

Zac's Place:
Critically Examining a Fresh Expression of Church
for Signs of a Renewal Movement

**A dissertation submitted to the University of Gloucestershire in partial
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of**

MA in Applied Theology

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Moorlands College

June 2020

Declaration

This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

MA in Applied Theology

I confirm that I am aware of the academic offences defined by the University of Gloucestershire and confirm that none of these offences have been committed in this work.

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Word Count: 17,815

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Abstract

This research provides critical examination of Zac's Place, a mission church in Swansea, founded in 1998, and embraced by the Fresh Expressions network. In this research, I consider questions regarding its validity, contribution and future. After two decades, these questions also shape what will need to be considered to not just survive as a fresh expression, but also thrive as part of the wider church community.

At a time when there is growing analysis of initiatives such as Fresh Expressions, I chose to use a framework that went beyond a valuation based on numerical impact or financial sustainability. My research therefore has been based on a pattern for renewal movements, offered by Howard Snyder. I have taken ten elements offered by Snyder and examined Zac's Place against each one, using literature based research, drawing on a wide variety of published observations and comment about Zac's Place. This research highlighted specific markers that do indicate there are signs of a renewal movement within the life of Zac's Place, most notably, a rediscovery of the gospel, the function as an *ecclesiola*, the use of small groups, a bias towards the poor and the centrality of the spirit and the word. It also highlighted the convergence of radical discipleship and service of the poor and the tension in maintaining that into another generation rather than diluting the ideal.

The conclusion produced an element of surprise, as the possibility of instituting a religious order into the life of Zac's Place emerged as a viable option for holding these tensions in balance. Whether Zac's Place runs its course as a short-term mission, or continues into another generation, there is evidence that this small community has not only had a renewing impact in its immediate geographical area, but also within the wider established church.

Acknowledgements

I owe a substantial measure of gratitude to a number of people who have assisted me in the completion of this work. First of all, my deepest love and thanks to my wife Jayne and our children, Torrey, Billy, Daisy and Danny, for accommodating the additional burden this study has brought and for their encouragement to see it through. Secondly, to two significant people who have shaped my passion for mission more than any others, my father the Revd David Stillman and the Revd Dr K. John Smith. It was also Dr Smith who so fervently encouraged me to read Howard Snyder's *The Radical Wesley*, which became my discussion framework for this work. My thanks are also due therefore to Prof Snyder for opening up an engaging way of critiquing our efforts. Thirdly, I wish to thank the staff at Moorlands College, in particular Chris Jack and Ian Coffey, for their encouragement throughout the duration of my studies with them. But all staff have all been exceptional in their dedication to providing an outstanding learning experience. Fourthly, I wish to thank the community of people who make up *Zac's Place - A Church for Ragamuffins*. They continue to amaze me and have breathed so much of the life of Christ into mine. May the beauty that we so often share in the chaos, remain fertile soil for mission, service, creativity and discipleship. Fifthly, I wish to thank the board of trustees of Exousia Trust who have consistently supported, encouraged and made this study possible. Finally, I want to express my gratitude to Dr Helen Morris who has supervised me through this work with dedication, enthusiasm and been a crucial sounding board when necessary.

This work is dedicated to the memory of the Revd Dr Kevin John Smith (1942 - 2019) and John Martin Myles (1961 - 2019) who both, for very different reasons, helped shape what Zac's Place is.

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Abbreviations

EPC	Evangelical Pentecostal Charismatic Churches
GSCMC	God's Squad Christian Motorcycle Club
YFC	Youth for Christ
ZP	Zac's Place

Introduction

In the autumn of 1998 I began an experimental initiative in pioneer ministry. Having already spent ten years in frontline mission among motorcycle clubs, artists and other sub-cultural communities, a pattern had emerged. There was no shortage of desire from people within my mission-field to engage with the Christian message and to invite dialogue on matters of faith and pastoral support into their sub-cultural context, but the church, as a body of people, was a distant concept to many of them. There were stories of genuine conversion and desire for discipleship, but there was a mismatch for these new followers in finding a place of community within the church that struggled to know how to deal with their “complexities of life”, beyond a simple Gospel understanding.¹ This initiative, based in Swansea, South Wales, was initially called ‘Zac’s Place - Church in a Pub?’ beginning as direct result of requests to gather from my mission context locally, but also drew on itinerant experiences.² ‘We want to know more, but we can’t face church’ was not an uncommon comment at the time.

Twenty-two years on, the experiment continues, now as an established diverse community of disciples and seekers, firmly rooted in a local context and engaged in many aspects of service and support. It now functions under the name of ‘Zac’s Place - A Church for Ragamuffins’, and whilst being an independent church community, has been embraced by the Fresh Expressions network as a viable example of a missional church

¹ Pete Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology: The Gospel and the Church* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2017), 123.

² See <http://www.zacsplace.org> and Sean Stillman, *God’s Biker: Motorcycles and Misfits* (London: SPCK, 2018) for a detailed account of Zac’s Place’s emergence. See Appendix A for a timeline. I have read and worked in line with Moorlands College *Research Ethics Policy*, with particular regard to items 3, 4, 10 and 11.

plant with an emphasis on its welcome to the poor and marginalised.³ After two decades, it is now appropriate to critique and reflect on what has been a significant part of my own ministry journey and ask some pivotal questions, to not only reflect on where we have been, but what any future beyond the present generation for an initiative such as Zac's Place may look like.

As part of this research, I will therefore be considering the following questions of Zac's Place. Is it just a short-term mission? Can it really be called a viable church community? Does it have a future beyond the present generation? Where does it find its place in the church community? Could it be part of a renewing movement within the wider church community, not desiring separation from it, nor questioning its fundamental structures, but existing as a little church within the larger church – in effect an 'ecclesiola' in 'ecclesia'?⁴ In practice, what I will be asking is what has happened, what have we got and where if anywhere, might it be going?

My Framework for Research

My critique will be literature based drawing on other people's observations, opinions, comment and experiences of Zac's Place. These will come from sources that include Fresh Expressions material, and literature that has critiqued Fresh Expressions, the emerging church and specifically that which has highlighted aspects of Zac's Place

³ See Fresh Expressions features, <http://109.104.89.222/stories/zacsplace>, September 29, 2009, accessed June 4, 2019 and <https://web.archive.org/web/20100309062654/http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk/stories/zacsplace>, March 8, 2010, accessed May 11, 2020.

⁴ Alister E. McGrath, "Anglicanism and Pan-Evangelicalism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglican Studies* eds. Mark David Chapman, Sathianathan Clarke, Martyn Percy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 317.

practice. I will also include individual comment from personal encounters in blogs and articles, conference papers, recorded video comment, media coverage and my own previously published work.

My discussion framework will be based around Howard Snyder's ten elements of a mediating model of patterns for renewal in his work, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker*.⁵ Although Snyder was particularly considering early Methodism, he also acknowledged his framework for critique, which takes into account both institutional and charismatic perspectives, and "... could be illustrated as well from other renewal movements", including Methodism, Pietism and Moravianism among them.⁶ These ten elements are listed below, and throughout the course of this work I shall refer to them as 'the ten elements' when referring to them collectively, or 'element 1' as an individual example.

1. The renewal movement "rediscovers" the gospel.
2. The renewing movement exists as an ecclesiola - ("It sees itself not as the true church in an exclusive sense, but as a form of the church which is necessary to the life of the larger church, and which in turn needs the larger church to be complete").
3. The renewing movement uses some form of group structure.
4. The renewal movement has some structural link with the institutional church.
5. The renewal movement is committed to the unity, vitality, and wholeness of the larger church.
6. The renewal structure is mission-oriented.
7. The renewal movement is especially conscious of being a distinct, covenant-based community.

⁵ Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker* (Tennessee: Seedbed, 1996), 152-159.

⁶ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 152.

8. The renewal movement provides the context for the rise, training, and exercise of new forms of ministry and leadership.
9. Members of the renewal movement remain in close daily contact with society, and especially with the poor.
10. The renewal structure maintains an emphasis on the Spirit and the Word as the basis of authority.

I will concentrate the majority of the discussion on elements 1 and 2. The rediscovery of the Gospel, was such a pivotal motivator in the emergence of Zac's Place and my own personal development as a mission practitioner, it merits a significant amount of space for this discussion. Similarly, element 2, poses the broadest area of discussion for where we find our place in the wider church community now and into the future. I will then consider the remaining eight elements, whilst in less detail, with no less significance.

Snyder's observations result from considerable experience in the study and research of John Wesley and renewal within the church globally, which does favourably colour my decision to use his framework.⁷ My attraction to his framework was drawn too, to several specific elements, such as elements 1 and 2 already mentioned, but also the significance of small groups, ministry among the poor, a default mission orientation and leadership training among the relatively uneducated, which marked early Methodism. This appears to be a framework not bound by a concept of niche church, but one of a diverse connected community challenged by a gospel that points towards ongoing mission and radical discipleship.

It is also a framework developed out of a Methodist context, that therefore historically included contribution and impact from travelling itinerant ministry, both by Wesley

⁷ See <https://www.seedbed.com/howard-snyder-about/>, accessed, June 13, 2019.

himself and those he sent out. Although a significant part of my own experience and practice (with God's Squad Christian Motorcycle Club specifically), it is not necessarily an aspect other Fresh Expressions or contextual church communities have as part of their story, but it is one that has afforded me a broad experience of engagement with people and perspectives beyond a local parish. Typically, these have included outlaw motorcycle clubs, musicians, artists, and other marginalised sub-cultural groups, indigenous communities and those caught in destructive patterns of behaviour in both a UK context, and also eastern European, Scandinavian, Australian, American, New Zealand and South African.

The framework also presents significant challenges when considering our place within the broader picture of the church. Whilst on the surface there appears to be some obvious common ground which is what attracted me to the framework, it also presents some significant questions at the outset of this research, primarily concerning our independent nature, which make it a worthwhile discussion.

Snyder observes, that the early Methodist societies were essentially “ecclesiological orphans” with Wesley not expelled from the Anglican Church, nor did he want or permit Methodism to leave but neither did the Anglican Church give Methodism any official mandate to exist.⁸ This is particularly pertinent for myself and the story of Zac's Place, as I was initially commissioned into mission work, with “licence to experiment”,⁹ by a Baptist Church, but after changes of leadership my mission endeavours were no longer

⁸ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 170.

⁹ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 109.

supported after ten years, but maintained by an independent Trust we had established.¹⁰ I was later ordained within an independent denomination (with Methodist heritage), which Zac's Place partnered with.¹¹ Whilst being part of this small collective of church communities, Zac's Place continues enjoying healthy relationships with many local and national networks and denominations, as illustrated by Fresh Expressions, but there is a genuine risk of becoming ecclesiological orphans. Ultimately this research using Snyder's ten elements is about finding our place and asking what our contribution to the wider church community is.

Snyder observes that Methodism under John Wesley had become a movement of common people, to whom the gospel was a foreign concept, but grew into a disciplined, cohesive movement that made the established church nervous. Above all, however, it was a movement of spiritual renewal marked by the power of God and this power was expressed in Christian community.¹² Snyder considers Richard F. Lovelace's work, who suggests successive renewal movements may follow patterns that are discernible and Snyder observes that Wesley's experience did in fact share aspects of a pattern of "cyclical renewal fitting into a more basic oscillating pattern of continuous renewal" that Lovelace suggests exists.¹³ In searching towards a model of renewal, Snyder also observes that renewal within the church is often viewed in one of two ways, an institutional view or a charismatic view.¹⁴ The former suggests "restoring people to the level of belief or action defined by the church as normal".¹⁵ The latter sees the traditions and institutional forms

¹⁰ Exousia Trust. See www.zacsplace.org

¹¹ John Smith, *On the Side of the Angels*, Revised ed. (Sydney: Strand, 2006), 298-299.

¹² Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 139.

¹³ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 140. See Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979).

¹⁴ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 144-146.

¹⁵ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 145.

within the church as obstacles to renewal, treated with a certain amount of ambivalence and, is instead attracted to a more primitive New Testament church.¹⁶ It is therefore, in light of these polarised perspectives, that Snyder strives to find some middle ground with his mediating model, recognising both views have strengths, and that “Whatever the church’s state of decline, it still carries (except in the most extreme cases) the Scriptures, the sacraments, and a deposit of Christian doctrinal truth – historical Christian DNA”.¹⁷

Snyder draws on the metaphor of the stock-and-branch (Isaiah 11:1), which “suggests an interdependence or symbiosis between the institutional church and the renewal movement” recognising that whilst the stock may have lost some of its vigour, it still contains the hope and promise of life.¹⁸ Also reflecting on the stock-and-branch metaphor (Isaiah 11:1), Eugene Peterson presents an image of Isaiah “standing in a field of stumps,” facing a bleak situation, but his vision was “charged with hope and goodness” – “he was not reduced to the conditions he experienced”, there was new life to come from the old stock.¹⁹ This is a useful image to consider where there is tension between new growth and ancient traditions.

Snyder cites Roman Catholic Theologian Rosemary Ruether, when she describes “the free church and the institutional church as “interdependent polarities” in the normal life of the church,” with the institutional church representing the historical dimension, the stock, with a willingness to permit the free church movement to autonomously and unhindered “work out their own gifts”, allowing “their fruits to be given to the church as

¹⁶ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 145-146.

¹⁷ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 148.

¹⁸ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 150.

¹⁹ Eugene H. Peterson, *As Kingfishers Catch Fire: A Conversation on the Ways of God Formed by the Words of God* (Colorado: Waterbrook, 2017), 133-134.

a whole”.²⁰ Snyder further observes Ruether’s pragmatism in acknowledging that human failings often block this dialectic of renewal in the church as it can fall into “alienation and schism” but highlights her caution, that unless room is given for this new growth, “the Spirit’s renewing work flees outside the bonds of historical Christianity and takes up its work elsewhere”.²¹ Snyder therefore offers his mediating model as a pattern for renewal with this tension in mind, which I also observe exists in my own experience.

I also wish to state at the outset, it is not my intention to critique Snyder’s model itself, nor his take on John Wesley as a movement maker. I am simply taking his framework and applying it to my context, in a manner that Snyder proposes when he states:

this is a model for renewal which assigns a normative role both to the institutional church and to a movement and structure for renewal. Obviously no actual instance of a renewal movement in an institutional church perfectly fits the model. Still, the model is useful in comparing and evaluating various renewal movements, including those of today and tomorrow.²²

As movements such as Fresh Expressions are now not so ‘fresh’ – some endeavours have fallen by the wayside, some have burned brightly but not for long, some have simply run their course, some look like they have a long-term future – it is also my intention that this research will offer the framework for other practitioners to critique their endeavours, as they too seek to explore their place within the wider church community.

