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Bridging the Gap

The Spiritual Revolution and
Trinity United Methodist Church
in Austin, Texas

Kristine Borgen

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PREFACE

Working on this thesis has been a delightful, sometimes painful, and frequently frustrating process. And, the word ‘process’ has never felt more true than it is as a description of what writing this thesis on my laptop between August 2005 and October 2006 has been.

I was initially interested in writing a chapter reflecting on the Norwegian religious landscape and how a congregation like Trinity would fare in Norway. However, within the framework of this thesis it turned out not to work out – the attempt I made was like starting over on an entirely new project. The questions and the variables turned out to be too many.

I am grateful to several people for support and good suggestions along the way. I will mention a few: First of I will thank the members and staff at Trinity United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas, and in particular the people that let me interview them and shared their stories, thoughts and feelings with me. I am grateful and humbled by their generosity and trust. For very obvious reasons I will not name them, but I can mention the pastors, Dr. Sidney G. Hall the 3rd and the Rev. Susan Sprague. Administrative assistant Erin Spalding was also very helpful. I will also thank all the people at Trinity who made time to chat with me after and in between services, who let me sing in their choir and visit their classes. And, I am very grateful to Jimmy, for love and support through this process.

A special thanks goes to Paul Heelas, for taking the time and energy to read and comment on a paper I presented at the Nordic Conference for Sociology of Religion in Århus in August 2006. That paper ultimately inspired this thesis in an important way.

More than anyone, I’m indebted to my great advisor, Pål Repstad, for his always clear, to the point, and friendly support, corrections, ideas, and advises. Thank you. Thank you!

Kvarstein, October 2006

1 QUESTIONS ASKED

- 1 What kind of congregation is Trinity?
 - What is Trinity?
 - Who is Trinity?

- 2 Where is Trinity in the British sociologists Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas' terms 'Life-as' religion and 'Subjective-life' spirituality, which they develop in their book *The Spiritual Revolution – Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (2005)?

- 3 Has the spiritual revolution Woodhead and Heelas talk about already happened at Trinity?

- 4 Is it true for Trinity that there is little or no contact (theological, ideological and cultural) between the Congregational domain and the Holistic domain? Or, asked differently: Does Trinity bridge the gap between the worlds of more traditional Christianity and holistic or alternative spirituality?

- 5 Is Trinity possibly the exception (from what was found in Kendal, England), or the American example that Woodhead and Heelas are asking/looking for in their book *The Spiritual Revolution*?

2 BACKGROUND – THE RESEARCHER

Where I Am – and Was. Background Story.

My background as a member of Trinity United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas, is the reason I do my masters thesis on the congregation. If I had not been a member of the congregation, I would not have known about it, or at least I would not have known enough to realize it is a very interesting and unusual congregation worth studying.

I grew up in a relatively conservative Christian environment in the south of Norway, and went to seminary to become a minister in the Church of Norway. Several events led to my leaving that path. Having gotten off that path, it became apparent to me that some of what the church stood for struck a discord with what I felt was true and important, and I kept exploring and looking to find something that I felt ‘agreed’ with my ideas and ideals. After a few years of working as a church secretary in The Church of Norway, I married a Texan and ended up in Austin. After going to another Methodist church for a while, I found Trinity, and I felt at home right away. The focus was, in my experience, on real, lived life and God as a creating part of it, instead of on old dogmas and fruitless bickering about what actions can be justified in the Scripture. I met real people that had lives that seemed to be lived in contact with self and God and with honesty. It has been over six years since I left Austin for Norway, years in which I have spent a considerable amount of time pondering what Trinity really was, or more aptly, is. When my youngest son was born, I actually took him to Texas and he was baptized at Trinity, in February 2003. My second son (out of three) was also baptized at Trinity, while as the first was born before I found Trinity and was thus baptized in Norway. I guess those events illustrate how at odds I now feel with the church of which I still am a member in Norway, which is The Church of Norway.

My lack of distance to the object on which I do my research, can obviously represent some problems when it comes to ethical and methodological considerations as a researcher. It can also have several advantages, and I will outline both the pros and cons, or advantages and disadvantages, more specifically in chapter 5, on Method.

3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

It seems appropriate to say something about what I expect to find. It can also be interesting later, to compare and see what is different, and it may also be a way of gaging or interpreting my own interpretations and analysis to see if they are maybe too colored by my own prejudice and what I initially expected to find. Another factor is that things may have changed since then, that is, since I was an active member of Trinity. These hypotheses do however not cover all aspects of the thesis or give a suggestion to the answer of all the questions that I ask. It is merely a first reflection over what 'things will look like,' especially in regards to numbers, structure, programs and make-up in the congregation. The more theoretical part of the thesis is not being reflected upon here.

3.1 Statistics and More

I assume that the congregation has few passive members. This trait is typical of American churches in general, but from experiences with another Methodist church in Austin (Hyde Park United Methodist Church), I think Trinity is even more of an active church. Trinity is not a big church, albeit growing, and I think that considered the number of members, it has a wide variety and many activities.

Trinity became, by voting, a reconciling congregation in 1992¹. I expect that a fair number of members left the church then, presumably mostly of the older generation, at the same time as I expect that the number of members increased in the time after and in not long surpassed the number of members before being a reconciling congregation.

I think that the Baby Boomer generation is overrepresented in the congregation,² and also that single people and, of course, gays and lesbians are overrepresented. This thus means that I think pre-boomers and post-boomers are underrepresented. This underrepresentation is, I think, not true for the gays and lesbians in the church.

¹ See chapter 6.5.2 for information about the Reconciling Ministries Network

² Baby boomers are usually thought of as those born between 1946 and 1961

3.2 The members' social, occupational, denominational, and personal background

Crudely put, I do not expect to find many car mechanics or grocery store clerks among the members of Trinity. I expect to find a relatively high number of people with a college degree. But I do not think too many has a doctor's degree either. I also think that teachers and health care workers are overrepresented, as are artists and musicians. Concerning denominational background, I think two groups are overrepresented, in addition to a large number of 'regular' Methodists that have a 'progressive bent' to them. The first group is people with a relatively to very conservative denominational background, for instance Lutherans in the Missouri Synod. I do not think this group includes Evangelicals to a large extent, but Southern Baptists I think might fit. The other group I think is overrepresented is people with hardly any religious background.

3.3 Why do I think people go to Trinity? What do they find there that is different?

The answer to these questions will of course partly be why I myself went to the church and what I found different and fulfilling there. What I experienced as important and special about Trinity was the openness (dogmatically, socially) at the same time as I experienced strong faith in God, a strong faith in Her/His presence through Her/His creation. What I found attractive was also a strong sense of justice and not least respect for the individual and its abilities to make good moral decisions independent of what society or family/peers might expect. This attribute was coupled by a high level of social and community engagement, challenging sermons, and a somewhat meditative service. At least this is how I remember it. Some of the gays and lesbians probably feel at home in Trinity because they are welcome and cherished as gays and lesbians, without the things that I listed above being important to them at all, the way they are for me.

3.4 Theology and programs

Having a fair amount of knowledge about Trinity before I start doing fieldwork, I already know much about what is presented theologically and about the programs. Well, unless much has changed, that is. I expect to find an earth-based theology, with much room for the individual to define his or her own spiritual path. I do not expect to hear any sermons about salvation or sinfulness. I expect drums and elements from other faith traditions in the service – which is what I have experienced before. But, I

am not really sure what the theological basis for the congregation is – formally. I expect a wide range of classes to attend on Wednesday nights, and good children and youth programs.

4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

An introduction – congregational and holistic, ‘life-as’ and ‘subjective-life’, religion/ spirituality and feeling rules

One of the things that I find interesting to my study, is how the book *The Spiritual Revolution – Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality*³ makes a sharp division between what the British sociologists Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas call ‘the congregational domain’ and ‘the holistic domain.’ The congregational domain is understood as relatively traditional church-based communities, from Catholics, via more liberal Protestants to Evangelicals, The holistic domain is understood as NRM,⁴ or more new age-inspired communities/practices, such as meditation groups, yoga classes, and acupuncture, to mention a very few of a myriads of different practices and activities connected with this realm. Woodhead and Heelas’ distinction between congregational and holistic is mirrored in their distinction between ‘life-as’ religion and ‘subjective-life’ spirituality, which is really their way of distinguishing between religion and spirituality.⁵ The former sacralizes ‘life-as,’ while as the latter sacralizes ‘subjective-life.’ ‘Life-as’ is characterized by the emphasis on a transcendent source of significance and authority to which individuals have to conform at the expense of their subjective lives. ‘subjective-life’ is characterized by the emphasis on an inner source of significance and authority and the cultivation and/or sacralization of unique subjective lives.⁶ When using the expression ‘life-as,’ one thinks ‘life-as the children of God,’ ‘life-as sinners,’ ‘saved’ or anything else that is defined from without and is ‘universal’ in the sense that it holds the truth.⁷

Woodhead and Heelas claim there is little or no contact between the congregational domain and the holistic domain. I want to discuss and challenge the division between concepts and pairs ‘congregational’ and ‘life-as’ on one side and ‘holistic’ and ‘subjective-life’ on the other. I claim that it is not true that there is little contact

³ By Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas, 2005

⁴ NRM – New Religious Movements

⁵ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005, p 5-6

⁶ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005, p 6

⁷ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005, p 14

between the two pairs, using Trinity as an example that may be in discord with this theory.

Jan Olav Henriksen's article *Spirituality and Religion – Worlds Apart?* (2005), is a review of *The Spiritual Revolution*. Even though the Norwegian theologian and philosopher Jan Olav Henriksen has much emphasis on the theoretical backdrop of *The Spiritual Revolution*, he asks questions that are similar or at least related to those that I ask, which, put shortly, is if the distinction between religion and spirituality is or is experienced as sharp as what one might think Woodhead and Heelas find it to be. I may claim the relatedness between religion and spirituality not on the same grounds as Henriksen, but still, there is a similar aim.

Linda Woodhead's article *On the Incompatibility between Christianity and Holistic Spirituality* (2006) is a defense of the theoretical distinctions made in the book, and a reply to Henriksen, introducing the term 'feeling rules,' or 'socio-emotional profile' to clarify and defend the division between the congregational and the holistic domain, and hence keep the worlds of more traditional religion and more 'modern' spirituality relatively separate.

4.1 *The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality.*

Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas; and their latest book

Linda Woodhead is professor in Christian Studies in the department of religious studies at Lancaster University in the UK. She has written, co-written, and edited/co-edited numerous books, including *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (2000), *An Introduction to Christianity* (2004), *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and alternative Futures* (2003), and *Reinventing Christianity: Nineteen Century Contexts* (2001).

Paul Heelas is professor in religion and modernity in the department of religious studies at Lancaster University. He has also written, co-written, and edited/co-edited several books, including *Religion, Modernity and Post-modernity* (1998), *Religion in Modern Times: An Interpretive Anthology* (2000), *The New Age Movement: The*

Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity (1996) and *Predicting Religion: Christian, Secular and Alternative Futures (2003)*.

The first part of *The Spiritual Revolution* is dedicated to distinguishing religion from spirituality, testing the spiritual revolution claim in Kendal and looking for evidence for a spiritual revolution in Britain and the U.S. The second half of the book tries to explain sacralization and secularization, and then has a relatively long chapter outlining their thoughts about what religion and the spiritual revolution may look like in the future, and how the different ‘types’ of religion will fare. My main focus in presenting their work will be on the spiritual revolution claim and the data on which Woodhead and Heelas base their theory. The claim and data are mainly to be found in chapters one through three in the book. Thus, these parts are the ones that I want to discuss later, in chapter 8.

The Spiritual Revolution is based partly on empirical studies in the city of Kendal in England. Even though I do present some of the empirical data from the survey done in Kendal a little later in this chapter, I have chosen not to give it much room. Neither have I focused on what methods they use. This decision is partly because their book is easily available, but mainly because my questions to and criticism of their work primarily concerns how I experience that they generalize too much from their findings; my aim and focus is not to question the empirical study in and of itself.

As the title of the book indicates, Woodhead and Heelas find that there is a movement from religion towards spirituality, albeit a slow and somewhat uncertain one. They make this claim in large part on the basis of the findings from Kendal. They have also looked for evidence for the Spiritual Revolution in the rest of Britain and in the U.S. When it comes to the U.S., the questions widen and change slightly, since the U.S. is ‘claimed exceptional’⁸ in the western world when it comes to religion. As I see it, with the relatively small amount of experience I have from living in the U.S., these questions are very much to the point and I think they also capture some of the general feel of how religion is developing in the U.S.:

⁸ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005 p 49

- They ask if the spiritual revolution also may be taking place *within* the congregational domain in the U.S. (which they find it does not in Kendal and in Britain as a whole), and even though they do not find clear evidence for this possibility, they leave the question somewhat open and in need of more research.⁹
- They also ask if maybe the ‘revolution’ is more advanced, or have come farther, in the U.S. than is the case in Britain.¹⁰

One of the main theories in the book is that the Spiritual Revolution (which is underway but has not happened yet) is taking place outside the church, in the holistic domain, and that there is little or no contact between the congregational and the holistic domain.¹¹ The basis for this theory seems to be connected to the distinction between religion (‘life-as’) and spirituality (‘subjective-life’). Since these two, in their pure form, are mutually exclusive, I sense the ‘need’ for logic, or maybe just an assumption of such. And, if indeed these two forms of religion/spirituality are mutually exclusive, then there *should not* be any contact between the congregational and the holistic domain, since it is then two very different ways of approaching life. Woodhead and Heelas connect ‘life-as’ to the ‘congregational domain’ and ‘subjective-life’ to the ‘holistic domain.’ In the table below, Woodhead and Heelas connection would be only vertical, between ‘life-as’ religion and ‘congregational’ on the left side, and ‘subjective-life’ spirituality and ‘holistic’ on the right side.

Life-as Religion	Subjective-life Spirituality
Congregational domain	Holistic domain

⁹ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005 p 50

¹⁰ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005, p

¹¹ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005 p 31-32

However, maybe reality is more nuanced, and maybe the two categories ‘life-as’ and ‘subjective-life’ have been too closely related respectively to the terms ‘congregational’ and ‘holistic’ in Woodhead and Heelas book? That is part of what I have discussed further in chapter 8.

In looking for evidence for a Spiritual Revolution, Woodhead and Heelas look, as already mentioned, to both Britain (not just Kendal) and the U.S. But, before they get that far, they present a map of the religious/spiritual landscape of Kendal. Woodhead and Heelas arrive at the conclusion that the congregational and the holistic domain in Kendal are two separate worlds¹² that have little or nothing to do with each other. Only two congregations/groups classified as belonging in the congregational domain are mentioned and discussed as to some extent fitting in the group of the holistic activities, and that is the Unitarian Chapel and the Society of Friends (Quakers). Despite these congregations’ focus on the member’s individual spiritual paths and being described as ‘going far in authorizing subjective-life’¹³, these two groups are placed as belonging in the congregational domain. It is a little unclear as to why they made this choice. I have discussed this issue in chapter 8.1.3.

The findings from Kendal show that at any given Sunday, 2207 people, or 7.9% of the population in Kendal were active in some way or other in the groups belonging in the congregational domain. Six hundred people, or 1.6%, participated in some activity connected to the holistic milieu. On the basis of these numbers, with five times as many people being active in the congregational domain as in the holistic domain, Woodhead and Heelas state that “it is thus perfectly clear that a spiritual revolution has not taken place.” But, if the holistic milieu keeps growing at the same rate as it has since the ‘70s, and the congregational domain continues to decline at the same rate as it has, a spiritual revolution will take place some time between 2020 and 2030.¹⁴

¹² Woodhead and Heelas 2005 p 31-32

¹³ Woodhead and Heelas 2005 p 21

¹⁴ Woodhead and Heelas 2005, p 45

In the findings from Britain and the U.S., the results are not too different. As regards to the numbers from Britain and the U.S., one of the things that ‘stick out,’ is the need for much more research. Woodhead and Heelas base their conclusions from the U.S. and Britain on other people’s work, surveys done not with their questions in mind. The authors are painfully aware of these findings being more of a guesstimate, or attempt to show some tendencies, than anything else.¹⁵ Despite the above mentioned reservations, they find that the rest of Britain is pretty much in line with what they found in Kendal.¹⁶ In the U.S., however, they find evidence for a 3:1 ratio between the congregational domain and the holistic milieu, with an estimated 22-24% active in the congregational domain any given week¹⁷ and 8% in the holistic milieu, rather than the 5:1 ratio found in Kendal and also in Britain as a whole. Thus, the spiritual revolution has not taken place in the U.S. either, but is under way, maybe and probably faster than in the U.K.

In chapter 8, I discuss several aspects of Woodhead and Heelas’ work. First of all is the distinction between religion and spirituality, then the connection and relationship between the two pairs, ‘life-as’/ ‘congregational’ and ‘subjective-life’/ ‘holistic.’ Also, I discuss Woodhead and Heelas’ thoughts on the possibility of congregations in the US that have implemented more elements from subjective-life, or the possibility of other groups or congregations bridging the gap(s) between congregational/holistic and/or life-as/subjective-life.

