individuals may belong to several formal organisations but if they have a third-place it is apt to make them feel more a part of the community than those other memberships (1999:45).

Oldenburg uses interesting language of ecumenism, borrowing this ecclesiological word that speaks of meeting grounds of agreement for people with varied views and orthodoxies, where unity is an important value. This seemed to be borne out in The Friendship Café as conversations between hosts and patrons were both faith and non-faith based. The Friendship Café seemed to have achieved this balance well. Mike, a regular patron at the café stated:

> I know if I wanted to come and talk about it [faith], I could and, and it wouldn't be forced upon me and it would be just fairly and openly (Mike, patron, The Friendship Café, 04/2/19).

Alison stated:

> I have had a few chats, but none of it has been in my face – it has been because I asked a question[63] – or just joined in with a conversation already going on in the café (Alison, patron, The Friendship Café).

The management expectation for the host team to share their faith seemed to be assisted by the creation of an environment conducive to general conversation, removing barriers that a 'proclaiming into' approach might create.[64] Such proclamation barriers were the causes of reticence amongst the conservative evangelicals that Strhan researched, as they negotiated within the broader urban context (§3.5). Lesley, the Manager of the café commented:

> So, there are sort of guidelines how to speak but we never ram the gospel down people's throats - so as soon as they come in it's not plastered with Bible verses all around the Café (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

[63] Alison's response reflects my understanding within my CIF that starts with God already at work in the world, with Alison having an enquiring spirit.
[64] Informing the subsidiary research question: To what extent did faith-based discussions take place in the cafés? – see §1

Lesley's statement reflected her self-awareness of the potential to come across as 'pushy'. However, it seemed that the provision of a safe, community based third place conducive to conversation, in some way mitigated the opportunist faith-sharing of the café hosts. The desire for The Friendship Café management team to communicate their faith through natural discussion as opposed to overt advertising came across in my interviews with them. The café hosts, with minimal signage or materials, were keen for their identity to be expressed in conversation, prayer, and overall ethos. A number of patrons commented on this as they observed interactions between the staff and patrons in the café:

> People seemed relaxed to talk about matters of faith and things…it's not something I would automatically talk or think about; but being such a small but friendly place, you can't help but overhear conversations or from time to time see people praying (Rami, patron, The Friendship Café).

I had observed Rami on several occasions as he frequented the café. The early visits were brief and polite. However, over time, he started to stay longer and engage with one or two other patrons or enter conversations about faith. Being from a Hindu background, something he revealed about his own identity, this created a common ground of discussion. As the café team spoke about their studies, Bible reading, and the Sunday services, amongst other things, this encouraged broader themes of faith. and spirituality in general. This ranged from patrons revealing childhood exposure to church, with some revealing more intimate and personal faith stories, as their confidence and sense of belonging within this third place developed.[65] Ruth, a Special Needs Coordinator, was one example of this, in one observation sharing about her faith background:

> I used to go to church but was hurt. I was going through a particularly difficult time in my marriage, and those I thought would be there for me, weren't. I felt judged and excluded. My parents were missionaries too, so I saw all of that (Ruth, patron, The Friendship Café).

Ruth clearly had been deeply hurt in her earlier experiences within an evangelical church. Exploring this a little more with her, she had her own ideas about how the Church should engage with the community:

[65] Observing these conversations revealed an eclectic mix of people who had been exposed to faith, or whom had faith-based questions, again reflecting my CIF of God already at work in the world.

> The Church should be out here, in the community, not staying within its own four walls. I think this little café is what it is really all about, creating a safe place for conversation and sharing (Ruth, patron, The Friendship Café).

These moments of disclosure by the café patrons were a valuable contribution to the faith-based conversations within the café and also revealed their own, very real sense of spirituality. Chapter three detailed the debates within evangelicalism that often pitch Christians against the world, with a strong emphasis on conversion (§3.4 and §3.5). It seemed that the team within The Friendship Café had developed a third place that diluted the sense of 'them and us', or to use Strhan's language, the sense of 'other'. Within this place of mutual community connection, people felt able to share openly about their own faith experiences and life events.

5.4 The Welcome Café - Contribution to Social Capital

The Welcome Café (see figure 7) was situated in an affluent area of Birmingham and was located within a community centre (figure 8) that had been developed over the years to become a central meeting point for many within the local community. The community centre was run by a separate trust board with its own trustees, additionally housing within it The Gateway Church which was affiliated to The Fellowship of the Churches of Christ. The Manager of The Welcome Café reported to the trust board who in turn, although legally separate, had a close working relationship with Gateway Church.

Figure 7 – The Welcome Café

Figure 8 – The Community Centre and grounds

In comparison to The Friendship Café, The Welcome Café was larger in every respect, both in its physical capacity, able to accommodate forty-five patrons, as opposed to The Friendship Café's twenty-two, and in its overall footfall of patrons and related volume of business. One factor in this which I discerned during my interviews, was that demographically, The Welcome Café was in an area where the people possessed more disposable income, or did not have to work, so had more free time. During my interview with Katy, The Welcome Café manager, she told me how the café first started:

> I'm the café manager which involves running the centre here, which includes the café – which is only one part – and it is just making sure that – the building here is run for the community – and it's a tricky one making sure that the whole community feels welcome here but run very much with a Christian ethos. The café was set up a few years ago – I think it's just had its 10th anniversary. It's quite a clunky old building and the café is run by a separate charity connected with (Gateway) church – they went out and did some research and found out what the community wanted – and it came back that it was a café (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café)

The café was set up as a response to the survey. However, in addition to the objective for the café to be a place that enhanced a sense of local community, the Gateway Church leadership were keen for the café to provide opportunities for faith-sharing. Katy, reflecting the host organisation's normative voice told me:

> We're operating it on a community basis with Christian values and using opportunities to share the fact that we are Christians (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

The next sections will analyse to what extent these objectives were achieved within The Welcome Café, comparing and contrasting my fieldwork findings from The Friendship Café.

Regarding the aim of developing a community place conducive to the enhancement of a sense of local community and belonging, there was an identifiable, common understanding and desire to achieve this amongst the staff, volunteers, and patrons of the café. This was evidenced during the semi-structured interviews. Abbie, a staff member commenting on the community feel of the café stated:

> Everyone's always chatty, everyone's getting to know you, it's a lovely community feel. I mean that's the main reason why I wanted to start. You know, I didn't want to get involved with the big chains. Being here, it's very tight knit, everyone's helpful (Abbie, host, The Welcome Café).

Interestingly, Abbie, like many others who were interviewed, contrasted the community feel of the café with the larger more corporate café chains. This resonates with Oldenburg who laments the loss of true third places to corporate chains whose priority, he suggests, is often the creation of profit over community (1999:18).

Logan, another member of the host team reflected on the café's sense of community:

> Yeah, it's got a good feel to it this place, a real community feel, everyone chats, it has a very relaxed feel to it, which is good (Logan, host, The Welcome Café)

Equally, a number of patrons valued the community contribution and feel of the café over other aspects:

> Don't come here if you're expecting super-duper, slick customer service and you know, posh coffees and, and all of that, like kind of Starbucks experience but if you're looking for a, you know, a place that's part of the community, that's real, that's authentic, you know where you can have a chat and there's always someone to talk to, yeah, it's just a yeah, welcoming, friendly place (Claire, patron, The Welcome Café).

> It's lovely. It's very special, it's very like, it's kind of…just really warm, it feels like home, it's not, it's not like slick, like Costa or Starbucks or something like that. it's just lovely…if you start going, you'll meet people…you'll make friends from just coming in (Zoe, patron, The Welcome Café).

Claire and Zoe, like Abbie, contrasted the community feel of the café to the larger café chains. They both used language of 'trade-off' between 'slick customer service' and a welcoming, friendly place of authentic conversation. This trade-off reflected the importance of third places being places of meaningful conversation (§4.1.3). Dave, a regular patron, reflected upon the home from home qualities of The Welcome Café:

> It's just a really relaxed place, somewhere you can feel at home. The other people chat to you but equally you can sit at a table and work if you need to (Dave, patron, The Welcome Café).

The major difference in The Welcome Café, in comparison to The Friendship Café, was that the expressed desire was for a community place of personal connection for the many people caring for children or isolated in their homes. As The Welcome Café was situated within an affluent area, wider community stakeholder objectives connected with those working within welfare-based projects, were not expressed in any tangible way.[66] The patrons wanted a local place where they could connect with other locals and break their own isolation. In this sense, Power and Wilmott's bonding capital (§3.1) that speaks of connection with local people enhancing a sense of personal belonging, was a key factor and motivation in patron attendance. Sarah, a working professional told me:

> When the kids were younger…I would take them out for a walk because being in the house is unbearable. So to have somewhere on my doorstep that I could come and just…find somewhere with a comfortable space to sit in was a bit of a lifeline actually, cos it meant I could leave my own 4 walls, it meant I could sit and have a cup of coffee, I could let the kids play or sit or sleep or whatever and I could have a chat with someone else, you know it didn't really matter WHO, I felt quite comfortable chatting to anybody cos quite often you find other mums with sleeping babies or not so sleeping babies…using this place as a bit of a refuge, you know just a change of scenery. I think what I have got from this place is just a bit of escapism - it's another place to go without feeling like you're unwelcome. When you go to places like Costa and your baby's crying, *you feel the eyes on you,* you know you can go to the café at M&S and you can feel the eyes on you because your child isn't sitting perfectly still eating without dropping crumbs on the floor and that doesn't make you feel desperately comfortable – it's uncomfortable (Sarah, patron, The Welcome Café).

[66] So, although this informs my research question about the cafés contribution to a sense of community (§1) – it reveals that this objective can be achieved with varying emphases of personal and community wide connectivity.

For Sarah, The Welcome Café was a place that was ‘comfortable’, this in contrast to other cafés that made her feel ‘uncomfortable’. This sense of a place being an accommodating place is an important third-place characteristic (§4.1.4). Additionally, when speaking to Zoe, another working mum, she found The Welcome Café to be:

> A place that’s part of the community, that’s real, that’s authentic, you know where you can have a chat and there’s always someone to talk to, yeah, it’s just a welcoming, friendly place (Zoe, patron, The Welcome Café).

Both Sarah and Zoe saw the café as a place of personal connection, with Sarah even using the terms ‘lifeline’ and ‘refuge’. This sense of personal bonding was evident in virtually all of my interviews with the café patrons. This sense of local connection echoed Hjalmarson in chapter four (2015:28), who expressed a common desire in people to find a place of belonging. This sense of belonging pervades both sociology (Oldenburg:1999) and theology (Brueggemann:2002), and in many ways demonstrates the importance of what I call ‘located theology’ – incarnational theology that is inseparable from its context.

Such was the connection that many patrons had with The Welcome Café, that attempts at broadening the café experience out to a wider audience were often met with statements of what I call, ‘mild resistive ownership’. The locals basically liked it as it was. Again, during my interview with Sarah, she expressed this ownership aspect:

> I don’t want it to be a victim of its own success. I like it the way it is. I want to keep it local for the local community (but occasionally) …they do fireworks night and they have fairgrounds and stuff. And to be honest I don’t really like that (Sarah, patron, The Welcome Café).

It was not that Sarah did not like fireworks, but rather what she saw as, the intrusion of other things on ‘their café’. Just as the management of The Friendship Café were keen to ensure no one demographic dominated their third place; it was the patrons at The Welcome Café that were keen to preserve its local “signature”.

Janine reflected this too:

> I don’t really like it when there are big events going on and stuff, cos’ the café has a different feel, other groups of people come in, and it changes the atmosphere (Janine, patron, The Welcome Café).

This sense of ownership and place-attachment are brought out by Oldenburg (1999) and Waxman (2006) as important aspects of third-place identity, with the regular patrons frequenting such places feeling a strong sense of loyalty, and personal investment and ownership. As far as Sarah was concerned, she had 'earned her seat' within the café that had provided such a lifeline for her when her children were younger. This type of place attachment is in general a positive thing, however, this can cause tensions should a specific group or activity start to alter the familiar third-place "signature". I bring this out in Chapter six where the transition of the café on Sundays into one that had a 'different feel', created some mild resentment in a number of patrons.

The Welcome Café for many had become a true third place. Using Oldenburg's categories, if first place is our home, second is our work, then for many attending The Welcome Café, this was their other 'home from home'. Claire, a café patron who had been attending for several years, had even got involved as a Trustee of the community site that the café was situated in. During my interview with her, she stated, 'It's lovely. It's very special…It's just really warm, it feels like home'. It was interesting how Claire's connection with the café gave her the confidence to explore and get involved with the wider Trust that owned the café. Claire did not express specific faith motivations but was comfortable in expressing her connection with the Trust. This language of ownership and familiar embeddedness came out during several interviews with the café patrons within The Welcome Café.

In comparison with The Friendship Café, this sense of ownership, home from home, and having 'earned my seat', was much more prominent within my discussions in The Welcome Café. One important factor in this may well have simply been the time served in the café. At the commencement of the interview stage of my research, The Welcome Café had been in operation some ten years, with The Friendship Café a comparatively shorter time of three years. Oldenburg's and Waxman's bonds of connection and belonging that form true third places had been well established at The Welcome Café.

The main seating within The Welcome Café comprised of café tables that collectively could cater for forty-five people, with an additional small 'comfortable' seating area designed primarily as a 'toy corner' (figure 8) for those parents or carers wishing to allow their children to play whilst they chat. Similar to The Friendship Café, the

seating area encouraged café patrons to stay and feel comfortable. Jodie and Janice commented on this:

> I like the fact that you can stay around, there is a nice seating area with toys and stuff that means you can relax and chat whilst your kids play, I like that (Jodie, patron, The Welcome Café).
>
> The good thing is you don't feel pressured to leave or anything, like you might somewhere else, this feels like a home from home sort of place (Janice, patron, The Welcome Café).

Unlike high-demand café outlets such as airports (Manzo, 2014), third places encourage the development of deeper, more meaningful connections with the regulars that frequent them. The coffee machinery and food preparation area within The Welcome Café were unobtrusive with an open counter that like The Friendship Café was conducive to conversation and ordering between the café hosts and patrons. The provision of a large array of home-made cakes on display enhanced the overall sense of a friendly homely place. The café was very busy and was extremely popular with young families. This was significantly different to The Friendship Café that as a smaller café, had less volume of both patrons and subsequent related background noise.

Figure 9 – The Welcome Café comfortable seating and Toy corner

This difference contributed to the overall capacity of each café to develop broader more communal conversations. Individual table conversations within The Welcome Café could be absorbed within the overall atmosphere and noise of the café whereas conversations within The Friendship Café often shifted between individual table-based conversations to more communal café wide discussion or conversation. This was an interesting observation, specifically in the way this impacted host and patron

interaction. The relatively small size of The Friendship Café was stated as one of the contributing factors in developing a friendly, non-threatening, safe place by a number of the café patrons. This said, The Welcome Café had developed a consistent group of regulars that frequently stated a real sense of ownership and general freedom to move around the café in multiple conversations.