²⁰ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 150-151 quoting Rosemary Ruether, “The Free Church Movement in Contemporary Catholicism,” in *New Theology No. 6*, eds. Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 269-287.

²¹ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 151-152. See Ruether, “Free Church Movement,” 286-287.

²² Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 157-158.

The Emergence of Zac's Place

From the early days of establishing 'Zac's Place - Church in a Pub?' we had some very clear boundaries and mandates.²³ The question mark was important, as we did not know whether a church community would develop. The name Zac's Place took inspiration from the story of Zacchaeus, the outcast tax collector, whose home Jesus made a deliberate point of visiting (Luke 19:1-10). We also made a deliberate move to gather people together outside of a traditional church building, instead using a bar with a live music and function space. There was a natural environment that encouraged interaction between people sitting around tables and at a bar, rather than sat in rows facing a single focal point. The intention was never to simply take what happened in a regular Sunday worship service and place it in an alternative venue.

Neither was there any intention to make this a niche church gathering. Whilst bikers and artists made up a significant number of our early enquirers, the policy of a literal 'all welcome' was to acknowledge both the breadth and diversity of those enquiring and also the all-encompassing embrace of the gospel. The potential to create a niche community with an insular focus was seen as being too restrictive. An outward-looking focus to those who were different was an early concept in our thinking, with diversity considered a strength not a weakness. The common ground was not a sub-culture, but a shared search for meaning, for truth, for God – for wholeness. It should also be noted, we deliberately avoided a gathering that emerged from the disgruntled voices in the back rows of existing churches, but we did desire to embrace the walking wounded of those who had left

²³ Stillman, *God's Biker*, 112-113.

churches.²⁴ Experience had already taught me that niche churches planted by cynics may not always be helpful, they simply endeavoured to justify their cynicism without a proactive choice to live as radical disciples.

It was to be a gathering with relationships at the heart of it. There was a desire to impact a triad of relationships including, those with each other as a community of people, the wider community outside of our own gatherings and our relationship with God.²⁵ There was a strong emphasis on retaining the Bible being taught well, expressions of prayer and storytelling, imaginative use of songs and poetry, but many aspects of a traditional church service were deliberately excluded at what was initially a regular gathering on a Sunday evening in a city centre bar. In 1998 this was a move that carried a certain amount of risk in my traditional evangelical networks, but from its outset, Zac's Place welcomed many who would not have otherwise considered engaging with a church community.

Whilst the broad cross section of people who came to be involved in this emerging community of Zac's Place embraced these concepts, others looking in offered a variety of opinion in those early years, and not all of it was favourable. The Banner of Truth published an article reflecting on the emerging church and, whilst acknowledging that as a movement the emerging church was seeking to understand the times and engage with people the mainstream church does not see, Thomas and Meredith saw four areas of weakness. Firstly, they argued that the emerging church, in which they included Zac's Place, was not critiquing culture, but was criticising traditional churches. "Its atmosphere is overwhelmingly laid back and acceptant ... They criticise the 'formal' and

²⁴ See

https://web.archive.org/web/20010213231300fw_/http://www.exousia.demon.co.uk/content/jesusok.htm, accessed, June 21, 2019.

²⁵ Stillman, *God's Biker*, 111-112.

‘authoritarian’ nature of traditional churches but they rarely lock horns with our culture”.²⁶ Secondly, they highlighted the apparent lack of the concept of sin, thirdly, the denial of the glory of the church and fourthly, the absence of “gospel wonder”.²⁷

Zac’s Place was singled out for criticism questioning whether conversion stories that they read about were little more than improvements to someone’s life and not a genuine, radical conversion.²⁸ Recounting the story of someone in recovery from alcohol addiction, Thomas recalling David Meredith’s lecture, on which his article was based, wrote “There is something dramatic about such changes, but this is social work stuff, and it is so dead! The authentic gospel is radical. The ideas behind Zac’s Place are tired and dead”.²⁹ Davison and Milbank also highlight the lack of references to sin and conversion in the Mission Shaped Church³⁰ report with the apparent lack of confidence from Fresh Expressions of church “in the power of the Christian gospel to challenge and convert”.³¹

It would also be viable to assume that Davison and Milbank may have been considering Zac’s Place when referencing a special interest church of ‘bikers’ that would not have had the diversity one would expect in a traditional parish context.³² I am unsure as to whether their observations are based on personal encounter, third party media features or our own material. Suffice to say, a personal encounter with Zac’s Place, even in the

²⁶ Geoff Thomas, *The Emerging Church* (Banner of Truth, 2005), 6.
<https://banneroftruth.org/uk/resources/articles/2005/the-emerging-church/>, accessed May 15, 2018.

²⁷ Thomas, *Emerging Church*, 6-7.

²⁸ To the best of my knowledge these opinions were not formed from any personal encounter.

²⁹ Thomas, *Emerging Church*, 3.

³⁰ See *Mission Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

³¹ Andrew Davison and Alison Milbank, *For the Parish: A Critique of Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM, 2010), 131.

³² Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, vii.

formative years, would have challenged both the arguments of a lack of genuine conversion and also any notion of it being a niche or special interest gathering.

It proved to be precisely the rich diversity of people engaging with Zac's Place and transformation stories that captured the interest of Rowan Williams during his tenure as Archbishop of Wales who saw something developing in Zac's Place. Looking back in 2012, he reflected, "Zac's Place was ... one of those new creations of God's grace that seemed to be springing up around" and "was one of my first experiences of what we would now call fresh expressions before that name was born."³³ After observing our formative years of development in Swansea city centre bars, he commented in 2005 after several years of personal interaction, "The work going forward at Zac's Place is in every way innovative, courageous and important for the community in general as well as the Christian community."³⁴ Right from its inception, Zac's Place has divided opinion.

At its outset, there was a desire to engage with people who were generally far removed from mainstream expressions of church life, but somehow stay connected to the mainstream church. Of the early years, Dave Cave, who was a Council and Executive Member of the Evangelical Alliance in the UK, suggested we may have been heading in a worthwhile direction when he commented:

Sean Stillman's awareness and effectiveness among "the Heineken Folk" (those people who the church cannot or will not reach) has to be seen. I have personally witnessed his work among the biker community as well as "Zac's Place" (a church in a pub) which reaches out to folk you would not normally find in a traditional church

³³ Rowan Williams, "Following the Missionary Spirit," Fresh Expressions event, *YouTube*, 1:33 November 22, 2012, <https://youtu.be/QfALmx-QBcY>

³⁴ See www.zacsplace.org, accessed May 31, 2019.

but still want to know Jesus and need to know of His love. His ministry really does reach the parts other Christian groups cannot or will not reach.³⁵

Our initial description included on occasions the tag line, ‘Expression of and enquiry into the Christian faith in a relaxed environment.’³⁶ Whilst there was never any intention of presenting a comfortable gospel, there was an intention to break out of a fixed traditional evangelical form that had potentially reduced the gospel to a “number of brief doctrinal statements.”³⁷ Ward further observes, “Being effective means finding a way to express the faith, while at the same time connecting with the cultural and spiritual worlds of those who are outside the church”³⁸ and it is that desire to connect and find the “theological resources to deal with the evident complexities of life”³⁹ that has motivated the emergence of Zac’s Place, influenced its development and also polarised opinion.

It is the “complexities of life” that have both challenged and shaped Zac’s Place more than anything else.⁴⁰ After several fruitful years using four different bars or function rooms, the pub environment had run its course. We were attracting more and more people who were either in recovery from alcohol addiction, or who needed to be, and the pub no longer became a wise space to use. The weakest brother and sister were a priority and motivated a move to our own venue, a recently closed Gospel Hall in the heart of the city that we purchased and breathed new life into. ‘Zac’s Place – Church in a Pub?’ had

³⁵ See <https://web.archive.org/web/20010419080450/http://www.exousia.demon.co.uk/>, accessed June 21, 2019.

³⁶ See

https://web.archive.org/web/20010217052007fw_/http://www.exousia.demon.co.uk/content/whowhatzacs.htm, accessed June 21, 2019.

³⁷ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 103.

³⁸ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 104.

³⁹ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 123.

⁴⁰ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 123.

already lost the question mark, as people asked for the sacraments of communion and baptism. But as we developed what church would look like in our own sacred space, ‘Zac’s Place – A Church for Ragamuffins’ seemed more appropriate as we acknowledged that discipleship began with poverty of spirit, and the ragamuffin identity took significant influence from Brennan Manning’s writing in *The Ragamuffin Gospel*.⁴¹

Unbeknown to me at the time, in 2000, John Drane summed up reimagining what the church could be like in a western culture in this new century. It is a culture whose framework was built around the Enlightenment and ancient Greek philosophy, and was now disintegrating, but provided an opportunity for new birth.⁴² He commented on the irony,

that the church is in serious decline at exactly the same time as our whole culture is experiencing a rising tide of spiritual concern – and that many of today’s spiritual searchers dismiss the church, not because it is irrelevant or old-fashioned, but because in their opinion it is unspiritual.⁴³

This potential new birth would embrace a certain amount of disorder, with the “‘wrong’ sort of people ... at the heart of things” and for whom a place to belong would be a genuine need, producing open, welcoming, nurturing and inclusive community that shaped disciples.⁴⁴ This reimagining would also be a place of “dynamic vision with the potential to transform the whole of life” even in suffering, “... a spirituality that is vibrant and alive ... where nobodies can become somebody”, where taking up your cross to

⁴¹ See Brennan Manning, *The Ragamuffin Gospel* (Oregon: Multnomah, 1999).

⁴² John Drane, *Cultural Change and Biblical Faith* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), 176.

⁴³ Drane, *Cultural Change*, 179.

⁴⁴ Drane, *Cultural Change*, 179-180.

follow Jesus means bringing the sum of the parts that we are, including our baggage with us amid a community of “the most unlikely of folk”.⁴⁵ As I consider Drane’s ideas now, reflecting back two decades, there are many threads that have resonated in the life of our emerging mission church community over this time. What Drane predicted as a possible pattern has in fact been our experience.

Zac’s Place continues to be a diverse community of believers, committed to discipleship and marked by its commitment to serve the poor in the city, working in partnership with many churches and secular agencies. Far from being a novelty gathering of a niche special interest group, Zac’s Place has gathered together, “the poor, the elderly and the perplexed” alongside the middle class, the educated and energised, precisely those whom Davison and Milbank suggested would be excluded from such fresh expressions of church, otherwise tempted to be drawn to a middle class organic pick and mix of selective community and watered down gospel.⁴⁶ Twenty years on from our experimental beginnings, Zac’s Place – a Church for Ragamuffins continues to function as a diverse city centre church community in Swansea, Wales, committed to being disciples of Christ, serving the poor and having an open door to all. Our shape, methods and patterns have varied over the years, and I will examine in more detail, using Snyder’s ten elements as a framework, what these look like, what they tell us about our own practice on the margins, and where it fits in the wider mainstream church community.

⁴⁵ Drane, *Cultural Change*, 181.

⁴⁶ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 101.

Snyder's Mediating Model for Renewal and Zac's Place

1. The Renewal Movement "Rediscovered" the Gospel.

Snyder states, "Genuine renewal movements often begin when a few people, by God's grace, rediscover the heart and power of the gospel."⁴⁷ I propose that the hallmarks of gospel understanding, taught and lived out at Zac's Place, find their roots in my own gospel rediscovery. This rediscovery radically changed my trajectory in mission and what Christian discipleship could look like beyond the church walls. To demonstrate this, I will discuss the context of this gospel rediscovery, the channels through which it occurred, the salient points of the message and how that message has shaped myself and Zac's Place.

a) The Context for Gospel Rediscovery: A Reflective Exile

To discuss the possibility of rediscovering the gospel would suggest that there was already an understanding of the gospel to be rediscovered. This was certainly applicable in my own experience. As the son of an itinerant evangelist, I inherited a gospel understanding from my parents, their associated evangelical church networks, and para-church mission organisations, which were typical of the 1960s' and 1970s' non-conformist church movements. Evangelistic crusades committed to the proclamation of the word and a call for personal salvation were my frequent experience. Ward observes of this era how the gospel was presented in ways that condensed doctrinal elements to make them easily accessible and understood by young people in particular, especially through the use of

⁴⁷ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 154.

gospel tracts – *The Bridge to Life* tract from Navigators, and Bill Bright’s *The Four Spiritual Laws* from Campus Crusade for Christ, being popular examples.⁴⁸

The whole of the gospel was encapsulated in a few short statements and associated Bible verses, presented in a manner that could be open to criticism for being an example of entrepreneurial marketing as much as a move of the Spirit of God. This would be harsh though, as in my experience intention was usually honourable, but Ward does observe these methods of evangelism did have traits on focussing on numbers, marketing methods aligned with business and persuasive communication.⁴⁹ Ultimately he concludes, that whilst these communication methods had a significant evangelistic impact, of which I was some of the fruit, they could be interpreted as a “radical abbreviation of the gospel,” and “so reduced the “truth” of the gospel, and the deep mystery of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, had been summed up in a diagram or a few lines of text”.⁵⁰ I was the preachers kid, whose faith had survived intact – but there was something of Christ and his church that remained a mystery.⁵¹ I was unsettled in my gospel understanding.

A call into mission among the marginalised followed, but my safe, simplified faith began to gather holes in it. The charismatic third wave came and went with an emotional high and left a vacuum. The church community I was experiencing headed towards a performance worship experience. “... I was hovering by the back door, ready to walk. I began to think that genuine seekers of truth, who had once had a desire to follow Jesus,

⁴⁸ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 113-121. See also <https://www.navigators.org/resource/the-bridge-to-life/> and <https://campusministry.org/docs/tools/FourSpiritualLaws.pdf>, accessed 26 June, 2019.

⁴⁹ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 117.

⁵⁰ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 124.

⁵¹ See Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 12ff, for a more complete narrative.

were buying into an experience and not a desire for ongoing transformation. This troubled me.”⁵² The very people I wanted to engage in mission with and the church experience I was familiar with were poles apart. “The gulf between the Church and the fringes of our community appeared colossal. I was in danger of being in ministry but dropping out of institutional church.”⁵³

In *A Churchless Faith*, Jamieson observed that the shift in church worship styles that previously focussed on the historical eternal God, now focussed on the needs of the individual, reflecting the increasing individualistic attitude in society, and became a factor in some people leaving Evangelical Pentecostal and Charismatic⁵⁴ churches during this era.⁵⁵ This resonates as I reflect back, as do his observations of those he interviewed who left EPC churches and became who he calls “Reflective Exiles”,⁵⁶ going “through a period of feeling anxious, scared, at loose ends, that they didn’t belong”.⁵⁷ Jamieson further observed that for the questioning reflective exile, the faith stance was not simply a matter of rejecting a rigid four spiritual laws gospel, but recognising its inadequacy in the light of actual experience. It became a pursuit of a more satisfying sense of ‘truth’ that did not seek to “merely wallpaper over the cracks of its own incompleteness”.⁵⁸

Whilst my solid evangelical-baptist-inherited gospel contributed to a righteous grounding of faith, it leant towards the pursuit of an outward performance to please others and

⁵² Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 31.