4.2 Jan Olav Henriksen’s review of *The Spiritual Revolution*, in his article *Spirituality and religion – worlds apart?*, in *Tidsskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, no 1, 2005, pp 73-88

Jan Olav Henriksen is professor in Systematic Theology and Philosophy at the Free Faculty of Theology in Norway, and adjunct professor at Agder University College. He has written and co-written several books, among others: *Imago Dei – The Theological Construction of Human Identity* (2003), *The Reconstruction of Religion:*

¹⁵ Woodhead and Heelas 2005, p 49

¹⁶ Woodhead and Heelas 2005, p 54

¹⁷ Many surveys find that as many as 40% of the American population is in church any given Sunday. However, there is evidence that people over report. See p 55-57 in *The Spiritual Revolution* for a discussion on this and how Woodhead and Heelas arrived at the numbers they use in their book.

Lessing, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (2001), *Grobunn For Moral: Om å Være Moralsk Subjekt i en Postmoderne Kultur* (1998) and *Tro i Sør: Sosiologiske og Teologiske Blikk på Sørlandsk Religion* (with Pål Repstad, 2005)

Henriksen's main issue in reviewing *The Spiritual Revolution* is the way in which the division between religion and spirituality seem to be made too sharp, with which he does not agree. In his opinion Christianity should (even if it often does not) cater to the individual and be a help in interpreting life. Also, he questions the seemingly unbounded faith in the subjective, that it may seem like the individual can define itself entirely from itself, not counting the impact and function of the culture. Along the same lines, the socialization element in subjective-life spirituality also lacks discussion¹⁸ in Henriksen's opinion.

Henriksen's main point is that the subjective turn is not at all as subjective as one might think, in that also the subjective-life spirituality is culturally conditioned and has its own dogmas or rules, so to speak. Henriksen says that

The subjective turn more than anything is a mode of living made possible by the cultural conditions and the contents (or effects) of socialization..... The subjective turn does not originate in the subject.¹⁹

Another thing Henriksen questions, is if the turn to 'subjective life' has to be in opposition to living according to duties to others. He is also critical to the optimism he experiences as a problem in the subjective turn. If it is encouraged by society to 'turn to the self,' he claims there is also the implication that this is good for society. Then, I understand him to take a slightly mocking tone, in that he is sceptical to the value or positive factors it has for society if everyone is to find out for themselves what is important and good and real for them.

All in all, despite all the references to moral philosophy and socialization theory, I experience Henriksen's review of *The Spiritual Revolution* as a defence of some ideals

¹⁸ Henriksen 2005, in *Tidskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 81

¹⁹ Henriksen 2005, in *Tidskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 76

of what he thinks Christianity/the church/theology ought to be.²⁰ It is, however, hard to distinguish what is review of the book and what is defence of some ideals. One of Henriksen's ideals that he holds programmatically, is that theology does not serve any other purpose than to interpret human experience and to open up to new experiences.²¹

In sub-chapter 8.2, I discuss Henriksen's claims and ideas, using the experience I have with more modern spirituality and my knowledge about and experience with Trinity. One of my main points is the way in which Henriksen holds religion and spirituality together, or on what basis he claims that they are not as separate as the impression one gets from Woodhead and Heelas. Discussing the subjective claim may be a less learned one, but probably of considerable enthusiasm.

4.3 Linda Woodhead's answer to Henriksen **in her article *On the Incompatibility between Christianity and Holistic Spirituality*,** **published in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, no. 1/2006**

In this article Woodhead introduces the term 'feeling rules' or 'socio-emotional profile' as a means to maintain and defend the distinctions and contrast between the congregational and the holistic domain, or more precisely, between 'life-as' religion and 'subjective-life' spirituality. She claims that what distinguishes the two domains is that they operate with distinctively different feeling rules. By 'feeling rules,' Woodhead talks about what feelings the service or activity generate, or is meant to generate, and what feelings are allowed, encouraged, discouraged, or forbidden.

Woodhead says that religion and spirituality share the aim of cultivating an emotionally-controlled selfhood, but while as Christianity centres this selfhood on God, the holistic spirituality centres is on the embodied self.²²

Woodhead agrees with Henriksen in that she thinks that participants on both the holistic and the congregational domain are socialized into the religion or spirituality of

²⁰ Henriksen, in *Tidsskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 78

²¹ Henriksen in *Tidsskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 81

²² Woodhead 2006, in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p 54

which they are a part.²³ But, Woodhead claims that there is a distinct difference in the socio-emotional profiles of the two domains. There are different patterns of worship, and the main difference lies in that while the congregational domain aims to generate feelings that are outer-directed, away from the self, towards God; the holistic domain aims to focus on inner-directed feelings, into the self, but also towards God, since God (or some version of him/her/it) most often is understood to be within as much as, or more than, without. Woodhead's conclusions are based upon how the congregational domain, with its main focus on the Sunday service, has an out- and upward directed worship service, where the unacceptable emotions (for instance anger, hatred, sexual desire, pleasure, pride) are to be reined in and defeated, and the acceptable emotions (like love, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, self-control) are to be cultivated. The services can also be what Woodhead calls bi-polar, in that it generates both in- and outward directed feelings. Woodhead classifies worship as an emotion, leaning on the American philosopher Robert C. Solomon's (1993) arguments for doing so. Solomon's observation is:

that all emotions are cognitive and as such, have criteria, a focus, an object, make a judgement/evaluation, and are normally associated with an ideology and/or mythology²⁴.

Solomon also says that "there are no 'basic' emotions, only those emotions which are prevalent – in word or in fact – in a particular society".²⁵ In this way, Woodhead in some way blends worship and emotion, in defining worship as emotion (maybe rightfully so), and the make-up of the synthesis become the measurement for where on the socio-emotional scale any given group or congregation lies. Woodhead stresses that the holistic domain is focused on 'wellbeing', and the treatment or practice aims to move from 'ill being' to 'wellbeing' by means of, among other things, 'going in' and acknowledge the various aspects of the inner feelings or states. Since most of the feelings that are validated in the holistic realm are inner directed, they will tend to:

²³ Woodhead 2006, in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p 56

²⁴ Robert C. Solomon in *The Passion. Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (2003) pp 224-5, quoted in Woodhead 2006 p 51

²⁵ Woodhead 2006, in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p 51

empower an individualist, personally bounded, subjectivity by making individual self-esteem and contentment a matter of importance second to none. In doing so, they carry the danger of disempowering God - and the church - and substitute a subjective-individualist ethic and worldview for a God-centred and/or community centred one.²⁶

Woodhead claims a different emotional logic exists between the two domains, and that “...each sphere also produces, performs and validates different modes of selfhood and relationality/community”²⁷. It is interesting for me to find what feelings the services and activities at Trinity are meant to generate and what feelings they in fact *do* generate. Also, I want to look at what patterns of worship I find at Trinity, and mainly whether the service is inner- or outer directed, or maybe both.

In the next chapter I look at methodical and hereunder ethical issues and aspects to this project. I get back to working on the theoretical material in chapter 8, where I discuss it in relation to the empirical material.

²⁶ Woodhead 2006, in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p 53

²⁷ Woodhead 2006, in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p. 53

5 **METHODICAL APPROACH**

In this chapter I outline the methods and the methodical approach I use. First, I say something about the concrete methods I use, I then go on to reflect upon some questions that arise out of the particular situation in which this particular study is done. This discussion includes admission to the field, reflections on the interviewees, the interview guide, ethical reflections and precautions, and reflections on researching 'my own' field.

This thesis is a study within the field Sociology of Religion. I thus have an approach to religion which is based mainly in the Social Sciences, with some assistance from the knowledge and perspectives of the Science of Religion and the Human Sciences. It would have been interesting to discuss some of the issues in this thesis with a systematic-theological approach, but it would have been too much, and too wide.

5.1 Chosen methods

This study on Trinity United Methodist Church in Austin is, at least, two-fold. And different methods are used for different parts or aspects of the study. Still though, the main method is qualitative, in that the interviews, which are probably the most important part of the material I have gathered, are qualitative interviews. To obtain good information on who goes to Trinity and why, it seems to me that qualitative interviews is the best way to get that information. In an interview the researcher has a chance to get 'on the inside,' and really understand the interviewee. At least that is the ultimate goal of the qualitative interviews I am doing. Not to say that digging deep into private matters is a goal, but trying to understand the way in which the interviewee understands her/his world, surroundings, life, and life situation is important.²⁸ A relatively small part of the qualitative material is observation, which I mainly think of as being something that can function as a corrective or maybe nuance the material I gather in both the interviews and in the information I obtain from the congregation as far as facts and figures go. I spent two weeks in Austin in January of 2006, which is when I did most of the interviews. I also attended services (four of

²⁸ Repstad 1998, p 16, 18, 63f

them), classes, choir practice, meetings in the finance team, the program counsel and the futures team. I chatted with the pastors and many members, and in general spend a good amount of time at church. I also visited Trinity for a little over a week in March, and even though I did not spend as much time at church, I did go to the services, classes, and social functions. Also, I spend over six weeks in Austin in the summer of 2006. I was visiting my partner and had my children with me, and thus had more of a role as a regular member of the congregation. My own experience as a member of Trinity may have somewhat of the same function as observation, to help nuance and maybe also deepen my understanding of Trinity.

Working on the statistical part, with numbers and figures about Trinity, the goal is to obtain a good overview on the congregation's structures, membership numbers and their development over the years; and also the programs and their development over the years, and the congregation's financial situation. Hopefully, the two methods will complement each other, leading to a better understanding of and answer to the questions asked in this study.²⁹

5.2 Admission to the field

When I initially started thinking about writing about Trinity, I was uncertain as to how I would be received as a researcher by the church and its leaders. As it turned out, I was more than welcome, and both members and church staff helped me in whatever way they could, with information, interviews and simply donating their time to my project. I experienced people as open and welcoming – and curious about my project! However, some of the information that I needed was hard to obtain, partly because it was not available at the time, and partly because Trinity, being very casual, formal things just do not seem to be high priority. I think that every one of the people I interviewed asked if they could get a copy of the thesis, and I know for a fact that the Future's Team at Trinity is planning on using my thesis in their work on for instance where Trinity is going in the future. My knowing the Futures Team's desire, could raise some ethical considerations , since I am still a member of the congregation and

²⁹ Repstad 1998, p 24f

‘feeling close and empathetic’ to what is going on there. I will look more closely at this issue later.

5.3 The interview guide

The interview guide (see attachments for the complete guide), will touch on themes like:

- What brought them (the members, pastors) to Trinity – their story
- Their background, social, racial, denominational, geographical
- Thoughts on Ethics
- Thoughts on Dogmatic themes in general – and on redemption and atonement in particular
- Trinity’s alternative spiritual ‘bent,’ Creation Spirituality and elements from other traditions used in the service
- What topics or things are problematic, or not spoken about in Trinity
- Identity as members of Trinity
- Religious practice
- Feeling rules
- Extra for pastors: Background, motivation for Trinity, preaching on redemption and atonement, job/calling? , challenges

5.4 The interviews and how they happened

I interviewed ten people when I was in Austin on my first trip to do fieldwork at Trinity, in January 2006. Eight of these were regular members of the congregation, two were the pastors. I did an additional four interviews (four of those from my first round of interviews) when I went back to Austin in March 2006, an also one informal interview that was not recorded. These last interviews were about feeling rules in Trinity, trying to map, in Linda Woodhead’s terminology, Trinity’s ‘socio-emotional profile’.

I had set up appointments with the interviewees mainly before I left Norway to go to Austin, but Americans are casual, and some appointments were made there, and some were changed along the way. All the interviewees wanted to meet me at church, even

though I offered to come to their house if they preferred that. That is, except for one of the shorter interviews in March, which happened at the home of one of the interviewees, but this decision was mainly for practical reasons. The parlour of the church is a pleasant room, and after having had the first interview there, and being happy with it, I made sure I had a key to the church and to the parlour, and used that space as my interview room throughout my visit. The pastors, however, were interviewed in their offices, which is what they preferred, and it felt natural. All the interviews were recorded, and I did not encounter anyone having a problem with that arrangement. All the interviewees were happy to help, and surprisingly open and willing to share their stories with me. I'm very thankful and humbled by the trust they had in me, and their enthusiasm for my project. One of the things that impressed me, was that people were willing to share their stories which were sometimes difficult and painful stories, talk about the good things about Trinity and the bad things about Trinity, but without me experiencing that their story or their viewpoint was the only one or the only one worth listening to. It was also interesting that some of my interviewees were a little nervous about the interview, in the sense that they were afraid I was going to ask theological questions they would have a hard time answering. Whenever this issue arose, I tried to tell them that I was interested in what they had to say and the thoughts they had, not in correct or well formulated answers.

I interviewed only four people about 'feeling rules' (chapter 7.7), and one member I had an informal interview with that was not recorded. One of the interviews I had on this subject was not very useful (at least not for the section on feeling rules). These interviews were done about a month and a half after the first round of interviews. I did not talk about feelings rules in the first round of interviews because I had not yet discovered the importance of this dimension. In the second round, I did not have the time and capacity to interview everyone from the first round again, and tried to make an as varied selection of interviewees as possible. Observation was also useful in working on this particular subject (feeling rules).

5.5 Ethical reflections and precautions

Anonymity: One of the most important ethical precautions for me is to ensure the anonymity of my interviewees. Trinity is a, relatively speaking, small congregation, and it will not be too hard for people to guess who at least some of my interviewees are. If this Thesis had been written in Norwegian it would have been a little different. As it is now, anyone in the congregation can read it, and several people have already expressed interest in reading it, including the leadership of the congregations and its pastors. And so, I had to find a way to let my interviewees' opinions be spoken freely, without it being too easy to find out who of them had this or that particular opinion. In chapter 5.5, I have given a presentation of each of my interviewees, a little about who they are, where they come from, what their story is. But, I have not said much about what their thoughts, feelings, and opinions are about things like ethical issues, theology, religious practice, and what things bug them about Trinity. This subject matter I present in chapter 6.4, not saying which of my interviewees said what, maybe sometimes, if it seems to be of some importance, saying whether it is the thought of a man or of a woman. The only people that will not be entirely protected by anonymity, is the pastors. Then again, their opinions are hardly a secret to begin with. But when necessary, sensitive material will be either cleared with those it concerns, or masked sufficiently.

Trust: Also, to make sure my interviewees felt secure that this is a serious project, I brought a recommendation from my advisor for them to read at the time I interviewed them. This recommendation was well received, but most of the people I interviewed knew who I was already, and knew that this is a serious project that is also supported by the pastors of Trinity. I had also been introduced in the first service I attended in January, which was before the first interview.

Integrity and 'going native': The possible ethical concerns in me being a member of Trinity and also having some strong personal connections, albeit living in Norway the past six years, is something I will discuss and reflect upon in the next subchapter.

5.6 Researching a dream - Pros and cons in researching my own field.

The insider/outsider debate and methodological atheism: balancing and tools

As a researcher, I take the position of ‘methodological atheism’³⁰ in working on this paper, in that I do not try to say anything about what is religiously true, and I do not include a divine reality in the analysis. The position of methodological atheism implies that I emphasize human and social conditions in trying to understand and explain Trinity, not divine interventions.³¹ However, toward the end of the Thesis, in chapter 9, I do say something about what I can possibly see in Trinity’s future, but it is not about religious truths, rather it is guesstimates (with some personal opinions) on how the organizational, human, and social conditions that are typical for Trinity might influence the congregation’s development. Still though, I have already made it clear that I more than sympathize with Trinity, the Trinity theology, and what they do at Trinity. I, thus, do not deny the existence of a divine reality, but I do not base any of my analysis, interpretation, conclusions or explanations on it.

Despite my position of methodological atheism, the fact that Trinity is somewhat of an ideal to me is something that may color my research more than I am aware of. It may make me blind and deaf to negative or inconsistent things about Trinity. It may make me hear and see what I want to hear and see, and not what is actually there. Also, my closeness to Trinity, and my friendship with the people and pastors there may lead to my integrity as a researcher being compromised if I do findings in my research that are very unsympathetic or outright bad.³² I also picture that some questions may be hard or awkward to ask. Another aspect is that my loyalty as a member of Trinity may clash with my loyalty to ethical standards as a researcher.³³ I must also consider other concerns in being an insider. There may be a danger in over-interpreting the interviewees and molding them into what is my pre-understanding of what and who Trinity is, or what and who I would like Trinity to be. Naturally, I do not wish to ruin the picture, the good memories, and the good relations I have of and at Trinity, even

³⁰ Methodological atheism is, according to Furseth and Repstad 2006 p 197, an expression that originates with British sociologist of religion Peter L. Berger.

³¹ Furseth og Repstad 2006, p 197-8

³² Repstad 1998, p 30

³³ Furseth and Repstad 2006, p 206

though I am aware that might be the result when doing my thesis on ‘my own’ church, so to speak.

It should probably be mentioned that while doing fieldwork at Trinity in January 2006, I met the man who is now my partner in life. He is a member of Trinity, and is actually one of the leaders of the congregation as well as a friend of one of the pastors. I get much information about Trinity and what is going on there, actually a little more than I want sometimes. I have also had the ‘role’ of a regular member at Trinity quite a bit, since I have visited Austin several times in 2006 and also for an extended period of time in the summer of 2006. I will discuss the insider/outsider challenges and/or advantages in the following, trying to pay special attention to the fact that I am very close to Trinity now.