So, regarding the objective to enhance the sense of local community, both The Friendship Café and The Welcome Café, albeit at differing stages of growth and development, were seen as important if not central actors by their respective patrons. Whilst there was a deeper sense of ownership at The Welcome Café and a very strong sense of bonding capital (Power and Wilmott, 2007), The Friendship Café on the other hand had become a hub for developing not only bonding connections between locals, but a place of bridging capital (Power and Willmott, 2007), and progressive localism (Baker, 2014). The sense of community connection was a strong and visible strand within both cafés.

5.5 The Welcome Café – Faith-Sharing and Evangelical Identity

Within the *shared values* document of the Gateway Church and the associated community centre trust that manages The Welcome Café, the stated values included 'sharing the message of Jesus locally and globally', 'living to welcome everyone', 'displaying generosity prayerfully and practically', 'standing up for social justice' and 'celebrating and enjoying community life'.[67] However, The Welcome Café, although thriving from a business and community sense, had over the ten years of its operation, allowed its core objectives to be somewhat diluted. This was brought out in my interview with Katy the café manager, who was now keen to restore the original dual objectives:

> We're operating it on a community basis with Christian values and using opportunities to share the fact that we are Christians… I started in January very much with the task of bringing back the Christian ethos (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

Katy expressed the sense of 'loss' of the Christian ethos as the previous café management had allowed other priorities such as income, to overtake its original core values and faith-sharing objectives. Katy was keen to restore these objectives

[67] Such a statement reveals "proclamation" to be an important aspect of the host organisations' ethos.

and communicated these clearly. However, in spite of Katy expressing the faith-sharing objectives in clear terms, there was a sharp contrast in the practice of many of the staff and volunteers within the host team. A significant reason for this was due to the recruitment policy of the café. Whilst in comparison, The Friendship Café recruited volunteers from within its host evangelical church, who saw the café as a missional project and expression of the church, The Welcome Café recruited in line with their Christian ethos but offered their paid and volunteer roles out to a broader evangelical and non-evangelical/non-faith-based demographic. This created tensions within the café host team who possessed a varied understanding of the conversionist objectives of the management team. In an interview with Abbie, one of the paid staff members she revealed:

> The majority of us that work in the café aren't Christian, we don't have, I don't think, most of us don't really have any beliefs, apart from a few (Abbie, host, The Welcome Café).

Speaking to this 21-year-old whom prior to being a staff member had been a patron with her family since she was a child; it was clear that there was a disconnect between the desired objectives of the management and the practical approach of many of the staff/volunteers. In contrast, when asked about the café objectives, Lisa, a Christian, who was the café supervisor stated:

> Obviously, we want to provide good service, good coffee, good food for the community, for the people that come through here, but more so on a deeper level, it's just serving the community, like, it's all about serving but, like serving with that faith and serving others like Christ served them and you know, that selfless nature of it[68]… *and that's really interesting when you have people that aren't connected to church or aren't Christians*. I mean, it's easy to ask, to ask people to be a nice person, to be kind and stuff like that, so I don't think that's a big ask of people - but doing it on behalf of the church or because we are connected to the church or because our objectives are Christian, I think it's interesting, sometimes asking people almost to subscribe to those things when actually they don't believe in God. I don't know if that makes sense (Lisa, host, The Welcome Café)

Lisa's answer reflected the disconnect she saw between the stated café objectives and the practice of the host team. Abbie, whilst feeling comfortable working in the

[68] Lisa' statement again reflects my CIF that sees God's people incarnationally serving within their communities.

café, expressed some concerns if the faith-sharing objectives were given a more prominent profile:

> it's their café, they can do what they want. They're higher than us but I'd probably want to understand why. Would that mean you wouldn't want a certain people coming in and what would you do with all of us because the majority of us that work in the café aren't Christian? (Abbie, host, The Welcome Café).

Another staff member, Logan, echoed a similar disconnect from the espoused vision of the café management team:

> Well, I know it's run by the church and there's bits and bobs lying around, like Bible verses and stuff, but I'm not really into that, and no-one has really mentioned it whilst I have worked here (Logan, host, The Welcome Café).

For Logan, beyond observing the presence of faith-based literature, he did not see himself as participating in the broader vision of the management team.

Additionally, the busyness of the café limited the host team's capacity to meaningfully engage with the patrons around matters of faith. Katy stated:

> It can be frustrating when the café is really busy, as those in the team who are Christians cannot hold many meaningful conversations or spend too much time chatting to one person (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

Lisa also reflected this frustration:

> It can get crazy in here, which is kind of frustrating, as I like to build relationships with people, because it's from relationships that more meaningful conversations about faith and stuff can take place.[69] Often we simply do not have time to enter into any real meaningful conversations, especially when things are hectic (Lisa, host, The Welcome Café).

Both Katy and Lisa expressed their frustration at the lack of opportunities to have meaningful conversations. Whilst my observations revealed it to be difficult for the host team to engage in conversations with patrons in busy periods, Katy's emphasis on 'those who are Christians' was interesting, as this reflected her desire for the Christians in the team to share their faith when possible. Lisa's comments about the importance of being able to develop relationships as a basis upon which to share her

[69] Lisa expressed her understanding of faith-sharing in language of relationship as opposed to proclamation – a challenge to some evangelical normative voices that insist on proclamation.

faith, reflected Smith's analysis of the 2021 survey of evangelical Christians, which revealed *building friendship* to be deemed the most 'effective way of sharing the Christian gospel today' (2021:47). Lisa continued:

> I'm a big believer in relations, in relationships, all of those things and so relational faith really. I think that in my opinion, or at least that's, that's what works best for me, bringing people to Christ, it starts with building a relationship first. You can't just put up a poster or say something or you know, shove a Bible in someone's face, it starts with a relationship (Lisa, host, The Welcome Café).

Lisa's answer revealed her understanding of the importance of being relational, of being Christ's presence in the café. Like Luke in The Friendship Café, Lisa's response also echoed her self-awareness of the potential to come across as 'pushy', being cautious not to 'shove a Bible in someone's face'. Chapter three highlighted this tension in some evangelicals (§3.5) who are conscious of how they are negatively portrayed by the media. Additionally, my interview with Lisa also highlighted the tension she felt with the staff that did not subscribe to the management vision:

> I think it's interesting, sometimes asking people almost to subscribe to those things when actually they don't believe in God. I don't know if that makes sense (Lisa, host, The Welcome Café).

Lisa also reflected on the variation of opinions within the team concerning the approach to faith-sharing:

> I know that a lot of people have different opinions on how we are doing on this or not, some people think we're barely doing anything and we should be doing so much more and other people think that actually we're being actually a little bit too much in people's faces and you know, and so it is interesting the various spectrum of that (Lisa, host, The Welcome Café).

Lisa's statement revealed the ongoing tensions and pressures amongst some evangelicals when discussing the approach to faith-sharing (see section 3.5). Abbie, who was one of the team that did not personally have a faith background, spoke more in neutral terms about the faith-sharing objectives:

> Well, the fact that they (the management) still want me here makes me feel valued, that my skill set is proved here…and the fact that I respect their views entirely, I'm guessing that they value that you know. I'm not someone to start a debate as such or I just get on with it and it doesn't really make me feel anything to be fair, I'm quite neutral on it all [faith]; I

> don't feel pressured to talk about it or to conform (Abbie, host, The Welcome Café).

Although Abbie considered herself to be 'neutral' regarding the faith-based objectives of the café, Abbie's language of 'them and us' was interesting as this revealed her inner tensions about the purpose of the café. Abbie had not been made aware of these objectives by the management team, it was only as I interviewed her that she began to articulate her feelings and react to the stated objectives. However, in my interview with Abbie, she expressed her own openness to faith, recalling her encounter with a number of evangelical interns from the US who were serving in the café:

> I'm interested in faith. I mean when the two Americans came over, they were Christian and we had loads of good conversations about that as well, and it was really interesting because they were understanding what I believe in and like what I think, and it was, because I've never studied it, or understood it as such - so I got to understand from them as well, so that was interesting (Abbie, host, The Welcome Café).[70]

This opens up the possibility that serving in the café itself provided an opportunity to be exposed to matters of faith. Commenting on the inconsistency in the staffs' understanding of the café's faith-sharing objectives, the café Manager stated:

> There are fifteen part time staff in the café. Only two are Christian but all have to accept our value…this is part of HR process now. Which is why we desperately need a Christian Senior Supervisor (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

Katy was keen to address this imbalance in the staff team by recruiting more Christian staff. However, in the interim, the desire for the management to develop a third place of gospel proclamation had been reduced to displaying literature advertising some of the activities of Gateway Church. A strong reliance on displayed items that communicated their faith, as opposed to a motivated team seeking to enter into meaningful faith-based conversations, was evident. This was an interesting observation as the patrons seemed oblivious to the background tensions within the café team.

[70] Abbie's response reflected my CIF of God already at work in the world.

Regarding the use of the café *place* to communicate their faith and identity, similar to The Friendship Café, the specific identity and evangelical distinctives of The Welcome Café run by Gateway Church were subtle and did not create any obvious tensions within the host team or between hosts and patrons. The importance of the Bible was simply expressed through a single verse on a chalkboard at the café entrance (see figure 10 below).

Figure 10 – Chalkboard in The Welcome Café with a verse of scripture

The prominent position of this verse at the café entrance reflected the importance of the Bible to Gateway Church and the café management team. Having said this, in my fifteen months of observations within the café, this Bible verse was not changed, and so as a familiar sign could easily be ignored. The verse on the chalkboard was taken from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, chapter 8, and simply stated, 'The joy of the Lord is our strength'. The noise of a busy café, bustling in conversation, with children playing and laughing, reflected this sentiment. To what extent the patrons sensed the joy of the Lord is uncertain, however the welcome and acceptance that is characteristic of a third place (§4.1) was evident. Zoe, a café patron felt this:

> It has a real light atmosphere in here, nothing too serious, it can lift you if you've had a bad day or are not feeling great, just a good feel to it (Zoe, patron, The Welcome Café).

Logan commented on this too:

> So, it's quite a fun place, kids are often running around, groups laughing and that, it has a good feel (Logan, host, The Welcome Café).

The Welcome café also had several items of printed stationery to communicate its programme and identity to the patrons (see figures 11 example below). These items were not intrusive and were included alongside other, community focused advertisements and notices. On the serving counter, there was a pile of Gateway Church welcome cards (see figure 12 below). These could be completed by café patrons that wanted to enquire about the church and its related activities. During my observations in the café, I did not see any of these items being read, though this does not mean that they were not. Examples of literature within the café:

Figure 11 – Leaflet communicating Church/Café vision

Figure 12 – Welcome card advertising church – The Welcome Café

However, if during the week the identity of the church that ran the café was not obvious, this changed on Sundays. The members of Gateway Church which met in the same building, were encouraged to help out or simply use the café, before and after the church service. Additionally, to encourage patrons to come to the café on a Sunday, the café management decided to offer free tea and coffee. This was a reduced menu, as the more expensive, barista style drinks were not included. There

had been some earlier debate as to whether the café should open at all on a Sunday, but Katy was keen to use Sundays to connect the church to the community:

> The one thing that I was keen to do, *because we're a church on a Sunday*, they closed the café on a Sunday and it was used for creche – but I felt very strongly about doing that – but it was seen as a barrier between the community and the church that it was closed on a Sunday (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

This gave Sundays in the café a very different feel to the rest of the week, reflecting Hovland's theory of how evangelicals use special times and days as one of their distinctives (§4.4).[71] Katy, the Café Manager recognised this different feel on Sundays:

> So one of the things I chose to do was to open the café on a Sunday– so we now give free tea and coffee from the church on a Sunday for a couple of hours - and that is very much a mission on a Sunday – so the café, even on a Sunday, is very much about presence evangelism and very much we don't want barriers between the church and the people. We also found that people didn't know there was a church here, though they came to the toddler groups in the week – (whereas now they might say) "oh I see there is a church here?" – so it gives us a huge opportunity to have conversations on a Sunday. So we have two elements, giving free tea and coffee out and we have the normal café open as well, because people want their bacon butties and everything – but it helps - it opens up those conversations – and we open up conversations with people. We see the same old people week on week – it's that friendly face. Some conversations go further and it's that making sure that church isn't scary – that we can just have those discussions – and that's the main missional bit we do on a Sunday (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

Katy saw the opportunity to develop conversations with the patrons who frequented the café on a Sunday, and shared her general approach to faith-sharing:

> It's just that friendly 'aw…here's a cup of coffee' place – cos' you know what's it's like, just to get a cup of coffee and have that chat – you know that we're there. We have the opportunity we have prayer sheets and a prayer book, so conversations about the church happen - but also we might ask: 'would you like us to pray for you?' We have the Sunday fisherman come out for drinks and that's reaching to that community as well (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

[71] The use of special times and days is not unique to evangelicals, many faiths have similar distinctives.

This shift in team dynamic, with more Christians helping out and being present in the café, impacted the approach of the café team to faith-sharing. This was manifest in the provision of more obvious faith-based material such as prayer sheets, in addition to patrons being offered prayer. Katy gave further insights into the 'Sunday approach':

> I have another woman that comes -and we always make sure there's worship music on as well – and it was *The Lord is my Shepherd* playing and she broke down in tears. And that was another barrier of 'I used to go to church'. There are other people coming who are looking for a church, we give them all the details of the church….We piloted in the summer, which is probably the worst time to pilot something – but we now have people queuing up at 9.30 waiting for us to open us which shows it was the right decision to open out – and by putting in free tea and coffee it opens up the opportunities. Still got to be commercially viable but to me it was about opening up before we worry about that. Get it open and serve the community and share what being a Christian is about (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

The Welcome Café on a Sunday, compared to the rest of the week, had a much more visible and audible evangelical identity with prayer cards, worship music, and a host team that broadly understood the faith-sharing purpose of the café. During our interview, Katy also revealed a strong, conversionist[72] motivation as she shared the story about someone becoming a Christian from another faith background:

> We have an Indian couple here who run the Place of Welcome and have very much taken it to heart…they were sad to see the café go the way it did and now really love it on Sundays and run with it – it really makes me so happy to see them – it's what's this building's for – and they have befriended a couple from the Hindu faith who had family issues – they now go to dinner and things like that. Creating links and sharing how 'we have found the Christian faith so much better than the Hindu faith in which we grew up' (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

In comparison to the rest of the week, my observations on Sundays revealed The Welcome Café to effectively be a separate café with a different identity that aligned much more strongly with the faith-based objectives of the church and café management. This placed the initiative firmly within the hands of the café hosts and arguably impacted the relational neutrality that Oldenburg suggests is characteristic of a true third place (1999:22). I will deal with the theological impact of this in chapter

[72] Conversionism is a common expectation amongst evangelicals – encouraged by the normative voices of their tradition.

six under the theme of *a gathered faith community.* The presence of more people who understood the café vision and objectives was an encouragement to Katy, but she was frustrated that this could not be carried out during the rest of the week:

> It would be nice to see this atmosphere and approach continue into the week really, but the team in the week don't all get it, it is something we are working on, because it makes a big difference (Katy, manager, Welcome Café).