⁵³ Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 48.

⁵⁴ Hereafter referred to as EPC.

⁵⁵ Alan Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith: Faith Journeys Beyond the Churches* (London: SPCK, 2002), 25.

⁵⁶ Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 60-74.

⁵⁷ Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 38, quoting H.R.F. Ebaugh, *Becoming an EX: The Process of Role Exit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 143.

⁵⁸ Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 72.

present a gospel to be signed up for after a convincing presentation. This observation is in no way intended to be dismissive of this early foundation, nor the whole-hearted commitment of my early influencers and those who nurtured my faith. It is simply placing the context within which I began to follow the call of Christ. R.T. France describes the comparison of the righteousness of the Pharisees and that which Jesus called for (Matt 5:20), not as one trying to beat them at their own game, but concern for “a different level or concept of righteousness altogether”, moving “beyond a literal observance of the rules”.⁵⁹ Neither was it a concept of righteousness demanded “only from an upper echelon of spiritual elites but from all who belong to the kingdom of God”, drawing its counter cultural inspiration “not from the norms of society but from the character of God” evidenced not in “moral flawlessness”, but maturity.⁶⁰ My own gospel rediscovery began by asking the questions of my church experience ‘Is this as good as it gets? Further-more, is my status as a Christian dependent on a flawless performance?’

b) The Channel of Rediscovery: A Prophetic Challenge

My period of reflective exile eventually led me to that gospel rediscovery, which began through dialogue and subsequent ministry partnership with Australian minister, activist and academic, John Smith⁶¹. Smith had been a straight-laced Methodist and full-time youth evangelist, but experienced his own gospel rediscovery during the 1960s’ Jesus Movement. This resulted in a path of radical mission among the marginalised including, indigenous communities, outlaw bikers, addicts, the poor and the oppressed. God’s Squad

⁵⁹ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 189-190.

⁶⁰ France, *Matthew*, 228-229.

⁶¹ See <http://www.bluespreacher.org/john-smith/> and John Smith and Malcolm Doney, *On the Side of the Angels*, (Oxford: Lion, 1987).

would subsequently be an extension of his mission endeavours in Australia that I would later be involved in establishing in Europe.⁶²

Smith opened up the scriptures in a manner I had never encountered before. He brought fresh understanding to the Beatitudes, the subversive Sermon on the Mount, the narratives from the Gospel writers of the on-the-road encounters Jesus had among the outcasts, and the cries for justice from the Old Testament prophets.⁶³ Where my inherited gospel gave me a solid foundation in core doctrine, a stoic, faithful commitment to persevere and a passion to pursue a holy and righteous life – it had not given me enough tools to live alongside questions, doubt, fear and pain in a world that was full of these things. The gospel was rigid, struggling to connect “with the cultural and spiritual worlds of those who are outside the Church”.⁶⁴

My experience was not isolated, as Smith’s preaching and radical edge had a broad influence particularly in the 80s and 90s. U2 singer Bono revealed a similar sentiment on his own gospel rediscovery through the same teaching from Smith, stating how the Bible took on greater depth “It was not a sop for mankind’s fear of death – it was an epic poem about life. It spoke about culture, about politics, about justice”.⁶⁵ Former CEO of World Vision Australia, Tim Costello, had a similar gospel rediscovery via Smith, describing him as the first evangelist he’d heard to speak of the prophets’ cries for justice in his call to faith, a prophetic voice advocating blood-and-guts Christianity rather than soundbites

⁶² God’s Squad Christian Motorcycle Club is an International lay ministry among the motorcycle sub-culture. See gscmc.com.

⁶³ See Appendix B, *The Influence of John Smith*.

⁶⁴ Ward, *Liquid Ecclesiology*, 104.

⁶⁵ Dean Troth, “U2’s Tribute to Smithy,” *Eternity News*, April 4, 2019.

<https://www.eternitynews.com.au/culture/u2s-tribute-to-smithy-revealed/>, accessed June 4, 2019.

about a sanitised Jesus.⁶⁶ This was a gospel that was full blooded, living life on the margins, in tension with the powerful, on the side of the outcast, and it was this gospel that revolutionised my faith and prevented a more permanent period of exile.

Smith opened up the gospel in the scriptures with a call to mission in a broken world that my solid evangelical formation had yet to discover. The gospel was not only to be considered a presentation of truths to respond to at a mission event and served with quiet devotion. It was much broader embracing all of life, seeing the redemption threads in all of creation and the chaos of the whole human experience, evidenced in the whole of scripture. When writing of his own deepening understanding, through the wisdom of Solomon, Eugene Peterson writes of the gospel permeating every aspect of our lives:

The Word of God to us is not only the radical invasion of our lives by Christ, not only that tremendous life-changing reconciliation that puts us in relationship with an eternal being, but also a detailed concern with every aspect of our humanity.⁶⁷

My experience of the gospel and the tensions of how that was to be lived had been interrupted and it was no longer possible for things to stay the same.⁶⁸ It was as if an additional light had been switched on, illuminating a new perspective and a new road to travel. My inherited gospel understanding came through a well-grounded evangelical tradition my gospel rediscovery came via prophetic interruption from a radical itinerant mission practitioner, a Jesus Movement survivor, who refused to stay silent, and continued to advocate, “Jesus is still good conversation if you can get the religionist’s

⁶⁶ Tim Costello, “The John Smith I Knew,” *Eternity News*, April 4, 2019.

<https://www.eternitynews.com.au/opinion/the-john-smith-i-knew/>, accessed June 7, 2019.

⁶⁷ Peterson, *Kingfishers*, 186.

⁶⁸ Paul H. Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society*, 3rd ed. (London: SPCK, 1996), 77.

hands off his throat long enough to let him speak for himself” – and I would add, or through his obedient church.⁶⁹

c) The Gospel Rediscovered: Its Impact and Application

Was this sermon-on-the-mountain-influenced gospel rediscovery merely to accumulate knowledge or did it have practical implications? Was it to have an impact at a grass roots level on the mission field, on the road, and in the life of Zac’s Place? Was it merely some “starry-eyed utopianism” with little relevance in a world that considers this ancient teaching “extreme and unwelcome”, even “practically unworkable”?⁷⁰

This application became influenced by a warning that Jesus gave to his followers “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod” (Mark 8:15). The fascination of Herod and what appeared to be a solid religious performance from the Pharisees did not manifest itself into “a fresh call to faith and understanding”.⁷¹ The corrupt and corrosive influence of the Pharisees, which yeast was commonly understood as symbolising in Jewish and Hellenistic circles, affected the failure of their religious devotion to be manifested in a transformation of their souls and an understanding of Jesus’ teaching on the Kingdom of Heaven without further signs.⁷² An application of a renewed and reinvigorated gospel understanding would surely only be fit for purpose if it endeavoured to pursue a righteousness that went beyond that of the false teaching and superficial devotion of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). This pursuit began with an honest appraisal of our

⁶⁹ Kevin John Smith, *The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement as a Revitalization Movement* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2011), 367. For a critique of Smith’s leadership see, Philip B. Muston, “John Smith: A Charismatic and Transformational Religious Leader” (MA thesis, Edith Cowan University, 2001). <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/1041/>

⁷⁰ R. T. France, *Matthew*, 217-218.

⁷¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 281.

⁷² Lane, *Mark*, 280.

own condition before God, the bountiful goodness of his grace and a deliberate move to welcome even the most undesirable into the church, knowing that they too would be welcomed into the company of Christ.

Zac's Place community member Martin Myles commented on why some people come to Zac's Place for fellowship, food and teaching by saying, "Zac's is about real people with real problems. The place is full of imperfect people, which makes it a perfect place for them to come to."⁷³ Where my previous simplistic understanding of blessing may have inferred an abundance of acquisitions or glorious perfection, there was a newly discovered beauty in the brokenness of poverty of spirit (Matt. 5:3). When the journey begins with an acknowledgment of our doubts, fears, failures, sinfulness and need of God, the Kingdom of Heaven becomes that blessed gift, and an open door to imperfect people. It is a "positive spiritual orientation, the converse of the arrogant self-confidence which not only rides roughshod over the interests of other people but more importantly causes a person to treat God as irrelevant".⁷⁴

After his visit, former director of training at Fresh Expressions, Andrew Roberts described Zac's Place as "one of the most authentic Christian communities" he had ever experienced.⁷⁵ He reflected, "At Zac's I met people really trying their very best to make all welcome. The love was tangible".⁷⁶ Roberts further observed:

⁷³ Fresh Expressions, "Chapter 28, Zac's Place," in *Expressions: Making a Difference* (Fresh Expressions, 2011), 2m56s, DVD.

⁷⁴ France, *Matthew*, 165.

⁷⁵ Andrew Roberts, *Holy Habits* (London: Malcolm Down Publishing, 2016), 54.

⁷⁶ Roberts, *Holy Habits*, 54.

The ‘Zaclicans’ highlighted the importance of the value of transformation. Personal transformation (including conversion and discipleship) and the transformation brought about by the struggles for social justice. At Zac’s the hungry are fed (the food is great), the naked are clothed, the sick are prayed for and God’s word is proclaimed. The Kingdom of God is at hand. The adventure of discipleship is being lived.⁷⁷

This lived adventure of discipleship finds its DNA in the Beatitudes, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7) – in the core of Jesus teaching to his first disciples. The deliberate and proactive welcome to the marginalised, the stranger and the destitute, that Roberts observed, is one of the most defining features of my own gospel rediscovery that has become the everyday practice of our church community.

This was no more evident at a Zac’s Place Bible study than when an abusive, intoxicated, angry woman, who was sleeping rough, burst through the door into our intimate gathering. Instead of being asked to leave, she encountered an environment that actually bathed her feet with tenderness. As she calmed down, her response was to sing an old Sunday school song of praise and declaration that reminded her of God’s love, even for her in such a vulnerable condition.⁷⁸

The story would go on to have a profound impact on our community. Just days after the young lady’s feet were washed, she died of an accidental heroin overdose on our neighbourhood streets. When meeting with her father to make funeral arrangements, he specifically requested not to have too much ‘religious stuff’ in the service, but he did request one song. It was the song he used to sing his little girl to sleep to every night many years previously. It was also the very song she sang as her feet were being bathed at our

⁷⁷ Roberts, *Holy Habits*, 54.

⁷⁸ Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 5-11.

Bible study ‘*Yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me*’. In a fragile moment, she made a declaration that dared to believe, despite all the darkness, heartache and oppression she was experiencing, that Jesus could possibly still love her. Our gospel rediscovery includes the challenge of, ‘What if Jesus actually meant that we practise what he was advocating?’ What if he really does want us to bathe each other’s feet (John 13:13–15), love our enemies (Matt 5:43–44) (Luke 6:27–28) and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44)?

The challenge to love my enemies came sharply into focus when I and two other colleagues, whilst engaged in ministry among outlaw motorcycle clubs, were severely beaten as an act of retribution towards priests who had sexually abused children.⁷⁹ It remains one of the most humiliating and frightening experiences of my life, but one that challenged us to put into practice the subversive love of Christ, not to seek revenge, nor give up our mission endeavours, but commit to finding another way of responding and demonstrating an alternative priesthood to the one they had experienced.

We had become what Goheen and Bartholomew describe as “critical participants” in a culture, finding ourselves with a very different worldview to those who sought brutal vengeance; seeking to practise what it means to be “in the world” but not “of the world” (John 17:13–18).⁸⁰ It was precisely when our stories collided that we were challenged to live with a ‘greater righteousness’, to make something beautiful out of what was ugly.

⁷⁹ Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 87ff.

⁸⁰ Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (London: SPCK, 2008), 133.

Martin Luther King advocated, “When the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, and this opportunity will present itself sooner or later, you must not do it.”⁸¹ “Somewhere along the way somebody must be strong enough to stand up and refuse to hit back.”⁸² My rediscovery of the gospel of Jesus called us to be counter-cultural, to actually “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5:39), against a back drop of failure within the church and extreme anger towards it. Allison advocates, Jesus’ teaching on retribution vividly represents “the demand for an unselfish temperament, for naked humility and a will to suffer the loss of one’s personal right: evil should not be requited with evil. There is no room for vengeance on a personal level”.⁸³ Chrysostom challenged, “Since Jesus transformed people’s souls, turned hatred into love and bitterness into sweetness, we should strive for that same transformation in our own lives.”⁸⁴ John Stott further endorses how the Christian calling is to imitate the heart of God:

And this righteousness, whether expressed in purity, honesty or charity, will show to whom we belong. Our Christian calling is to imitate not the world, but the Father. And it is by this imitation of him that the Christian counter-culture becomes visible.⁸⁵

Hauerwas comments, the Pharisees’ observance of the law was not “recognised as subversive by those who ruled them” – the kingdom rule that Jesus spoke of was however, a counter-cultural “alternative to the violence of Rome” giving a radical new vision of

⁸¹ Martin Luther King, “Love Your Enemies,” *Journal of Religious Thought*, 27, no. 2 (1970): 34.

⁸² King, “Love Your Enemies,” 35.

⁸³ Dale C. Allison, *The Sermon on the Mount: Inspiring the Moral Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 93.

⁸⁴ John Chrysostom, *On Living Simply: The Golden Voice of Saint John Chrysostom*, ed. Robert Van De Weyer (Missouri: Liguori, 1997), 81.

⁸⁵ John Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Leicester: IVP, 1984), 124.

what it was to be to be human, proposing a new way to live as community, in diverse composition.⁸⁶

Over two decades on from that incident, my colleagues and I continue to provide an ever deepening level of chaplaincy support, having sought to build reconciliation with our aggressors and show genuine care, endeavouring to be an ongoing, accepted, visible expression of the Christian counter-culture in their sometimes violent sub-culture.⁸⁷

On learning of the story of the woman whose feet were bathed Dunlop comments favourably, seeing evidence of a church community, that despite her nothingness, “the young lady was able to experience the love God had for her and the value he places on her. She was accepted into a community of faith, and she turned this into praise. In it she experienced atonement.”⁸⁸

This gospel rediscovery that has become part of the DNA of Zac’s Place finds further insight in the parable of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24–27). What we decide to build a life on, to listen to and put into practice are choices, but the storms and unpredictability of life are indiscriminate. There is no immunity from pain, questions and doubt. It is a gospel that visits Gethsemane allowing “Christ to enter into our darkness, our isolation, our moments of imminent pain”.⁸⁹ The heart and power of the gospel that Snyder writes of has come alive within the context of Zac’s Place in the most challenging of circumstances and experiences.⁹⁰ It is a gospel rediscovered that desires to love God

⁸⁶ Hauerwas, Stanley, *Matthew* (London: SCM, 2006), 67.