I think that many people, if you asked them, would say that one is more objective in studying something if one is not involved in what one studies. The argument on the other side of that argument is the question of how you can study something in a good way if you do not have some deeper knowledge of it. Even though in the Age of Enlightenment there was established a scientific tradition of interpreting religion from the outside,³⁴ there have since been several scientists that have claimed that it is essential to have a religious faith when you study religion. The German theologian and historian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937) thought that only people who were themselves religious could study religion in a good way. Otto thought that it was important to have some understanding and memories of the phenomenon one was studying.³⁵ Wilfred Cantwell Smith is a Canadian scholar of religion who, along the same line, said that:

No statement of Islamic faith is true that Muslims cannot accept. No personalist statement about Hindu religious life is legitimate in which Hindus cannot recognize themselves. No interpretation of Buddhist doctrine is valid unless Buddhists can respond: ‘Yes! That is what we hold.’³⁶

³⁴ Furseth and Repstad 2006, p 205

³⁵ Furseth and Repstad 2006, p 205

³⁶ Wilfred Cantwell Smith, 1981, p 97, in Furseth and Repstad 2006, p 205

On a more practical level, which is some of the aspects that I experienced at Trinity, knowledge about what you study can prevent you from making basic mistakes. You have a network of people who trust you, and thus, you probably have easier access to information. It is also a point that when knowing language and culture you are better suited to ‘feel’ and understand what the interviewee means with what he or she says, and place things in the bigger picture of the congregation, group, or movement. It can also be argued the neutrality or objectivity is an illusion, or not really possible, and that ‘not believing is also a belief’.³⁷ To clarify that statement: A person without a religious faith, who is doing research on a religious movement, still believes something, if not *in* something. This person believes that what he studies is not true. I think that entering a field of research thinking that one is neutral to the field is somewhat naïve. Especially when it comes to religious faith, we all have some thoughts and preferences, if not necessarily a pronounced religious faith. Studying religion easily seems to become more ‘personal’ than studying for instance computers or architecture. But then again, I do not know those fields and may just reveal my ignorance and lack of knowledge about them. Still, I do think one can argue that some areas of study touch on things that are more existential and related to identity as well as emotions. Religion is one of them. And thus, I think it is important to be aware of ones own preferences, judgments, and, to some extent, emotions when researching religion. A different aspect to the study of religion is that a few characteristics are probably typical for the people that do end up doing this type of study. I may myself fall into the category of religious researchers that are positive to religion as such, but skeptical to the dogmas they grew up with and later discarded. This position seems to be typical of Western religious scholars: a seemingly implicit commitment to religious diversity and openness, but often with a somewhat negative attitude towards dogma.³⁸ Maybe one of the best things about studying in my own field, is that I study something I am excited about and find important.³⁹ This characteristic may effect the researcher’s stamina, in for instance carrying out the sometimes rather tedious work of gathering, checking, and analyzing information.

³⁷ Furseth and Repstad 2006, p 206

³⁸ Furseth and Repstad 2006, p 205-6

³⁹ Repstad 1998, p 30

My experience in doing research on Trinity this year has been a good, interesting and exciting one; and a very educational one! I have been thinking about the concerns that are important in that I study my own church, and especially now that my partner is one of the congregation's members. However, the main outline, the interview guide and the main focus was already set when I met my partner, just to make that clear. Some great discussions have occurred at Trinity the past six months about the future of the congregation. This process has had had some disputes, and the group that works on this, which is the Futures Team, has encountered difficulties. And much of what is and has been going on, I know about. Luckily the subject of Trinity's future is not an important part of my project, even though it comes up now and then, especially in the interviews with the pastors and also with some of the members. Even though Trinity's future is not my focus here, I have tried to leave that discussion and theme remain in my 'private'⁴⁰ sphere, and leave it out when I work on the analysis in these thesis. I do not know now how well I have succeeded in this effort, but if I read this Thesis two years from now, maybe I will be able to say more about it. As already mentioned, I have let myself think a little ahead about Trinity's future in chapter 9. Then, if nothing else, my opinions and possible agendas in that area are known.

And so, in summing up a little, it seems that having been a part of Trinity and then been gone for six years, thus having at least *some* distance to the object I study, has two sides to it. One is that I now maybe idealize Trinity and my time as a member there, having missed a community like Trinity ever since I left Austin. The other side is that distance also makes for some perspective and reflection. The first one about idealizing may be a concern, the second, distance and perspective, may be an advantage (even though now the distance is again not much). It may be relevant to mention that all the writing has happened in Norway, except for a paper that was presented at a conference in August 2006 which was written partly in Texas and partly in The Smokey Mountains of North Carolina. This paper ended up solving some of my main questions in how to approach the theoretical discussions in my thesis. And so,

⁴⁰ I use the word private in quotation marks, because I know that it is almost impossible to separate what happens in our private lives from what we do in our professional lives. It tends to seep in. And, I do not have any intention of claiming I can do what I have myself have labelled as almost impossible.

between these two, closeness and distance, I hope to balance and be able to steer the ship of this thesis relatively ‘safely to shore.’

I can use several concrete things or tools to buffer the effect of the concerns I have outlined in studying my own church.

- Try to outline some areas I think may be hard or areas where I am especially positive.
- Talk to my advisor and also friends and my fellow students and have them ask some critical questions. Try to keep these in the back of my mind (and on a piece of paper!) while working on the thesis and especially when I do my field work.
- Try to mentally put myself in the position of an outsider, or even an evangelical or more conservative Christian.
- Be critical of myself and try to examine whether I thought the same way/the same things, when I was an active member of the church.
- Use statistical information and other ‘objective’⁴¹ sources.

5.7 Imbalances – in the light of 20/20 hindsight

When I got to the point of actually systemizing the interview material, I discovered that on one particular question, the answers from the interviewees did not have any variation whatsoever. This question was on the matter of whether Trinity ought to remain a member of the UMC (see chapter 6.7.4 and 6.8). All the interviewees said they thought Trinity should remain a part of the UMC. Upon discovering this consistency, I have been thinking that maybe the group of people I interviewed was not diverse enough. And, I wish I had had at least one or two interviews with members who thought that Trinity should leave the UMC. In what way would the other answers have been different, too? I will not get an answer to this question, at this point I can only point out the imbalance here, that the picture I paint of Trinity might possibly have been more nuanced and many-faceted had I had a more varied group of interviewees.

⁴¹ I use the word objective in quotation marks to indicate that I don’t really think there is such a thing as objective information. Even statistics are selected.

In discussing Trinity motto, which says ‘where you can be you,’ I wish I had done some interviews with former members of Trinity. It would be very interesting to find out what the main reasons for people leaving are, and if it is connected to an experience of *not* being able to be oneself.

In almost all the interviews I did about feeling rules, the interviewees said that the service generated (among other feelings, things) an inward, centring feeling. These responses are also an imbalance, and I wonder what it would look like if I had interviewed ten more people about this issue. It may have been exactly the same, but at least some nuances might have appeared.

As I got to know Trinity and the people there better over time (or get to know them again, even though Trinity has many new people since I was there last, in 2000), I identified several people I wish I had interviewed, thinking that they might have information or view points that are interesting to me. But, in this thesis, it does not seem possible to get more interviews done. I would also have been very happy to have interviewed all the members of the congregation that works as therapists, yoga- or tai chi teachers, or work in the area of alternative medicine. It would be very interesting to know how they viewed what they do, especially whether they consider what they do as being spiritually important. This information would have been very useful when discussing how Trinity possible bridges both a cultural and a theological gap between the congregational domain and the holistic domain.

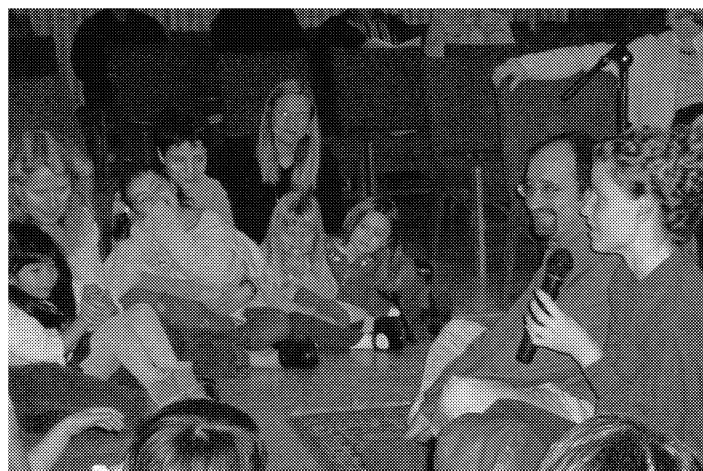
6 WHAT IS TRINITY?

6.1 A Sunday at Trinity – the experience

A Sunday at Trinity is not your regular experience of walking into a church belonging to one of the mainline denominations in the US. Well, several things are, seen from the view of a foreigner, typical American about a Sunday at Trinity. For one thing, it is very casual, but in my experience even more so than in most Methodist or similar churches. People typically wear Jeans, shorts, sandals, t-shirts. Some people are a little more dressed up. Those people are likely to be visitors though. Another typical American thing is that people are very friendly. If you are new, someone is likely to introduce themselves to you. I think that practise is nice, even though I have friends (they would be Norwegian) that just want to be alone in their own world when they go to a church service. Trinity is maybe not the perfect church for them. So far Trinity is not too different from other American churches. The feel is different though, and as mentioned, much more casual. And the make-up of the people attending is also somewhat different. The congregation has long haired hippies and straight looking software people. For some, it is not easy to say whether they are men or women. Some look tired and a little worn, from substance abuse or from mental problems. Another thing is that some people are eating their breakfast (mainly muffins) and having their morning coffee on their way to find a place to sit.



It feels real there. Well, maybe I'm not exactly the one to ask, being a member of the congregation, but it does to me; it really does. Real in the way that I feel okay just being *me* there. Unpretentious is another word for it. And, 'real' also in the very practical sense that many people have morning faces with just thin slits for eyes. It is after all not 9:00 a.m. yet, on a Sunday morning. Oh, and some people come late. They grab a cup of coffee and find a seat, not seeming bothered by not showing up on time. The service is in a room that used to be a traditional sanctuary. Now, the pews are gone; we are facing one of the side walls, sitting in a semi circle, on chairs that are wonderfully comfortable. The traditional altar piece is replaced by a tie-dyed altar drapery, clearly emphasizing the circular view of life, and with symbolism often found on items associated with what many people call New Age, or holistic spirituality. There is a small round altar table; there is a piano and drums - not a drum set, but congas. The 'headlines' in the bulletin are Befriending Creation, Befriending Letting Go, Befriending Creativity and Befriending Compassion. After the announcements at the beginning of the service, there are the drums and the calling of the directions.⁴² Early in the service, there is the children's time. One of the Sundays I was there in January 2006, Dr. Seuss' book *The Sneetches* was read, and there is prayer time with the children. And, believe me, the grownups enjoy the children's time as much as the kids do. Afterwards, some of the kids stay in the service, but most of them go to the nursery for children program activities.



⁴² Calling the four directions (east, west, north, south), each representing and emphasizing different aspects of life and nature, is a tradition we find in for instance Native American spirituality

There are songs, prayers and a sermon, which is called 'Witness in Word.' The sermon is done by Sid Hall this particular Sunday. Some Sundays Susan Sprague, Trinity's other pastor, does the sermon. Some Sundays they have a guest speaker, or they do a pulpit swap with another church. And often, there is a guest artist or a band playing music/singing or dancing or reading poetry, and this segment is called 'Witness in Art.' The service also has an earth prayer, focusing on our connection to everyone and everything. Some of the liturgical songs are from Taizè.⁴³ There is often a body prayer, that is, a prayer done with words (often a song) and/or with movements. There is the offering, a plate for regular offering, and a basket for special offering, the latter often being something related to social justice. On the first Sunday of each month, there is communion. A few words must be said about the prayer time. It is not too different I think than prayers for the people in most Methodist churches. The sense of community is strong, and the feeling that these people care about each other is strong. For this time in the service is when people share the joys and concerns in their lives, or in their neighbours life, or about something they have seen on the news that was painful. And, the pastor says "joyful and healing spirit" after each prayer request. And, the people answer "receive our prayer." One older woman prays for world peace every Sunday. Sometimes people get more political than most of the people are comfortable with, and more than what is appreciated by the leadership.

Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness... It is better in prayer to have a heart without words, than words without a heart." Gandhi. (Printed in the bulletin for both services one Sunday in January.)

The preceding was an attempt to describe the early service. The 11:00 a.m. service is slightly different; more traditional, less earth-based. But in both services usually have 70-90 people. The 'call to celebration' in the 11:00 a.m. service is called 'Congregational Introit,' but it is the same song as in the early service. The headlines in the bulletin for this service are 'We Celebrate With Praise,' 'We Celebrate Through Reconciliation,' 'We Celebrate Through God's Word', and 'We Celebrate With Our

⁴³ Taizè is an ecumenical monastery in France, and songs and a song tradition has spread from there to at least large parts of Europe and to the U.S. (see <http://www.taize.fr/en>)

Gifts.’ The clientele is not quite as varied; people are dressed a little less casual. The altar is being used, the small round table is gone. The chancel choir has special music every time, there are no drums and usually no guest artist. The hymnal is used more often than in the early service. Music and songs from Taizè are used here, too. The sermon is the same in both services.

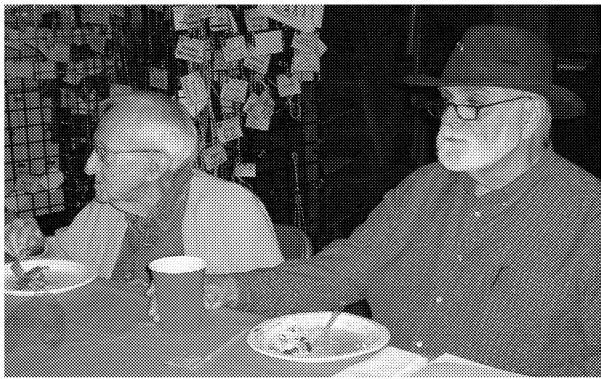
I assume some people will label Trinity as flaky and wishy-washy. I guess it depends on the perspective and how one approaches spirituality, and maybe life in general. If the one-and-only-truth (that is accessible to everyone) is what spirituality is about, then yes, Trinity will seem wishy-washy. If dress code, homogeneity, and newly combed hair are important, then yes, it will look flaky. If neither of these are present, then maybe not.

6.2 A ‘Wednesday night alive’ at Trinity

Wednesday night is a time for community and education at Trinity. They start at 6:00 p.m. with a catered dinner that usually costs \$ 7 (\$ 2.50 for children). Straight forward food, usually pretty healthy and with a vegetarian dish for those who want. Plus dessert, that is, and it’s usually not all that healthy... It varies how many people show up, from 15 to 40, in my experience. Sometimes there is a potluck instead of a catered meal. The meal is a social event, people get to catch up on what is going on, and get to tell people what is going on with them and their lives. Some of Trinity’s members go only to the Wednesday night activities, and not to any of the services, others go only on Sundays. On Wednesdays it is less of the feeling of there being two congregations as you can sometimes get the feeling of on Sundays. On Wednesday nights it is just Trinity, no 9:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. folks.



After the meal, at 7:00 p.m., classes of various kinds are held, there is rehearsal for the choir, Kids Club and some activity for the youth. The nursery is open, so the adults that bring children can take a class or go to choir rehearsal. People are hired to take care of the children in the nursery. There is a \$10-25 fee for the classes, depending on whether literature is needed or other costs. On the Wednesday I was there in January, four different classes were held, in addition to Kids Club, the youth group, and the choir rehearsal. The classes were:



- ‘The Mystic Heart’, discussing Wayne Teasdale’s book *The Mystic Heart*. “Being religious connotes belonging to and practicing a religious tradition. Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality. Religions of course, are one way many people are spiritual. Often, when authentic faith embodies an individual’s spirituality, the religious and the spiritual will coincide. Still, not every religious person is spiritual and not every spiritual person is religious” – Quote from the book on the flyer that was giving a presentation of each of the classes.
- ‘Right and left brains at work: Creating and editing.’ On the flyer: This five week writing class has two themes: 1) The need for creative sparks to ignite writing, and 2) The need for editorial discipline to forge the final product. Key concepts that will be discussed are: 1) Author – establishing your character and voice. 2) Audience – whether writing to your Mom, manager or the Austin City Council, visualize the likely response. 3) Subject and purpose – whether the topic is

concrete, abstract, humorous or expository, what's the goal? In-class activities will include: Speed journaling, Reworking and tightening prose samples, Relating a meaningful anecdote, Small group editing, Examining professional and amateur pieces, Reviewing a favourite book, Writing a short story for children or a joke, Studying common literary devices, Revisiting mechanics

- 'Disciple Bible Study.' On the flyer: Trinity is continuing its study of 'Remember who you are.' This study is an in-depth Bible study and reflection on the Letters of Paul. There is a video presentation as well as lots of discussion each week. This spring we will focus on the epistles with strongest evidence of Pauline authorship.
- 'Presence,' discussing the book *Presence; And Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations and Society*, written by Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers. On the flyer: Presence is an intimate look at the development of a new theory about change and learning. The authors explore the nature of transformational change – how it arises and the fresh possibilities it offers a world dangerously out of balance. The book introduces the idea of 'Presence' – a concept, borrowed from the natural world, in which the whole is entirely present in any of its parts – to the worlds of business, education, leadership and government. By encouraging deeper levels of learning we create an awareness of the larger whole, leading to actions that can help to shape its evolution and our future.