It will be interesting to observe the development of the café should a faith-sharing agenda and the host team evangelical identity become more visible during the week.

5.6 The Welcome Café – The Patron's Attitudes to Faith-Sharing

During the week, the faith-sharing objectives and identity of the café were not obvious and so did not create obvious or visible tensions either within the host team or between the hosts and patrons. However, as the host identity became more obvious on Sundays, effectively creating a different café, a number of patrons commented on this:

> I have been down to the café on one or two Sundays, but mainly during the week. There is definitely a different feel to the café on Sundays (Dave, patron, The Welcome Café).

Janine also commented:

> I think they have got the balance right here. There is not too much on the walls, and we know that it is run by the church. This is a lovely community, though it does have a different atmosphere on Sundays (Janice, patron, The Welcome Café).

Both Dave's and Janice's answers revealed how they perceived the café on a Sunday to be a place with a 'different feel' or atmosphere.

For many patrons who attended mainly in the week, it was only as I made them aware of the café's faith-sharing objectives that they offered their reflections on this. My interviews with patrons revealed a mixed reaction to the faith-based objectives of the host team. Sarah, a long-standing patron of the café, when asked about how she felt about faith-sharing stated:

> I'd feel alienated. Cos that's not what I want. Cos I come here for a chat and a coffee. I haven't come here to be… preached to. It would be a *massive turn off* (Sarah, patron, The Welcome Café).

Sarah was comfortable speaking to me about this, but clearly communicated an uncomfortable opposition to faith-sharing. Sarah had never had a conversation about faith in her eight years attending the café. Regarding the physical factors pointing to the café host faith identity, Sarah commented:

> There's just a sign, there's a sign outside, a big-big sign outside saying about the church and the times of worship, and then there's a door outside that you notice. I don't mind, like on the chalkboard they've written…they've usually got a sign or something on the chalkboard…on there, they'll have a couple of things saying worship, and I don't mind that either because it's not being pushed. That's my choice to read that. It's not in my face. So, there's no kind of signs of God up here, there's kind of like nice words written on a door and there's a couple of kiddies storybooks that are, like, from the Bible. Any more than that I would find it off-putting (Sarah, patron, The Welcome Café).

Sarah saw these subtle factors as nothing more than information and did not express any sense of them prompting her to enquire more about faith. Sarah's answer about feeling 'alienated', captures the sort of discomfort that many evangelicals sense and imagine concerning faith-sharing. This can lead to them subsequently being reticent to share their faith in spite of the normative and espoused expectations coming from their churches. What the third places appear to do is to develop arenas of faith-based conversation as opposed to platforms of proclamation. Dave, a café patron, gave his opinion on the faith-sharing objective of the management:

> Well, I have never personally experienced this, or really seen it, unless you can call chat about the church toddler group that, I don't know. It would depend for me, on whether or not I had started the discussion or whatever (Dave, patron, The Welcome Café).

This said, one patron within The Welcome Café, Fiona, expressed her sadness that during a time of personal need, people were reluctant to bring a faith perspective to her situation:

> It's interesting actually, I was speaking to someone here once (a believer), when something happened that I was a bit thrown by; and I just happened to say to this person "This has happened" - and I wouldn't have minded a faith perspective on that, but they didn't give that, or didn't overtly give that. And I remember thinking "Oh, actually, I wouldn't have minded if you were a bit more, had brought a bit more of your faith into that conversation". Generally, when I come and ask for advice, I'm really open-minded and I think, I'm never going to be close (Fiona, patron, The Welcome Café).

Fiona's answer revealed how for her, the café had become an important place where she was open to talk about matters of faith. However, when Fiona desired to speak about such, she was disappointed at the lack of response she received. This aligns with my CIF that sees God already at work in the world, in this case, in the life of Fiona. The disconnect seemed to be in the host team's inconsistent sense of seeing themselves as partners with God in local mission.

5.7 Chapter Conclusions

The focus of this chapter has been to consider how the two cafés communicated and practically approached the joint objectives of creating community third places, that enhanced a local sense of community, whilst also being conducive to faith-based conversations. From the research conducted, it seemed that both cafés had successfully positioned themselves as valued third places within their community, places that were welcoming and that encouraged community, general conversation and a sense of belonging. This included the achievement of personal and broader community goals (bonding capital, bridging capital, progressive localism). My fieldwork revealed The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés reflected Oldenburg's third-place characteristics, as places of relative neutrality and general social levelling, where specific roles expected in homes and workplaces were laid aside. Both cafés provided a place of friendly acceptance and conversation for many, equally being welcoming and accommodating to patron's requests. Over my fifteen months of observations, I too became a "regular" and was welcomed as such by the hosts and patrons. Meaningful conversations were frequently observed during my visits to the cafés, though the busyness of The Welcome Cafe and its staff recruitment policy mitigated against these developing into faith-based conversations. Both cafés were described as "homes away from home" within several of my interviews with patrons, and whilst their design was 'low profile' in comparison to a number of high street coffee-house chains, they were clean and respectable.

The interviews with both café managers revealed the theme of *faith-sharing* or conversionism as an important objective. This was clearly reflected within my interviews and observations within The Friendship Café. It seemed within The Friendship Café, that the development of a local, welcoming third place went a significant way to mitigating negative tensions that faith-sharing might create. The close proximity of café hosts and patrons within this third-place helped develop

friendship and understanding. This created open opportunities for the hosts to instigate faith-based conversations with those patrons who wished to do so, with an accepting tolerance amongst other regulars who seemed to value the net result of a welcoming third-place above personal discomfort around faith-based proclamation.

However, within The Welcome Café host team, the understanding of the management's faith-sharing objective was inconsistent. The clear and obvious reason for this was the varied faith/non-faith profile of The Welcome Café host team, which strongly diluted the espoused host church organisation and café management objectives. The semi-structured interviews with several members of The Welcome Café host team revealed tensions as they expressed their feelings toward this. A number of non-faith-based staff used the language of 'other' when describing Christian colleagues, such as 'if they want to'. Additionally, those staff who professed a faith, shared their frustrations with the team inconsistency regarding faith motivations and sharing. This reduced the faith-based "signature" and approach of the café to more visible, printed and displayed material. This displayed literature could be ignored and did not in itself create tensions within the café as it was generally low key and unobtrusive. Sundays mitigated against this somewhat, as more volunteers from the host church were involved in the café, but this in effect created a different café that impacted the relational neutrality of this third place.

Patron awareness of the objectives also provided a contrast in both cafés. Concerning the development of a local third place that enhances community, both cafés were perceived by the patrons to do this well, with the cafés being popular and important places for the local, regular patrons. However, regarding the visibility of the hosts' faith-based objectives and identity, this was much more prominent within The Friendship Café with many of the patrons I interviewed commenting on this. In comparison, the vast majority of patrons I interviewed within The Welcome Café were unaware of this objective.

Although different in their approach and intentionality to fulfil the management objectives, tensions were manifest in both cafés in several ways:

- Tensions between the team members of The Welcome Café who were recruited from a broader faith and non-faith-based background.

- Tensions within the Christians in both host teams who were conscious not to be labelled as pushy or judgemental.
- Tensions amongst The Friendship Cafe patrons who expressed the importance of achieving a balance between “better community” and faith-sharing.
- Tensions amongst The Welcome Café patrons, who expressed concern should faith-sharing objectives become more visible.

The careful management of these tensions was considered to be an important factor by both management teams. The Friendship Café seemed to generally manage these well with the host team having a more unified awareness of the overall café objectives. The Welcome Café team may find these tensions a challenge as or when their faith-sharing objectives become more visible during the week.

Whilst this chapter has focused on the capacity of The Friendship and The Welcome Cafe host teams to fulfil the stated objectives of their management teams, the interviews with the hosts and patrons of both cafés revealed rich themes that emerged beyond these objectives. These themes of j*ourney*, *spiritual place* and *gathered faith community* will now be considered.

6 Chapter Six: Journey, Spiritual Place and Gathered Faith Community

This chapter draws out key themes that emerged from my analysis of the café host and patron interviews.[73] As I re-listened to the recorded interviews and analysed the subsequent transcripts from both cafés, I was able to identify repeated or similar key words and phrases. Having carried out this exercise, I then categorised these under common themes of *journey, spiritual place and gathered faith community.* This chapter considers the extent to which each theme was evident within The Friendship and Welcome Cafés. Initially considering the theme of *journey*, I will draw on the work of Smith, Jamieson and Lees-Smith amongst others. The chapter will then move on to the theme of *spiritual place*, drawing on the work of various scholars, including Brueggemann and Rumsey. Finally, the theme of *gathered faith community* will be considered, engaging with the work of Elliott and Watkins and Shepherd.

6.1 Journey

And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." (Exodus 3:12).

Chapter three revealed the debate amongst some evangelicals that pitches the language of "crisis conversion" against that of "faith journey" (§3.4). Crisis conversion emphasises the importance of a visible and tangible conversion experience, with some evangelical Christians considering a deep awareness of one's depravity that leads to repentance to be an important sign of this. To effect this, many evangelicals consider direct preaching to be an important method leading to conversion. Those that hold such a view are often critical of those who promote a more gradual journey of faith.[74] Such an emphasis oversimplifies what for many, is a more complex journey toward God. Smith's recent analysis of research into evangelical experiences of conversion revealed a broad variation:

[73] These themes are those I identified beyond the initial core research questions of community and faith-sharing – see §1.
[74] For example – see https://www.rlhymersjr.com/Online_Sermons/2014/030914PM_TheThirdWay.html (accessed April 2022).

> Various comments or testimonies made clear that UK evangelical Christians have come to faith or been converted in a wide variety of different manners and contexts, some almost instantaneously, some over a long period. Perhaps the majority have found God before they were adults, in the context of a Christian upbringing through family, school and church. Some conversions have produced a rapid transformation of lifestyle and circumstances, others have been followed by slower growth as a disciple of Christ (2021:46).

Smith's statement highlights how the faith of some Christians had in fact developed over time. The personal conversion experiences of evangelicals are important and can often inform their attitudes toward the faith-stories of other people (§2.1).

During my interviews and conversations within both cafés, evidence emerged of just such a spiritual and theological journey amongst both café patrons *and* hosts. In several chapters of this thesis I refer to Hardy's research within Phoenix Church, which considered the transition of Phoenix Church from an 'attractional' church to a 'missional' church based upon a Missio Dei theology (2021).[75] The Gateway Church had also developed a Missio Dei understanding and so both cafés were based on this theological platform (§1.2). In 2009, when I was interviewed by the leadership of Phoenix Church for the role of Church Pastor, one of the issues raised was that they had not seen any 'tangible' conversions for ten years, and they wanted the new minister to prioritise this. The transition to a missional church over the subsequent years helped develop the church members' understanding of both mission *and* conversion (Hardy, 2021). This understanding was frequently reflected within my interviews with The Friendship Café hosts and was an important factor that informed how the hosts saw and approached their mission. Interviewing the hosts revealed how they perceived God to be at work in the cafés. Lesley, The Friendship Café manager stated:

> I was from quite a traditional church family really, where you *made a decision* for Christ. It was all about repentance and needing to ask for forgiveness. I still think this happens, but the last few years have challenged me as I have come across various situations and people, with lots at different stages of faith and understanding – especially in the

[75] An attractional approach to mission is considered to be where churches develop projects and programmes designed to attract people to their church building, hoping to share their faith with the people that come. Missional church based upon a Missio Dei theology is where the church sees itself in partnership with the God of mission, looking to set up projects located within the community, often outside of the church building – this reflects my CIF.

> café, I realise no one-size fits all (Lesley, Manager, The Friendship Café).

Lesley's family had emphasised a crisis conversion approach to faith, however as a graduate from a Bible college that emphasised a Missio Dei theology, Lesley's understanding of conversion developed, particularly as she engaged with the café patrons and heard their faith stories. Lesley told me:

> It's been amazing really to listen to and get to know the regulars here (in the café). It can be easy to see them all as heathens or atheists, but many of them have their own stories of faith and have been involved in the past with churches and things, and have their own opinions on things (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Another Friendship Café host, Luke, expressed a similar understanding:

> So it's not always obvious where people are at…but occasionally they will say something that shows they are thinking about faith, or Jesus or something they have read or seen. There's a few (patrons) too that have been to church and have stories about that (Luke, Host, The Friendship Café).

Luke expressed the patron's exposure to faith using terms of journey too:

> One person I met, when I first met, they were completely shut off to church and God because of the circumstances in their life. But now, through getting to know them, spending time with them, talking with them, they actually come along to church but I don't think that would happen if they had bumped into someone on the street who was talking about God, or something like that - it would only come through relationship and talking within the Café because they felt comfortable opening up and sharing. It has been a *journey* for them (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

Lesley and Luke's language of journey and faith-story reflect Jamieson's research (2003). Within his book, Jamieson speaks of 'transitional explorers' (2003:75), speaking of those who are 'scouting out or opening up a new faith journey' (2003:75). Jamieson compares this to the journey of Israel in the Bible, seeing such biblical events as crossing the Jordan, the exile and entering the promised land as 'pivotal moments' of journey. Whilst Jamieson's work was conducted amongst people that had left evangelical churches, his findings reflect the faith-story of many people. During my interview with a number of patrons within both cafés, the sense of them being 'transitional explorers' on a faith journey, with God already at work in their lives (reflecting my CIF), emerged a number of times.

Rami, a regular patron of The Friendship Café, told me:

> Although I am from a Hindu background, I like to think that I am on a journey of discovery, learning new things. Even sat here and stuff, I hear the conversations and think about my own experiences, though people here sometimes use language that I'm not familiar with. I like to think that my experiences also count and contribute. It's good that people listen here, I am definitely interested in being open to whatever (Rami, patron, The Friendship Café).

Rami had experienced spiritual encounters in his Hindu faith and culture, and was happy to express these, yet still saw himself on a journey. Rami's 'concrete and lived experiences', to use Root's phrase (§2.1.2), were just as valid to him as those of the café hosts. As I observed Rami during my visits to the café, he was often heard enquiring about 'how things went' in the Sunday church service. Anyone coming into the café for the first time might hear Rami in discussion about spiritual things and even assume he was part of the host team.

In chapter five, I quoted Fiona, a patron I interviewed within The Welcome Café. Analysing her quote again here, the language of enquiry and journey is evident:

> It's interesting actually, I was speaking to someone here once (a believer), when something happened that I was a bit thrown by; and I just happened to say to this person - "This has happened" - and I wouldn't have minded a faith perspective on that, but they didn't give that, or didn't overtly give that. And I remember thinking "Oh, actually, I wouldn't have minded if you were a bit more, had brought a bit more of your faith into that conversation". Generally, when I come and ask for advice, I'm really open-minded and I think, I'm never going to be close (Fiona, patron, The Welcome Café).