⁸⁷ See Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 87ff.

⁸⁸ Andrew Dunlop, *Out of Nothing: A Cross-Shaped Approach to Fresh Expressions* (London: SCM, 2018), 127.

⁸⁹ Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 162.

⁹⁰ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 154.

with all its heart, soul, mind and strength (Mark 12:30) – but is coming from a place of poverty of spirit. Hearts that have been broken, souls that carry dark secrets, minds that are muddled and strength that has been sapped, form the fragile ‘all’ that many members of the Zac’s Place community love God with.⁹¹

In his research concerning care for those who have left EPC churches, Jamieson notes several characteristics of churches sensitive to those leavers (and I would also identify them as significant characteristics of Zac’s Place), that have emerged naturally as a direct result from a gospel rediscovered. These include, providing places for people to explore, question and doubt, providing a theology of journey, providing resources for people in dark places, providing models of an honest Christian life rather than ‘should’s; and providing room for emotions and intuitions.⁹²

The ongoing ministry at Zac’s Place in all its expressions of; Bible study, worship, prayer, hospitality, care for the poor, advocacy for justice and embracing the arts evidences the original challenge of my own rediscovered gospel alongside an inherited gospel. The Kingdom of Heaven would indeed appear to be the gift of the poor spirit and lie at the heart of Zac’s Place’s rediscovery of the gospel in its pursuit of a righteous life. The centrality of Christ’s teaching has provided the platform that has shaped what is most attractive, most subversive and most counter-cultural about Zac’s Place and its associated endeavours.

⁹¹ Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 197.

⁹² Jamieson, *A Churchless Faith*, 146-150.

John Stott points to this necessary practical outworking of radical discipleship, and introduces us to how it may connect to element two of Snyder's model: the concept of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*. On Matthew 6:1–6, 16–18 Stott notes:

Thus again Christians are to be different from both Pharisees and pagans, the religious and irreligious, the church and the world. That Christians are not to conform to the world is a familiar concept of the New Testament. It is not so well known that Jesus also saw (and foresaw) the worldliness of the church itself and called his followers not to conform to the nominal church either, but rather to be a truly Christian community distinct in its life and practice from the religious establishment, an *ecclesiola* (little church) in *ecclesia*. The essential difference in religion as in morality is that authentic Christian righteousness is not an external manifestation only, but one of the secret things of the heart.⁹³

⁹³ Stott, *Sermon on the Mount*, 126.

2. The Renewing Movement Exists as an Ecclesiola

In this section I will consider whether Zac's Place is an expression of what Snyder terms, an ecclesiola. In doing so, I will take into consideration definitions and use of the expression in different contexts, namely, Wesley's early Methodist societies, a model for discipleship, parachurch organisations, monasticism and the new parish movement.

Ecclesiola in Ecclesia

Whilst researching spiritual transformation and discipleship in a local church context, Dunmire observes it was Martin Luther who discussed the concept of "establishing small private gatherings for worship for those who were seeking Christ earnestly, or the idea of a core group of the church community" and it was Martin Bucer who actually put Luther's concept of discipleship into practice, and gave it the Latin name, *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, "the little church within the church".⁹⁴

Snyder defines his use of ecclesiola as a "smaller, more intimate expression of the church within the church," seeing itself:

not as the true church in an exclusive sense, but as a form of the church which is necessary to the life of the larger church, and which in turn needs the larger church in order to be complete. It understands itself as necessary not merely because of a perceived lack in the larger church but also because of a conviction that the

⁹⁴ Steven L. Dunmire, "Growing Disciples in the Pattern of the Twelve: The Ecclesiola in Ecclesia as a Model for Spiritual Transformation and Local Church Discipleship" (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2012), 79, citing J. I. Packer, *God's Plans for You*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 208, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*. 1930, ed. Clifford J. Green, trans. Reinhard Krause and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 245 and Martin Luther, "The German Mass and Order of Service." *Luther's Works: Liturgy and Hymns*, Vol. 53, ed. Ulrich S. Leupold, trans. Augustus Steimle (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965). 79, 81.

Christian faith can be fully experienced only in some such “subecclesial” or small-church form.⁹⁵

In Snyder’s later work with Runyon, he observes that at its deepest level, renewal often begins at the “periphery, or the margins, of the church,” seldom beginning from a central or established place of leadership.⁹⁶ This is an astute observation as it suggests potential for some tension in attempting to define what is going on in the formative stages of a renewal movement where what emerges on the periphery may not always be taken that seriously. Indeed, it is only during a period of subsequent reflection that we may become fully aware of the impact of any renewal movement. A small group, possibly lacking in traditionally defined leadership roles, asking awkward questions and challenging the status quo can easily be seen as a sect or at the very least, an unwelcome interruption to the ‘way we do things around here’. Some of the early opinion towards Zac’s Place, already noted, indicates that a small band of alternative thinkers and practitioners was not welcome in all institutional church networks.

The challenge to live in radical discipleship, within an emerging community of followers set against a backdrop of an onlooking established church, need not be restricted to a western urban context. When reflecting on his work among the Masai community in Tanzania, Vincent Donovan recognised that the result of the missionary task of preaching Christ would inevitably lead to churches being planted, but “it might not be the church he had in mind.”⁹⁷ Amidst an indigenous tribal community, he observed intimate expressions of church forming out of a response to Christ, which on the surface had very

⁹⁵ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 154.

⁹⁶ Howard A. Snyder and Daniel V. Runyon, *Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of Christ’s Body* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 81.

⁹⁷ Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (London: SCM, 2001), 66.

little in common with the church that had sent him.⁹⁸ Donovan went so far as to advocate that in not recognising them as the church, “we are doing violence to Christianity”.⁹⁹

a) Ecclesiola in early Methodist societies

As Snyder considers Wesley’s developing radical Christianity from within the Anglican Church, he notes Frank Baker’s observations that Wesley “did not attempt to formulate a new doctrine of the church but to remedy its decadence.”¹⁰⁰ Any forms of ecclesiola that would be evidenced in what became Methodist societies, within the system of bands and classes, did not come from an intended desire to form a new denomination or split away from the established church, but were shaped by a desire to disciple the poor, which would “take precedence over custom and propriety”.¹⁰¹ Indeed, as Henderson notes, “The meetings of the Wesleyan societies were carefully scheduled so as not to conflict with any of the services of the Church of England”, as if to endorse their ongoing loyalty to the Anglican Church and acknowledge a submissive, subordinate posture and not one of competition.¹⁰² In seeking to explore this concept, Snyder further observes some shared understanding in ecclesiology between Wesley and Zinzendorf. Zinzendorf theorised around the concept of “*ecclesiola in ecclesia* (little or small church within the church)”, and “argued for the utility of movements such as Moravianism as missionary and renewing structures within the church” not seeking separation from the church.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 66-68.

⁹⁹ Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 68.

¹⁰⁰ Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), 299, quoted in Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 9.

¹⁰¹ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 45.

¹⁰² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki, 2016), 83.

¹⁰³ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 56.

Despite these early intentions, and amid significant response and the subsequent Evangelical Revival, hostility from the Church of England eventually led to Methodist separation from the established church – but not without the revival positively influencing the whole church in England, including the traditional free churches such as Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Baptists.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps more significantly, Lane further observes, “all levels of society were affected and the moral tone of the nation changed”, particularly among the poor, without which, a revolution such as occurred in France may otherwise have happened in England.¹⁰⁵

What became known as Methodists, began as a small movement that fostered radical discipleship among sectors of the community disengaged with the established church. It still sought to operate within it, and as it gathered momentum in its mission, became seen by the establishment as a threat and was ostracised, but not without the established church benefitting from its influence.

b) Ecclesiola as a pattern of discipleship

Dunmire’s research into using the concept of *ecclesiola in ecclesia* as a model for discipleship offers some relevant observations on this concept and my specific context, whilst also having obvious relation to the previous example.¹⁰⁶ Whilst referring to the context of a local church congregation, he describes *ecclesiola* as a “specific type of small group,” comprised of a core number, invited by the pastor, to pursue a deeper life of radical discipleship in Christ.¹⁰⁷ He cites influence from early Methodism under Wesley,

¹⁰⁴ Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 214.

¹⁰⁵ Lane, *Concise History of Christian Thought*, 215.

¹⁰⁶ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*.

¹⁰⁷ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 6.

who recognised the “*ecclesiola* as a way to breathe new life into the official structures of the church, to counteract stagnation, to maintain vitality, and to nurture the spiritual health of the overall church”.¹⁰⁸ In using this model, Dunmire saw favourable results in his own experiments. He notes that whilst many will be attendees of church services, fewer will choose to engage with intentional discipleship, which stands awkwardly in opposition to the prevalent “consumer driven model for ministry” within his North American context.¹⁰⁹ This would concur with Snyder’s observations that American evangelical church patterns include those of Revivalist, Pentecostal-Charismatic and rock concert influences, which emphasise personal benefit, but could be argued are light on communal mission and discipleship.¹¹⁰

In this model for discipleship, Dunmire draws a parallel with Christ’s methods of intentionally choosing the twelve, stating, “Jesus could not accomplish this work with a crowd; he needed a tribe.”¹¹¹ This tribe had clearly defined boundaries, an identity that was unique and distinct, and a focus on spiritual formation, which in turn generated a bond of community and fellowship – an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.¹¹²

As well as drawing on eighteenth-century Wesley’s early Methodism, Dunmire also highlights the *collegia pietatis* practice of Philipp Jakob Spener in seventeenth-century German Pietism and the *inner mission* of Hans Nielson Hauge in nineteenth-century Norway, as viable expressions of *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.¹¹³ These examples provided

¹⁰⁸ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 81.

¹⁰⁹ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 83.

¹¹⁰ Howard A. Snyder, “The Marks of Evangelical Ecclesiology,” in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?* ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 77-81.

¹¹¹ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 74.

¹¹² Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 74.

¹¹³ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 75.

participants with an opportunity to deliberately opt in, knowing there would be a high level of commitment expected.¹¹⁴ It is this terminology of a tribal identity that particularly resonates in the context of Zac's Place. For the last fifteen years, the name given to our weekly gathering for Bible study, prayer, sacraments and fellowship is a 'Tribal Gathering'. Whilst the terms of engagement are somewhat more open than Dunmire's invite-only concept, there is certainly some shared thought and experience in the uniqueness and depth of fellowship and community.

Dunmire also confirms the benefits to the wider church community from an expression of *ecclesiola in ecclesia* as it endeavoured to be a "tool for both the transformation of individuals and the revitalization of the organization", with the potential for being a "discreet subversive ministry working against the perils of institutionalism", citing what Willard defines as "full-throttle discipleship to Jesus Christ".¹¹⁵

c) Ecclesiola in parachurch organisations

Parachurch organisations continue to be an active part of my experience in church and mission engagement, and I have been familiar with the debate and tension as to where they fit into the relationship with the established church. John Hammett's observation therefore resonates: "While many churches applaud the work of parachurch agencies, there has also been a persistent undercurrent of concern regarding parachurch groups, especially the issue of their theological basis and their relationship to church structures".¹¹⁶ Can they be taken seriously as part of any renewal within the church?

¹¹⁴ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 75.

¹¹⁵ Dunmire, *Growing Disciples*, 76-77 and quoting Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 235.

¹¹⁶ John S. Hammett, "How Church and Parachurch Should Relate: Arguments for a Servant-Partnership Model," *Missiology: An International Review*, XXVIII, no. 2 (April 2000): 199.

Hammett offers a model of servant-partnership where “Parachurch groups are seen as partners, or helpers, raised up by God to aid the church, but possessing a status subordinate to that of the church”.¹¹⁷ As part of his discussion, Hammett considers Snyder’s *ecclesiola in ecclesia* model. Here he notes what Snyder considers to be three aspects essential in defining what is church is: leadership based on spiritual gifts, large communal gatherings and smaller, more intimate gatherings, which often have a mission and renewing focus and could be seen to have similarities to parachurch organisations.¹¹⁸

Hammett observes, however, that some parachurch organisations and structures are no longer small concerns, with many now as large as some church denominational structures, if not larger. He also notes that a greater commitment is required to engage in pioneer mission endeavours over maintaining an institution. He cites Ralph Winter’s two structures approach with regard to seeing the participation of the priesthood of all believers within the church – those of modality, “a mainly non-voluntary, inherited structure”, and sodality, which is “more likely to be voluntary, contractual, and purposive”.¹¹⁹ It is in the course of mission endeavours, especially those of a pioneering nature, where a higher cost of discipleship is required as “churches simply cannot maintain that level of commitment in a substantial portion of their membership”.¹²⁰

As Hammett seeks to explore a functional relationship between church and parachurch, he recognises that, whether they be modelled as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, parachurch,

¹¹⁷ Hammett, *Church and Parachurch*, 200.

¹¹⁸ Hammett, *Church and Parachurch*, 202–203.

¹¹⁹ Ralph D. Winter, “The Two Structures of God’s Redemption Mission”, *Missiology* 2.1 1 (1974): 143-145, quoted in Hammett, *Church and Parachurch*, 204.

¹²⁰ Hammett, *Church and Parachurch*, 204–205.

renewing movement or sodalities, they can each “serve to call the church to its own proper goal.”¹²¹ As we consider the work of discipleship and mission of parachurch organisations within the context of the broader established church, there is a relationship of mutual benefit to be fostered in the cause of the gospel of Christ and his church.

d) Ecclesiola in Monasticism

Martha Driscoll, OCSO, Abbess at a Cistercian order in Indonesia, cites Louis Bouyer in her essay, *The Monastic Community: Ecclesiola in Ecclesia*, when describing the monastery as a “little church within the Church”, expressing its mystery and striving towards the Father’s house:

The vocation of [the monastic community as] an *ecclesiola in Ecclesia* . . . is unceasingly to urge the whole body of Christ, which is the Church, to this growth, toward this final term. These “churches” are groups of Christians who are differentiated from the others by their particular endeavour toward this eschatological plenitude, toward which the whole Church must tend in order to be one and catholic in the fullness of love. They are therefore “pilot” communities which must guide and lead the whole Christian community, the whole Church, toward the sole end, where she can be perfectly fulfilled: her ultimate encounter with Christ at the Parousia. . . . Monasticism, faithful to its vocation, is therefore a vanguard community which should lead, or tend to lead, the whole body of the Church toward its final destiny, resolutely taking the only path that can bring it there.¹²²

Reflecting on the establishment of Benedictine monasteries amid a disintegrating Roman Empire, where the church was no longer a persecuted minority, and monasteries became

¹²¹ Hammett, *Church and Parachurch*, 205.