Each class had about four to twelve people in it. The choir is small, with 4-6 people. This small size is probably partly because Trinity did not have a music director at that time. Some people have followed the Disciple Bible study classes for years, other people tend to go to classes that are somewhat on the same subject. The classes are over at about 9:00 p.m.

6.3 The 'Trinity culture'

Is there such a thing as a 'Trinity culture?' I think one can say that there are things that are characteristic for Trinity, and that it has a culture that is, if not unique, then at least not similar to many others. This culture has several aspects, such as language, widely understood, and art/music, ideals, appearance, and so on. It seems to me that the Trinity culture is one influenced by both the culture of the mainline denominations in

the U.S., and the holistic movement, and inspired by so-called new age spirituality. This intersection of effects is also partly what makes Trinity unusual – this is not a common combination!

First, I will look at the language. Now language could mean both the language you meet in the service at Trinity, and what language the members ‘speak.’ When looking at the language in the service, it is probably a mix of the language one would find in a more traditional congregation and the holistic domain. But, as I experience it, it leans heavily in the holistic direction. So many of the traditional images of God, church, and faith are not used, and instead words like ‘Great Spirit,’ ‘the Divine,’ ‘community,’ ‘experience,’ ‘authentic,’ ‘spiritual path,’ ‘healing,’ and ‘diversity’ are used. Not that all those words can be paralleled or replaced by more traditional Christian language, the imagery used is also different. And, chatting and having conversations with the members, the expressions, the imagery, the focus, is very much in the holistic direction. When looking at the language spoken in the interviews with those people I would characterize as ‘traditional, yet progressive,’ (the most traditional group, see chapter 7.1) I think that their language was more toned down when it came to the more typical holistic or subjective-life expressions, more of the imagery from traditional Christianity was there, but often explained and/or reinterpreted. The language may vary some, depending on what ‘part’ of the congregation one focuses.

When it comes to professions, teacher, health care workers, and artists are overrepresented. Another cultural aspect is education, or the intellectual level. In *The Spiritual Revolution*, the educational level is higher in the holistic domain than in the population s such⁴⁴. For Trinity this is very true. Making a guesstimate, I would say that over half, maybe two thirds, of the congregation have a Master’s degree. Very few have anything less than a Bachelor, and there are maybe as many as thirty Ph.D.s.

Looking at other parts of Trinity culture, a typical trait is the casualness, both in appearance and in form of behaviour. The self-expressive focus in art and performance is also easily discovered, when dance usually means modern dance, and a guest artist usually means a singer-songwriter with a guitar, sometimes a full band.

⁴⁴ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005, pp 93-4

6.4 Trinity history – local

Trinity United Methodist Church in Austin, Texas.

The church was founded in the post-war 1940s, and was a traditional neighborhood church for many years. When Sid Hall, senior pastor at Trinity, came there in 1988, he was told he came there either to renew the church, or to perform a funeral for it. It was greatly renewed, and now has more than 400 members and an extensive program for most ages. The congregation has two full-time pastors (which is unusual for a church not bigger than Trinity), a part-time secretary, music director, youth director, and children's director.

The largest part of the church building is from 1955, and has a sanctuary, a fellowship hall, a parlor, a kitchen, and about seven rooms that are used for such activities as nursery and education. It also has a fenced yard with nice playground equipment. The offices are in what used to be the parsonage, just 30 feet from the church building. Some repairs and renewals have been done to the church building in the past few years, but it is still an inadequate building for Trinity, both in terms of size and facilities, and also in terms of some major things that ought to be done with the building, for instance the air-conditioning/heating system (which is in bad shape) and rest room facilities.

November 1992

November 1992 is when Trinity became a reconciling congregation. After a process when the congregation had started focusing on issues that are in line with the reconciling movement, it was decided the congregation was to vote on the matter. As already mentioned, the church had about 110 members then, out of which 8-10 were gays/lesbians. When voting, 79% voted for becoming a reconciling congregation. The election was "watched over" and supported by the district superintendent. Trinity lost 20% of its members after the vote, and 50% of the income.

6.5 Trinity history – on United Methodist Church level

Trinity is a part of the largest Methodist church in the US, which is the United Methodist Church, also one of the largest mainline churches in the US. Here are a few excerpts from the United Methodist Church's homepage:

What we believe.

As United Methodists, we have an obligation to bear a faithful Christian witness to Jesus Christ, the living reality at the center of the Church's life and witness. To fulfill this obligation, we reflect critically on our biblical and theological inheritance, striving to express faithfully the witness we make in our own time. Two considerations are central to this endeavor: the sources from which we derive our theological affirmations and the criteria by which we assess the adequacy of our understanding and witness. Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason.⁴⁵

Shortly on the history of the United Methodist Church (UMC) The United Methodist Church was created in 1968, in Dallas, Texas. Two American churches were then joined together, The Methodist Church and The Evangelical United Brethren Church. The Evangelical United Brethren Church had its background in (German) reformed churches and in Mennonite tradition. The Methodist Church had its background from England and the Wesley brothers, John and Charles. The churches had for a long time had a close relationship and similar ecclesiastical structures. In 1968, the United Methodist Church had approximately 11 million members, making it one of the largest Protestant churches in the world.⁴⁶ The United Methodist Church has in 2005 about 8.2 million members, about 1.9 millions of them outside the US.

6.6 Trinity theology

Creation Centered Spirituality is an earth based spirituality drawing on many different faith traditions. This spirituality is Trinity's theological base. In addition to, and along the lines of being a reconciling congregation and thus open to gays and lesbians (see chapter 6.6, on the Reconciling Ministries Network), Trinity has an emphasis on social justice, or issues of discrimination. According to one of Trinity's pastors, Susan

⁴⁵ <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=519>

⁴⁶ <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=346>, and <http://www.bartleby.com/65/ev/EvangUBC.html>, (read November 4th, 2005)

Sprague, Trinity had a strong sense of social justice already when she was a pastor at Trinity in the early eighties. One of the interviewees who is a life long member of Trinity, thinks that Sid Hall could not have led the congregation down the path he has, if 'the basic feeling' had not been there.⁴⁷

6.6.1 Trinity's Statement Regarding Creation Spirituality

The Trinity web page (www.tumc.org) presents a statement about the basis for the congregation's theology:

Trinity's clergy support Creation Spirituality, a movement that draws on ancient spiritual traditions and contemporary science to awaken authentic mysticism, revitalize Christianity and Western culture, and promote social and ecological justice. Creation Spirituality teaches that God permeates all things and that humanity is created blessed, not tainted by original sin. In this paradigm, Christ is God's liberating and reconciling energy, transforming individuals and society's structures into conduits of compassion. As we embody God's love, we become the Creation that God intends.

Creation Spirituality draws on the earliest traditions of the Hebrew Bible and has been celebrated under various names over the centuries, most notably by the Rhineland Christian mystics of medieval Europe. It is an eclectic tradition that honours women's wisdom and the cosmologies of indigenous cultures around the planet. Creation Spirituality seeks to revitalize contemporary worship by asking what would happen if, instead of requiring artists to conform to established worship practices, Christian worship adapted to the creativity of artists.⁴⁸

These are 'Ten principles of Creation Centered Spirituality,' which can give an overview and a good idea of what it is about:⁴⁹

1. The universe is a blessing, that is, something God created and we experience as 'very good.'
2. Humans need to relate to the universe as a whole as we are a microcosm of that macrocosm.
3. Everyone is a mystic, born full of wonder and capable of recovering it at any age and of not taking the awe and wonder of existence for granted.

⁴⁷ There is presentation of all the interviewee in chapter 7.2

⁴⁸ <http://www.tumc.org/creation.htm>, read Jan 3rd 2006

⁴⁹ <http://www.tumc.org/csprinciples.htm>, read Jan 3rd 2006. The ten principles are to be found on many web pages, most of them seem to be based in the US. It is however hard to find out from where they originate

4. Everyone is a prophet, a ‘mystic in action’ who is called to interfere with what interrupts authentic life. We are called to the margins of the status quo to interrupt systems that marginalize other humans, creatures and our Father, the Earth.
5. Everyone is an artist. Art as meditation is a primary form of prayer for releasing our images and empowering the community and each of us. Art finds its fulfilment in ritual, the community’s art.
6. Everyone and everything expresses divinity. All humans are all children of God; therefore, we have Divine blood in our veins and the Divine breath in our lungs; and the basic work of God is Compassion.
7. Divinity is as much Mother as Father, as much Child as Parent, as much Godhead [mystery] as God [history], as much beyond all beings as in all beings.
8. We experience the Divine in all things and all things are in the Divine. This mystical experience supplants the experience of the Divine as separate and unattainable.
9. Humans have to dig and work at finding the deep self, the true self, the spirit self. This is the spiritual journey. It is not so much about ‘adding on’ as it is ‘letting go.’ If we do not undergo the spiritual journey, we live superficially out of fear or greed or addiction or someone else’s expectations of us.
10. The spiritual journey is an ever-expanding spiral encompassing four paths.
 - *Via Positiva: Befriending Creation – wonder, delight, revelry*
 - *Via Negativa: Befriending Darkness – emptiness, sinking, suffering*
 - *Via Creativa: Befriending Our Sacredness – creating, awakening, birthing*
 - *Via Transformativa: Befriending New Creation – coming home, doing, justice*

6.6.2 If You Meet Jesus at the Crossroads, by Sid Hall

Here is an excerpt from ‘the Trinity Voice’ (newsletter for Trinity) in May 2006,⁵⁰ which is also helpful in understanding the Trinity theology:

⁵⁰ <http://www.tumc.org/Voice/TrinityVoice.pdf>, read May 26th 2006

The story of Jesus on the road to Emmaus is one of the most gripping and compelling stories in the Gospels. Some disciples are travelling on the road feeling the grief and loss of their leader betrayed, arrested and crucified. Though tales of a resurrection are rampant in the community the sojourners are cautious to believe. On the road they encounter a stranger, one whom they do not recognize. Then, in a moment of awe and relief, the stranger breaks bread and they recognize him as Jesus. I often wonder if I would recognize Jesus on the road and if I did, would I know what to do or say? The Gospel story makes it clear that if we want to see Jesus at the crossroads of our own lives we must keep our eyes affixed on the stranger, the excluded, the broken and the oppressed. This is where Jesus meets us today. I also believe that Jesus would have much to tell us about how we're behaving toward each other and would want us to see how much alike we are rather than different. Wouldn't it be exciting and challenging to eavesdrop on Jesus talking to the great mystics of the world's religions? In spite of the cultural differences and time constraints, I believe they would share much in common when they meet at the crossroads. On the Sundays after Easter (two have already passed) we will have our own encounter with the post-resurrection Jesus on the road to enlightenment. We will do this by exploring some of the core ideas and beliefs of the great religions and imagine how Jesus would interact with great leaders, both mythological and historical, in those traditions. Here is the line up:

- Sunday, April 23rd – Meeting Jesus and Lao Tzu at the Crossroads: Christianity & Taoism
- Sunday, April 30th – Meeting Jesus and Rumi at the Crossroads: Christianity & Islam
- Sunday, May 7th – Meeting Jesus & Ramakrishna at the Crossroads: Christianity & Hinduism
- Sunday, May 14th – Meeting Jesus & Abraham Joshua Heschel at the Crossroads: Christianity & Nature-Based Spirituality
- Sunday, May 28th – Meeting Jesus & the Buddha at the Crossroads: Christianity & Buddhism
- Sunday, June 4th – Pentecost: Jesus, the Spirit, & Inter-Spirituality at the Crossroads

6.6.3 The Reconciling Ministries Network

As mentioned before, Trinity is a part of the Reconciling Ministries Network, here is an excerpt from Trinity's webpage about being a reconciling congregation:

What it means to be a Reconciling Congregation

Trinity has a strong commitment to justice and social action. Therefore, we are involved in a variety of community outreach ministries and issue the following reconciling statement that clearly welcomes all people:

Trinity is a congregation who welcomes and affirms all people regardless of Race, Nationality, Age, Gender, Gender Identity, Marital Status, Sexual Orientation, Physical Ability, Mental Ability, Economic Class, or Educational Class. Trinity has been a reconciling congregation since 1992.⁵¹

Twenty five to thirty percent of Trinity's members are gay/lesbians, and Trinity is a part of a sub-movement within the UMC, the Reconciling Ministries Network. The reconciling movement in the UMC, now called the Reconciling Ministries Network, started out in 1982. The movement now consists of over two hundred single United Methodist congregations, campus ministries, and smaller groups that have a special program or intention to include gays and lesbians in their church/groups. Trinity and many other reconciling congregations also have a profound engagement in other social and justice related issues, and Trinity includes in its statement, as shown above, not only sexual orientation but also social and economic class, ethnic background, and so on.

From the webpage of the Reconciling Ministries Network:

The Reconciling Ministries Network (RMN) is a growing movement of United Methodist individuals, congregations, campus ministries, and other groups working for the full participation of all people in the United Methodist Church.

As of January, 2006, the RMN encompasses 208 Reconciling Congregations, 28 Reconciling Campus Ministries, and 31 other Reconciling Communities and Ministries. There are over 18,000 Reconciling United Methodists⁵². The Reconciling Ministries Network is part of a much larger ecumenical "welcoming church" movement which now encompasses more than 1500 congregations, ministries, and judicatories in ten faith traditions. This ecumenical movement is growing at the rate of two new churches each week--

⁵¹ www.tumc.org under "being a reconciling congregation" (Read September 2005)

⁵² <http://www.rmnetwork.org/whoarewe.php>. (Read November 13th 2005)

probably the fastest-growing grass roots movement in mainline churches today.⁵³

Reading some of the articles I found in the archives on the UMC webpage, it seems clear that the RMN is not all that popular. To illustrate: On the United Methodist Church Web pages, there was, in August 2005 published an article written by Neill Caldwell, on controversy surrounding and upcoming event at Lake Junaluska in North Carolina. The Reconciling Ministries Network wanted to rent the United Methodist Church's retreat centre at Lake Junaluska for their conference, called 'Hearts on Fire.' Lake Junaluska can be used by any official or unofficial United Methodist group, but the 'Hearts on Fire' conference spurred a storm of protests from more conservative parts of the United Methodist Church. Many of the protests sounded about like this:

The 'Hearts on Fire' conference should not be held....The conference will not just be advocating for change in the church's standards; it will include large doses of preaching and teaching which are in direct opposition to the Scriptural norm and to the church's standards. That should not happen at a United Methodist conference center. (The Rev. James V. Heidinger II, president and publisher of Good News magazine)

Another example:

Since Lake Junaluska's own internal rules require it to rent its facilities only to groups that share the 'mission' of the United Methodist Church, it seems highly inappropriate to rent those facilities for a rally for same-sex 'marriage,' homosexual clergy, and various exotic forms of sexual expression (Mark Tooley, director of UMAction, part of the Institute on Religion and Democracy)

However, the executive director at Lake Junaluska takes a neutral stand and does neither approve or disapprove of the conference, but say that

The participants in the event will use the facilities of SEJAC⁵⁴ and we will host them, as we do other groups who are our guests, in a gracious way that is exemplary of the wonderful United Methodist Church that we so love and desire to serve in the name of Jesus Christ.

⁵³ <http://www.rmnetwork.org/welindex.php> (Read September 2005)

⁵⁴ Southeastern Jurisdiction Annual Conference

6.6.4 Summing up

Trinity's ideology is based on principles of equality, a strongly egalitarian basis. This ideology seems to also be the structure of how the meetings in the various committees work. The opinions of each individual are respected, but that does not mean there are no conflicts. It also means that big decisions are difficult to make. A leader of a committee/team (for instance finance team or future's team) has to be able to juggle and maintain a very fine balance of listening to and heeding all the different opinions (and believe me, progressive baby-boomers have a lot of them!), and at the same time move forward, being able to go on without letting someone's expressed fear or venting stall the progress altogether. It requires good people skills (a little knowledge about psychology is probably a good idea) and communication skills.

Trinity is and has to be politically neutral. However, the congregation holds many of the ideas and opinions of the political left. One of the pastors, Sid Hall, says that it is very healthy, at least for him, not to put the focus on who or what political party or faction does this or the other, but on the issues themselves. That way the action of the church becomes one that is pro-active rather than re-active. This is slightly idealized, in that there in my experience is quite a bit of bantering and re-active attitudes towards or about, for instance, George W. Bush, the war in Iraq (and not just focus on peace), taxation (and not just better distribution of the wealth) and so forth, in more informal Trinity-related forums.

Trinity does partake in various activist-like things. One is that the congregation always has a booth on the gay pride festival every year. Another thing is that a group from Trinity always participates in the MLK (Martin Luther King Jr.) march every year. But mostly, these activities can be defined as being pro-active activities, and not reactive.