Fiona's use of such terms as 'faith perspective' and 'never going to be close', revealed language of someone seeking a new horizon and perspective. Fiona considered herself open-minded toward faith, however she also saw herself somewhat distant, hoping that those whom she considered to possess a greater understanding of faith might be able to encourage her enquiry. During one of my visits to The Welcome Café, chatting to Fiona further, she revealed that she had attended church as a child until her early teens, when she then 'fell away'. For Fiona, her faith-journey that had started as a child, had now stalled, yet God was still at work in her life.

Alison, one of The Friendship Café patrons, expressed similar language of journeying during her interview, albeit in different terms:

> It's a friendly place, one where I can relax but also listen to conversations [about faith] that take place. I might occasionally ask a question if they [the hosts] are talking about their church and stuff – but I don't consider myself to be religious at all, but I like to think that I am open to that sort of thing (Alison, patron, The Friendship Café).

For Alison, The Friendship Café provided an environment for her to encounter and enquire about matters of faith in a way in which she felt safe, describing herself as 'open to that sort of thing'. To what extent Alison could be described as a 'transitional explorer' was not certain. However, it was clear that The Friendship Café provided an environment where faith exploration was possible.

Rami's, Fiona's and Alison's café experiences revealed people seeking to make sense of their lived experiences, desiring to interpret this through a new lens of faith-enquiry. The café hosts' capacity to identify this language and to encourage faith-enquiry was critical in the patrons' ongoing faith journeys. This involved being open to the faith-stories of the patrons who did not express their experiences in familiar Christian jargon or terms. At the end of chapter two, I quoted Morisy who provided a challenge to those Christians who might feel they are the custodians of spiritual 'truth':

> Truth is tricky. We have to take more seriously how prone we are to deluding ourselves that we have the truth. Furthermore, the scope for delusion is greatest when we are powerful – and when we are anxious…. Truth is relational, in other words our journey towards truth relies on encounter with others – especially an encounter with those who are different from us (2004:ix).

For some evangelicals, such a statement is considered to be dangerously ambiguous (Chester, 2007). Formal, academic evangelical theology and its associated language provides clarity and an ordered sense of divine encounter for many evangelicals. Yet my interviews and observations, more so within The Friendship Café, revealed a journeying and searching for truth as the café hosts and patrons engaged in faith-based dialogue. As both groups shared personal experiences of faith-journey an 'exchange of truth stories' took place.

Whilst the normative voices within evangelical theology often express conversion using terms such as repentance, regeneration, and justification (Grudem, 1994), the

'on the ground' reality of the café patron's lived experiences was expressed in much more everyday terms. Use of the correct language to define the Christian experience, including conversion, is important to many evangelicals. A number of influential evangelical scholars lament the decline in the use of such language within the Church, with an understanding of words such as repentance, justification and sanctification deemed critical (Packer, 2008).[76]

The difference between the language of the hosts and patrons had the potential to obscure the faith-journey that each had experienced. Lees-Smith speaks of 'language acquisition and the development of religious belief' (2013:24), proposing that the language we use to describe our experiences, including religious ones, is bound up in the social context and culture we have been raised up within. Lees-Smith states, 'It is a question of learning the grammar or rules of the particular game in question' (2013:24).

Lees-Smith emphasises the importance some people put on the use of correct language to adequately define their experiences and highlights how the ordinary theology of Christians, 'attempts to make meaning out of a universal experience of life and the divine within the parameters of a particular tradition' (2013:26). Lees-Smith compares this to academic theology, defining this as, 'more formal, detached, impersonal and systematic' (2013:27). Ward, commenting on ordinary theology states that:

> Ordinary theology is what we start with, a kind of primal knowing that co-exists with the more technical and systematized knowing that is learnt through processes of education (Ward and Campbell, 2011:226-242).

I suggest that ordinary theology can also be found within the expressed and lived experiences of everyday people, not just Christians. Root's research (see chapter two) contains stories from a range of people who recalled having a divine encounter, and who used 'ordinary' language to define their experiences (Root, 2014).

Applying this to The Friendship and Welcome Cafés, the interaction between the hosts and patrons revealed considerable variations in the language used to describe

[76] Packer's book, *18 Words, The Most Important Words You will Ever Know* (2008), is a call to Christians to rediscover the depth and meaning of what he considers to be key words that should be understood.

spiritual understanding and experiences. My interview with Lesley revealed the influence of more normative theology as she spoke of 'repentance'. However, the ordinary theology expressed by hosts and patrons, revealed a broad and varied exposure and understanding of faith and of how God 'works'. This highlights the importance for evangelicals working or serving within community contexts to be "bi-lingual", having the capacity to understand the language of their tradition, yet able to interpret the concrete and lived faith-experiences of everyday people within their community.

This can create tensions for some evangelicals as they 'wrestle' with the more normative language of evangelicalism and endeavour to make sense of the faith-language and experiences of everyday people. This was evident within my interviews with some of the café hosts, Molly stated:

> People have all sorts of views about faith and stuff…expressing it in different ways…some of it quite weird, but It's good to see some respond, to have conversations about Jesus, its why we are here (Molly, host, The Friendship Café).

Katy, the manager of The Welcome Café said:

> People have their own opinions and backgrounds…but we see it very much as bringing people in, giving people the option, opening those (faith-based) conversations, making people aware of what's going on in the church, making absolutely everything we do, making people aware that it's because we are Christians (Katy, manager, The Welcome Café).

Whilst Molly and Katy recognised that patrons had various opinions on matters of faith, it was interesting to note their emphasis on having 'conversations' and giving people 'options'. Molly and Katy's answers revealed the importance of seeing measurable, faith-based encounters, yet also revealed how they identified the faith encounters of the patrons, albeit in everyday language. Such faith-based "encounters" are often implicit and difficult to quantify. Reader states:

> The search for a situated understanding of the Christian faith will involve a series of encounters with groups of people who are not regular churchgoers. As well as practical engagement, this process involves a deepening self-awareness for each of these groups, including those standing more firmly within the traditional Christian framework (1994:3).

Spiritual experiences and journeys are subjective and difficult to define and may not always be obvious. Observations within The Friendship Café revealed some patrons

quietly reading a Bible-based story to their child or reading a faith-based biography. Encounters between the café hosts and patrons, including the sharing of faith experiences, not only developed a self-awareness within each group, but also gave mutual insights and understanding into each other's faith-based experiences and journeys. A number of patrons within both cafés recalled conversations that had taken place. Mike, a patron in the Friendship Café, told me:

> It's a place where people have different views and opinions [on faith]. I have my own and find others interesting…. it's ok as long as people don't try and force their opinions on you (Mike, patron, The Friendship Café).

Mike was a daily, regular patron at the Friendship Café. The importance of a safe, comfortable place that encouraged conversation, came out in my interview and occasional chats with him. Mike often offered opinions on a whole range of issues, be that the latest news headlines or matters of faith. It was clear that Mike felt comfortable speaking with the hosts and sharing his opinions. Additionally, Janine from the Welcome Café told me:

> I feel this is a safe place to chat without anyone condemning you or making you feel awkward. That would put me right off if people suddenly started to force their views on me…but I feel I can explore…if I want to…and ask questions when I want. My friends who come here go to church and we sometimes chat about what they have been doing and stuff (Janine, patron, The Welcome Café).

Janine's response revealed another interesting dynamic within The Welcome Café. In spite of the lack of host and patron interaction, there were a number of Christian patrons who used the café as a place to share their faith. Janine did not want anyone to 'force their views' on her, yet those she considered 'friends' were welcome to share their opinions.

Astley depicts the coming together of an array of opinions in the terms of ordinary theology (the learners) and theology from 'the academy' (the formal theological establishments, formal authorities). Yet, Astley cautions that this is not about silent learners simply recording what they hear from the established theological academy, but rather a two-way dialogue:

> Learners never enter any task of theological learning with empty minds or hearts; they always come with something to contribute themselves – something to say on their own account….Although this learning is never

> a monologue in which academic theology (or the Christian tradition) speaks and the learners silently records what it says; neither should it be a monologue in which they only speak about their own point of view, without ever hearing it being challenged or allowing it to be transformed (2013:47).

Whilst Astley is speaking about the dialogue between the formal academy and the ordinary theology of Christians within the Christian tradition, this can loosely be applied to the cafés too as the evangelical hosts and the café patrons come together and share faith-based stories and ideas.[77] Watkins emphasises the importance of such interaction, expressing this in terms of a *theology of grace*:

> The more we tend to identify God's graceful working simply with what is explicitly 'religious' - scripture, talk about God, the institutional church etc., the less likely we are to be able to celebrate the graces at work in cultural formation, in friendships and in the deeply human-divine phenomenon of people looking for something, gently enquiring after things in the midst of busy, complex and sometimes lonely lives (2014:106).

I witnessed such 'graces at work' within The Friendship café as I saw 'people looking' at faith-based books or 'gently enquiring' about Sunday services or faith-based stories that they overheard. In contrast, the busyness of The Welcome Café operated by a largely non-faith host team, often prevented them from seeing these 'graces at work'.

Mary, a patron in The Friendship Café, told me:

> It's really relaxed Here….so people feel safe to chat about faith and stuff. A lot of my clients need to feel safe, whereas in a big church and that, they might not…but here, they can get used to the people and feel safe about joining in (Mary, patron, The Friendship Café).

Mary made an interesting comparison between 'big church' and the café, seeing this as an important factor in encouraging faith-based conversations. This local café provided an environment where the patrons felt safe to share their faith experiences. Bolger speaking of the rediscovery of public faith states:

> The shift that we are witnessing…involves a recognition that our worldviews are drawn from much more than our independent

[77] Reflecting my methodological approach based upon critical realism that gives value to the everyday language and lived experiences of people.

> intellects…we are increasingly conscious that we cannot divorce them from the realities of community, practice and tradition (2012:128).

Bolger is reflecting here, like Root in chapter two, about the importance of taking peoples' 'concrete and lived' experiences seriously. The critical realist underpinning of my research approach ensured that I remained open to the opinions of the café patrons as they spoke about their own faith experiences and journeys. This can draw criticism from some within the "evangelical magisterium"[78] who prefer the use of more formal language to describe conversion. However, the language of journeying is not in opposition to formal definitions of spiritual encounter.

Smith's analysis of research conducted into evangelical beliefs and practices (2021), highlighted how many evangelicals see the importance of 'building friendship' as an effective way of sharing their faith (2021:47). For a number of patrons, these cafés were important places where relationships could be built and where their faith journey could be encouraged. This led some patrons within The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés to describe their cafés as blessed or spiritual places, a theme I will now draw out.

6.2 Spiritual Place

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, 'Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it' (Genesis 28:16).

Brueggemann states:

> The sense of being lost, displaced, and homeless is pervasive in contemporary culture. The yearning to belong somewhere, to have a home, to be in a safe place, is a deep and moving pursuit. Loss of place and yearning for place are dominant images (2002:1).

This is not simply a theological observation that is visible through the life of Israel but can subsequently be seen through the lives of Christians within church history, including the persecuted church today. Additionally, this sense of a loss of place and connected belonging is a lament from sociologists, including Oldenburg, more specifically within what they see as the disappearance of local place:

[78] Referring to the language of influential evangelicals.

> The problem of place…manifests itself in a sorely deficient informal public life. The structure of shared experience beyond that offered by family, job, and passive consumerism is small and dwindling (1999:13).

This longing for meaningful place is a common factor that was evident within the café host and patron interviews. This search for such a place, however personally defined, was a shared thread between the patrons and hosts of both cafés. Jodie, a regular Welcome Café patron commented:

> This is a lovely place, I've been coming for 6 years now and really miss it when I can't make it for whatever reason (Jodie, patron, The Welcome Café).

In chapter five, I quoted Lesley, The Friendship Café manager, who commented on the café, not only as a place of belonging, but one where faith could be expressed:

> So, the idea was really based on, we wanted it to be a neutral space where people could come, a safe space where people can come. Those people that get marginalised for different reasons, those people who just need somewhere to hang out but we, we needed to be, as I say, a neutral space, where people could come, that actually a safe space where we can express our faith. So that is, well what we do and how we care for people - but also very much so what we say and what we speak and what we talk about and how we operate in that space (Lesley, manager, The Friendship Café).

Mike, a Friendship Café patron commented:

> Whatever you want to call it, it is a nice place to come when you have a religion or not. You can come and mix and learn (Mike, patron, The Friendship Café).

Zoe, a Welcome Café patron told me:

> It's lovely. It's very special…if you start going, you'll meet people…you'll make friends from just coming in (Zoe, patron, The Welcome Café).

For Lesley, the importance of the café was that it was a place of faith sharing. For Mike, he valued the café as a place that encouraged mixing, the creation of community and that gave opportunity to learn from others. Jodie and Zoe from The Welcome Café, simply saw it as a 'lovely place' to meet people and make friends. Their common observations was that their cafés had become *places of conversation,* reflecting one of Oldenburg's key characteristics of a third place (1999:26).

This common ground that sees sociological and theological objectives converge, was expressed in chapter three (§3.2) in terms of *secular spiritual capital* (Baker,

2008), where equivalent moral and ethical objectives within faith and non-faith-based groups and individuals align. The patrons in general valued the provision of a safe, friendly and comfortable place, yet it was also a spiritual place for those who could recognise and take the time to engage with matters of faith. This was more the case within The Friendship Café as the hosts were more intentional about contributing a spiritual dimension. Such things as offers of prayer and the sharing of personal faith stories developed a sense of spiritual place as people "talked about God" in this café. A number of the patrons interviewed used interesting language as they described their cafés as places of blessing. Lucy, a patron in The Friendship Café told me:

> When I saw people being prayed for and the way people were in general, how the café team spoke to people, I thought '"what a blessed place this is" (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

Claire, a Welcome Café patron stated:

> I think it's got a feeling of like being a blessed place. That's how I feel. I'm not a Christian myself but I feel like ... not only through having the Café. It feels like a blessing, a special place (Claire, patron, The Welcome Café).

Both Lucy and Claire expressed their appreciation of such a local place, yet equally could recognise the spiritual aspect and value of their cafés, framing this in the language of *blessed* place.

Cafés that reflect the characteristics of community and meaningful place, theologically reflect the understanding of Brueggemann as he speaks of God bringing a people together in community, all within place (2002:3). Brueggemann argues that place, specifically speaking of 'land', lies at the very heart of the biblical story and furthermore is the central theme of biblical faith (2002:3). According to Brueggemann, our spiritual experiences take place in concrete places (land) and give a 'rootedness' to our experiences (2002:4). Within my joint, co-authored work with Andrew Hardy, I concur with this:

> It will be through blessed place and people that God (works out) His redemptive history. Whilst humankind, made in His image, will be the focus and benefactors, this will be achieved in the context of place (Hardy and Foster, 2019:72).

Such places as The Friendship and Welcome Cafés, offered opportunity for a broad range of people to experience shared community in a place where conversations,

including faith-based ones, could take place. Inge goes as far to suggest that it is the *duty* of the Church to, 'live out a witness in the service of God and humanity', achieving this in local place, thus, 'giving great nourishment and sustenance to it' (2003:136-137). Yet whilst the creation of place does not necessarily have to have an obvious spiritual element - there are plenty of third places without faith-based objectives – a number of Friendship Café patrons welcomed the presence of visible faith-based activity.