¹²² Louis Bouyer, of the Oratory, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit*, trans. Charles U. Quinn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1969), 457, quoted in Martha E. Driscoll, “The Monastic Community: Ecclesiola in Ecclesia,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly*, 38.2 (2003): 213–214.

hubs of Christ-centred life and learning, these monasteries served as pilot communities.¹²³ Driscoll advocates, now in the twenty-first century amid the present threats of terrorism, obscene materialistic greed and a heavy reliance on military might for security, that monastic communities continue to be places to experience the love of Christ and his church as “a living reality of hope, compassion, and certainty in the midst of confusion”, finding an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, “where people discover the life of the church”.¹²⁴

In recent times, there has been a return within the church to explore ancient monastic practices. The New Monastic Movement is representative of this, and Cray observes that these monastic insights have a missional contribution in sustaining and preserving “Christian community from the acids of a post-Christian culture.”¹²⁵ He also notes, “Consumer culture may be rootless, having turned ancient heritage into tourist experience, but it also lacks hope for much beyond ever greater choice” and it is in this context we need viable expressions of hopeful “anticipations of the future.”¹²⁶ Cray sees new monastic communities as viable avenues of mission through the Church, but warns, “if new monasticism is to serve the mission of God through the Church, as I hope, then retrieval – reconnection to the ancient church, and renewal – the breaking in of God’s future, his new creation, need to go hand in hand”.¹²⁷ Cray clearly hints at the importance of interconnectedness of both ancient and new practices, mainstream and marginal, *ecclesia* and *ecclesiola*, with roots in ancient practice, but striving towards renewal.

¹²³ Driscoll, *Monastic Community*, 223.

¹²⁴ Driscoll, *Monastic Community*, 223–224.

¹²⁵ Graham Cray, “Why is New Monasticism Important to Fresh Expressions?” in *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: New Monasticism and Fresh Expressions of Church*, eds. Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), 10.

¹²⁶ Cray, “Why is New Monasticism Important to Fresh Expressions?,” 10.

¹²⁷ Cray, “Why is New Monasticism Important to Fresh Expressions?,” 10.

Stuart Burns OSB endorses this relationship of old and new, commenting that new monasticism expressions “are attempts to live the Christian gospel with a fresh integrity”. He also recognises a tension, highlighting the temptation of this new era that seeks “recognition and approval of the institutional Church,” but he is cautious suggesting we “should sit light to seeking formal regulation and structure for these communities too soon”.¹²⁸ His caution is motivated by a concern that the prophetic edge that challenges the mainstream of the established churches could be watered down or even lost.¹²⁹

This was also a tension that Snyder observes within Wesley’s early Methodist societies. Despite Wesley’s innovative methods, he was never disciplined or removed from the Church of England.¹³⁰ Neither was Wesley’s early Methodist Movement offered any formal recognition within Anglicanism, nor status such as an Anglican Order. Snyder suggests that if Methodism had emerged out of the Roman Catholic Church, it may well have become a recognised order, rather than remaining “ecclesiological orphans,” eventually becoming a separate denomination.¹³¹ Snyder hints that Wesley hoped for some official recognition within Anglicanism suggesting that, had this actually happened, “the history of Methodism – and probably of Anglicanism–would have been much different.”¹³² He concludes:

Methodism sought to be neither above history nor shackled by tradition. This was the basis for Wesley seeing Methodism as *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—the charismatic

¹²⁸ Stuart Burns, “Reflections on New Monasticism” in *Ancient Faith, Future Mission: New Monasticism and Fresh Expressions of Church*, eds. Graham Cray, Ian Mobsby and Aaron Kennedy (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2010), 141.

¹²⁹ Burns, “Reflections on New Monasticism,” 141.

¹³⁰ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 170.

¹³¹ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 170.

¹³² Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 170.

community (not entirely unstructured) within the institutional church (not entirely devoid of grace).¹³³

The question remains, if Methodism had become a religious order within Anglicanism, would it have retained its radical, prophetic edge? This is also a question I now find myself asking of Zac's Place. What will it take for Zac's Place to retain its radical prophetic edge as an *ecclesiola*, yet remain connected to the *ecclesia*?

e) *Ecclesiola* and the New Parish Movement

Sparks, Soerens and Friesen have offered some insight into the collaborative working of “communities of Christ followers” in neighbourhoods living in “faithful presence”.¹³⁴ Whilst not using the term *ecclesiola*, much of what they propose encourages a mutual flourishing of churches, mission agencies and community groups to become connected together in their shared geographical space, working towards a common purpose as small groups – potentially as a collective of *ecclesiola*. They use terminology such as, the church “*Within* its place while collaborating *In* that place *With* others.”¹³⁵ There is a broad understanding in defining parish, referring to “*all the relationships (including the land) where the church lives out its faith together*”.¹³⁶ They observe, “When followers of Jesus share life together in a particular place they become much greater than the sum of their parts—they actually become something altogether new”, with the parish forming the context and connectivity coming from relationships of faith.¹³⁷

¹³³ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 171.

¹³⁴ Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighbourhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 46.

¹³⁵ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 46.

¹³⁶ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 23.

¹³⁷ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 22.

Space does not permit a full critique of their work here, but it does stir up an aspect of *ecclesiola in ecclesia* that would be worth further exploration. In a missional mode that moves away from affinity group targeting, towards an elective relational life together amid diverse communities, I am therefore drawn to posit, ‘What if the *ecclesia* finds its form, definition and function as a collective of *ecclesiolas*, rather than *ecclesiolas* being add-ons to the *ecclesia*?’¹³⁸ When considering a seventeenth and eighteenth-century tension in defining the nature of true church and true christianity, Hindmarsh considers Whitefield’s take on Edwards’s concept of “religious affections” when he states, “The church is not constituted by stated ecclesiastical authority but by elective affinity of a spiritual sort.”¹³⁹ Is a small marginal church community like Zac’s Place an awkward add-on to something much larger, or is the larger church an ‘elective affinity’ of relational-based communities, embedded in their neighbourhoods, faithfully present in all of life, striving towards a common goal of living in the light and revelation of the Kingdom of God?

Is Zac’s Place an Ecclesiola?

Zac’s Place is to a certain degree disconnected from the mainstream, and this fact is a significant influence in choosing to embark on this reflective research. Whilst having had formal ties as a supported mission project from my original commissioning Baptist church, time, leadership changes and geographical separation have meant those formal connections no longer exist. Partnering with a small network of connected church

¹³⁸ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 82-83.

¹³⁹ Bruce Hindmarsh, “Is Evangelical Ecclesiology an Oxymoron?” in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 33.

communities overseas has also not developed as originally hoped. However, amid this sense of ecclesial orphaning, or perhaps lack of formal adoption, there are strong relationships locally in Swansea and a wide degree of respect within mainstream denominations, but no formal link.

To some, Zac's Place is a parachurch community and mission, and some onlookers may never see it as a credible 'proper church', but do consider it a valuable mission endeavour. Within Zac's Place, it is understood to be a home of discipleship but not as selective as Dunmire experimented with, and not every participant would be a radical disciple, but would be exposed to the effects of radical discipleship amidst them. The tribe is not a closed one and is more open to comings and goings, but our experiment has been running for twenty years not a few months. We share more than a few aspects of common ground with early Methodist societies, but without the underlying developed structure that Wesley put in place. There is also a radical nature that could warrant exploration as an order, to see that prophetic edge maintained. Whatever our context for exploring and defining *ecclesiola*, there are some common threads and shared tensions between Zac's Place and the contexts explored above, which would point towards it having at least some attributes of being an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*.

As I consider the concept of an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, a smaller intimate expression of the church whilst still connected to the mainstream church, in the context of Zac's Place, I am aware that our situation is not an isolated circumstance. It is in fact part of a repeating pattern in the history of the church where it is renewed from the margins where the *ecclesia* and *ecclesiola* are dependent on each other, sharpening each other, partners in what it means to be the church.

3. The Renewing Movement Uses Some Form of Group Structure

Snyder continues the concept of *ecclesiola* in what he observes about group structure. Within renewal movements he notes a “fairly consistent pattern” committed to a small-group gathering within a local congregation, involving twelve or less people, meeting together weekly.¹⁴⁰

As Wesley used many groups in Methodism, Henderson highlights the importance of the interaction between people in solving problems and fostering maturity.¹⁴¹ There were distinct advantages for learning within a group context, a biblical mandate to do so, and condemnation for those systems that sought to isolate people from their community of peers.¹⁴² Preaching on its own, without the sincerity of genuine religious connection and a pursuit of holiness void of social implications, was considered a “solitary quest” having little lasting impact.¹⁴³

Roberts observes that where there is a renewal of a discipleship movement we not only see a renewed emphasis on looking to the needs of those outside the church, but also a renewed commitment to a depth of relationship within the church.¹⁴⁴ He highlights a specific commitment to “intentional, supportive and accountable relationships” that formed best in small groups – and points to the concept of *catechumenate* in the early church, which involved several years of intense discipleship formation prior to

¹⁴⁰ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 154.

¹⁴¹ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 130.

¹⁴² Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 130-131.

¹⁴³ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 131, referencing *Works*, VIII:252 and *Poetical Works*, I:ix-xiii.

¹⁴⁴ Roberts, *Holy Habits*, 93.

baptism.¹⁴⁵ Roberts also draws on Wilkey-Collinson's observations on Jesus's rabbinical teaching methods which included creating an environment where learning becomes collaborative, communal and relational as life is shared together.¹⁴⁶ This is also the pattern the Murray Williamses observe in renewal movements, noting Jesus modelling a multi-voiced, participatory learning process.¹⁴⁷

Jesus set the tone for small group learning and discipleship when he chose and gathered his twelve disciples. Whilst he was not deliberately prescriptive in his instructions advocating small groups, the way of discipleship he modelled and the Kingdom of God that he spoke of flourished in small relational groups. Practising what Snyder refers to as the "one-another" behaviours that we find in scripture, which include confession, encouragement, accountability, worship, celebration, mourning and conflict resolution, is an aspect of life shared together.¹⁴⁸ The glimpse of the early church gathering in each other's homes (Acts 2:42–47) gives us a picture of this shared life together, devoted to the purposes of God, nurtured in small communal groups.

After the initial years of gathering in bars, Zac's Place has come to settle, and thrive, on a weekly gathering for Bible study, food, fellowship and prayer. On a typical Tuesday evening, there may be between fifteen to forty participants, with a core of a regular twenty attending. Graham Watkins, a Baptist minister who visited us whilst on sabbatical,

¹⁴⁵ Roberts, *Holy Habits*, 96-97.

¹⁴⁶ Sylvia Wilkey-Collinson, *Making Disciples* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 241, cited in Roberts, *Holy Habits*, 119.

¹⁴⁷ Stuart and Sian Murray Williams, *Multi-Voiced Church* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), 22.

¹⁴⁸ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 183. See James 5:16, Hebrews 3:12-13, 10:24-25, 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Colossians 3:16, Romans 12:15 and Matthew 18:15-18. See also Murray Williams, *Multi-Voiced Church*, 87ff.

reflected on his experience making some important observations. He noted, “at its heart, what I experienced was profound in its simplicity; people gathering around a bible with food all of which clearly worked because the depth of relationship between them had led to trust long before I walked in”.¹⁴⁹ He also commented on the openness and the honesty that the group had and picked up on a sense that, as people contributed in discussion, everyone was with each other, supporting and encouraging one another – a visible outworking of God’s love and grace.¹⁵⁰ Watkins also posed the question as to whether the group dynamic would still be effective if everyone that comes infrequently all came at the same time as all the regulars, and how large the group could realistically get before it lost what makes it effective as it is.¹⁵¹

There is no doubt that one of the key aspects of what has enabled people to mature and grow in their faith at Zac’s Place, has been the diverse, eclectic mix of people learning alongside each other in a relational, emotionally safe, and nurturing small group environment. When Snyder describes Wesley’s Class Meeting, he could be describing Zac’s Place Tribal Gatherings: “The entry point and key place of belonging was a face-to-face community where everyone knew (or got to know) everyone else.” It is where the Bible becomes real and grace is experienced.¹⁵²

But this is where the similarity and some of the momentum falters for Zac’s Place. Where the Class Meetings replicated and became the collective Methodist Society, enabling faith to mature for thousands of people, Zac’s Place has stayed as one central gathering. As

¹⁴⁹ Graham Watkins, email message to author, March 12, 2019. See Appendix C for this email which is included in this assignment with his permission, granted by a further email on December 13, 2019.

¹⁵⁰ Watkins, *Zac’s Place*.

¹⁵¹ Watkins, *Zac’s Place*.

¹⁵² Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 65-67.

Wesley formed his disciplined Band System and also the Select Societies to foster a greater commitment to holiness and discipleship to those wanting to pursue it, I do wonder if we have missed an opportunity to provide this additional avenue of group learning and accountability. Snyder observes, “Commitment to Christ, no matter how sincere, has a way of evaporating with time if not tied to and reinforced by specific commitments and disciplines which undergird the corporate experience of the Christian community.”¹⁵³

A small group structure has been the backbone of Zac’s Place. All that we have experienced and what others appear to observe as outsiders looking in, indicate that we have something cohesive and constructive happening as a community of people, but some people’s commitment has indeed evaporated over time. The challenge for us, if what we have is to maintain momentum, may well be to explore creating additional gatherings that have a specific emphasis on deeper discipleship, and therefore leadership development, in addition to a gathering that warmly welcomes all-comers, all of the time.

¹⁵³ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 181.

4. The Renewal Movement has Some Structural Link with the Institutional Church

A formal link with the Institutional Church becomes

crucial if the renewal structure is to have a revitalizing impact without sparking division. Some kind of tie between the two structures is mutually sought and agreed upon. This may mean ecclesiastical recognition as a religious order, ordination of renewal leaders, or some other organizational linkage.¹⁵⁴

Any movement that seeks an alternative way of expression potentially risks being ostracised by those whose practices it is challenging. Gibbs and Bolger observed of emerging churches, of which they included Zac's Place in their research, a tendency to deconstruct church practices, with a shifting emphasis from church to Kingdom.¹⁵⁵ In being prepared to deconstruct practice and challenge the status quo, the possibility also emerges for barriers to be erected and distance to be drawn from both the establishment and from those daring to implement a new idea. This polarity of opinion has already been illustrated in the context of Zac's Place in earlier chapters and Snyder captures the potential extremes of this tension when he states, "Effective movement leaders who gain some recognition by the larger church become saints. Those who do not are often pronounced heretics."¹⁵⁶

For all of Zac's Place's marginal activity and alternative methodology, there is one significant structural link that has remained throughout its twenty-year history, and that is one of active support from the wider church community. Zac's Place has never been

¹⁵⁴ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 154.