Trinity is a congregation that has, to a large degree, implemented many elements from more modern spirituality with strong focus on the individual. Trinity has also a theological base of Creation Centred Spirituality, as already mentioned. I want to highlight two elements that points to important aspect in the Trinity theology:

1. The individual's experiences, emotions, and opinions are being strongly validated and understood as vital in that particular person's spiritual and personal development and path. Thus, in a different way than what is experienced in most traditional Christian theology, the faith in every person's ability to find their own way and spiritual path in life, is stronger. One may also say that "finding yourself" is a dogma in the world of modern spirituality, which I will discuss in chapter 7.
2. The strong connection to both the Earth and to the Universe that we find in Creation Centred Spirituality, the belief that humans basically are part of something much larger, a whole, gives creation more worth or higher value, than what is the case in traditional Christian theology. There is more than a streak of pantheism in this theology, and the respective value of humans is, at least in theory, less than what is the case in traditional Christian theology. I do not experience that the human value is lessened though, the experience is more that humans are *part of* the larger whole in a spiritual and in a practical sense, and that acknowledging this has vast consequences for how we deal with our lives and our (widely understood) resources.

6.6.5 Trinity and Alan Race's typology of theology of religion⁵⁵

Theology of Religion is the theological discipline that addresses the relationship between the religions, and in this case, the relationship between Christianity and other religions. In 1983 the English minister Alan Race developed a typology that systemized the various approaches in Theology of Religion. Race describes three types: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. According to Race, all the different views on the relationship between the religions can be put in one of the three categories. Race's typology has been criticized for being too simple and too restrictive to cover the multiplicity of religion, but Race claims there is room for expansions and modifications within this model/typology.⁵⁶ **Exclusivism** is the view that God reveals himself through only one religion. This way of thinking is found in both Christianity

⁵⁵ In this sub-chapter I had generous help from my colleague, Kari-Mette Wahlman Hidle, and her paper called 'Drøft hvilke konsekvenser Karls Barths åpenbaringsforståelse får for religionsdialogen. Diskuter noen alternative posisjoner' – about consequences of Karl Barth's understanding of the revelation for the Theology of Religion.

⁵⁶ Race 2001, p 22

(Lutheran, Reformed and also Catholic tradition) and in Islam. **Inclusivism** is the belief that God reveals himself to salvation through a religious principle that is cosmically present in all religions, the cosmic Christ.⁵⁷ When God reveals himself in Christ he therefore reveals himself in all religions. Inclusivism is found in Islamic, Hindu, and Buddhist variations. In Christianity it is best known from the Catholic Church's 2nd Vatican Council. This view is also the position of the World Council of the Churches. **Pluralism** is the understanding that God reveals himself to salvation through different religions. There are several different pluralistic approaches. They often lean on important Biblical principles like love or equality in stead of using Christology as the only criteria.

I find it interesting to place Trinity within the framework of Alan Race's theory, and thus in some way place it in relation to churches in a global perspective. Looking at Trinity through the glasses of Alan race's typology, Trinity can be classified as having a pluralistic attitude towards other religions than Christianity. Trinity believes there is truth in all religion, and more than that, believes that other religious traditions are equally valuable in terms of their ability to help us connect with the sacred and ourselves, which in essence is one and the same thing in the Trinity theology. Looking at the programs and classes and at the Sunday service bulletin, one finds elements from many other traditions, and in the educational program one frequently finds studies of other religious traditions as an option. In chapter 6.6.1 (above), on Trinity theology, is a good example of the pluralistic stand in Trinity's statement regarding Creation Spirituality. An inclusivistic approach is probably the most common one in the United Methodist Church as such, but I think there are variations, and maybe not necessarily sharp divisions.

6.7 Facts and figures about Trinity

6.7.1 Classes, programs, and events

In this sub-chapter, I give an overview of the programs and activities at Trinity. This spans from weekly events to monthly activities, events or classes that are on a less

⁵⁷ Race 2001, pp 25-6

regular basis. Since I described the Wednesday Night Alive in chapter 6.2, I mention these only briefly here.

Children's programs

Sundays: At each of the Sunday Celebrations, a Children's Time is held early in the celebration during which children may come forward and hear a special story from one of the pastors or another friend. Then, the children may return to those who brought them or go to the children's area for Sunday School, which consists of special activities, stories, crafts, or games, and a snack. Age categories for Sunday school are Infants-age 4, ages 5-8, and ages 9-12⁵⁸.

Parents' Night Out is held at the church building from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. on the second Friday of each month during the school year. This event is a fun time for kids to play and parents to enjoy a break. Activities include lots of arts and crafts, games, and a movie.⁵⁹ (This program is of course as much for the parents as for the children). Parent's night out costs \$ 10 per child, but with a maximum of \$ 15 per family.

Wednesdays: On Wednesdays, as mentioned already, dinner is served at church. After dinner classes are conducted and rehearsal is held for the choir. At the same time there is Kids' Choir, which is for toddlers to age 4 from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. The Magnificent Sanctuary Band for ages 5-12 practices from 7:00 to 7:30 p.m. Then from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. there is Kids' Club, which includes art, games, service projects, and free play time.

Youth programs

Sundays are devoted to low-key activities (youth hang out, movies), and food is provided except on the second Sunday of each month, when the group goes out to eat. Wednesdays are more intensive, and the youth split into two groups for outdoor games or discussion on political, religious, and philosophical topics.⁶⁰

SafeParents provides mentoring support for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons and their families. The SafeParents program is a non-profit ministry of The

⁵⁸ <http://www.tumc.org/childrenspgms.htm>, read May 24th 2006

⁵⁹ <http://www.tumc.org/childrenspgms.htm>, read May 24th 2006

⁶⁰ www.tumc.org, read May 24th 2006

Trinity Social Justice Institute, Inc. Its function is to provide well-trained, experienced, and supervised mentors (safe parents) to guide and support gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons and/or their families in the decision of coming out.⁶¹

Fellowship groups

Trinity has a multitude of groups to join. Some groups are the kind that you find in most Methodist Churches, for instance United Methodist Women. Other groups are not to be found in too many other places, for instance Trinity Triangle Fellowship. Here is an overview:

- United Methodist Women
- United Methodist Men
- Trinity Triangle Fellowship – Gay, Lesbian, Transgendered and Straight Allies Fellowship
- Care of the Soul (COTS) – Groups. Each COTS group meet twice a month for support and community, and involved eight to 12 people.
- Wednesday Night Alive (as described in chapter 6.2)
- The Red Tent – a women’s group⁶²
- Other small groups – Son’s Group,⁶³ Centring Prayer group,⁶⁴ different Sunday school classes

Other ongoing ‘things’

- Hope Food Pantry (giving food to poor people)
- Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets for poor families in the area
- Summer supper clubs – organized pot-luck dinners in people’s homes during the summer months
- Feed the homeless – every Sunday morning, some people from the congregation bring food to the homeless day workers at ‘The Work Corner’
- Homeless shelter on cold winter nights
- Fundraisers of different kinds, such as theatre plays, cruises

⁶¹ www.tumc.org, read May 24th 2006

⁶² See <http://www.tumc.org/redtent.htm> for more on The Red Tent

⁶³ See http://www.tumc.org/pdf_documents/smallgroups.pdf for more on Son’s Group

⁶⁴ See http://www.tumc.org/pdf_documents/smallgroups.pdf for more on Centring Prayer Group

6.7.2 Services, classes and programs - attendance

The average number of people at the Sunday services has stayed fairly stable the past seven years, but with a slight decrease, and varying from 182 in 2005, to 210 in 2000. Senior pastor Sid Hall mentions the possibility of a connection with the article about Trinity in Time Magazine at about that time in 2000. The number of baptisms varies quite a lot, from two in 2004 to eight in 2000. The number of people enrolled in Children's classes has increased steadily from 60 in 1999 to 102 in 2004. This increase is probably and mainly because the congregation has hired a children's director, and she keeps a good program going. The number of people enrolled in youth classes varies from 20 in 1999 to 42 in 2000. The number of people enrolled in Adult classes has increased from 90 in 1999 to 170 in 2004. The number of people enrolled in Sunday classes varies from 45 in 2002 and 2003 to 88 in 2004.

6.7.3 Membership numbers and membership make-up

Trinity had 410 members in 2005. The membership numbers have increased from 110 people in 1992, and in spurts over the years. However, the past few years, the increase has almost stopped, and one year the congregation lost more members than it gained. This year was 2000, when 27 members were gained and 38 were lost. There seem to be many reasons why members leave, and talking to the members of Trinity and with its pastors, the main reasons are:

1. Trinity is too liberal/radical/alternative, both theologically, socially and politically,
2. Trinity is still a member of the UMC, where the reconciling congregations really are not welcome.

It seems to be mainly gay men leaving the church, and often because of one of the above reasons.

Some of my research hypotheses (chapter 3) were about the make-up of the members at Trinity. Several of them were confirmed (some of this information is also to be found in sub-chapter 6.3, on Trinity Culture): Boomers are indeed overrepresented at Trinity, as are people with a therapeutic profession. There are not too many business people, but a fair amount of people working in the high tech industry and in the

software industry. The education level is very high, and as one of the pastors said, one is hard pressed to find a person without a bachelor degree. Most people have a master's degree, many a Ph.D. And so, in my experience (even though I did not really count) Trinity has a higher amount of people with a doctorate than what I had expected. The confessional background of the members is 'all over the place', but a fair amount of people grew up Methodist.

6.7.4 Finances

The total expected income for 2006 is \$308,893, while the total expected expenses are \$ 329,368. Over two-thirds of the anticipated income is pledges. Then:

- Loose plate is an estimated \$32,000,
- fundraising \$15,000,
- rental income \$12,000,
- appointments and Christmas gifts \$11,000, to mention some, or most.

Of the expected expenses, pastoral and staff expenses take up over two thirds, \$222,230. This includes paying both of the pastors, the accompanist, the administrator, the children's director, the childcare workers, and so on. Connectional expenses (having to do with the United Methodist Church, and mainly the apportionments to the UMC) make up a fifth of the expenses, while administrative and operation (utilities for instance) expenses make up about a ninth.

In 2005, 135 of the members pledged. This number was an increase from a low of 113 in 2000. The average monthly pledge per member in 2005 was \$45, in 1999 it was \$53. When adjusting the 2005 amount for inflation, the number is down to \$38. So, despite the increase in number of members pledging, the income from pledges is actually down, from \$225,801 to \$213,911 (\$179,147 when adjusting for inflation). As mentioned above, Trinity lost 50% of its income when becoming a reconciling congregation in 1992, and really struggled financially for a long time. For several years, the apportionments to the UMC have not been paid in full, but they were in 2005, and also in 2003 and 2004. I had an interesting experience when I got to be at a meeting in Trinity's finance team in January 2006. One of the tasks for the meeting

was to accept the budget/fiscal overview for 2006. A member of the congregation who is an accountant had done all the work with it, and to my eyes it looked very professional (not that I really know much about things like that). Another thing they were working on, was how to make more people pledge, so that they could break even on the 2006 budget. When the meeting started they were lacking about \$21.000. After fifteen minutes or so this was down to \$15.000, just by people in the committee saying “I can put in a thousand extra by the end of next month” or “I can give \$500 more”. I was pretty impressed; these people are probably among the ones that pledge the most already. They also had different ideas for fundraising, and one of them was to talk to the congregation in both services the following Sunday.

6.7.5 Administration and organization

Being a part of the United Methodist Church, Trinity has delegates to the general conference and also pays apportionments to the UMC. The money paid as apportionments goes partly to administration, but mainly to support different programs, often missionary programs in the third world, often with focus on social justice related activities and/or programs to help poor people.

Trinity is organized like any other United Methodist church, it has different teams taking care of different aspects of the life of the congregation, everything from someone working on the children’s programs, to people counting money after the service, people looking into and making long term plans for the church, and people that are concerned with the maintenance of the church facilities.

Leadership Teams

Many different teams and committees make up Trinity, and provide many opportunities for members who want to participate. Most of these teams are vital in making things ‘go round’ at Trinity:

- Adult Nurture Team
- Children’s Nurture Team
- Youth Nurture Team
- Hospitality Team
- Program Council
- Administrative Team
- Trinity Social Justice Institute

- Care and Nurture Team
- Communications Team
- Nominations Team
- Team of Stewards
- Celebrations Team
- Finance Team
- Operations Team
- Staff-Parish Relations Team
- Board of Trustees
- Futures Team

6.7.6 Summing up 6.7

Trinity is a congregation that is relatively well-organized. It is struggling financially, but making it, being resourceful in finding ways to do so. The relative instability financially is still somewhat of a strain on the leadership. Trinity has a pretty extensive program for all ages, especially considering that the congregation is not so big. The programs also seem to have a pretty well thought through philosophy behind them, the Youth Program's webpage shows a good example (<http://www.tumc.org/youth.html>). Trinity has grown a little the past few years, but seems to be struggling and kind of stuck in this area. Other than in that area, programs and classes are well-attended, probably indicating that a relatively large group of members are pretty active.

6.8 'Typical' Trinity conflicts/debates/challenges.

As somewhat of an introduction to the next chapter, in which I present the interviewees and the interview material, I here try to outline some typical themes/conflicts/challenges that are burning hot in Trinity most of the time lately. This description is in order to create a kind of a backdrop and help in understanding some of the answers and reaction from some of the interviewees. Some of what is listed below, in this chapter, may in part be repeated later, when presenting interview material, and maybe especially when presenting some of the pastors thoughts.

6.8.1 Trinity being a part of the UMC

It has been debated whether Trinity should remain a part of the United Methodist Church. The UMC does not support what Trinity and other reconciling congregations stand for in the gay/lesbian issue, and has added a paragraph in the Book of Discipline, saying that ministers in the UMC are not allowed to be openly gay/lesbian, and ministers in the UMC can not perform same sex unions. The reconciling congregations are, in other words, not looked kindly upon by at least parts of the

UMC. Some people, therefore, ask why Trinity wants to hang on to a structure that really does not want them there. Trinity pays apportionments to the UMC, a related issues and one several people have problems with that, given that the UMC does not really want Trinity there, much less support what they are doing. Those people who do want to hang on to the structure of the UMC, think it is important to be part of a larger organization and try to change it from within. For comments by the interviewees on the issue, see 7.5.4.

6.8.2 Trinity and location/facilities.

The futures team is and has been working on what should be done with Trinity as far as facilities go, and Trinity's future in general. The church building is no longer a practical place for Trinity. It is too small for one thing, if some activity is going to happen, the question is always where it will be, since most rooms in the building are taken most of the time. The church almost stopped growing all together, because it does not really have a comfortable room for a bigger congregation in the building they now have. The building is not practical either, in addition to there being much repair and maintenance needed. So, should Trinity try to find another location, or try to utilize the facilities/lot it has? A part of this question is also about Trinity having some identity of being a neighborhood church in one on of Austin's oldest and most liberal neighborhoods, Hyde Park, an area many people associate with the 'good old Austin.' So, there is much sentimentality and probably just good old fear of change connected to this issue. The leadership knows that some people will leave the church if it does not stay in the location or at least in the area where it is now.

6.8.3 The level of political activity/ the political rhetoric.

As mentioned in presenting some of the interview material, some members and pastors find it difficult to handle the way some people use the service, and in particular the prayer time, to voice their political opinions or often more aptly their political frustrations. People sometimes get outright hateful and can tend to demonize anyone opposing a particular political view. Trinity is of course politically neutral, otherwise it would not be eligible for its tax-exempt status. Also, with a slogan like 'where you can be you,' it is obvious that there must also be room for Republicans,

even though it is pretty easy to deduce that with the values Trinity promotes and the issues that are important, most of the congregation's members are Democrats. One of the pastors, Sid Hall, says that because of the tendency to tip over into politics in the service, he has to be constantly and extremely conscious of how he words himself, as to make sure the boundary towards the political is not crossed, neither in the service, in classes, or in informal conversations with his parishioners.

6.8.4 Lack of loyalty/ willingness to commit, and the constant draft of people.

It is a problem for Trinity that many people are not willing to commit to being a part of the congregation with their time and/or money. Ironically enough, there are similarities in this group to the Norwegian situation, where the attitude sometimes is that "don't we have a staff to do that job?" Consequently, those Trinity people who are in fact willing to commit, tend to do more than their share, which is also an unhealthy situation. Along with the lack of willingness to commit, the leadership's experience is that there is a lack of loyalty to Trinity within the congregation, which can be explained in the same way as with the lack of willingness to commit. The draft is way above what one would expect in a church this size.

7 WHO IS TRINITY?

Presenting the interview material thematically – typology and interpretations

In this chapter I first present a typology of different kinds of Trinity members. I then present the interviewees and then the interview material itself. I have divided the interview material into different themes, like theology, ethical issues and so on. At the end of each chapter, I will reflect upon the answers the interviewees have given together with the typology presented in 6.8.1. This is an attempt to get a fairly good overview so as to have some grounds to base the answers I will give in chapter 8, where I discuss the empirical material in the light of the theoretical material presented in chapter four.