Whilst overt faith-sharing was not a consistent part of The Welcome Café host teams' practice, Claire still sensed that the café was a 'blessed place'. For Claire, she was able to discern that the café had a tangible sense of 'otherness', although she was referring more to the cafés general feel as opposed to more visible expressions of spirituality. Sundays changed this 'feel' somewhat as the café hosts and their host church developed more intentional expressions of faith (§5.5). Church members sat in the café before and after the service creating a more recognisable group, with visible prayer 'pots' encouraging anyone who felt the need, to request prayer.

A number of The Friendship Café patrons commented on the difference between their café and many others, referring to faith-based activity they had witnessed. Lucy spoke about 'people praying', with Rami speaking about the faith-based discussions he had seen taking place or had been involved in. This lead to a number of patrons defining the café in terms of spiritual place. Chapter five highlighted how a number of the café hosts had observed this, and so used the language of 'church' to describe their café. Whilst the patrons within both cafés could not all articulate what that 'blessedness' was, referring to Jacob's encounter with God recorded in Genesis,[79] Rumsey states:

> For Jacob, God's 'being' precedes his own 'knowing' – 'God is' in this place and 'I knew it not'. The existence of God 'in place' is thus independent of Jacob's knowing it, but…is nevertheless *revealed* to him, imaginatively – and in that revelation comes the awareness and symbolic construction of 'place' (2017:20).

Like Jacob, the patrons had sensed an 'otherness' about their 'place' and used language of their cafés being blessed. God's activity and presence within the cafés

[79] Genesis 28:16

was not dependent on the patrons ability to articulate it. Rumsey suggests that an encounter with the risen Christ is not only found amongst the formal or classical church-based practices or places but rather is, 'also grounded in a definite kind of local encounter' beyond these practices (2017:3) and suggests that, 'Christ may be encountered in all places' (2017:21).

This can often challenge Christians, who may consider that it is only their own, more traditional places of worship that can be considered 'blessed' and where God can be encountered 'properly'. Chapter four drew out the tensions that exist within the Christian tradition around 'proper church' (§4.5). This can lead to a strategy of Christians trying to invite the people they come across in everyday places, to their central gatherings, as places of blessing. This emphasis on the traditional, central church gathering has often been in response to heavy criticism of the institutional Church by some Christians who prefer what they consider to be more culturally relevant, "missional" expressions of Church. DeYoung states:

> We all agree with the theory of being a community of God that defines and organises itself around the purpose of being an agent of God's mission in the world. But the missional conversation often goes a step further by dismissing the "attractional" model of church as ineffective (2009:45).

Criticisms aimed at the institutional church have tended to emphasise it's outdated practices and irrelevance to modern day culture (Frost and Hirsch, 2013),[80] which in turn has led to a number of community initiatives being developed across a range of Christian traditions, aimed at providing a contextually relevant church expression that meets both a local community need and offers a "new expression" of church (§4.5).[81]

The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés were not cafés seeking to intentionally become new expressions of church but were third place cafés that a number of their patrons could describe as "blessed places", where spiritual encounter was possible. Having said this, a further theme that my analysis of the interview transcripts revealed was one of *gathered faith community.*

[80] *The Shaping of Things to Come, Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church,* by Frost and Hirsch is one such book, that heavily critiques the institution of traditional forms of church.
[81] As mentioned in chapter four - Although Fresh Expressions is described as a 'non-prescriptive' form of church – it still has a very defined model/process which leads to a recognisable 'church taking shape'.

6.3 A Gathered Faith Community

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them (Matthew Chapter 5:1-2).

The gospel of Matthew's introduction to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount depicts a crowd gathered around the person and teaching of Jesus. The established, classical, and formal religious establishment, portrayed by the temple, with its orthodoxy, is frequently seen to 'react' against this activity. John Elliott suggests that within Luke's volumes, The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts depict a 'drawing away from' the classical establishment; with 'temple versus household' being one such example:

> Among the means by which Luke has chosen to concretize the message and meaning of the good news, is his depiction of two basic institutions of Judaism and early Christianity: namely, the Jerusalem Temple and the private Household. Quantitatively, the Lucan references to these institutions outnumber those of any other New Testament writing. Qualitatively, as the use of common and special tradition, structural arrangement, and coordination of themes demonstrate. Temple and Household constitute key elements in Luke's gospel of the reign of God in human history…. Although this focus of Luke's work is generally recognised…far less attention has been given to what appears to be a deliberate contrast drawn between Temple and Household and the social and ideological ramifications of this contrast in the narrative of Luke-Acts…in the Lucan economy of salvation, the Temple and the Household represent opposed types of social institutions and economic relations, only one of which, the Household, is capable of embodying socially, symbolically and ideologically the structures, values and goals of an inclusive gospel of universal salvation… (Elliott, 1991:211-213).

Elliott is pointing us here to the disconnect between the central activity of the religious groups, represented by the Scribes and Pharisees, and the day-to-day ministry of Jesus that took place where people were at and within their locale. The centrality of the temple in the religious life of Israel was often emphasised at the exclusion of God's perceived work in other places, reflecting Pears' concerns about places potentially being places of exclusion (2015:35). However, Elliott argues that in Luke's writings, we see an increasing movement away from temple to household as the strategic locale of God's activity. This transition is developed within the New

Testament as it speaks about the *gathering* of God's people being a "temple" where God's Spirit dwells.[82]

This domination of the 'religious centre' can be an underlying attitude amongst Christians today. In my professional practice as a church minister for twenty years, this attitude was often reflected by church members who emphasised the importance of inviting people to church. In chapter five, this was reflected somewhat by Luke, one of The Friendship Café hosts, it is worth requoting:

> We've had one person who came along quite a lot to the café, they were quite keen, they were usually there before it opens. Then they came along to church through it and they even said something at one point, that they want to come to faith - and they wanted to know God more. So, they have started their journey. There has been a few other people who have come along to church because of it, they haven't necessarily come to faith yet but they are a lot more open to church than they were when I first met them (Luke, host, The Friendship Café).

This 'moving away' from temple to household is an interesting concept in Elliott's work. Elliott goes on to associate the temple narratives with 'conflict', with the followers of Jesus increasingly gathering in homes and other places. These gatherings outside of the temple, portray a mix of Jewish and non-Jewish believers, working out their identity and place in their new location.

As The Friendship Café started to develop a gathered community of hosts and patrons, many of whom saw the café as a place of spiritual gathering, this presented a specific challenge to Phoenix Church as the boundaries between the church and the community were blurred.[83] This challenge is reflected in a number of New Testament narratives as the predominantly Jewish early Church had to come to terms with their newly constituted gathering, embracing people from a broad range of cultures. Acts chapter fifteen reflects this conflict as the early Church met to discuss how the newly converted, non-Jewish believers could be integrated into this 'new community'.[84]

---

[82] Paul's letter to the Ephesian Church in Chapter 2, verses 19-21 depicts them as the temple of the Holy Spirit.
[83] This represents the final part of my CIF that sees a newly gathered community being formed within the cafés – and informs the subsidiary research question asking to what extent the cafés were forming Christian community – see §1.
[84] See Acts 15, verses 1-35

Earlier in chapter five, I quoted Julie, a host in The Friendship Café, who expressed her understanding of the café being seen as church by some of the patrons:

> It became clear that people weren't going to cross that road to come to Phoenix Church, and yet there was a perfectly good community Café there that they would go into, that they were going into and that, that could become their church (Julie, host, The Friendship Café).

Joanne and Mike, regular patrons reflected this understanding of The Friendship Café being a 'gathering', where a new community was being formed:

> It's interesting to see the people come together actually, with different views. It's nice that they feel comfortable to chat about things, including faith and stuff. I think this creates a really *special community* where people can feel safe and explore (Joanne, patron, The Friendship Café).
>
> They've kind of *created a community* within the café, a very *special community* where you feel welcome and part of it, giving you the confidence to share your opinions on all sorts of things (Mike, patron, The Friendship Café)

Joanne and Mike's language of 'special community' was interesting. For Joanne, this was not a formal religious gathering, but rather a comfortable and vibrant gathering of people who felt safe to ask questions of faith. Equally, Mike saw this as an inclusive community, where opinions were encouraged to be shared, including those about faith.

This said, this does raise the question around who the Church is for, and for what purpose people gather. Watkins and Shepherd highlight the challenges of assessing the authenticity of such a gathering where not everyone acknowledges it to be a "gathering around Jesus":

> The mission statement of (this) Church that undergirds all its work and worship - including Messy Church – is 'All for Jesus, Jesus for All'. It is an unashamedly Jesus-centred community. The data seems to be suggesting, however, that Messy Church is in danger of creating *'Jesus-less community'*. The network of friendship and support that attracts parents of young children to Messy Church can operate and even be self-perpetuating without any reference to Jesus (2014:99).

This is an interesting tension and raises some important questions for The Friendship and Welcome Cafés. In the last section I quoted Rumsey's challenge of God 'being' in place independent of [us] 'knowing' it (2017:20). Theologically

reflecting on this, as Jesus delivered His message on 'the mountainside', the individuals within the crowd reacted in various ways. Yet any failure to recognise Jesus' true identity did not make the place less Jesus centred. The pivotal point seemed to be why the crowd were gathered, with Jesus able to hold their various motivations in tension.[85] This biblical faith *community* found in the gospels manifested itself in various outcomes that saw Jesus rejected, misunderstood or embraced and followed.

Notwithstanding Rumsey's interpretation of Jacob's experience in Genesis 28, in the case of the cafés, I suggest that the identity of these places as a 'community gathered around Christ', depended equally on the intentional practices of the host teams too. The Friendship Café hosts each understood their role in helping to develop an environment conducive to faith discussion, whilst The Welcome Café host team did not all see themselves as actively participating in a faith-community. Additionally, the capacity of the host team to recognise and interpret the faith responses of the café patrons was a key factor, in seeing the 'graces at work' in the patrons' faith-enquiries (Watkins and Shepherd, 2014:106).

Lucy, a patron within the Friendship Café, speaking about the café as a gathered place of faith discovery stated:

> I thought that was really lovely and I thought there is very much a need out there for more of this, because you wouldn't get that if you went to an ordinary café. I think there's a real fear out there on the streets the more I'm talking to people, there's a real fear of what's happening in the times that we live in…and that fear seems to be almost a God-driven...fear. Not just a community or society breaking down which, you know, we all know and feel it is, but this café is a comfortable space….(and speaking about faith conversations) - it didn't worry me that 'oh that feels uncomfortable', I really thought that was quite an amazing thing to be able to do - this is an amazing community (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

For Lucy, she saw the café as a place of *faith encounter*. The faith-based objectives were on full display as she saw people praying, overheard faith-based conversations, and indeed engaged in faith-based discussion herself. Lucy's language revealed a recognition that this place was no 'ordinary' café. Lucy's own

[85] Those listening to Jesus had various motivations for doing so – some needed healing, others were keen to know if Jesus was the Messiah who would restore Israel's rule, others sought to catch Jesus out in order to discredit Him, whilst others were open to following Him.

sense of faith was also revealed as she spoke about the challenging times being 'God-driven'. Lucy contrasted the café community to the general community that, in her eyes was 'breaking down'. Lucy recognised the special nature and dynamic of this 'new community' and was able to identify this in language of faith. The spiritual practices of prayer and faith-based discussion, often associated with gatherings in more formal, religious settings, were taking place in the café.

Mary, a Friendship Café regular stated:

> Well, I don't think it [faith] is forced, nobody's ever said, you know, like you said, it's just your own awareness of something, especially with me. You know. It's definitely more, to, you know, you've got to have that self-realisation – be aware of it (faith) (Mary, patron, The Friendship Café).

Mary recognised the faith-based identity of the café. Yet whilst she struggled to articulate this in religious terms, the reality of this café being different and 'gathered around something', and not simply a community of friendly people, was clear within my interview with her.

In comparison, within The Welcome Café, the identity of it being a gathered faith community was reduced to Sundays. This significant difference in atmosphere and emphasis on a Sunday, set it aside, and in the opinion of some patrons I interviewed, encroached on a place they saw as 'their café'. Sarah commented:

> If you come on a Sunday morning, then its…it does have a religious, yeah, it does have a religious feel…and they open the café, after church, on a Sunday morning, and it's just the people that are here for that event (Sarah, patron, The Welcome Café).

Sarah saw the Sunday café as something separate, something that had a 'different feel'. Sarah used language of exclusion too, the café on a Sunday morning being, 'just for people that are here for that event'. This change in emphasis on a Sunday was introduced by Gateway Church and the café management to mitigate against the fact that during the rest of the week, prayer and faith-sharing was not an obvious and planned part of the café team approach. However, this seemed to work against any attempt to develop a café with a consistent culture of spiritual gathering, as it seemed to enforce the assumption that such things were characterised by special times and locations. The mitigating strength of The Welcome Café was that as a third place of community conversation and belonging (Oldenburg, 1999), this

facilitated opportunities for Christians using the café to share opinions and 'faith journey'.

There was a marked difference in the perceptions of The Friendship Café hosts and patrons in comparison to The Welcome Café hosts and patrons, regarding what a 'gathered faith community' could look like. The Friendship Café hosts and patrons saw the café as a place of gathering that could, for some at least, be their 'church'. For a number of the patrons, the café was the place they experienced prayer, conversations around Bible stories, and heard personal stories of faith. Within the New Testament book of Acts, Luke depicts several practices of the early Church, stating how, 'they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer'.[86] The Friendship Café community of hosts and patrons was also characterised by Bible discussions, the meeting of regulars, conversations about Jesus, and people occasionally praying. The café hosts and patrons had in effect, become a 'newly constituted community', with the hosts from the 'religious centre' welcoming the patrons' faith stories and enquiries.

In contrast, The Welcome Café had no consistent identity as a spiritual gathering during the week. Sunday's mitigated against this somewhat, though brought mild resentment from some regular patrons who saw this as encroaching on 'their café'. The patron's café had effectively become a church on Sundays, and in the eyes of some was 'just for people [here] for that event'. Whilst patrons were encouraged to join the Sunday café community, being enticed through free tea and coffee, they did not see themselves as part of the 'gathered community'.

6.4 Chapter Conclusions

Although more prominent within The Friendship Café, across both cafés there was a real sense of *journey* for both hosts and patrons. For hosts as their understanding of 'God at work' was challenged by seeing and hearing the faith-experiences of the patrons. For the patrons, as they overheard host conversations, read faith-based literature, and engaged in faith-based conversations and activity themselves. Patron's stories of their previous faith encounters, and their reflections on what they saw and heard was frequently expressed in the language of journey and encounter.

[86] Acts 2:42

Again, this was more anecdotal within The Welcome Café, yet very evident within my patron interviews in The Friendship Café.

Additionally, both cafés could be described as *spiritual places.* Several patrons described their café as “blessed” places that were ‘different’, places that offered the home from home characteristics of a regular cafe, yet with an additional spiritual aspect that could be accessed if desired. To what extent all the patrons *knew* God was in their ‘café place’ is questionable, however, Rumsey’s challenge of the existence of God in place being independent of us knowing it (2017:20) offers hope to both cafés.