¹⁵⁵ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (London: SPCK, 2006), 96.

¹⁵⁶ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 155.

financially self-sufficient. It has benefitted from regular mission support from a couple of church communities and many other individual Christians to function on a practical level – both in terms of contributing to maintaining a building and also sustaining a wage for those involved. Without this external support, Zac’s Place would not have had opportunity to begin and certainly would not have been in a position to continue if it was solely reliant on its own community of people. This in part is due to the ongoing economic hardship that many within Zac’s Place experience, and there continue to be only a handful of wage earners in the fellowship. This, albeit a somewhat informal, structural link with the established church community, has been a very tangible, long-term, endorsing and supportive one.

Zac’s Place has also benefitted from senior church figures publicly endorsing our efforts, as has already been stated, and whilst being an independent church community, being embraced by movements such as Fresh Expressions as a functional example of what they have been seeking to do, has certainly helped to give some credibility to our endeavours. But it is not just about financial resources and credibility. What we have lacked is that wider supportive structure of wise counsel, leadership training and development, and pastoral accountability that an established, institutional church has.

Reflecting on my initial call to mission on the margins, my sending church accommodated this call and supported it, but had little idea how to engage with my ideas. I did not fit into their typical Baptist missionary mould, nor that of the typical parachurch evangelist. I learned early on that pioneering was frequently a lonely experience, but you would eventually gather and value supportive travelling companions along the way. The links that survive are those that have been borne of the shared mission experience over many

years, which has included elements of: faithful support, questions, doubts, fears, risk-taking, loss, celebration, deeper understanding and an underpinning of service shaped by the Kingdom of God. It is these relational structural links that have been a sustaining stability, enabling both longevity and integrity in mission.

Of all the topics covered in the course of this work, there is none that challenges me more than the need to search out how a pioneering initiative like Zac's Place cannot just be taken seriously by the institutional church, but how it can truly be connected to what has gone before, sustaining and flourishing alongside other churches in the present, and not lose its radical edge into the future.

5. The Renewal Structure is Committed to the Unity, Vitality, and Wholeness of the Larger Church

In 2004, the story, thus far, of Zac's Place was included in a working group case study in the Lausanne Forum for World Evangelization, researching the *Realities of the Changing Expressions of Church*. The concluding recommendations of the report, which considered fifteen global case studies, highlighted the tension between and the need for: dialogue, cohesive partnership and understanding between the emerging expressions of alternative church communities and the historical established church. It called for "established churches and mission movements to acknowledge, understand, support and bless creative expressions of the church that are missionally motivated" and it also called for "emerging church movements to value the experience, history and theology of established churches and seek expressions of unity as well as diversity in the body of Christ".¹⁵⁷

In a contemporary world that is becoming increasingly more sceptical about institutions and more dependent on the informality of networks, how does a mission church like Zac's Place actively participate in a relationship of mutual benefit with the larger church? Can we expect to see aspects of unity and affirmation when there could be so much to cause division?

Helen Morris discusses this question and suggests there can be unity in diversity, as the tension between the informality of networks and institutional formality can facilitate an

¹⁵⁷ Wilbert R. Shenk and David Parker, "The Realities of the Changing Expressions of Church," *Lausanne Occasional Paper 43 From the 2004 Forum for World Evangelization hosted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. September 29 – October 5, 2004*, ed. David Claydon (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2005), 47. https://www.lausanne.org/docs/2004forum/LOP43_IG14.pdf

interdependent relationship.¹⁵⁸ Morris observes, “It is in dialectical tension between informal, spontaneous, creative, networked relationships and formal, planned, stable, institutional structures that the church is best able to facilitate gift-exchange within its internal relationships.”¹⁵⁹ In seeking to define gift-exchange, using Paul’s body of Christ metaphor in 1 Corinthians 12, Morris highlights there needs to be a willingness to not only give, but also receive, and those who would appear to have the most to offer should “respect and value the contributions of those members who appear to be their inferiors, both in social status and spiritual potency”.¹⁶⁰

Where some have initially seen Zac’s Place as something of an irrelevance, over time it has been able to participate in gift-exchange with the broader local and global church community. This has been fostered by the sharing of its experiences and the prophetic challenge they present, sometimes causing Zac’s Place to be an irritant to a comfortable church. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Williams, admits Zac’s Place’s experience has served as a reminder to him of “what lies at the heart of the Christian community’s life”, where Christ is unveiled “in the toughest and loneliest of places, in lives that seem as far as you can get from ‘church’ as we usually think of it”.¹⁶¹ What began as a mission experiment in a small city centre bar, has found its voice heard at the core of the institutional church and some would even note the experience of Zac’s Place

¹⁵⁸ Helen D. Morris, *Flexible Church: Being the Church in the Contemporary World* (London:SCM, 2019), 110, 102.

¹⁵⁹ Morris, *Flexible Church*, 113.

¹⁶⁰ Morris, *Flexible Church*, 111, quoted in R.B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1997), 213; cf. G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 601-2.

¹⁶¹ Rowan Williams, foreword to *God’s Biker: Motorcycles and Misfits*, by Sean Stillman (London: SPCK, 2018), x.

includes a potential “wake up call to the bigger picture of what it means to be part of the body of Christ”.¹⁶²

A unity of commonality in the creeds and the practice of the sacraments of baptism and communion underscore that whilst Zac’s Place is deliberately different, it shares unity in the foundations of the church and its practice. It should also be noted that, at its outset, there was never any intention for Zac’s Place advocates to speak ill of other church communities. This was important to us as we naturally attracted many walking-wounded from previous negative church experiences, but we saw little to gain by negative criticism and more to gain from proactively seeking healing and modelling a pattern of practice and behaviour that could, in time, challenge institutional churches’ attitudes towards those that were ostracised. The Lausanne report highlighted the tension in the early years however, that despite significant support from some in church leadership locally, there was a cost in a sense of feeling isolated and misunderstood.¹⁶³

In practice Zac’s Place has set an example in the way it opens its doors to the poor and advocates a shared responsibility to care for them across the church community locally. An aspect of this influence is indicated in the now well-established winter night shelter provision for the city’s rough sleepers, which is run by a vast number of local church communities across multiple denominations and uses the support of over two hundred volunteers for the three coldest months of the year. This on its own has resulted not only in actual care that saves lives, but has also developed a network of diverse relationships across the city, including those of the whole local church, local government, welfare

¹⁶² Ruth Clemence, “God’s Biker by Sean Stillman - Book Review”, accessed March 13, 2020. <https://ruthclemence.com/2019/02/19/gods-biker-by-sean-stillman-book-review/>

¹⁶³ Shenk and Parker, “The Realities of the Changing Expressions of Church”, 39.

organisations and healthcare providers. There are signs of unity, vitality and wholeness, not from an “overarching institutional structure”, but through a practice of gift-exchange using networks that not only have an impact within the larger church, but also the wider community.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Morris, *Flexible Church*, 101.

6. The Renewal Structure is Mission-oriented

Since its inception in 1998 Zac's Place has had an outward-looking mission focus and continues to describe itself as a Mission Church. It has aligned itself with, as Snyder suggests, a dual emphasis of seeking to be a witness for Christ in the world, and seeking to agitate a comfortable church.¹⁶⁵ Carter and Warren refer to a similar concept as mission birthed in disruptive innovation.¹⁶⁶ Our deliberate move to the neutral space of a bar took us out from the comfort within the church walls, to pioneer new places in mission.

At first glance, the mission community at Zac's Place has very little to offer. It is small, relatively poor, and has very limited human and material resources. But, conviction is such that we have placed ourselves with our limited resources where God is at work, and as Fung suggests, have become co-workers with God.¹⁶⁷ Zac's Place has chosen to be where people are, and has deliberately chosen to keep company with the outcasts of society. It has often been a messy experience, "a simmering casserole of oddities" immersed in complex relationships and fragile people.¹⁶⁸ A natural outward looking missional way of existence has developed, possibly as a result of what Drane suggests as theology being worked out in community.¹⁶⁹ In practice, this encourages a level of engagement that moves us to "ask the right questions . . . to walk alongside people as they struggle to make sense of it all", rather than simply "imposing our own answers".¹⁷⁰ A

¹⁶⁵ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 155.

¹⁶⁶ Kenneth H. Carter Jr. and Audrey Warren, *Fresh Expressions: A New Kind of Methodist Church for People Not in Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2017), 66-67.

¹⁶⁷ Raymond Fung, *The Isaiah Vision: An Ecumenical Strategy for Congregational Evangelism* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), 28.

¹⁶⁸ Stillman, *God's Biker*, 121.

¹⁶⁹ John Drane, "Learning From the Past to Inspire the Future" in *Future Present: Embodying a Better World Now* (Proost, 2018), 133.

¹⁷⁰ Drane, "Learning from the Past", 139.

move outside of the walls challenged how we went about discipleship, it coloured what mission looked like. On relocating the church, Smith challenged our early thinking:

You can't talk about a world out there if you don't sit with them. You can't make moral judgments of prostitutes if you never talk to them. You can't castigate your teenage rock-and-roll kids if you never listen to their case. We have to listen, but first we must relocate.¹⁷¹

The community we sat with challenged our practised theology. It moved us to be more compassionate and less judgemental in our relationships, which in turn enabled us to be more effective communicators and more attentive listeners.

But has it produced any of this missional fruit by way of new disciples and contributed to any renewal in the wider church? The first part is easier to answer with a resounding, yes. The second part is more complex to answer, and is a significant part of the rationale for this research. I will endeavour to draw some conclusions on this second point at the end of the paper.

Regarding new disciples, the evidence is in our midst, in our stories and our lived experience. Lives have been transformed, baptisms have marked milestone commitments, those with demonic influences have been liberated and attitudes have been challenged by embracing the Kingdom of God, which has been faithfully taught and demonstrated.¹⁷²

One of our long term community participants, Mark, reflected on his early engagement

¹⁷¹ John Smith, "Relocating the church outside the walls," *Good News: Leading United Methodists to a Faithful Future*, April 3, 2019, <https://goodnewsmag.org/2019/04/relocating-the-church-outside-the-walls/>. Republished from January/February 2000 issue of *Good News*.

¹⁷² See Stillman, "Scrambled Eggs" in *God's Biker*, 135-153.

with us, from when he first arrived, homeless and with multiple addictions, by commenting:

One thing that I will never forget is that it is where I first found Christ. Not in a head knowledge way but in a deep, heart knowledge. It was the first place I found God's unconditional love, acceptance and grace in action. Not people talking it but people living it. Authentic faith and deeds in action.¹⁷³

Mark's experience responded to mission that was more than just words; it was what Gibbs and Bolger observed of Zac's Place as "presence rather than proclamation".¹⁷⁴ There has been a constant tension, however, of discipleship and frontier mission, as we have sought to find a mature balance in the challenge presented by complex pastoral issues. It is a tension we recognise as "complicated beauty and glorious chaos",¹⁷⁵ and finds its home in an understanding of *missio Dei*, entrusting all our efforts, no matter how feeble, and challenging within the grace of God.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ See <http://www.zacsplace.org/support-2/endorsements-2/> accessed March 13, 2020.

¹⁷⁴ Gibbs and Bolger, *Emerging Churches*, 129.

¹⁷⁵ Stillman, *God's Biker*, 153.

¹⁷⁶ Michael Jenkins, "The "Gift" of the Church" in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 207.

7. The Renewal Movement is Especially Conscious of Being a Distinct, Covenant-based Community

The previous chapter noted Drane’s connection between theology and missional living both being significantly influenced by community.¹⁷⁷ Dulles previously considered the “community of disciples” a significant perspective on the church, when it is lived out as an “alternative society”.¹⁷⁸ Snyder observed of Wesley’s societies, classes and bands, a pattern marked by a system of “discipline-in-community”.¹⁷⁹ In a non-western-influenced context, Donovan posits, “How seriously do we consider the possibility that Christianity is essentially directed neither to the individual nor to the organization, but to the community?”¹⁸⁰ All of these observations point towards an expression of *koinonia*, reflective of the substance of fellowship that is “profoundly practical and deeply relational” that only forms out of community, such as experienced in the early church (Acts 2:42-47).¹⁸¹

It is precisely the alternative nature of a Kingdom-of-God-affected way of sharing life together that can make a community distinctive. When Norman Ivison visited Zac’s Place in his capacity as Fresh Expressions Director of Communications, he commented:

I knew as soon as I walked into Zac’s Place I was somewhere special. Amazing things were happening in that small space: lives being transformed, wounds being healed, God taking control in a gentle way. I left inspired, humbled and changed.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Drane, “Learning from the Past to Inspire the Future”, 133.

¹⁷⁸ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Doubleday, 1987), 207ff.

¹⁷⁹ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 63.

¹⁸⁰ Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered*, 73.

¹⁸¹ Roberts, *Holy Habits*, 130.

¹⁸² <http://www.zacsplace.org/support-2/endorsements-2/>, accessed, February 5, 2020.

Nashville-based musician, Rick Elias visited during the early gatherings in a bar and was deeply impacted by his experience with us, stating:

It is unpretentious and non-exclusive, two traits I believe characterized the early church. Moreover, it has proven to be a refuge for both believer and those still seeking, the strong and the weary, young and old, rich and poor. This, to me, is true church.¹⁸³

This aspect of Christian community does not happen by accident. It comes from a place where there is a shared commitment to live the same alternative lifestyle. Its distinctive nature carries the marks, albeit sometimes flawed, of lives committed to being disciples of Jesus. The ragamuffin nature of the Zac's Place community, reflective of the poverty of spirit advocated by Christ (Matt. 5:3), is a very real observation that the community Zac's Place shares together is far from perfect. Zac's Place is a long way from being a complete picture of the Church. It has, however, demonstrated that, for some people (and quite a diverse array of people at that), Zac's Place has served as a place of community and discipleship in a manner that you would expect to find in any functional expression of the Christian church.

Whilst it is reasonable to suggest that Zac's Place is a functional community, it can be open to challenge as to whether it is a *Covenant-based Community*. Unlike Wesley's early Methodist societies, Zac's Place has no formal membership process.¹⁸⁴ People join the community by actively being present and engaged in one another's lives. Whilst the relaxed informality makes for an accessible environment, it can breed a rather casual attitude to sharing responsibilities within the community. In practice, however, those of

¹⁸³ <http://www.zacsplace.org/support-2/endorsements-2/>, accessed, February 5, 2020.