7.1 Typology – different types of Trinity members

I hope and think that a typology of the Trinity members can be a useful tool in my analysis of the interview material. And, even though it is necessarily somewhat of a simplification and often lacking the nuances of reality, it still describes ‘ideal types,’ different types of members that *typically* have certain traits and views. Inger Furseth and Pål Repstad say in their book *An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion* (2006) that

...typologies are useful maps that must not be mistaken for the terrain. At the same time, if the map is glaringly imperfect, its use must be questioned.

I did find it difficult to make a typology out of the Trinity members that I interviewed. When it seemed I had found some common denominators between some of them, an element showed up that did not fit there, but fit better in another group. Yet, I have made an attempt, also based on experience, observation, and conversations with Trinity members other than the ones I interviewed. It is worth mentioning that I do not think Trinity is made up of three equally large groups, if this typology is at all a practical tool in mapping the congregation. Regardless of that, I think that ‘the progressive Methodist’ is the biggest group, maybe 45-50%, while as ‘the new agy’ probably is the smallest group, maybe 20-25%, which leaves the Traditional-yet-progressive type with about 30%. It is also worth mentioning that there is somewhat of

a scale here, where 'one' represents a low degree of being more traditional and a high degree of 'new agy.' 'Ten,' thus, means a high degree of being more traditional and a low degree of being more 'new agy.' The first group then would be 1-3 on a scale of 1-10, group number two 4-7 and the third group 8-10.

The 'new agy,' a little loosy-goosy⁶⁵ type

This type of members often (but not always) have little or no religious background, and can let church be church for a while and do other things Sunday morning. If there is not a lack of commitment, it at least often comes and goes; these members are often active in spurts. They are theologically very progressive and often not so articulate, at least relatively speaking; they do not feel the need for that skill since they do not need to defend anything. Their theology is often almost stripped of Christian language, and they have few or none of the wounds, problems, and things to work through that some of the members have from their conservative background. These members can be straight or gay (they did not grow up with it being a big issue anyway, thus they do not necessarily give it a lot of emphasis). Most of these members go to the 9:00 a.m. service. It is often hard to distinguish between this type of Trinity members, and the next, which is

The progressive Methodist

These members are not necessarily Methodists to start with, but they have a relatively speaking liberal background, often within one of the mainline churches, and have fewer (but still some) things to work through than those in the next group. They are generally more willing to commit than both the former and the latter groups, mainly because that is the culture in which they grew up; church is priority. They are likely to be more on committees than in the food pantry. At least, I think this split is true for the men, the women may be likely to have a heritage of helping out with practical things with them; depending on their age, of course. Theologically they are often very

⁶⁵ Loosy-goosy is an expression I have borrowed from one of Trinity's pastors, Susan Sprague. Loosy goosy means something like not taking things so seriously, very easy going, not being attached to conventions, traditions and particular ways of doing things. It's not quite irresponsible, but I'm sure someone would think it is similar. It can sometimes mean that something or someone is borderline flaky, or a little messy (sometimes past the point of being charmingly so). It's important to know though, that I don't think that the slightly loosy-goosy ones are *only* to be found in the category with that particular expression in it.

progressive, articulate, and well-reflected. They often explore other religions and embrace them. These members can be in either the 9:00 a.m. or the 11:00 a.m. group. Again, it is difficult to draw a clear line between the progressive Methodist and the next group, that I have called

The traditional-yet-progressive type

These members often grew up Southern Baptists, or have a similar background that is fairly conservative or even fundamentalist. They are often wounded in their spirituality, and have spent some time working through with what they grew up. The members in this group are often gay, lesbian, or transgendered. The activity- and commitment level can be very high, but they can also have a reaction to their background that makes them less active, or they do not want to commit and 'give their life to the church' the way for instance their parents did (a commitment that may have been a traumatic one for them). Some of them prefer the 11:00 a.m. service, and enjoy the familiarity of it, something slightly traditional, and some go to the 9:00 a.m. They generally tend to be more active with practical things, such as the food pantry or the work corner, or with things that are art related.

7.2 The interviewees – a short presentation of each of them

I give a short presentation of the interviewees here. Following the presentation I present thematically what their opinions and thoughts are about different issues about which I have inquired. This presentation of the interview material will, however, be done without saying who of the interviewees have this or that particular opinion, thought, or idea. This approach is used in order to secure the anonymity of the interviewees.

Teresa is in her mid 40s, is lesbian, and lives with her female partner. She grew up a little here and there, but mainly in Texas. She has been going to Trinity for about seven years, but she grew up Southern Baptist. Teresa works with children with special needs, and holds a Masters degree in social work. The fact that Trinity draws on many faith traditions is very important to Teresa. When, after a failed early marriage, she came to terms with and accepted being lesbian, she decided she no

longer believed in the god she grew up with. The first time she went to Trinity, she had been invited to come hear a friend sing. On the way there, she felt physically sick, with nausea and stomach aches, and she then really discovered how hurt she was in her relations to church and spirituality. After the initial encounter with Trinity, it took Teresa and her partner a long time to come back, and then they stayed. Teresa has volunteered in many ways at Trinity, and has attended several classes.

Gladys is in her late 30s. She is transgendered, lesbian, married, and has stepchildren. She works with computers, and has a Bachelor's degree in computer science. Gladys grew up Southern Baptist, and spent a lot of time at church in her childhood. She knew from when she was about five or six years old that she was a girl in a boy's body, but had never heard of anyone who was like that and thought she was either crazy or the only one who was like this. Yet, she knew she was not accepted in the church the way she really was. It took a lot of convincing to make Gladys come to Trinity about eight years ago. At the time, to her therapist's office was the only place outside her home she went as a woman. Through the whole process of legally becoming a woman, Gladys says again and again how important Trinity was, both as a community that provided support and prayers, with pastors she could talk to, and as a place where she could be herself and share what went on. Gladys has been very active at Trinity, and has served on national committees as well. She didn't realize until she came to Trinity how much she had missed a spiritual aspect to her life.

Ginger is in her mid 40s. She's straight, married, and is a stepmother. She works in the field of social work, and holds a Masters degree in social work. She has a mixed religious background, but did not go to church as a child. She came to Trinity 12-13 years ago because of the alternative service and because she had heard Sid give a speech somewhere. Ginger is from the South, but has lived other places in the US for periods. Her father was a self-employed businessman, her mother a stay-at-home mom. Ginger has been active at Trinity in many ways, but is less active lately, and has a little more of a distance to the church than she used to. Spirituality is to Ginger closely related to the intellectual. She does not experience Trinity as being in conflict with her background, since she grew up with practically no religion.

Don is in his early 50s. He is single, and holds a Ph.D. in anthropology. Don grew up Southern Baptist. His father was in the military, so they moved a lot, but Don thinks of himself as being from the Southwest. He works in the field of social work. He drifted away from church in college; did not like being associated with the fundamentalists. A friend brought him to Trinity about ten years ago. The openness, that he was welcome as who he was and what he had to bring, is what makes Trinity so special to him. Don is active at Trinity in many ways, on committees and also in the homeless task force. He also contributes artistically with his talents. Even though he disagrees with a lot of things his father stands for and vice versa, they do not bring up issues with each other. As Don says, they have been through a lot together, his mother and his brother died early.

John is about fifty. He is straight, divorced, and is an attorney. John grew up a Methodist in the Southwest. His father was a salesman, his mother a homemaker, but later got a teaching degree. He came to Trinity about 13 years ago. A girlfriend wanted to go because she had read about Trinity and Sid in a newspaper; he came along, and has been at Trinity since. John distanced himself from church in his youth. But he never really made a break with what he grew up; instead he searched other places for spiritual experiences. Coming to Trinity was more like a step further in going in the spiritual direction he felt was right, also, several negative aspects he had experienced in churches earlier were not present at Trinity. John is also member of an earth-based spiritual group that has its roots in Native American spirituality. He is and has been active in the church in many different ways.

Ralph is around 40, straight, married, has kids, works as a high tech engineer, and grew up in Central Texas. He worked as a mechanic for years and went back to school for his degree (a Bachelor in engineering) as an adult. Ralph is relatively new to Trinity; he started going three to four years ago. Ralph and his wife were introduced to Trinity at a difficult time for their family. Later when they decided they wanted to pay more attention to the spiritual aspects of life, they knew they wanted to go to Trinity. They did this partly because their teenage child had some issues, and a counselor

suggested they add some spiritual structure to their life. Ralph grew up with little religion. His mother was kind of a hippie type, but they never had a steady spiritual community. He grew up in an open-minded atmosphere. His parents were divorced. Ralph is active in church in different ways, mainly on committees, and finds the community aspect of church very important.

Ben is a former Methodist minister in his early 90s. He has been a widower since the late seventies. He grew up in the Deep South and has grown children. His father was a native of England; his mother was from Tennessee. He grew up in a liberal and open-minded atmosphere. His mother got her degree long after he himself did and was very concerned with racial matters. Ben went to seminary and served as a minister in the Methodist Church different places in the South, mainly in Georgia and Louisiana. Ben expresses that it was difficult to serve as a minister in areas that were very often conservative, when he was a liberal and believed in for instance racial integration, which was one of the issues of that time. Despite his age, Ben is an active member of Trinity. He goes to Sunday service every week and takes classes. He moved to Austin because his children live there. Ben was in a reconciling congregation where he lived before he came to Austin, and looked for one to join when he moved there, and so he found Trinity; that was seven or eight years ago.

Ester is in her 50s, she grew up at Trinity. Her mother and grandparents were members, and she grew up with her mother and grandparents. She is straight and married twice. Ester works as an office manager, and she has step children and grandchildren. She almost finished her Bachelor degree. Her parents were divorced, and her mother was a school teacher. During a period as a young adult she didn't attend church much, but she never rebelled against church. Ester got more active again as an adult when she started taking her husband's children to church. She has been teaching Sunday school, been on different teams and committees, and volunteered in many other ways, but sees herself as a 'behind-the-scenes' person. Ester's spiritual journey is very different now than 25 years ago.

Sid is about fifty, straight, divorced, has grown kids, has been the senior pastor at Trinity for about 18 years, and grew up a Methodist in the Midwest. His parents were active in church on and off, his grandparents more stable. He protested his parent's way of life and became a Jesus freak; fundamentalist and a hippie with the guitar. He had some major liberal influence in college, ended up doing a Bible study for lesbians, and was thus already a liberal when he went to SMU (Southern Methodist University) in Dallas to go to seminary. He struggled hard and worked a lot to be a good minister, and ended up so stressed that he did not eat several days out of the week. His doctor made him take one day a week off and sent him to therapy, the latter being one of the most important things he has done. Sid came to Trinity in 1988, with the message from his superintendent that he went there either to perform a funeral for a church or to revive it. Therapy was, over time, a major transformation process for Sid, and something that influenced his life as such, but also his job as a minister. Another major influence has been Matthew Fox and Creation Centered Spirituality, along with the GLBT⁶⁶ rights movement. One of the things that made him put more focus to this issue, was his discovering how scared and freaked out he was when one of the people he performed the first same sex union for wanted to invite the Bible study group and the youth group (which this person was the leader of) to the ceremony. Since it is now not allowed for a Methodist minister to perform same sex unions, Sid does not perform any unions at all. Another important influence and probably also a part of why Trinity has had the development it has as far as growing in numbers and programs, is a book on leadership Sid read about the time he came to Trinity.

Susan is in her mid to late 50s, straight, married twice, grew up Southern Baptist in the Deep South, and has been a pastor at Trinity for about 12 years. She grew up with traditional and conservative Christianity, but not fundamentalist. Her mother was a teacher and a librarian; her father was a manager and then worked for the state. Moving while in high school was a life changing experience, as she moved from 'Southern Baptist country,' to the Midwest and a school that was predominantly Jewish and Catholic. Another important, scary, but very alive experience was her working in a short-term missionary program in her early twenties. She worked at a

⁶⁶ Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered

community center in a poor, black neighborhood in Washington D.C., an area badly scarred by the riots after Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. She felt a call to ministry here, and went to seminary in Kentucky. Susan loved seminary, learned so much, and developed into being even more liberal during the years there. She married another minister and they came to Austin to work at University Baptist (Susan says this was back when there still existed such a thing as liberal Baptists). Yet another life changing experience was her mother dying when she was in her late twenties. After getting a divorce, she was basically kicked out of her job at University Baptist. She became a Methodist and started working as a minister in the United Methodist Church after a transition period. Susan remarried about 22 years ago.

The rest of this chapter is a systematic presentation of the interviewees' responses to my questions, material gathered when visiting Trinity in January and March 2006

7.3 Theology – God, Jesus and redemption/salvation/atonement, Creation Spirituality and elements from other faith traditions.

7.3.1 God

God seems to be mainly a creating and sustaining spirit. Whether God exists is not really discussed, except for one person, not being sure whether he/she really believes in God. Another one expresses that the picture of what and who God is changes over time. None of the interviewees think that God is expressed only in Christianity. And, very few think that God is expressed better in Christianity than in other religions. They have a high consciousness about God not being neither male nor female (and most importantly not male), and several people emphasize this point.

7.3.2 Jesus, redemption/salvation/atonement

Jesus as the son of God: Few of the interviewees see Jesus as the son of God, in fact only one expresses clearly that Jesus is the son of God. Another one sees Jesus as *the* revelation of God. Yet another one sees Jesus as divine, but as divine by adoption, that is, not the one and only son of God.

Jesus as a healer: At least six of the interviewees see Jesus as healer, a teacher, an amazing example, a mystic, someone who had a transforming experience and experienced God and the connection to God in its totality, or completely. Some also see Jesus as the rebel sticking out for the poor and oppressed. Two express that they do not really know what to think about Jesus.

Jesus as the redeemer: Only one clearly expresses that Jesus is the redeemer, and thinks that sin must be taken more seriously, even though this person does not believe in original sin and believes there is truth in all religion. Still, he/she does not see Jesus as the redeemer in the sense that some sacrificial blood shedding saves us. Another one sees Jesus as the supreme example of sacrificial love, and a goal in life, but does not believe that the blood shedding saves us. One thinks of Jesus in connection with at-one-ment, but not in any traditional understanding of redemption and atonement. None of the interviewees, maybe except for the one mentioned above who sees Jesus as redeemer, think that we need Jesus to atone for our sins. One says that God does not forgive us because Christ died, but because it is the nature of God. Most of the others do not emphasize God forgiving our sins. The one that leans in the direction of seeing Jesus as one who atone for our sins, thinks that Jesus saved the world in a spiritual sense.

Many of the interviewees do not believe in the miracles in the Bible, or even the resurrection, except for the healing stories. Not everyone talked about this issue in detail, but those who did had this opinion, and the general impression is that most of the others would think about the same.

7.3.3 Creation Spirituality

Six of the interviewees express clearly that Creation Spirituality is important to them. Several emphasize that Creation Spirituality helps them ‘tune into nature’, or something in that direction. One says that he/she does not really know what it is. One says that even though he/she believes we are original blessings, he/she will not go as

far in the direction of Creation Spirituality as the pastors, because he/she thinks it does not take sin/evil seriously enough.

7.3.4 Elements from other faith traditions.

None of the interviewees think that elements from other faith traditions that are used in the service, do not belong there. However, not all of them 'get something out of it'. The ones saying they really like the elements from other faith traditions, are by and large the same as those who say that Creation Spirituality is important to them. One person thinks that some of the elements from other faith traditions "are pretty moving, but feels too 'new agy,' it just isn't quite me." Another one says "I tolerate it. It's good if someone get something out of it, but I don't. It's not that it doesn't belong here." One says he/she "identifies less with some of the earth-based stuff."

7.3.5 Theology and the typology

In reflecting on theology and the typology, I try to see if it is possible to place the different theological opinions within one (or two) of the different type of Trinity members presented above. In this way it will be possible to outline somewhat of a pattern of how the different views are distributed in the congregation. I will use the interview material as a basis here, but also my general experience of the Trinity members and numerous informal conversations with other members influence the way I think here.

The new agy, a little loosy-goosy type member

This group is probably the most likely one to question whether God exists at all, and the least likely one to have a male, old-guy-with-a-beard-on-the-throne kind of picture of God. Their view of Jesus is somewhat vague, yet they see him as an important teacher and example. Interestingly enough, some of the members who to a large extent fit in this category, voiced most clearly that they thought that "Jesus has pretty much been bastardized by the right," or "there's a lot that's been built up on the guy over the years." They tend to embrace elements from other faith traditions, and kind of take it for granted. It is not a conflict, they are not 'tickled' (which both the other groups might be) by enjoying something that is considered 'out there' in less progressive

milieus. They also to like Creation Spirituality; the closeness to nature is important. And, I think it is fair to say that this group is probably the most likely one to have a pantheistic view of God. Even though the other groups may voice the same opinion, I think that they often, at least to some extent, combine the new experience of a more pantheistic and ‘inner’ God with an older view of God, closer to the theistic⁶⁷ God they grew up with.