Concerning the theme of *gathered faith community,* both cafés manifest this to a greater or lesser extent. The Friendship Café had developed into a gathered faith community with a number of hosts and patrons describing it in similar terms. The patrons I interviewed within The Friendship Café each considered themselves to be a part of this ‘special community’. The Friendship Café constituted a ‘new faith community’ where prayer, ‘fellowship’, the reading of Bible-based literature, and conversations about Jesus took place.

In comparison, this was not as defined within The Welcome Café, with perhaps the exception of Sundays. This said, the welcoming, third-place nature of The Welcome Café facilitated the opportunity for faith-based conversations for those staff, volunteers and Christian patrons that saw the opportunity to do so.

7 Chapter Seven: Conclusions and Contributions to Knowledge and Practice

This chapter draws together the findings and conclusions from the research conducted within The Friendship and The Welcome Cafés. At the outset of this project, I wanted to understand the extent to which the cafés contributed to a sense of local community whilst also providing an environment for faith-based conversations. Additionally, I was keen to understand the extent to which both cafés were manifesting a Christian community. To address this, I set up a number of sub-questions that asked:

- To what extent did the cafés contribute to a sense of local community?
- To what extent did the café hosts communicate their Christian identity?
- To what extent did the physical café layout communicate the Christian hosts' identity?
- To what extent did faith-based discussions take place in the cafés?
- To what extent were the cafés manifesting Christian community?
- What additional themes might emerge from analysis of the interview transcripts?

The findings and emerging themes from the research, detailed in §7.1 and §7.2 below, reveal the answers to these questions. I will initially summarise the findings from the fieldwork, and then detail the key points of significance and contribution to knowledge of this thesis, concluding with recommendations for further research.

7.1 Summary of Findings

Concerning contribution to a local sense of community, the fieldwork conducted within the cafés revealed them to be significant contributors to social capital, albeit in different ways. Chapter three detailed the issues surrounding social capital, including how theology has contributed to this important measure of community well-being (§3.1-3.2). The varied definitions and emphases of some author's construal's of social capital included Power and Willmott's concepts of bonding and bridging capital, where bonding capital emphasised the importance of personal connections to other local people and bridging capital referred to connections with local community groups and organisations (2007:6). The fieldwork revealed The

Friendship Café to be a key contributor of both bonding and bridging capital, providing the patrons not only with personal friendship and connections, but also becoming a hub for other community groups seeking to enhance their own profile and local connections (§5.1). In comparison, the strength of The Welcome Café was more in its contribution to bonding capital, providing a place of local connection for many people who felt isolated within the local community (§5.4). This bonding element of local connection had been well established within the café throughout the ten years of its operation.

Within chapter three I highlighted how a number of churches and faith-based organisations sought to develop local community connections through the provision of projects designed to meet a local, measured need whilst also creating opportunities for faith-sharing (§3.3). Chapter three also highlighted how evangelising within welfare projects had attracted criticism from some quarters that saw this as a potential abuse of relational power (Morisy, 2004; Cloke et al, 2013). Additionally, I also brought out the risk of erosion of the identity and faith-sharing objectives of FBOs as they collaborate with local government-funded community projects (Cloke and Pears, 2016), with such objectives and faith-sharing motivations often being minimalised or side-lined altogether. The fieldwork revealed that the cafés, by their nature *not* being needs-based projects or churches, attracted a much broader range of people from the communities they were located in.

Concerning the communication of the café hosts' Christian identity, as the café hosts and patrons were brought into close proximity, a place was created where views and opinions on a whole range of issues, including faith, could be shared (§5.3). The two cafes were found to be key locations that brought the evangelical hosts and the patrons from the local community together in interaction and dialogue, effectively creating a new community.[87] This provided an interesting contrast to Strhan's research into a London-based conservative evangelical church that depicted evangelicals' sense of disconnection and alienation from the 'urban city' (Strhan, 2019).

The fieldwork revealed The Friendship Café to be a place where faith-based discussions took place. The approach of the café host community, informed by a

[87] Reflecting my CIF of the creation of a newly gathered community.

Missio Dei, incarnational theology, saw them develop meaningful conversations around faith (§5.2). Such conversations made these cafés places of gospel conversation in the sense that opinions around experiences of the divine, attitudes to church, who Jesus was, and what a community of faith-enquiry might look like, frequently took place. Such faith-based conversations within The Welcome café were not frequently observed. The Welcome Café hosts communicated their faith and identity more subtly through the provision of Gateway Church information and welcome cards, in addition to a bible verse displayed on a chalkboard in the café entrance (§5.5). Although there was a more obvious Christian presence on Sundays, there was no obvious gospel conversations taking place within The Welcome Café during the rest of the week.

The fieldwork also revealed that the physical layout of both cafés was a crucial factor in facilitating the conversations between hosts and patrons and communicating the hosts' Christian identity (§5.2 and 5.5). The Friendship Café, being smaller, made it more conducive to café-wide conversations, where interactions between hosts and patrons could easily switch from private table conversations to café-wide ones. This enabled both direct conversations and indirect participation, people effectively listening in to the conversations of others. A bookshelf containing bibles and faith-based books, including children's books, provided an alternative resource for faith-enquiry for café patrons. Whilst a number of patrons were happy to engage in conversations around matters of faith, some preferred more discreet ways of enquiry. This involved parent and carers reading bible-based books to their children, or alternatively taking books home – what Watkins refers to as 'ecclesiological overflow' (2014:104). The Welcome Café was much bigger and much busier. This gave the café a real sense of life and interaction, though worked against a sense of communal café-wide conversation. Conversations here were restricted to those sitting together, or near each other. Additionally, in the patron interviews within both cafés, comments around café layout frequently emerged (§5.1 and 5.4), with patrons describing the cafés as, 'no dark corners or hidden booths' (Lucy), a place where, 'you can feel comfortable' (Mary), 'somewhere comfortable…where the kids can roam around' (Sarah). The layout of both cafés significantly contributed to the overall sense of these being welcoming community third places, with comfy seating areas designed to encourage patrons to 'stay and chat'. This joint desire to create a

meaningful place of connection was an important factor in both cafés, in the development of an arena where conversation was the 'main activity' (Oldenburg, 1999).

In addition to the core research themes of community and faith-sharing, further themes emerged out of the research. The fieldwork revealed a number of patrons to express their experiences and understanding of faith in terms of *journey* (§6.1). Chapter three highlighted the debate amongst some evangelicals that pitched crisis conversion against what others see as a more gradual journey to faith (§3.4). Engaging with Jamieson (2003), chapter six spoke of 'transitional explorers', those seeking out or 'opening up a new faith journey' (2003:75). Rami, a patron within The Friendship Café was an example of someone who, from a Hindu background, was open about his own faith-story and experiences and expressed an openness to the stories of the café hosts. Fiona, a patron within The Welcome Café, was also open about her own childhood exposure to faith within a Christian context yet was disappointed that when she desired to enquire further, was not offered any encouragement to encourage her faith exploration.

The fieldwork also revealed the cafés to be *spiritual places* (§6.2). The desire for meaningful place was expressed in varied terms by the hosts and patrons of both cafés, describing their cafés as places of welcome, blessed places, lovely places, and places of learning amongst other things. In chapter six I defined this converging of common desires as a form of secular spiritual capital – where equivalent values are expressed by the people within the local community and FBOs (Baker, 2008, §3.2). Upon this platform of meaningful place, the host teams had the opportunity to develop a *spiritual* dimension within their cafés. The extent to which they achieved this was explored in the fieldwork chapters (§5.2, §5.5, §6.2). Within The Friendship Café, frequent conversations about faith coupled with visible prayer taking place, helped create the sense of their café being a 'blessed place'. The practices of the host team and the activity taking place within The Friendship Café was what differentiated it from many other third places. Although The Welcome Café hosts relied more on displayed literature to communicate their faith-based identity, a number of the patrons still commented on the café in terms of it being a blessed and special place (§6.2).

Finally, the fieldwork conducted within The Friendship Café, revealed a common theme of *gathered faith community* (§6.3).[88] In chapter six I compared The Friendship Café community with the early church depicted by Luke where he characterised the early church as those who gathered to hear the Apostle's teaching, for social connection, prayer and communion.[89] These characteristics were evident within my observations in the café as hosts and patrons discussed the Bible, prayed, enjoyed each other's company, with varied conversational topics, including the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus.

7.2 Key Points of Significance and Contribution

The practical research findings from the fieldwork provide the basis for several significant insights and contributions to knowledge that this section will now detail. On a cursory glance through the list, one might be tempted to divide these contributions to knowledge into sociological and theological. I suggest that in one sense they are all theological.[90] For as places of hospitality are created, this provides the arena and platform within and upon which conversation can take place, including faith-based conversation.

My Christocentric Incarnational Framework emphasises the importance of God already at work in the world, this includes creating places of connectivity. As God's people partner with Him in these places, as Mueller stated, our sacramental theology can be lived out and witnessed (2015:89). This coupled with my four-voices analysis of the host and patron conversations and interviews, allowed me to exegete the theology and related insights out of these unique places of connectivity. So it was out of this collective framework that the following contributions to knowledge emerged:

Firstly, *evangelical third place cafés are important hubs of social capital that create a platform for faith-sharing with a broad range of people by meeting a need for personal and community connectivity.* The patrons' need for a place where they could develop personal and community connections was a consistent theme that emerged from my interviews in both cafés. The cafés were meeting this need within their communities by providing places of *conversation* and *connectedness*. Chapter

[88] Answering my question concerning 'To what extent where the cafés manifesting Christian community?'
[89] Acts 2:42
[90] What I referred to earlier as located theology.

four highlighted how third places are traditionally ones where a broad array of opinions are shared, and to a great extent are expected, forming part of the attraction of such places (§4.1.3). This challenges those churches that focus on obvious or other specific needs and shows the importance of projects designed to enhance the bonding and bridging capital needed by the broader community.

Secondly, *evangelical cafés provide an environment where psychological barriers between the evangelical hosts and local patrons, be they imagined or real, can be diluted as the cafés become authentic third-place communities.* My research revealed the cafés to be important community hubs that brought the evangelical hosts and the local patrons into close proximity and dialogue. This provided an important contrast to Strhan's research that depicted an evangelical approach to community engagement as one of 'proclamation into'. Strhan's research revealed how the conservative evangelicals[91] she researched were encouraged by their church leaders to see the city as a 'cosmic battleground' (2019:87). Such heightened language of conflict was the cause, according to Strhan, of 'imagined barriers' within a number of those she interviewed, who were conscious of how negative media portrayals of evangelicals might affect those they were trying to share their faith with (2019:4). Within my twenty years of professional practice as an evangelical pastor, I found such attitudes to be prevalent amongst many congregations, with negative media portrayals of evangelicals impacting how they saw themselves and subsequently engaged with their communities.[92]

However, in contrast to Strhan's research, within The Friendship Café, the Missio Dei understanding of the host team (§3.6) helped them to take an incarnational approach, one that physically "entered into" and did not "proclaim into" the local community. Additionally, the café environment helped hosts and patrons get to know each other as they exchanged general conversation and opinions, effectively reducing the social 'distance' between them. It was this close interaction that saw both the hosts and patrons develop a greater understanding of each other's worldviews, and enough of a sense of ease to share their stories of divine encounter. Both cafés, as true third-place communities significantly reduced any hierarchy

[91] Strhan makes a footnote reference to the general differentiation and theological emphasis between conservative and charismatic evangelicals – but her focus is on conservative evangelicals.
[92] Phoenix Church changed its signage from "Phoenix Evangelical Church" to simply "Phoenix Church" reflecting this self-consciousness of attitudes around the word "evangelical".

within host and patron interactions as these welcoming, friendly places encouraged conversation, belonging and a sense of place-attachment and ownership.

Thirdly, the Friendship Café fieldwork revealed that with a host team aligned with faith-sharing objectives*, third place cafés of general conversation can be developed into places of faith-based conversation too.* As third places, where opinions on an array of subjects are typically shared, the hosts were able to naturally develop faith-based conversations. The general conversational atmosphere of the café minimised what for some can be the "awkwardness" of faith-based discussions, as conversations about faith were included within the general mix of topics characteristic of such places. This revealed the importance of developing places of general, everyday conversation and interaction, which can be used as a basis to develop conversations around faith.

Fourthly, *the physical layout of third place cafés and availability of faith-based literature within them, contribute to faith-based discussions and enquiry.* Chapter five revealed the contrast in the cafés' layout (§5.2 and 5.5), with the design of the smaller Friendship Café enabling conversations to switch from private table ones to broader 'café-wide' ones. This allowed patrons and hosts to 'listen in' to the broader discussions, effectively creating a form of "passive evangelism". Additionally, the availability of faith-based literature allowed more subtle forms of faith enquiry as patrons read bible or faith-based stories to their children. This provided a sharp contrast to the congregation researched by Strhan that were encouraged to focus on *verbal* proclamation as a form of mission.

Fifthly, the fieldwork also revealed that *evangelical third place cafés encourage faith journey and exploration*, with patrons and hosts expressing their own faith-journeys using a variety of terms. A challenge for evangelical churches or others that insist on a more traditional view of "crisis conversion" or faith encounter, with its associated normative language, is to develop places that facilitate faith-enquiry and journey. This has the potential to lead to the creation of a dynamic community centred around faith-based discussion, with individuals at varying stages.

Sixthly, *evangelical hosts of third places need to develop a "bi-lingual" approach to ministry that is able to interpret both the normative language of the evangelical magisterium and the everyday "faith-language" of the patrons*. The contrast between

Rami's and Fiona's experiences of faith-enquiry (§6.1), demonstrated the importance of what Lees-Smith refers to as 'language acquisition' (2013:24), with a significant factor being the capacity of the hosts to interpret the language of the patrons as they communicate their faith-based experiences. This will involve both assisting patrons to make sense of the normative language they hear, often expressed in terms such as repentance and justification, whilst also interpreting the everyday faith-based language of the patrons themselves. Developing such a skill would help the hosts to 'celebrate the graces (of God) at work' in the cafés. To re-quote Watkins:

> The more we tend to identify God's graceful working simply with what is explicitly 'religious' - scripture, talk about God, the institutional church etc., the less likely we are to be able to celebrate the graces at work in cultural formation, in friendships and in the deeply human-divine phenomenon of people looking for something, gently enquiring after things in the midst of busy, complex and sometimes lonely lives (2014:106).