¹⁸⁴ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 105.

more maturing faith tend to lead by example. Murray Williams further observes, we should not underestimate the vitality of a natural mutuality of commitment to one another compared to institutional membership, which can be open to superficiality.¹⁸⁵

The informal nature can present problems, however, in matters of discipline. On very rare occasions, if someone's behaviour has been deemed to be unacceptable, where Snyder suggests that disciplinary exclusion was an option within Wesley's structure, it has not formally been part of ours.¹⁸⁶ However, on rare occasions, individuals are escorted from the premises when their behaviour has posed a threat to the wellbeing of others, and entry to a gathering has been denied for the same reasons.¹⁸⁷ There are clearly understood ground rules among the community as to what is acceptable and what is not, and which are responded to from within a community naturally wanting to "care for each other", bearing one another's burdens.¹⁸⁸

We have always been very realistic in recognising that Zac's Place serves different purposes for different people. For some, it is their primary church community, their sole communal expression of worship, service and fellowship. For others again, we are a staging post – an essential point along their journey where they find refreshment, renewed hope and a challenge to stay on the road of Christian discipleship. They may stay a few weeks or a few years, but our hope is they continue their journey onward, renewed. For others, we are like a field hospital. They arrive in our midst in a chaotic mess, not necessarily looking for Christian discipleship, but a place of support and safety. They may have little recollection of being among us, other than remembering it was a safe place

¹⁸⁵ Murray Williams, *Multi-Voiced Church*, 97.

¹⁸⁶ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 155.

¹⁸⁷ Stillman, *God's Biker*, 149.

¹⁸⁸ John Wesley, *Works*, 9:262, quoted in Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 44.

to be. The pattern of behaviour we expect from people will vary widely according to where they are on their own discipleship journey, while also being aware of a communal responsibility to the weakest sister or brother among us. Where Wesley's societies were finely tuned into classes and bands according to levels of commitment, Zac's Place has not developed that structural framework, but it's something that certainly needs to be considered. However, what it does have is something that at times resembles what Dulles advocates as a "network of interpersonal relations resembling the community life of Jesus with the Twelve" which hints at being family.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁹ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 218.

8. The Renewal Movement Provides the Context for the Rise, Training, and Exercise of New Forms of Ministry and Leadership

When reflecting on leadership that impacts a community, Sparks et al suggest that by allowing the “broader culture to predetermine the qualities of a leader, we can easily overlook the very gifts, skills and character” necessary for godly leadership.¹⁹⁰ They continue by observing there can be an assumption that obvious positional leaders with status and expertise are not necessarily the most suitable to lead a Christian community, where instead, “character is king” marked by the fruits of the Spirit.¹⁹¹ These observations reflect our experience at Zac’s Place, which has developed out of a desire to mature in discipleship and has often brought to the fore unlikely candidates, such as Liz.¹⁹²

Liz, a creative writer, was short on confidence, residing in a part of the city that was vastly different to many of our Zac’s Place community, who were in social housing or on the streets. On the surface, Liz had little to offer these people she was so different. But over the years Liz became an essential part of the life of Zac’s Place, befriending and supporting vulnerable women and bringing her creative gift to help us write communal psalms and laments that reflected the harsh reality of life’s struggles. Liz had been overlooked elsewhere as a leader, but as she gradually found her place among a diverse community bound together by Christ, the outworking of her devotion to Christ, no matter how fragile, was seen as authentic and she remains a respected leader and teacher at Zac’s Place.

¹⁹⁰ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 166.

¹⁹¹ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 167, 171.

¹⁹² For Liz’s story see, Stillman, *God’s Biker*, 151-152.

Boers defines leadership within a Christian context as, “Inspiring, challenging, or empowering people or groups to join God’s mission of redemption and healing”.¹⁹³ It is out of the communal desire to explore what this *missio Dei* looks like in a community of misfits, marked by poverty of spirit, that we have experienced redemptive practices bringing forth examples of unlikely leadership. This becomes an example of salt and light (Matt. 5:13–16) having an influence, where we can all “point and orient others to God and God’s priorities”.¹⁹⁴

Snyder observes, that a significantly high number of church leaders are drawn from a well that has sprung from the legacy of renewal movements, citing the renewal popes who came from religious orders.¹⁹⁵ Smith, who researched the legacy of the Jesus Movement, also comments on the need to take seriously the prophetic voices from within renewal movements:

I have come to the conviction that the missing link between the period of church abandonment of popular culture in the 1960s, and the current interest in a missional focus for the church is the pioneering work of the largely forgotten apostles and prophets of the counterculture. It could have had much greater outcomes in terms of penetrating the wider society ... The most telling moments in the advance of the church are when it is movemental.¹⁹⁶

It is my experience through what we have endeavoured to pioneer at Zac’s Place, and also within God’s Squad, which both carry some of the legacy of the Jesus Movement via Smith’s influence, that there have been experiences of being held at arm’s length by the mainstream church. But, as time has gone on, our advocacy for the poor, our welcome of

¹⁹³ Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools: A Biblical Theology of Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 161.

¹⁹⁴ Boers, *Servants and Fools*, 162-165.

¹⁹⁵ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 156.

¹⁹⁶ Kevin John Smith, “The Origins, Nature, and Significance of the Jesus Movement as a Revitalization Movement” (PhD diss., Asbury Theological Seminary, 2002), 522.

the outcast, our efforts to function as a community of grace, have given space for servant-hearted disciples to emerge as leaders. This something ‘new’ is in actual fact, reflective of something very ‘old’, as it finds its birth in the teaching of Christ and the practice of the early disciples. It fosters courageous, wise leadership and practice that encourages disciples to keep going.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Sparks, Soerens and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 180.

9. Members of the Renewal Movement Remain in Close Daily Contact with Society, and Especially with the Poor

When Jesus cleared the Court of the Gentiles of money changers (Matt. 21:12–17, Mark 11:15–18, Luke 19:45–46), he was directly challenging a pattern of oppression, by the priestly elite, causing a detrimental effect on the poor.¹⁹⁸ The very space allocated in the temple for those otherwise excluded from prayer had been prostituted for commercial gain.¹⁹⁹ Reflective of many of the prophetic voices in the Old Testament, this was a pattern of behaviour that stood in direct opposition to the “covenantal equality” set out in the Law.²⁰⁰ Throughout scripture, there is a strong mandate for a community that is gathered around the Father, Son and Spirit, to be good news for the poor, meeting them where they are, no matter how difficult their circumstances.²⁰¹

Hughes advocates, the normative experience of a thriving church community is one that is rich in mercy, looking particularly to the needs of the poor.²⁰² It is no surprise therefore, that Snyder highlights this pattern of behaviour in a renewal movement. Whilst acknowledging not all renewal movements appeal directly to the poor, he does recognise that those that do are likely to have a greater and more radical influence on social transformation as a result.²⁰³ Henderson highlights how Wesley took the example of Christ and deliberately took the gospel to the socially excluded and it was this “keen sense

¹⁹⁸ Dewi Arwel Hughes and Matthew Bennett, *God of the Poor* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 1988), 192-193.

¹⁹⁹ Hughes, *God of the Poor*, 192.

²⁰⁰ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2009), 175.

²⁰¹ David Sheppard, *Bias to the Poor* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 175-176.

²⁰² Hughes, *God of the Poor*, 106.

²⁰³ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 156-157.

of mission to the disadvantaged” rather than any plan for renewal that motivated him.²⁰⁴ It was Wesley’s message of God’s grace, that changed individuals within the safety of a group structure that reflected the working class ideal of a loyalty to people, rather than ideas that challenged and changed society.²⁰⁵ Snyder notes further, “The early Methodists were radical precisely in being both in the world yet covenantally distinct” from it, and it is this challenge that has been experiential for us at Zac’s Place.²⁰⁶

My earlier gospel rediscovery, which brought my own discipleship outworking alongside the poor and the outcast, has become part of the fabric of what passes for being ‘normal pattern of practice’ at Zac’s Place. Dulles warns of the temptation to make religion “divorced from daily life” and it has been our desire to make the voice of the poorest count at Zac’s Place that has kept us connected with many of the harsh realities of daily life in our community.²⁰⁷ It has become a place where questions, doubts and fears are worked out in a community of grace, and my personal experience is somewhat reflective of that of A. B. Simpson. Snyder writes of Simpson’s shift from comfortable, conventional parish life, to one that was filled with “publicans and sinners”.²⁰⁸

In practice, Zac’s Place has developed into a mission church community that is fully engaged in the life of the local community, with an emphasis on a relationship with the most destitute. This relationship is not simply one way, where we provide material need, and support – which we do through the provision of daily breakfast for those sleeping rough, soup kitchen, and other services in partnership with numerous agencies. We also

²⁰⁴ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 133.

²⁰⁵ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 133-134.

²⁰⁶ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 157.

²⁰⁷ Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 219.

²⁰⁸ Snyder, “The Marks of Evangelical Ecclesiology”, 99.

endeavour to fully engage the same broad cross section of people into active participation into the life of our community of grace, in learning what it is to follow Christ together. We are not simply a church plant, only for the poor, and therefore being kept separate from those considered to have greater social status, about which Hull expressed concern in his critique of the Mission-shaped Church report.²⁰⁹ We have experienced a richness in diversity, with a preference for the poor. The advocacy of and care for the weakest brother or sister has been not only a challenge but has brought immense growth and maturity of discipleship across the whole Zac's Place community. Hughes offers this concept on the church being the diverse body of Christ – "Humility is the first step to a real experience of unity in the context of church".²¹⁰

Reflecting on her engagement with the poor and destitute who we attract to us at Zac's Place, the nurse who cares for many on the streets in our community commented:

Swansea has a great many services for homeless and vulnerable people. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to access statutory and voluntary services. Some are excluded because of their past or current behaviour, social or financial reasons but some exclude themselves, choosing not to accept such help or support. It is on these occasions that the care offered by Zac's Place comes into its own.... For some people Zac's Place is the only safe haven in their lives. Here they find help, the love and support of others and, importantly, acceptance of who they are and the life that they are leading. It may not seem much, but for many, it is a lifeline.²¹¹

Not only do the poor feel welcome at Zac's Place, the wider community understand our deliberate move to embrace the marginalised and see significant value in a community

²⁰⁹ John M. Hull, *Mission-Shaped Church: A Theological Response* (London: SCM, 2006), 15, 33.

²¹⁰ Hughes, *God of the Poor*, 83.

²¹¹ Janet Keauffling, see <http://www.zacsplace.org/support-2/endorsements-2/>, accessed, February 5, 2020.

of people marked by an understanding that Christ, and the Church, should be good news for the poor.

10. The Renewal Structure Maintains an Emphasis on the Spirit and the Word as the Basis of Authority

The grounds for which any church community can assume to give authoritative direction into the lives of its members ought to be clearly defined. Questions over the basis of authority will often be at the core of why church communities split, fragment, or simply fizzle out. Keeping Zac's Place focussed on what is vital, and defining what is vital, as a mission church community has been a genuine priority over the two decades. Snyder's inclusion of an emphasis on the Spirit and the Word does not surprise me therefore.

He concludes that Wesley maintained an important balance between the influence of the Spirit and the Word. Where an exclusive reliance on the Word, and a disconnect from the Spirit, could foster a "highly legalistic sect", he conversely notes that an over-dependence on the Spirit with scant regard for the Word leaves a community open to becoming an "enthusiastic cult".²¹² Snyder sets down the challenge for a potential renewal movement of taking its authority and carefully balancing the Christological and the pneumatological, whilst not excluding the authority of the institutional church embedded in its traditions.²¹³

Goodhew et al challenged of Fresh Expressions that, "if they are to be true to their calling and bear fruit as they share in the *missio Dei*, then they need to be truly God-centred in everything that they are and do".²¹⁴ I would similarly advocate that to have a truly healthy relationship with the Word, both scripture and made flesh, there needs to be a basic desire, as an individual and as a community of people to be God-centred, reflective of the

²¹² Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 157.

²¹³ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 157.

²¹⁴ David Goodhew, Andrew Roberts and Michael Volland, *Fresh: An Introduction to Fresh Expressions of Church and Pioneer Ministry* (London: SCM, 2012), 131.

devotion expressed by the early believers, who sat at the feet of the Apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42ff). Lane issues a stark warning on the risks of a dynamic community's experience shaping its doctrine, such as advocated by Schleiermacher.²¹⁵ Where there is a risk for an ever emerging and evolving experience to wield the doctrinal secateurs, Lane warns, "experience should be tested by the norm of Scripture" rather than doctrine being pruned by experience.²¹⁶ It is this argument that has remained pivotal in our reasoning to place such a high priority on the communal teaching of the Word.

As the Word became flesh and lived among us, so the Word espoused, finds its expression in community. Davison and Milbank draw on Hauerwas when they state, "scripture is actually unintelligible without the interpretive community of the Church".²¹⁷ Hunsberger reflects on Newbigin seeing the Bible as a storybook, "a narrative that "renders accessible to us the actions, character and purposes of God".²¹⁸ Hunsberger concludes that for the church to rediscover its missional identity it needs to become a "storied community" and in doing so "a gospeled community, cross-shaped and resurrection-voiced" evidencing a narrative showing signs of renewal.²¹⁹

It is also a Holy Spirit community. Whilst reflecting on the Apostolic nature of the church in Acts 2:42ff, Humphrey draws attention to the concept that, "In order to be Christian, it is not enough to be in the Apostles' teaching. You must also be in the Apostles'

²¹⁵ Lane, *Concise History of Christian Thought*, 239.

²¹⁶ Lane, *Concise History of Christian Thought*, 239.

²¹⁷ Davison and Milbank, *For the Parish*, 215.

²¹⁸ George R. Hunsberger, "Evangelical Conversion toward a Missional Ecclesiology" in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003) 129, quoting Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 55.

²¹⁹ Hunsberger, "Evangelical Conversion toward a Missional Ecclesiology", 129-130.

fellowship”.²²⁰ I would argue that lived expression of the Word taught and engaged with, in the fellowship of covenant community, finds its authenticity in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Polhill observes of the role of the Holy Spirit in Acts, “It is primarily through God’s Spirit that the community was aware of the divine power at work among them.”²²¹

It therefore makes reasonable sense to expect a community that is based on the Word and the Spirit to be marked by the qualities advocated by Paul as the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galations 5:22–25). As I reflect on our stubbornness to keep *The Word* central at Zac’s Place – our commitment to communal learning around the scriptures, allowing the narrative to engage with our own shared story – it would appear to have borne the fruit, and the desire for it, that evidences the work of *The Spirit*.

²²⁰ Edith M. Humphrey, “One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic: Awaiting the Redemption of Our Body” in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 147, quoting from www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/creed.church.txt

²²¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, TNAC (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 64.