The Progressive Methodist type member

A pretty wide range in the views of God is to be found in this group, from the thought of God being a divine spirit, to a more traditional picture of God. Still, the larger group here will probably tend to think of God as a creating spirit, a presence. However, this view may be one that they have been struggling to obtain. Jesus to the progressive Methodist is likely to be divine, but not the only son of God. I think these members have a wide variety of views on how they would emphasize the importance of Jesus, but I think only a very few would think of Jesus as the world’s saviour (in any understanding of the concept). I think many of the members in this group would see Jesus as someone who embodied God’s love in a way not many have done before or after him; that he was in connection with the ultimate goal in life, the complete connection with God, with self and with others. If there is focus on salvation, it is probably understood as Jesus exemplifying what can make our world a better place or something in that direction. Many of the progressive Methodists like Creation Spirituality, mainly because it provides a way of understanding God that they experience is strongly and in a practical way connected to life. The emphasis on nature and interrelation I think is also important. In my experience, this group has some variation in the extent to which they find the elements from other faith traditions to be meaningful. They have some respect and appreciation for elements from other faith traditions, and I would assume that well over half of the people in this group really like and find it very meaningful and important to draw on other faith traditions.

⁶⁷ A theistic God can loosely be understood as a God “out there”, that is not within, a God that is separate and something different from humans/creation, a God of authority.

The traditional-yet-progressive type member

This group is by and large the group with the most theistic view of God, even though it is relative, and theistic is hardly how anyone would describe their view of God/the transcendent. Jesus, to this group, seems to have kept more of the traditional role of being a redeemer, or one who atones for our sins. This group is also where one will find the most emphasis on Jesus as if not *the* son of God, than at least Jesus as *a* son of God or a special revelation of God. This group tends to appreciate many of the ideas of Creation Spirituality, but I think that many of them feel it is a little too different and strange. Similar to their approach to Creation Spirituality, the Traditional-yet-progressive type Trinity member has a somewhat hard time connecting to spiritual practices from other traditions. There are exceptions, and I am thinking that it may have to do with in what way they broke with their conservative background. It is hard to find a pattern here though; it just seems to be a tendency that people with a very conservative background are less into the elements from other faith traditions.

7.4 Ethical issues

The one ethical issue that sticks out as being something with which everyone is concerned, is social justice related issues. Among these issues are poverty, racism, GLBT⁶⁸/equality, and environmental issues. Three emphasize honesty and living in love.

Social justice issues include many of the other things that are mentioned as ethical concerns and functions like an umbrella for issues like poverty, racism and GLBT/equality. These issues are the ones on which Trinity is ‘big.’ Some emphasize that one of the reasons they came to and still are at Trinity is because Trinity focuses on issues that are important to them.

Ethical issues and the typology

It is hard to make a distinction and differentiate what ethical issues are the most or the least important to the different types of Trinity members. There seems to be a large consensus in thinking that social justice issues are important. Other than that issue, I

⁶⁸ GLBT means Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered

think it is more ‘person-to-person’ differences, when it comes to more specific issues that are important. For instance, gay/lesbians will tend to put emphasis on the GLBT issues. Someone working as a social worker will be acutely aware of issues about racism and poverty. Someone who has been betrayed or lied to will put emphasis on honesty. Someone spending a lot of time out in nature will be very aware of ecological issues. Someone working in poor areas may be concerned with domestic politics and taxation.

7.5 Why do they go to Trinity?

Identity as members of Trinity, counter cultural, socially and spiritually. Do they think of themselves as ‘typical’ Trinity members? View of the larger structure, the United Methodist Church.

7.5.1 Why do they go to Trinity?

One of the interviewees was clear in that he/she is there because he/she feels Trinity is spiritually fulfilling, and he/she can be him/herself, also in the sense that what he/she can contribute with is really valued. To one person it is very important that he/she is being shared with, not preached to. Also, he/she feels that the slogan ‘where you can be you’ really hits home. Yet another one says that the community aspect is very important, the aspect of a *spiritual* community. One emphasized the support he/she feels from the community. Some of the interviewees emphasize that Trinity has focus on ethical and social issues that are important to them, and that they probably would not be there if this focus was not there.

I perceived a pretty large consensus about why people go to Trinity. Most important is the community aspect, the openness, and the focus on everyone’s right to be themselves.

7.5.2 Counter-cultural?

All my interviewees say they feel they are a part of something counter-cultural by going to Trinity. But, one says he/she does not think about it much. One says with amazement “like when they were putting out for the congregation the idea of teaming

with a Buddhist community and a mosque, and it was accepted!” (*i.e.*, *that* is counter cultural!).

Four or five are pretty excited (and express it!) about being able to participate in something that some of them characterize as being cutting edge. (In the excitement I hear frustration, spoken and unspoken, over the war in Iraq, the domestic politics, environmental problems not being taken seriously, poverty not being taken seriously, and the power of the political and religious right.)

Two of the members, and also the pastors, say it is sometimes hard to separate church from politics, even though they all think it is very important (to separate them, that is). One expresses that it is upsetting to him/her when people get too political in the service, typically during the prayer time. He/she says that “this doesn’t lead us to that place where Jesus is.” Sid says that one of his ways of dealing with the political rhetoric is to always be pro-active rather than reactive, that is, working *for* what you believe in rather than *against* what you disagree with. One of the members thinks that Trinity is counter-cultural also in the sense that it explores the boundaries of spirituality.

7.5.3 A typical Trinity member?

Most of my interviewees think they are pretty much a typical Trinitarian. But, they often add something like “as far as I know,” or “at least the people I have talked to more than just a little,” or some other qualifier. This, I think, shows that they have a somewhat close relationship with a relatively limited group of people in the congregation, and that they are aware that there probably are some people in the congregation that they would not get along or agree with.

Two of the interviewees think they are theologically more traditional and conservative than both most Trinity members and the pastors. Two describe themselves as ‘in the middle.’ One expresses that he/she is more traditional in form, but not theologically. Sid says that he has probably moved on from where Trinity is now, that he was where Trinity is now 16 years ago.

7.5.4 Trinity and the UMC.

(For more on the issue of staying with the UMC or not, see chapter 6.8 on ‘typical’ Trinity conflicts/challenges.)

All the ones I interviewed said they thought it was important that Trinity stay within the larger structure of the UMC. One clearly expresses that he/she thinks that the message of Trinity is given a little more traditional legitimacy to a certain audience when it comes from someone inside a larger structure, even though it per se does not *have* more legitimacy. One says he/she thinks it is easier to change the larger structure when on the inside of it. One says “if we leave, they win, we lose.”

7.5.5 Reasons to go to Trinity, Identity, typicality, the UMC, and the typology

Similar to how the ethical issues related to the typology, I do not find a clear pattern in the answers to questions regarding reasons to go to Trinity, typicality, and relations to the UMC, that I can relate to the typology. The answers are ‘all over the place’. I will still point out a few things:

The differences in why they go to Trinity, seems to be more a difference in emphasis. Whereas some emphasize spiritual fulfilment, others emphasize that they can be themselves. Still, they both would probably mention the other. And, I do not find a pattern that is connected to the typology here. The issue of Trinity being counter cultural released a cascade of excitement. It seems though, that those that are the least concerned with it, are the ones in the loopy-goopy, new agy group. They seem to think of it more as being normal, or a given.

On the question of being or not being a typical Trinity member, the traditional-yet-progressive were the ones who thought they were the most different, in that they thought they were more traditional as far as theology went. Which is true, they are more traditional, but they are not the smallest group; I have estimated this group to be about 30% of the congregation (see subchapter 7.1). Other than the traditional-yet-progressives, most of the other ones seem to think they are typical, or “somewhere in

the middle” as many of them put it. There is an exception for pastor Sid, who thought he had ‘moved on’ from where Trinity is now⁶⁹.

7.6 Trinity being a reconciling congregation – is it important?

One says “can we get over this?” and laughs. Meaning that, of course, it is important, but other issues are important too, and according to this person the GLBT issues have been given too much focus, at the expense of other issues. And so, all the interviewees say that being a reconciling congregation is important. However, some say they would not go to Trinity if it was not reconciling, while others say they would not leave the church if it decided not to be reconciling. When talking about the GLBT issue, some interviewees focus on the fact that people are who they are, and that God does not make any exceptions. One interviewee focuses on the inclusiveness, yet another one says he/she has gained consciousness about the issue over time.

Reconciling and the typology

Being a reconciling congregation is clearly most important to those interviewees that have themselves experienced discrimination and alienation, being gay/lesbian/transgendered themselves. And, they are often in the traditional-yet-progressive group. Those who somehow see the GLBT as a problem of the past, are typically in the new agy, loosy-goosy group. Other than that distinction, there is generally a consensus on this issue; it is more a matter of *how* important it is. As mentioned above, some would leave the church if Trinity was no longer a reconciling congregation, some would not. But a majority of my interviewees probably would leave. I think it is a fair assumption that the strait traditional-yet-progressives ones would be the last ones to leave.

7.7 Religious practice

In addition to going to church on Sundays, all the interviewees mention prayer as a part of their religious practice, even though one person initially responded by saying “None! Except for going to Trinity.” Some pray regularly, and at certain times of day, others “talk to God a little,” or “think a little deeper about God now and then.”

⁶⁹ This is very interesting to me, since it seems like he then somehow indicates a form of evolution in spirituality. I will probably get back to and discuss this further in chapter 8, and possibly also 9.

Three say they read some devotional literature every day. None of the interviewees specifically mention reading the Bible as a part of their religious practice. Some mention meditation as a part of their practice, and several say they have taken classes at the Seton Cove, an interfaith spirituality centre with focus on spiritual formation, creative learning, and holistic renewal.⁷⁰ One of the pastors tries to go and worship somewhere else now and then.

Some mention doing art, dance or music as part of their religious practice; or bicycling out in nature; or being part of an organization that tries to get people more involved in the political process; or things they support with their money; or time alone; or just being genuinely present. One says that making a lifestyle out of his/her religion is part of the religious practice.

Religious practice and the typology

The ‘New Agy,’ a little loopy-goopy type member. This group tends to have less structured religious practice than the other groups. Also, when they talk about prayer, they may just say that they “talk to God a little,” or “think a little deeper about God.” They may take classes of various kinds, but just as often, religious practice is connected to nature, or to doing some form of art.

The Progressive Methodist type member. This group is more structured and organized in their religious practice, and it often involves devotional and other spiritual/inspirational literature. Their prayers are often at certain times a day, and their religious practice sometimes involves how they prioritize spending their time and money. Meditation and taking classes are also common in this group.

The Traditional-yet-Progressive type member. This group is ‘all over the place.’ Some are very structures, even rigid, while as others have a religious practice that is happenstance and in spurts. Some art related things can be part of the religious practice in this group, and also inspirational or devotional literature. I think that also in this group, a good half will consider how they spend their time and money as part of their religious practice.

⁷⁰ <http://www.seton.net/Wellness/Spirituality5/SetonCove/index.asp>, read May 23rd 2006

7.8 Feeling rules

In the article that is presented in chapter 4.3, Linda Woodhead talks about feeling rules as a way of distinguish or define a group or congregation, and maintain the distinction between the congregational and the holistic domain. One of the main differences Woodhead finds, is that the congregational domain has a outward directed service with focus on worshipping God up there or out there, while the holistic domain has activities or groups with a distinct inward directed self-searching spiritual work. Along the same lines, the authority in the congregational domain is without (God is authority), while the authority in the holistic domain is within (the individual is authority).

Using or discussing the term ‘feeling rules’ or ‘socio-emotional profile,’ is something I came upon after my first round of interviews. It is, however, very interesting for the discussion in chapter 8, and so when I went back to visit Austin in March 2006, I made four additional interviews, plus an informal one that was not recorded, with this as a subject. Therefore, the material is limited, and I wish I had more interview material on this subject. Still I think it is useful, especially since some of the things the interviewees talked about in the first round of interviews are related, and thus I can link it with and sometimes ‘fill in’ some of the first interviews with these four interviews (five if you count the informal one). It was somewhat difficult to explain and present this subject or aspect of church or the service to the interviewees. What I found worked, was to ask them pretty straight forward about feelings the service actually generated with them. I then asked them if they thought those feelings where the ones the pastors wanted them to be left with after the service. With some of the interviewees, I also used the term ‘socio emotional profile’ and said a little about Linda Woodhead’s article, just to shed some more light on what I talked about and from whence it originated.

7.8.1 Feelings the service generates

Of the people I interviewed about feeling rules, all thought the service generated an inward turning feeling. It generated a feeling of being centred, and in contact with yourself and thus with God, or the Divine.

One person uses several words to describe what feelings the service generates: safety, inspiration, compassion, community love, sharing, comfort, peace, acceptance of being human. He/she also says that the feelings the service generates changes with time, and that the fact that some laughter always arise in the service, is important to him/her. Other people also commented on the importance of humour. One says that in the service he/she feels “the constant drumbeat of God,” the feeling of community, that the service is centring and emotional in a personal way, and that he/she leaves the service feeling happy. “I compare myself with God and where I am that week,” he/she says. One says that the feeling of community is the first and most important thing he/she thinks about when asked what feelings the service generates, but, also centeredness, the inward looking, connecting with yourself and with God; and all this in order to “go out into the world” with it afterwards.

One person thinks that people leave the service with different feelings. He/she is often left with a feeling of renewal, but also a feeling of connection, partially with other people, and with God. He/she feels “more in tune with the world and my own spirituality” coming out of the service. He/she also emphasizes the importance of the feeling of letting go in the service.

7.8.2 Feelings the services are meant to generate.

Two of the people I interviewed about feeling rules, think that the service is meant to generate something else than what they themselves experience or ‘take out of it.’ These two think that the pastors or leadership of the church want to ‘fire us up for social justice,’ directing the message, or at least the result of it, more outwards. One of these two expresses that he/she already has the outward aspect and needs to go inward when going to the service. Another person says that he/she thinks the service is meant to generate what it does generate with him/her.

Sid says that a goal for him, ever since he got out of seminary, is that people leave the service with some sense of hope. Even at a Good Friday service, he does not want people to leave in complete darkness; there must be some ray of hope, of light. He does not want to just comfort though, and believes in what the American theologian Reinhold Niebur says, that he thinks Jesus came “to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.”⁷¹

7.8.3 Feelings that are not tolerated.

One says that he/she thinks that much anger is not tolerated, or wishing harm on others. After thinking a little, he/she says that anger is ok, but not hatred, and not intolerance. One says that absolutism and intolerance is not tolerated at Trinity. One thinks that intolerance and racism is not tolerated

7.8.4 Feeling rules and the typology

I do not have enough interview material here to make more than an educated guess as regards to feeling rules and the typology. In addition to interview material (however limited it is), I will base what I say here on general experience with Trinitarians and also with the services. I think that all the groups will say the feeling or experience of ‘letting go’ is important to them.

The ‘New Agy,’ a little loopy-goopy type member. This group is the one that focuses the most inward, and that will use the word ‘God’ in relation to describing emotions of the service the least.

The Progressive Methodist type member. This group has more focus on the community aspect. They can also think that all the ‘looking in’ and focus on centeredness and connecting with your inner self and with God, is in order to later

⁷¹ What I learned from Sid Hall was that to the best of his knowledge, the quote reportedly is a reinterpretation of an earlier quote by Benjamin Franklin, related to the role of the church in modern society (Niebur was a pacifist during World War II). Franklin's original quote was: "The duty of a good newspaper is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable."

‘look out,’ and be active in, for instance, social justice issues. A meditative aspect of the service also seems to be important among these members.

The Traditional, yet Progressive type member. This group will sometimes use the word renewal to describe their emotions from the service. Connecting with God and with other people also seems to be important to them.

7.9 Conflicts and/or challenges, or “is there anything in or about Trinity that rubs you the wrong way?”⁷²

Three of the interviewees say that the political rhetoric bothers them sometimes. One thinks that Trinity focuses too little on social justice. By this complaint he/she means that more activity must be aimed at the decision-making process rather than just ‘mending the symptoms’ by, for instance, feeding the poor, even though he/she thinks that effort is also very important

One person expresses that it is difficult that the UMC now has in the Book of Discipline that a Methodist pastor can neither be openly gay nor perform same sex unions. Two or three of the interviewees are bugged by the lack of willingness to commit in some people. One says that it is difficult that some people are so ‘out there’, he/she does not like them, and says that “some of them just grate at me a little.” Still this person sees the value of Trinity being open to everyone, and this problem is just part of the package, so to speak. A couple of people express that they wish the church had more money. The same ones, plus at least one more, wish the facilities were better and/or different. Two people think that the early service was better and more earth-based when the service was at The Hancock Recreation Centre⁷³, which lines up, to some extent, with frustrations with the facilities.

⁷² What the pastors at Trinity say about this, is presented in chapter 7.10

⁷³ The early service was for several years held in another building than the church building. This was a recreation centre in the neighbourhood, a beautiful building that fit the early service. Several things led to moving the service back to the church building, among others financial issues, and an unhealthy experience of there being ‘two congregations’, not one.

Conflicts/challenges, and the typology

The ‘New Agy,’ a little loosy-goosy type member. This group seems to be most bothered by the service not being progressive or earth-based enough, and by the political rhetoric. This group also has some dissatisfaction with the facilities.

The Progressive Methodist type member. These members are mainly bothered by people’s lack of willingness to commit and by the condition of the facilities.

The Traditional-yet-Progressive type member. These members seem to think that Trinity is not involved enough in social justice-related issues. There was a surprising lack of dissatisfaction with the facilities in this group.

7.10 The pastors: Identity as pastors, is being a pastor a calling? Conflicts in/with and challenges for Trinity

Susan says that her identity as a pastor at Trinity is very much being a teacher, but also and enabler, comforter, and an administrator.