In chapter six I also referred to Astley's concept of 'imaginative seeing' that seeks to look beyond the face value words and activity, with the need to, 'picture life through theological or spiritual eyes' (2013:48). As the café hosts looked beyond the expressed words and experiences of the patrons, this 'imaginative seeing' helped them discern the patron faith journeys and enquiries. The cafés had in effect become "third linguistic places" and hubs of conversation where faith stories and experiences were exchanged, albeit in different terms. Reflecting on this theologically, the seventeenth chapter of the New Testament book of Acts comes to mind where in Athens the Apostle Paul can recognise the spirituality and religiosity of the local people, seeking to use this as a basis for ongoing dialogue.[93]

Seventh, *the research revealed the cafés to be spiritual places.* Yet an important factor that I brought out in chapter six (§6.2) was the sense of God *already* 'being' in place, without people necessarily being aware of it. To requote Rumsey on Jacob's experience in Genesis 28:

> For Jacob, God's 'being' precedes his own 'knowing' – 'God is' in this place and 'I knew it not'. The existence of God 'in place' is thus independent of Jacob's knowing it, but…is nevertheless *revealed* to

[93] Acts 17:16-34 sees the Apostle Paul addressing the local Stoic and Epicurean philosophers with his distinctive Gospel message whilst being able to acknowledge the spirituality of his listeners.

> him, imaginatively – and in that revelation comes the awareness and symbolic construction of 'place' (2017:20).

This gradual revelation of the presence of God is reflected in several other Biblical narratives. Throughout the gospels the recognition of Jesus as 'God in the flesh' is developed over time as the disciples witness His ministry and miracles. In the eight chapter of Mark's gospel, Jesus questions the disciples about their understanding of His identity.[94] The realisation of 'God being with them' was a gradual process for the disciples. On the Emmaus road, the resurrected Jesus appears and speaks to two disciples who initially do not recognise who He is. It is only once Jesus disappears from their presence and they are reflecting on what they had seen and heard that they then proclaim, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?'.[95] A number of the café patrons reflected on what they had "seen and heard", commenting on conversations or prayers they had witnessed or participated in (§5.2 and §5.5). In chapter six I quoted Lucy from The Friendship Café:

> When I saw people being prayed for and the way people were in general, how the café team spoke to people, I thought '"what a blessed place this is" (Lucy, patron, The Friendship Café).

It was the visible witness of prayer and the behaviours of the host team that influenced Lucy to describe The Friendship Café as a blessed place and to express a sense of 'otherness' in the café. It was through such observed and personal faith encounters that patrons reflected and echoed the words of Jacob that, 'God was in this place and I did not know it'.[96] The sense of these cafés being spiritual places provides a challenge to those who emphasise the spirituality of religious buildings over and against what can be seen as the *secular* world. The cafés were spiritual places where the presence of God was discerned, albeit expressed by the patrons in various terms such as 'blessed' and 'special'.

Eighth and finally, the research revealed The Friendship Café to have developed from purely being a third-place community, *into becoming a type of gathered faith community, a new locus of spirituality, characterised by prayer, Bible-based discussion, social connection and conversations centred around Jesus*. In chapter

[94] Mark 8:27 – Jesus asks His disciples, 'who do you say that I am?'.
[95] Luke 24:32
[96] Genesis 28:16

five, I quoted Lesley, the café manager, where she stated how the main road separating Phoenix Church from the local community operated in effect as a barrier to local people coming to the church, this being one of the main reasons for the development of a community-based café (§5.1) where Phoenix Church members could connect with people from the local community. In chapter six I highlighted how Elliott, commenting on Luke-Acts, depicted the formation of a new locus of gathering away from the religious centre (1991:211-213), suggesting an intentional contrast between the temple as a zone of conflict, and the household as a place of gospel inclusivity. Elliott depicted the household as a place of welcome and belonging for those considered on the periphery of Judaism's social and religious life (1991:213). In his analysis of several biblical narratives, Elliot drew out this tension. Commenting on the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector,[97] Elliot states:

> The story begins in the temple…which is the conventional place for demarking social and religious differences; it concludes in the house…as the locus of the justified…temple and household denote contrasting forms of social life; the temple, an alienating form of collective, institutional life; the house, a creative form of integrative group life (1991:214).

My interviews within The Friendship Café revealed an integrated group of hosts and patrons whom, away from the 'religious centre', sensed an inclusivity and belonging where faith conversations could take place. To what extent this newly formed gathering of hosts and patrons could be considered 'real church' is interesting. Watkins and Shepherd, in their research into a Croydon Messy Church expression, posed the same question:

> This raises the question…as to whether Messy Church really can be called a church if its members are not seeking to encounter or engage with God in anyway…it might be better instead to understand it as a 'Church of the Unknown God' where encounter is possible if it is sought (Shepherd, 2014:101).

The contrast with my research was that a number of patrons interviewed were indeed seeking to encounter and engage with God. The Welcome Café was possibly a closer comparison to the Croydon Messy Church expression, as faith exploration

[97] Luke 18:9-14

was much more subtle and less defined (§5.5). Having said this, Watkins questioned the necessity to be so constrained when defining what true church is:

> However, to raise this question (pertinent as it may be) is to read the data in only one way - a way that implies a clear delineation of what is or is not church, and who is or is not a disciple…[this Messy Church community] presents us with a reality of church which resists the clear setting of boundaries, or simple identifications. For, as a matter of fact, this…group…do meet regularly, hear about each other and about scripture, and are developing particular kinds of supportive relationships which have begun, in small but significant ways, to impact on their wider social existence. It is arguable that they do, in fact, encounter Jesus - even if they would not name this encounter, and that they return month after month because of this (possibly anonymous) meeting (Watkins, 2014:104-106).

I agree that it is unhelpful to be so definitive, but as I drew out in chapter five, it was the contrast in approaches of the café host teams that made a huge difference and contribution to the faith-based "signature" of their cafés. The intentionality of The Friendship Café hosts to share their faith and create a place of faith-enquiry was a significant differentiation between theirs and the approach of The Welcome Café hosts (§5.2 and 5.5) The "Sunday approach" of The Welcome Café demonstrated a much more intentional faith-sharing strategy, but with strong and visible connections to the "religious centre", did not foster an integrative group of hosts and patrons.

This newly formed community of faith-enquiry within The Friendship Café could be critiqued as patron participation was inconsistent. However, within my twenty years of professional practice as a church pastor, the same observations could be levelled at the congregations I served, with varying levels of engagement and enthusiasm. The development within Phoenix Church from seeking to attract local people to its church-based programme, to a congregation with a Missio Dei understanding, translated into the development of The Friendship Café as a new locus of spiritual enquiry for the local community. This parallels Elliot's comparison of temple versus household in Luke:

> The temple was for Luke a holy place which had lost its power to make holy, that is to bring all who were unholy into communion with the Holy One…[it was] no longer the place where the hope of the world's salvation and the universal experience of God's mercy could be realised (1991:223).

The Friendship Café offered a place of hope and salvation for those willing to enquire and participate in this gathered faith community.

7.3 Further Research and Conclusions

This thesis addressed a largely neglected field of research in evangelical community third places, specifically cafés. Considering the research findings and insights detailed in §7.1 and §7.2 above, I can conclude that cafés diminish social barriers by providing a place of personal and community connectivity, where faith-based conversation can take place that encourages faith journey and exploration, at the same time helping develop such cafés into spiritual places, constituting a newly gathered faith community.

The significance of this is that it challenges those within the evangelical tradition who may insist on a "proclamation into", "crisis conversion" approach to Christian mission, informing how third place café-based mission provides a viable alternative to this. Theologically, I would seek to help stakeholders appreciate the value of community-based third places that have the potential to become spiritual places of faith enquiry, journey and community.

Further research is encouraged within several associated areas:

- Research within evangelical cafés that are based within church buildings would provide an interesting comparison regarding the impact of location, particularly considering how direct and obvious ecclesiological associations may impact café host and patron perceptions and subsequent interactions;
- Further research is recommended into evangelical third places that display a more overt conversionist "signature". This might take the form of Christian worship music playing, amongst other, more obvious faith-sharing activity. It would be interesting to see how such an increased and obvious profile might impact the delicate balance of patron perceptions of enhanced social capital and faith-sharing;
- Research into evangelical third places that adopt a less overt conversionist "signature" but that are fully committed and attentive to developing faith-based conversation would be interesting;
- Further research considering other third place locations run by evangelicals would also be beneficial in order to assess how the variation in third place

platforms impact the development of the formation of an enquiring faith community;

- Research into evangelical attitudes toward what constitutes a “gathered faith community” is also recommended.

This focus of this research was to investigate *How evangelical third place cafés facilitate gospel conversations.* The research within both cafés revealed them, to varying extents, as important hubs of personal and community connectivity, within which a community of faith-enquiry and faith journey had been established. This third-place community of hosts and patrons, more prominently within The Friendship Café, created a gathered faith community that for many had become a new locus of spirituality, a blessed place.

Bibliography:

Archer, M.S. (2020) 'The Morphogenetic Approach; Critical Realism's Explanatory Framework Approach', in Rona, P. & Zsolnai, L. (eds.), *Agency and Causal Explanation in Economics.* Cham, Switzerland: Springer. pp.137-150.

Astley, J. and Francis, L.J. (eds.) (2013) *Exploring Ordinary Theology.* Farnham: Ashgate.

Atkinson, P. and Hammersley, M. (1994) *Ethnography and Participant Observation.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bacon, D. (2003) *Communities, Churches and Social Capital in Northern Ireland.* Ulster: Centre for Voluntary Action Studies.

Baker, C. (2014) *Spiritual Capital and Progressive Localism,* Public Spirit Blog

Baker, C. (2021) *Confronting Christofascism: Healing the Evangelical Wound.* Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press.

Baker, C. and Miles-Watson, J. (2008) 'Exploring Secular Spiritual Capital: An Engagement in Religious and Secular Dialogue for a Common Future?', *International Journal of Public Theology,* 2(4), pp.442–464.

Baker, C. and Skinner, H. (2005) *Faith In Action, The Dynamic Connection Between Spiritual and Religious Capital.* Manchester: William Temple Foundation.

Beaumont, J. and Baker C. (eds.) (2011) *Postsecular Cities, Space, Theory and Practice.* London: Continuum Books.

Bebbington, D. (1989) *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, A History from the 1730s to the 1980s.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

Bolger, R.K. (2012) *The Gospel after Christendom, New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The Forms of Capital' in Richardson, J.G. (ed.) Nice, R. (trans.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education.* New York, NY: Greenwood.pp.46-58.

Brueggemann, W. (2002) *The Land, Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith.* Minneapolis, Min: Fortress Press.

Calver, C. and Warner, R. (1996) *Together We Stand, Evangelical Convictions, Unity and Vision.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Cameron, H. and Duce, C. (2013) *Practice in Ministry and Mission, A Companion.* London: SCM Press.

Cameron, H., Bhatti, D., Duce, C., Sweeney, J. and Watkins, C. (2010) *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology*. London: SCM Press.

Chester, T. and Timmis, S. (2007) *Total Church, A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community.* London: IVP.

Cloke, P. and Pears, M. (eds.) (2016) *Mission in Marginal Places, The Theory.* Milton Keynes: Paternoster

Cloke, P., Beaumont, J. and Williams, A. (2013) *Working Faith, Faith-Based Organisations and Urban Social Justice.* Milton Keynes: Paternoster.

Coleman, J.S. (1988) 'Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital', *American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 94, Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure*. pp. S95-S120.

Coventry City Council (2015) *Insight, The English Indices of Deprivation 2015, Summary for Coventry.* Coventry (UK)

Cray, G., Kennedy, A. and Mobsby, I. (eds.) (2012) *Ancient Faith, Future Mission, Fresh Expressions of Church and the Kingdom of God*. Norwich: Canterbury Press.

DeYoung, K. and Kluck, T. (2009) *Why we Love the Church, In praise of Institutions and Organized Religion.* Chicago, Ill: Moody Publishers.

Dunlop, A. (2021), Using the 'four voices of theology' in group theological reflection, *Practical Theology, 14:4, 294-308*, DOI: 10.1080/1756073X.2021.1957075

Elliott, J.H. (1991) 'Temple versus household in Luke-Acts: a contrast in social institutions' in Neyrey, J. (ed.) *The Social World of Luke-Acts, Models for Interpretation*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, pp.211-240.

Fellowship of The Churches of Christ (FCC). *Basis of the Network.* Retrieved 15th December 2021 from https://www.globalconnections.org.uk/about-us/basis-of-the-network.

FIEC (2016) *Who We Are*. Retrieved 30th September 2020 from https://www.fiec.org.uk.

FIEC (2016) *Beliefs*. Retrieved 3rd March, 2021 from https://fiec.org.uk/whowe-are/beliefs.

Flett, J.G. (2010) *The Witness of God, The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Foster, K. (2020) *Whatever Happened to the Rich Young Man? The Church and the New Marginalized.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock.

Frost, M. and Hirsch, A. (2013) *The Shaping of Things to Come, Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

Gauntlett, D. (2011) *Making is Connecting: The Social Meaning of Creativity from DIY to YouTube to Knitting and Web 2.0.* Bristol: Polity Press.

Graham, E. and Lowe, S. (2009) *What Makes a Good City? Public Theology and the Urban Church.* London: Darton, Longman and Todd.

Grudem, W. (1994) *Systematic Theology.* Leicester: IVP.

Habermas, J. (1964) 'The Public Sphere, An Encyclopaedia Article', *STOR, Sara Lennox, Frank Lennox, A New German Critique,* No.3, (Autumn, 1974). pp.49-55.

Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* translated by Burger, T. and Lawrence, F. Oxford: Polity Press.

Haine, S.W. (1996) *The World of the Paris Cafe, Sociability among the French Working Class*, *1789-1914*. London: John Hopkins University Press.

Hall, S. (2012) *City, Street and Citizen: The measure of the ordinary*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Hardy, A.R, (2022), *An Ordinary Mission of God Theology: Challenging Missional Church Idealism, Providing Solutions,* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock

Hardy, A.R. (2021) *A critical investigation of the impact of the communication of a Newbigin-like theology of Missio Dei on Phoenix church members by graduates of ForMission College*. DTh Thesis: Roehampton University, London.

Hardy, A.R. (2019) *How a ministerial education programme with a very distinctive ethos has helped leaders to begin to develop a new living tradition in a church.* (Unpublished Paper) Roehampton University, London.

Hardy, A.R. and Foster, K. (2019) *Body and Blood, The Body of Christ in the Life of the Community.* Eugene, OR: Cascade.

Hickman, P, (2012), *"Third Places" and Social Interaction in Deprived Neighbourhoods in Great Britain,* Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University.

Hjalmarson, L. (2015) *No Home Like Place, A Christian Theology of Place.* Oregon, Urban Loft.

Hovland, I. (2016) 'Christianity, Place/Space, and Anthropology: thinking across recent research on Evangelical place-making'*, Religion*, 46(3), pp.331-358.

Idestrom, J. and Stangeland, K. (eds.) (2018) *What Really Matters, Scandinavian Perspectives on Ecclesiology and Ethnography.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications.

Inge, J. (2003) *A Christian Theology of Place.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Jack, V. (2017) *Believe and Be Baptised.* Lancs: 10ofthose.

Jamieson, A. (2003) *A Churchless Faith, Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches.* London: SPCK.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2006) *Faith as Social Capital, Connecting or Dividing?* Bristol: Policy Press.