For Further Consideration

If I was to suggest adding any additional elements to Snyder's ten, it would be to consider the place of the arts in renewal movements. Murray Williams also observes the voice of the arts is one that often gets overlooked.²²² Sanders cites Hauerwas in advocating how art helps give us "language to make sense of God, the world and ourselves".²²³ It is this ability to articulate pain and struggle that has been our communal experience of the arts at Zac's Place.²²⁴ Peterson, in conversation with Bono, discusses with him the need to "find a way to cuss without cussing" and references the Psalms and Jeremiah as biblical examples of how the arts help us, through the language of metaphor, to navigate with honesty ways of engaging with what God is doing.²²⁵ It is this appetite to see the arts as an essential part of our language, not simply a decorative experience, that opens the way for the arts to have a prophetic influence.²²⁶ Space does not permit further discussion here, but I would encourage further exploration in how renewal movements have historically engaged with the arts.

²²² Murray Williams, *Multi-Voiced Church*, 120.

²²³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Performing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 83, quoted in Michelle Sanders, *Art and Soul: Generating Missional Conversations with the Community through the Medium of Art* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 32.

²²⁴ See Stillman, *God's Biker*, 122-123 for the place of the arts at Zac's Place.

²²⁵ Bono and Eugene Peterson, "The Psalms," Fuller Studio, *You Tube*, April 26, 2016.

<https://youtu.be/-l40S5e90KY>

²²⁶ Bono and Peterson, "The Psalms," 3.49.

Conclusion

At the beginning of Snyder's work in searching for a pattern of a renewal movement, he asks the question – "What is the shape of our life together as the people of God in the world?"²²⁷ Using Snyder's framework I have been able to examine what it is that defines the ecclesiology of Zac's Place, and whether there are any marks of a renewal movement in how that connects to the wider church community and the physical community Zac's Place is rooted in locally. Even as a small mission church community, it would appear that several hallmarks from Snyder's model do resonate with our experience, and are worthy of note.

The gospel rediscovered through a prophetic challenge, following a period as a reflective exile, and finding its application earthed in the counter-cultural, subversive teaching of Christ has been foundational in defining who we are and what we do. It was this personal renewal–rediscovery that has impacted who we have prioritised with our time and resources, how we have served, and how, what and where we have communicated.

The challenge of finding where we fit into the mainstream church community has been lengthy, but there is scope for seeing Zac's Place as an *ecclesiola*, somewhat marginal, but one that has a contribution to make as a possible vanguard or pilot community. The small group dynamic, which has been a defining feature and the catalyst for so much productive discipleship at Zac's Place, does evidence areas of weakness. The lack of expected commitment and the ease with which people can drop in and out, may hinder the deeper expectations of more committed participants. This could well be a contributing

²²⁷ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 8.

factor as to why Zac's Place has not replicated into multiple gatherings such as the Wesleyan experience.

A formal structural link with the institutional church has been tenuous at best for Zac's Place, but our influence within it has been significantly noted. This research has highlighted the tension of us having freedom to explore radical discipleship, but also experience being ecclesiological orphans. Finding a formal tangible link with the institutional church could be the difference in seeing whether Zac's Place serves any further purpose beyond the present generation of participants.

In tension with this though, is the concern of 'selling out' – losing the frontier missional edge is a genuine concern in considering what the future may hold for Zac's Place. This missional edge that seeks to practise faith, hope and love on the margins of our community has not only been the source of some of the most radical encounters individuals have had with God, but has also presented some of the most challenging stories to cause the institutional church to reflect and re-engage with mission and service among the marginalised. This aspect of the renewed focus on mission to the margins has possibly been one of the most significant contributions Zac's Place has made to the life of the institutional church.

The community naturally formed at Zac's Place resulting from discipleship and service of the poor has not only been experienced by those involved, but widely observed by those looking on. The unstructured informality of expected commitment raises legitimate questions as to whether what we have is a truly covenant-based community, but evidence suggests that is our lived experience. Whether we have enough substance and structure to

see this replicated into a further generation, will be influenced by whether or not we have the vision and capacity to train leaders who understand this as being essential to our DNA.

Our active engagement with the poor and with the scriptures have both evidenced the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of individuals and our community. My greatest concern for Zac's Place is that over time, we lose that balance. Zac's Place could remain solely as a very effective charitable mission to help the poor in our city. Similarly, it could remain solely an ongoing place of worship, and serve a very useful purpose. But what has given Zac's Place its edge has been this fusion of discipleship practised in diverse community with a bias towards the poor and marginalised. As I have considered the marks of renewal movements, I can conclude that Zac's Place evidences many of these characteristics, but the challenge exists: how do we see that 'renewal' renew as this generation ages, and not simply lose its edge and become diluted as time goes on?

In conclusion, to help answer this question, I shall explore the options of introducing the structure of a religious order into the life of Zac's Place, particularly exploring New Monasticism, but not ruling out engagement with historical monastic orders. This could open the possibility of holding this balance together, whilst also providing a formal link with the mainstream church, creating greater opportunity for leadership training and, importantly, having a vision shared by a wider body beyond a few radical pioneers. It is important to note that this is not a conclusion I saw coming, and presents as an option as a direct result of this research and reflection.

As time can now afford an honest appraisal of not only Zac's Place, but many explorations into missional church over the past two decades, I am aware assessing our efforts based

on numerical engagement or financial viability would not tell the whole story. I can therefore see merit in advocating the use of Snyder's framework to critique other missional movements, whether, Fresh Expressions, emerging, simple, or missional churches, or even parachurch organisations.

Snyder concludes his observations on Wesley's Methodism:

One of the clearest lessons from twenty centuries of experience is that the church has always been most faithful when it has gotten back to its biblical, spiritual-social roots. Then it is freed to be most creative in challenging the spiritual, social, and economic crises of the day.²²⁸

Whether Zac's Place manages to maintain its momentum and missional ethos in a post-Christendom society, into another generation, will largely depend on the vision of the present community, trustees and support-base to continue to be faithful like this.²²⁹ If however, it does not, there is no doubt Zac's Place has been fertile ground for some of the seeds of renewal that have borne fruit in its lifetime to the glory of God.

²²⁸ Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, 186.

²²⁹ Murray Williams, *Multi-Voiced Church*, 130.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Timeline

Sean Stillman	Selected Milestones	Zac's Place & Other Related
1967 Born, Reading, UK.	1967	1971 <i>God's Squad</i> begins in Sydney, then also in 1972 in Melbourne, Australia, under John Smith's leadership.
1979 Baptism into an Evangelical Baptist Church.	1980	
1987 Call to mission and 'gospel rediscovery' begins via John Smith.		
1988 Ministry Commissioning from home Baptist Church and an Associate of YFC.	1990	
1991 UK Tour with John Smith 1992 Marriage to Jayne Morgan		1991 Exousia Trust established as a charity and supporting framework for developing ministry in UK.
1994 Ministry partnership exploration visit in Australia with Smith/GSCMC/ St.Martins.		
1995 Formally start God's Squad in the UK after four years of prep work. 1996 Move to Swansea.		1995 GSCMC founded in the UK.
	2000	1998 'Zac's Place - Church in a pub?' begins to gather in Swansea at the request of mission-field and gathers momentum. 2000 ZP hosts stage at Swansea music festival 'Xtreme World'. 2001 <i>Zac's Place</i> HTV Network TV series, includes first meeting with Rowan Williams. 2001 First sea baptism for Zac's Place. 2003 Purchase of Gospel Hall for Zac's Place development as a 'Church for Ragamuffins'. 2004 Eight pieces of artwork commissioned on the Beatitudes for in house ZP exhibiting. 2004 Pub gatherings conclude, but active service among the poor begins from ZP along with regular Bible teaching, 'Tribal Gatherings'. 2004 ZP features in Lausanne Occasional Paper. 2004 <i>Mission Shaped Church</i> report. 2005 Banner of Truth article referencing Zac's Place 2005 <i>Fresh Expressions</i> begins. 2005 ZP features on BBC Songs of Praise. 2005 ZP features in 'Emerging Churches', Gibbs & Bolger. 2006 ITV Wales - in depth feature. 2008 'Foot washing' lesson at Zac's Place.
2002 Ordination at St. Martins, Melbourne (A Concern Australia Community of Faith) and recognition of partnership with Zac's Place in Swansea.		
2004 Attend Lausanne Conference as part of the <i>The Realities of the Changing Expressions of the Church</i> working group.		
2009 Australia Speaking Tour.	2010	2011 Zac's Place features on Fresh Expressions 'Making a Difference' DVD.
2012 UK Speaking Tour and 2013 NZ Speaking Tour both supported by Fresh Expressions.		2015 ZP Associated social enterprise starts, 'Rough Edges'. 2016 ZP features in 'Holy Habits', Andrew Roberts. 2017 Beatitudes Art Commission exhibited in the public space at Swansea Grand theatre.
2013-2014 Regular retreat time for semi-sabbatical & writing 2016 SS begins MA studies.		
2018 <i>God's Biker: Motorcycles & Misfits</i> published by SPCK with a foreword from Rowan Williams.		2018 Zac's Place story is included in Sean Stillman's autobiography 'God's Biker'.
2019 Appointed GSCMC International President.		
2020 Ongoing research into Zac's Place development.	2020	2020 Zac's Place continues as a mission church & GSCMC is operating in 16 countries.

Appendix B – The Influence of John Smith

The following excerpt is from an obituary that I wrote in Smith's memory on behalf of God's Squad CMC. It reflects something of the magnitude of 'gospel rediscovery', not only for me, but also for our associated wider mission movement, which includes Zac's Place, other church communities, and God's Squad, who each carry the DNA of a similar gospel rediscovery.

For Smithy, the road was the place of discipleship and mission, and like John Wesley ... the world very much became his parish. It was where you worked out what it meant to be a follower of his hero, Jesus of Nazareth. The road would take you to the marginalized ... the Gospel still ought to be good news for the poor and uncomfortable news for the powerful. He remained passionate about the need for the message of Jesus, to be faithfully proclaimed in the public sphere, but he also taught us that it should be something that should be lived – putting it into practice was not an optional extra.

He taught us how the bible was not a book to pull 'proof texts' from, to justify personal gain. Neither should we conveniently skip over the hard to read passages, like loving your enemies and doing good to those who persecute you. He introduced us to new travelling companions in the scriptures such as Jeremiah and his laments, the counter cultural prophetic voices of Amos and Micah ... He highlighted the frailty of King David, and introduced us to the blues songs in the Psalms that pointed to the hope of the gospel. The road trips of Jesus connecting with outcasts and undesirables saw him ... burst with enthusiasm at the all-embracing love of God, that was at work long before we would ride into town. And he never lost his enthusiasm for the apostle Paul's ability to cross borders and be a cultural chameleon, which he himself did so well. John was able to connect with people in a myriad of contexts – whether it be in a smoky motorcycle clubhouse bar, backstage at a rock and roll gig, in the corridors of political power, a chapel pulpit, a street corner talking to a complete stranger, sitting amid indigenous communities,

engaging in academic dialogue, or crying in the pouring rain at a graveside with a grieving family.²³⁰

²³⁰ “John Smith (1942 -2019): A Tribute from God’s Squad CMC”, accessed 4 June 2019, <http://gscmc.com/john-smith-tribute/>, which is also in a recorded presentation, Sean Stillman, “John Smith’s Legacy/Memorial,” *YouTube*, 40.40, April 24, 2019, <https://youtu.be/WNopCHP9aRY?t=2440>

Appendix C - Email from Graham Watkins

This email contained the original contents of a blog post authored by Watkins some years earlier, now no longer available on line. It is included in this assignment with his permission, granted by a further email on 13 Dec 2019.

Tue, 12 Mar 2019 2:07:13 PM

From: Graham Watkins [REDACTED]

To: "exousiatrust" <exousiatrust@[REDACTED]>

Hi Sean.

The blog went when our website host went under... but I think I have tracked down the original file...

...God bless, Graham

Zac's Place

Zac's place was started by Sean Stillman as church above a pub for people who were unlikely to go to a traditional church in the late 1990s. Heavily influenced by and connected to an Australian called John Smith who runs "God's Squad", Christian Motorcycle Club for bikers, this church became a collection of people from bikers to homeless people to people recovering from addictions to anybody who happened to walk in. It has been called a church for ragamuffins, or a scrambled egg church: messy and difficult to define. A few years ago, the option of buying a brethren hall which was closing down became available and so Zac's place ended up with its own building, which also gave the opportunity to move away from the upstairs of a pub which was a problem for some of people now a part of the church. For me personally there was a strange trip down memory lane as I remember being deeply moved and influenced by John Smith as a speaker, and Martyn Joseph as a singer/songwriter before going to bible college. Sean is a personal friend of both of them.

Who was Zac? Zacchaeus.

For a 2 minute explanation go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=vINojzbWg0k.

Zac's Place hosts many local events from homeless meals to Christian music events. My visit was to take part in a gloves-off bible study at a tribal gathering on a Tuesday night, very importantly including coffee and home-made cakes. Google maps and my sense of direction let me down a bit so having walked around most of Swansea city centre I arrived late and the bible study had already started. There is no entrance lobby and the place is set out like a bar which was completely packed with people sitting around tables, you kind of walk right into the middle of it; no chance to sneak in at the back. Looking round at people in biker jackets etc this sounds like it could have

been intimidating but was instead remarkably warm and welcoming. The leader briefly stopped to welcome me and show me a spare seat. Somebody brought me coffee and cake, and the person next to me gave me their bible open at the passage and reached behind him for another bible to use himself.

OK yes – I arrived late without a bible for a bible study! And that is exactly what it was – going through a passage in Acts with different people reading a few verses, the occasional question and the general invitation to pitch in which people did. The language used did not sound “religious” or “churchy” but there was nothing shallow about the study and I learned something new. Generally, the comments people made related the passage to their lives and there was a wonderful openness and honesty about what was said, along with the sense that everybody else in the room was with them as they spoke. At the end, there was a time to pray for people and then an extended time to share with each other over more hot drinks and homemade cakes. People quickly shared some of their own story with me and showed great interest in what I do and why I was there. One of the most noticeable things in hindsight was that God remained the centre of the conversation for this part of the evening. Talking afterwards, on some evenings they have done things such as writing a new Psalm together reflecting their experiences of Jesus or produced artwork which expressed what they had learned about God though reading the bible together. But at its heart, what I experienced was profound in its simplicity; people gathering around the bible with food all of which clearly worked because the depth of relationship between them had led to trust and honesty long before I walked in.

We talked afterwards about one thing that was clearly missing, family, and about how large this gathering could get before it lost what makes it what it is at present. Zac’s Place is still very much evolving and there are the beginnings of plans on both fronts. In terms of family, the ideas focus around creative arts and story-telling to make the gospel accessible to all ages. In terms of size, if everybody who ever comes came to one tribal gathering one night it would not work either in terms of group dynamics or available space so the hope of starting a new Zac’s Place in another town could be the answer.

Overall, I was reminded that practical demonstrations of God’s love and grace create an atmosphere of openness and honesty which allows God to speak through his word and each other.