Kraft, C.H. (2015) *The Evangelical's Guide to Spiritual Warfare, Scriptural Insights and Practical Instruction on Facing the Enemy.* Minneapolis, Min: Chosen.

Lees-Smith, A. (2013) 'Ordinary Theology as 'Mother Tongue'' in Astley, J. and Francis, L.J. (eds.) *Exploring Ordinary Theology.* Farnham: Ashgate. pp.23-32.

Local Government Association, FaithAction (2017) *Working with Faith Groups to Promote Health and Well-Being.* London (UK).

Lukito, Y.N. and Xenia, A.P. (2017) 'Café as Third Place and the creation of a unique Space of interaction in UI Campus', *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science,* 99(1) p.012028.

Manzo, J. (2014) *Machines, People and Social Interaction in "Third-Wave" Coffee Houses.* Calgary, AB: University of Calgary.

Marsden, G.M. (2019) 'The Evangelical Denomination' in Noll, M.A., Bebbington, D.W. and Marsden, G.M. (eds.) *Evangelicals, Who they Have Been, Are Now, And Could Be.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. Pp.17-30.

McLaren, B.D. (2006) *Church on the Other Side, Exploring the radical future of the local congregation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

McPhee, A. (2001) 'The Missio Dei and the transformation of the Church;' *Vision,* (Fall). pp.6-12.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985) *No sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Morisy, A. (2004) *Journeying Out, A New Approach to Christian Mission.* London: Continuum.

Mueller, P, (2015), *Sacramental Theology and the Third Place,* Lutheran Society for Missiology - https://www.lsfm.global/. Retrieved 23rd December 2022

Newbigin, L. (1989). *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

Neyrey, J. (ed.) (1991) *The Social World of Luke-Acts, Models for Interpretation.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

Noll, M.A., Bebbington, D.W. and Marsden, G.M. (eds.) (2019) *Evangelicals, Who they Have Been, Are Now, And Could Be.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Office for National Statistics - https://www.ons.gov.uk/. Retrieved 15th December 2021

Oldenburg, R. (1999) *The Great Good Place, Cafes, Coffee shops, Book stores, Bars, Hair Salons and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community.* Cambridge, MA: Da Capo.

Oldenburg, R. (2001) *Celebrating the Third Place, Inspiring Stories about the "Great Good Places" at the heart of Our Communities.* Boston, MA: Marlowe and Company.

Packer, J.I. (2008) *18 Words, The Most Important Words You Will Ever Know.* Fearn: Christian Focus Publications.

Pears, M.J. (2015), *Towards a Theological Engagement with an Area of Multiple Deprivation,* Amsterdam, VRIJE Universiteit.

Platz, T.K. (2012) *Café Culture: Socio-historical Transformations of Space, Personhood and Middleclass in Pune, India.* Durham: Durham University.

Power, A. and Willmott, H. (2007) *Social Capital within the Neighbourhood, Case report 38.* London: Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion.

Pozos-Brewer, R. (2015) *Coffee Shops: Exploring Urban Sociability and Social Class in the Intersection of Public and Private Space.* Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College.

Putnam, R.D. (2001) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Reader, J. (1994) *Local Theology: Church and Community in Dialogue.* London: SPCK.

Root, A. (2014) *Christopraxis, A Practical Theology of the Cross.* Minneapolis, Min: Fortress Press.

Roxburgh, A.J. and Boren, S.M. (2009) *Introducing the Missional Church, What it is, Why it Matters, How to Become One.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.

Rumsey, A. (2017) *Parish, An Anglican Theology of Place.* London: SCM Press.

Saey, S. and Foss, K. (2016) 'The Third Place Experience in urban and Rural Coffee Shops', *Midwest Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 6, pp.171-177.

Schneider, J.A. (2016) *Envisioning Religiously Diverse Partnership Systems among Government, Faith Communities and FBOs.* Basel, Switzerland: MDPI.

Shaw, I.J. (2021) *Evangelicals and Social Action, From John Wesley to John Stott.* London: IVP.

Sheppard, D. (1983) *Bias to the Poor.* London: Hodder & Stoughton.

Smith, G. (2021) 'The Ordinary Theology of British Evangelicals, The Bebbington Quadrilateral and Beyond', *Theology and Ministry,* 7. pp.31-54.

Smith, J.K.A. (2016) *You are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Ada, MI: Brazos Press.

Snyder, T.K. (2014), 'Review: Andrew Root, Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross', *International Journal of Practical Theology,* 2014; 18(2): pp.358–360, De Gruyter.

Sobel, J. (2002) 'Can we Trust Social Capital?', *Journal or Economic Literature*, 40(1). pp.139-154.

Stott, J. (2003) *Evangelical Truth, A Personal Plea for Unity and Faithfulness.* London: IVP.

Strhan, A. (2019) *Aliens and Strangers? The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday lives of Evangelicals.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swinton, J. (2001) *Spirituality and Mental Health Care: Rediscovering a Forgotten Dimension.* London: Jessica Kingsley Publications.

Swinton, J. and Mowatt, H. (2006) *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research.* London: SCM Press.

Ţenescu, A. (2014) 'Non-places, Neutral Spaces and the Specificity of Communication in Postmodern Francophone Literature' in Smarandache, F. and Vlăduţescu, S. *Communication Neutrosophic Routes.* Columbus, OH: Education Publishing. pp.105-122.

Theos (2013) *Is there a 'Religious Right' Emerging in Britain?* London: Theos.

Thomas, G. (2013) *How to Do Your Research Project, A Guide for students in Education and Applied Social Sciences.* London: Sage Pubs.

Thwaites, J. (1999) *The Church Beyond the Congregation.* Milton Keynes: Paternoster

Turner, M, (1996), *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts,* Massachusetts, Hendrickson Pubs.

Ward, P. (2017). *Introducing Practical Theology, Mission, Ministry and the Life of the Church.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

Ward, P. and Campbell, H. (2011) 'Ordinary Theology as Narratives: An Empirical Study of Young People's Charismatic Study in Scotland', *IPJT,* 15. pp.226-242.

Warner, R. (2007) *Studies in Evangelical History and Thought, Reinventing English Evangelicalism, 1966-2001, A Theological and Sociological Study.* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock

Watkins C. and Shepherd, B. (2014) 'The Challenge of 'Fresh Expressions' to Ecclesiology, Reflections from the practice of Messy Church', *Ecclesial Practices,* 1. pp.92-110.

Watkins, C. (2015) *Practical Ecclesiology, From Product to Process, Developing Ecclesiology as a non-correlative process and practice through the Theological Action Research Framework of Theology in Four Voices.* London: University of Roehampton, University of London, Heythrop College.

Watkins, C. (2020) *Disclosing Church, An Ecclesiology Learned From Conversations in Practice.* Abingdon: Routledge.

Watts, D (2017) *Edward Jeffreys, Healing Evangelist: History, Movement and Legacy.* Stourbridge: Transformations Publishing.

Waxman, L. (2006) 'The Coffee Shop: Social and Physical Factors influencing Place Attachment', *Journal of Interior Design*,31(3). pp35-53.

Wexler, M.N. and Oberlander, J. (2017), 'The Shifting Discourse on Third Places: Ideological Implications', *Journal of Ideology, Vol. 38(1), Article 4*

Wier, A.P. (2013) *Tensions in charismatic-evangelical urban practice: Towards a practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethic,* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Chester.

Wier, A.P. (2015) *Creative Tension in Urban Mission, Reflections on Missional Practice and Theory.* Cambridge: Grove Books.

Worthen, M. (2019) 'Defining Evangelicalism: Questions that Complement the Quadrilateral' in Noll, M.A., Bebbington, D.W. and Marsden, G.M. (eds.) *Evangelicals, Who they Have Been, Are Now, And Could Be.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.pp.171-175.

APPENDIX A – SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE FOR DTh - PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Research Student: Keith Foster

Research activity: November 2018 to February 2020

Research Base: The Friendship Café, Coventry

The Welcome Café, Bourneville, Birmingham

Title of Research Project:

Research to assess: *How Evangelical third place cafés facilitate Gospel conversations:*

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. This is a voluntary exercise from which you can withdraw at any time, with any subsequent research findings and results only being published with the full consent of the participants, all of whom will remain anonymous throughout the research and within any published findings.

The research process comprises **TWO** parts: an initial questionnaire to be completed (approximately 10 minutes to complete) followed up with a 20 minute one to one with the researcher that will be aimed at obtaining any clarification needed from the initial questionnaire, in addition to allowing the interviewee to add any further comments that they feel might clarify and/or enhance their answers. Both the questionnaire and subsequent interview transcripts will be securely stored. Participants can also ask for their completed questionnaires and related transcripts to be withdrawn at any time.

General Data:

Sex: M/F…….. Age Range (circle): 18-30 31-45, 46-60, 60+

Income Data: Household Income bracket (circle): 10-20k, 21-40k, 41-60k, 61k+

Does your household receive any welfare benefits (excl child benefit)?
Yes/No (circle)

Q1: Community well-being (Social Capital):

a) What is your connection with the local community? (tick as many as are relevant):

Resident Work School Residents Association café

Community Centre Other (please state)……..

b) On a scale of 1-5 (1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'very much') - To what extent do you have someone to rely on within the community?

c) On a scale of 1-5 (1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'very much')To what extent do you feel a sense of belonging to the community?

Q2: Contribution of the Café to the sense of Community:

a) How long have you been coming to the café?

b) How often do you come to the café?

c) On a scale of 1-5 (1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'very much') - To what extent has the café enhanced your sense of community?

Q3: Attitude to the Faith Community within the café:

a) Which of the following words might you use to describe the Christian staff/volunteers within the café? (circle relevant words):

Caring Kind Helpful Nosey Rude Approachable Annoying

Friendly Any other words (please state)…….

b) Have you had a conversation or been involved in an individual or group discussion about faith with any of the staff during your time here? (circle)

Yes No (if "Yes" complete question 3 c) below)

c) How did you feel after the conversation? (tick all relevant words or statements:

Open to hear about faith again

Challenged to think more about faith in general

Felt a bit awkward

I wish I had that sort of faith

It didn't really have any impact on me

d) What is your general opinion of the Café? (let us know in your own words):

Thank you for completing this questionnaire. Our researcher may ask if you would be willing to participate in a one to one interview (no more than 20 minutes) this is to allow them to clarify or explore any of your answers a little further – any notes of this will be transcribed below – **please tick the following box if you are happy to participate in this second phase:** ☐

Research – Part Two – One to One semi-structured Interview:

Transcript Notes:

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

Director of Studies Contact Details:

Name

Dr David Muir

University Address

Dept. Humanities

University of Roehampton

London SW15 5PH

Email

David.muir@Roehampton.ac.uk

Telephone

+44 (0)208 392 3230

Head of Department Contact Details:

Name

Prof. Trevor Dean

University Address

Dept. Humanities

University of Roehampton

London SW15 5PH

Email

t.dean@Roehampton.ac.uk

Telephone

+44 (0)20 8392 5143

APPENDIX B – SAMPLE PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: How Evangelical third places cafés facilitate Gospel conversations

Brief Description of Research Project, and What Participation Involves:

This project is looking at how people feel about where they live (social capital) and how a local faith-based expression (name of project) might enhance the local social capital yet keep its faith identity. The research will also be interested in finding out how residents and other stakeholders in the local area feel about the project and the people who help run it with regards their expressed faith, seeking to find out whether or not attitudes to this have changed over time since the project has been running. The research will involve being asked a number of questions about how people feel about where they live and whether or not the project has affected this. Additionally, the questionnaire will ask questions about perceptions of faith and the people who run the project.

The research will take place in two separate projects run by two separate churches out of the evangelical tradition. It is envisaged that there will be a total of around twenty-four people to be interviewed (16 project users plus 8 volunteers/staff). I will be devising quantitative questionnaires around the local resident's sense of community well-being and also around their perception of how the project and the people serving within it have impacted this. Semi-structured interviews will also take place, envisaging around 20 minutes required for each. The questionnaires form the initial part of the interview, with the semi-structured discussions following – envisaging 30 mins in total for each participant. Participant observation will also give insider perspective on each

project. Following this part of the research, the results will be reviewed using project user and staff focus groups for feedback and analysis

Investigator Contact Details:

Name: Keith Foster (Student)

Department: Humanities

University Address: University of Roehampton

Roehampton Lane

London

Postcode: SW15 5PU

Email: fosterk@roahampton.ac.uk

Telephone: 0780 552 0058

Consent Statement:

I agree to take part in this research and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point without giving a reason, although if I do so I understand that my data might still be used in a collated form. I understand that the information I provide will be treated in confidence by the investigator and that my identity will be protected in the publication of any findings, and that data will be collected and processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and with the University's Data Protection Policy.

Name …….

Signature ……

Date ……

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator (or if the researcher is a student

you can also contact the Director of Studies.) However, if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department.

pp. Director of Studies:

Name: Dr David Muir

Department: Humanities

Ho.102a

Digby Stuart College

University of Roehampton

London SW15 5PH

Email: John.Moxon@Roehampton.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)208 392 3350

Head of Department:

Name: Prof Mike Edwards

Department: Humanities

Ho.006

Digby Stuart College

University of Roehampton

London SW15 5PH

Email: Mike.Edwards@Roehampton.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)208 392 5143

September 2018

APPENDIX C – ETHICS APPROVAL CONFIRMATION

Ethics Application

Applicant: **Keith Foster**

Title: **How might a church from within the evangelical tradition develop a local third place café that both enhances social capital whilst providing opportunity for intentional Gospel conversations?**

Reference: **HUM 18/ 036**

Department: **Humanities**

Under the procedures agreed by the University Ethics Committee I am pleased to advise you that your Department has confirmed their approval of your application and that any conditions for approval of this project have now been met. I am pleased to confirm that the risk assessment for your project has been reviewed and approved by the Health & Safety Office. We do not require anything further in relation to this application. Please see the attached with requirements in order to comply with GDPR (page 1 – Existing Projects). This applies to applications that have received final ethics approval.

Please note that on a standalone page or appendix the following phrase should be included in your thesis:

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference HUM 18/ 036 in the Department of Humanities and was approved under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 31.10.18.

Please Note:

- **This email confirms that all conditions have been met and thus confirms final ethics approval (it is assumed that you will adhere to any minor conditions still outstanding, therefore we do not require a response to these).**
- **University of Roehampton ethics approval will always be subject to compliance with the University policies and procedures applying at the time when the work takes place. It is your responsibility to ensure that you are familiar and compliant with all such policies and procedures when undertaking your research.**
- **Please advise us if there are any changes to the research during the life of the project. Minor changes can be advised using the Minor Amendments Form on the Ethics Website, but substantial changes may require a new application to be submitted.**
- **If this project involves clinical procedures or administering substances it is a condition of Ethics approval that all relevant SOPs published on the department communities pages are fully complied with.**

Many thanks,

Jan

Jan Harrison
Ethics Officer

Research Office
University of Roehampton | London | SW15 5PJ

jan.harrison@roehampton.ac.uk| www.roehampton.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0) 20 8392 5785