Susan experiences being a pastor as something she is called to do.

It’s not like God struck me dumb, more a coming to terms with what was the best thing to do with my life. I wanted to do something that made a difference.

Susan finds a few things to be difficult at Trinity. First is the general lack of loyalty and willingness to commit in some of the members. Growing up in church herself, she has a hard time understanding that non-committal attitude. Along with the commitment problem, she has a frustration that many people do not seem to take the financial and administrative part of running a congregation seriously. This issue is a part of a frustration that some people are what Susan describes as “a little too loosy-goosy.” Also, that the congregation seems to be “leaking in so many places for so many different reasons” is a point of frustration for her.

Susan thinks that one of the main challenges for Trinity is to hold Reconciling and Creation Spirituality together. This point of connection is where one of the leaks is.

Sid loves to be the pastor at Trinity. He has some feeling of being the parish priest, and he loves that aspect. His feeling is because Trinity still has some of the neighbourhood feel to it, is engaged in neighbourhood issues, and also because Sid himself lives in the neighbourhood and raised his children there. Sid also feels some guilt for not giving as much as usual to the congregation the past couple of years, after going through a divorce. As mentioned in chapter 7.8.2, Sid wants people to leave the service with some sense of hope. Sid also says:

I don't know why I do what I do. Sometimes when I look back I understand some. What I do here is, you can think of a rock that has different sides to it. What I do every worship service is to hold up the rock and say "look at it from this side!" And maybe some people will get the whole rock thing, and some people will get just one side of it. And, if that helps them struggle and wrestle and find meaning for their life, then we've done what we're supposed to do.

Being a pastor is to **Sid** a calling:

I don't know. I don't know what I'm doing, I've never known what I'm doing. (researcher says "that's brave") What other alternatives do I have? I feel called. I have to do it. But, I don't think it's what I'm doing. I just create the container for it to happen; sometimes in spite of myself. That's really the way it works. I love being up there, it's a perfect job for an extrovert. I get to talk for 20 minutes, nobody interrupts me. For those 20 minutes, I'm performing. I'm narcissistic. This is not real, but life is real. So it's real in the sense we find connection, community and hope, it's a framework for finding these things.

Sid's frustrations with Trinity are somewhat similar to Susan's, in that the loyalty- and commitment level is hard to handle. Tight finances are also difficult. Another major frustration for Sid is the church's facilities. Sid also says that the tendency towards close-minded liberalism is something that bugs him.

The pastors, and the typology. Both Sid and Susan fit in the category of the Progressive Methodist type Trinity member. However, Susan leans in the direction of the Traditional, yet Progressive; she is more traditional in form, but not at all theologically. Sid leans in the direction of the New Agy, a little loopy-goopy, even though he is not the least loopy-goopy when it comes to commitment and loyalty. He

is, however, both theologically and in form very progressive, and leans toward Zen Buddhism in his ideology or philosophy.

Trinity consists of people with a multitude of experiences, views, thoughts and opinions. Having presented the interview material and the interviewees answers as best I can, I will in the next chapter go on to discuss my findings in relation to the theoretical material presented in chapter 4.

8 QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED – IN THE LIGHT OF THEORETICAL MATERIAL

In this chapter I first of all discuss my findings in relation to the theoretical material with which I worked and presented in chapter 4, which is Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas book *The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality*, Jan Olav Henriksen's review of the book, and Woodhead's answer to Henriksen's review. Thus, I answer one of the questions I ask in chapter 1. I look at where and how, in Woodhead and Heelas' terminology of 'subjective-life' spirituality and 'life-as' religion, we can place Trinity; and also how this 'placing' relates to Woodhead and Heelas categories of *congregational domain* (in this domain we usually find, especially in the West, more traditional Christian congregations) and *holistic domain* (more new age/modern spirituality- inspired activities and groups). Working on this analysis, several other questions arise in discussing also with Henriksen's article, and with Woodhead and the approach in her article; thus these are also discussed here, all in sub-chapters 8.1-8.3.

8.1 Where is Trinity in Woodhead and Heelas' terms 'Life-as' religion and 'Subjective-life' spirituality, which they develop in their book *The Spiritual Revolution – why religion is giving way to spirituality*?

Woodhead and Heelas operate with two pairs, or couplings, in their descriptions and definitions of the experience and organization of something spiritual or transcendent or sacred. As mentioned above and outlined in sub-chapter 4.1, where I present Woodhead and Heelas book and theories, these are 'life-as' religion/ 'congregational' domain and 'subjective-life' spirituality/ 'holistic' domain. I have chosen to organize them in a table, to see the possible or impossible connections between the two:

Life-as Religion	Subjective-life Spirituality
Congregational domain	Holistic domain

In their book Woodhead and Heelas present these two pairs as being combined in only one way, and that is the way it looks in the table: ‘life-as’ religion and ‘congregational’ on one side, and ‘subjective-life’ spirituality and ‘holistic’ on the other. As I have mentioned earlier, Woodhead and Heelas do not find evidence for any contact between the two ‘sides’ in Kendal, and thus conclude by saying that the spiritual revolution takes place only in the ‘holistic’/ ‘subjective-life’ realm, at least in Kendal. In general, I think this is a useful and probably good description of what the religious landscape looks like most places in the West. However, I believe there are exceptions from this rigid pairing/coupling, and I claim that I have found one in Trinity. I also believe that the picture has nuances to it, in that it seems the terms ‘congregational’ and ‘holistic’ domain often refers more to structure and organization than to content and/or theology/ideology, the latter which I experience that the terms ‘subjective-life’ and ‘life-as’ usually address. The ‘domains,’ dealing more with structure, thus seems to be more fluid and less ‘set,’ while as the latter two, ‘subjective-life’ and ‘life-as,’ in addressing the theological and ideological level, are more rigid and set, and less flexible. As mentioned before, I want to challenge Woodhead and Heelas conclusion that there is little or no contact between the congregational and the holistic domain, and doing so is part of the aim of this chapter.

8.1.1 Trinity and ‘life-as’/ ‘subjective-life’

In this sub-chapter I place and define Trinity within the four categories/two pairs presented in the table shown above, in sub-chapter 8.1. I will start with Trinity and the ‘life-as’/ ‘subjective-life’-terms: Without a doubt, with the knowledge and experience

I now have of and with Trinity, I place the congregation as belonging on the 'subjective-life' side, not the 'life-as.' Trinity's focus on the uniqueness of everyone's spiritual path and the validation of it, points to a subjective basis for their understanding of human life and human spirituality. The relative lack of dogma also points in the same direction, namely that what is important, is your own search for your inner self and God, Great Spirit, the Divine, Mother God, or whatever is your preferred name for God. The creation-centered spirituality is very subjective, mystical and non-dogmatic, and is stated as the official Trinity theology⁷⁴.

Trinity's motto is 'where you can be you'. This motto is a very subjective one, and it is not only words. Some people at Trinity are pretty 'out there.' Some are mentally sick; some are just very neurotic; some are substance abusers or are very marked by earlier substance abuse. But, of course, most of the members are pretty normal, at least in the world of progressive Baby-Boomers. But as always, it is all relative. However, some of these people, that are 'not-so-normal,' are not easy to deal with; they require a lot of time and energy. But if the slogan is to be true, they must be able to be part of the congregation as well. And they are.

Now if you were a war-supporting, Bush-loving Republican, I think it might be difficult to be a part of Trinity, especially if you wanted to voice your opinions a lot. You might feel uncomfortable and leave. As have some Trinity members (that are not necessarily Republicans or fit a certain category of theology or politics). But, does that mean that 'you can't be you?'

In reflecting on this, I am thinking: "Is it possible to have a community where each and every individual feel at home?" I think that it is possible to create a community where every member feels cared for, cared about, and respected. But, most groups that function as a community and have something they believe in, necessarily have preferences and somewhat of an agenda. And, with an agenda like Trinity's, which is one representing a minority in several ways, many people will not feel at home. The particular situation at Trinity, being a 'gay church,' has been that people looking for a

⁷⁴ See chapter 6.5.1

gay church come to Trinity because they can be themselves as far as sexual identity goes. But, not all lesbians or gays share the same opinion about other aspects of theology. Thus, some people come to Trinity and after a while discover that several other issues do not resonate with them there. And, they go on to find another gay church, with a more conservative theology. And so, does that mean that ‘you can’t be you’? I cannot really answer this question, more than reflecting on it like I have above. But, I would think that those that do leave the congregation because of theological issues, do not agree with what is so important at Trinity, namely the ‘subjective-life’ approach to life and faith. Maybe they wanted more structure, more answers? As mentioned in sub-chapter 5.7, I wish I had done interviews with several of the church’s former members.

Also, Trinity has strong of focus on community. This focus may be seen as not being subjective. I do, however, not perceive it to be this way. Community is also ‘a biggie’ in most new-age/holistic groups – therefore probably the many groups in this realm. But, Trinity’s focus on social justice issues and that we all are responsible as regards to what goes on around us and in the world might be seen as not subjective. The engagement in neighborhood issues, in gay/lesbian issues, poverty, and racism points away from the individual and out to the world and the people around the individual. Does this disqualify Trinity as being holistic or subjective or belonging in the ‘subjective-life’ realm? As far as I can see, the collective thought does not exclude the subjective focus and freedom. Without some common focus, one can hardly form a community. So, if a common focus of something one thinks of as important can disqualify a group as being one belonging in the realm of ‘subjective-life,’ then no group would be found there. I come back to this issue when discussing Trinity and ‘holistic.’ I also discuss some of the possible indications in Trinity towards more ‘life-as’ elements in sub-chapter 8.1.3. So, thus far, Trinity is on the right side of the table, having been defined as community oriented, with a ‘subjective-life’ approach, in both theology and practice.

8.1.2 Trinity and ‘congregational’/ ‘holistic’

Does Trinity belong in the congregational or the holistic domain?

Holistic: In the Trinity theology, we, meaning humans, are seen as part of something larger, a larger whole, a larger and all encompassing understanding, where what we do influence other things and existences. Trinity theology also has the ‘body-mind-spirit’-concept or aspect, where all these three are important to nurture if we are to be complete, harmonious, and healthy human beings. Trinity’s concerns with environmental issues also seem to be part of the holistic aspect, as do concerns with social justice issues, such as poverty and other forms of discrimination, since, according to Trinity theology, everything around us is in essence also part of us. A yoga class used to be held in the Fellowship Hall on Sunday evenings, which to me pinpointed the holistic attitude and aspect of reality. The yoga class ended, not because of any protests or ideological clashes, but for just practical reasons.

Not holistic: Trinity is, at least that is what I have observed, less holistic in the way it addresses environmental issues/reality at the church/in the congregation. An example can be the kind of food that is served for instance to the kids in the nursery, which is sometimes not so healthy at all. I actually think that more often than not, it is not on the list of what would be called healthy food. Another example is that I do not think Trinity has a good statement or practice of sustainable use of energy in its facilities and activities/programs. I think it is important to note, that it is unlikely that all of the people that go to Trinity have a holistic approach to life. Some of them probably embrace certain parts of what Trinity has to offer, but care less about others.

Congregational: Here, I first address ‘congregational’ as a structural trait, and not one that necessarily carries with it theology or ideology. Woodhead and Heelas define the congregational domain as the domain of the more traditional churches, and seem to connect it relatively strongly with theology. Even though most of the time a connection might be there, I try to separate structure and theology/ideology. I am, however, aware that a traditional congregational structure, often has some implications for especially ideology (at least more than for theology), such as the

community aspect. Now does Trinity have anything left that is congregational? This question really answers itself, but I am making a point of it here, to make sure Trinity is not being defined as being *not* congregational. More of this information can be found in sub-chapters 6.1-6.4 and 6.6. Trinity is organized as a congregation, is a part of the United Methodist Church, and pays two full-time pastors plus several part time employees through pledges and offerings from its members. Trinity's activities take place in a relatively traditional church building. Maybe it should be said that the building may not have looked as traditional as it does, if the congregation had had more money, and maybe that part will be different in the future.

And, so, my conclusion is that Trinity is both holistic and congregational, and the seemingly clear distinctions in the table are starting to blur.

8.1.3 Trinity and Kendal – breaking up the pairs

Trinity seems to be an exception and not an example of the pattern Woodhead and Heelas found in Kendal, England. Before saying more about that issue though, there is the case of how Woodhead and Heelas classify the Unitarian chapel and the Quakers in Kendal in their book *The Spiritual Revolution*. Despite their focus on the member's individual spiritual paths and being described as “going far in authorizing ‘subjective-life,’”⁷⁵ these two groups are placed as belonging in the congregational domain and ‘life-as,’ together with Pentecostals, Anglicans, Evangelical, Catholics and so on. It is a little unclear as to why the authors made that decision, but it seems to be because of some countervailing tendencies in these congregations, with some of the older members having a less ‘open’ and more dogmatic approach to life and God. Another factor was that these groups shared the focus on the humanitarian aspect with the congregations of humanity.⁷⁶ A conversation with Paul Heelas in August 2006 clarified some of my puzzling over this decision. In that it was the strong ‘ought to’-attitude (with the possibility of guilt if the ought to was not followed) that was present in the humanitarian aspect that the Unitarian Chapel and the Quaker community

⁷⁵ Woodhead and Heelas 2005 p 21

⁷⁶ Woodhead and Heelas 2005, pp 21-22

shared with the congregations of humanity.⁷⁷ I am also thinking that part of the reason for placing, especially the Unitarian Chapel, within the congregational domain, may have to do with Unitarian churches often being or feeling somewhat over-intellectual and not so spiritual. The same may be true for the Quakers. Then again, I do not know enough about the Unitarians and the Quakers in Kendal to say too much about it. But to me, it seems that Trinity would be very similar to especially the Unitarian Chapel, and thus Woodhead and Heelas might place Trinity too within ‘life-as’ religion and exclusively the congregational domain. And, this point is where to me, the pairing of ‘congregational’ to ‘life-as’ and ‘holistic’ to ‘subjective-life’ does not hold up. For, even though Trinity is congregational in form, it certainly is holistic in content and practice.

And so, Trinity seems to fit three of the four in the two pairs that Woodhead and Heelas use in their book: ‘congregational,’ ‘holistic,’ ‘life-as’ and ‘subjective-life.’ What it has virtually none of, is ‘life-as.’ But, I think that if you really wanted to bend the definitions, one could say that Trinity has some ‘life-as’-aspect in some variation of ‘life-as world citizens’ – accompanied by some basic responsibility in relation to how you address resources, the environment, how you view and think of other people, and so on (similar to the Quakers and Unitarians in Kendal). However, I do not experience the ‘ought to’ at Trinity. I hear what they think, and maybe I do not hear the ‘ought to’ because I agree with their way of thinking. I experience a respect for people, in that we are where we are on our path in life, and we all contribute the way we can. I do not experience any set answers to how one is to live ones life; how one is to live out ones ‘part in the play’ – that is an individual matter. Maintaining that Trinity really does fit in the ‘subjective-life’ category, the congregation is an exception of what was found in Kendal.

8.1.4 Other combinations in the table?

We have found that in the table, we can combine not just vertically, but also diagonally, between ‘congregational’ and ‘subjective-life.’ But are there yet other combinations? Is it possible to combine ‘life-as’ and ‘holistic?’ It seems an unlikely

⁷⁷ Congregations of Humanity is one of three categories of religion Woodhead and Heelas present as the dominant types of religion in their book *Religion in Modern Times – an interpretive anthology* (2000)

couple, but in her book *Reenchanted Science – Holism in German Culture From Wilhelm 2nd to Hitler* (1999),⁷⁸ American historian of science Anne Harrington poses an interesting example of the National Socialism under Hitler being an ideology based on holistic values, but where the individual/subjective aspect ‘disappears,’ is subsumed in the whole, and the whole being larger than the sum of the parts.⁷⁹ A holistically-oriented *science* became the (at least official) ideological base of the Nazi regime, a holism with focus on order, ‘wholeness,’ and organic structure, ultimately leading to the Holocaust, and described in 1935 by the physician Alfred Böttcher:

The Jewish way of thinking carries, like his blood that came out of chaos, a dissolutive character. For this reason, the Jew is always attempting to split all things, to break them down to their atoms and in this way to make them complicated and so incomprehensible that a healthy person can no longer find his way in the jumble of contradictory theories. Thus does the Jew dissolve the miracle of creation, leaving behind him a pile of rubble, a “chaos” everywhere he penetrates with his corrosive mind. The healthy non-Jew, in contrast, born out of creation, thinks simply, organically, creatively. He unifies, builds up – he thinks in terms of wholes. Briefly summarized, the blood law of the Jew advances: chaos, world revolution, death! And the blood-law of the creative-heroic man advances: the organic worldview, world pacification, life!⁸⁰

The materialism and mechanism of the ‘West’ and the ‘Jewish-international lie’ of scientific objectivity was something to ‘overcome’ and to fight against.⁸¹

Life-as Religion	Subjective-life Spirituality
Congregational domain	Holistic domain

⁷⁸ While discussing the two pairs in the table above on a conference in 2006, Paul Heelas very generously gave me the idea of using Harrington’s book to find further combinations in the spreadsheet.

⁷⁹ Harrington 1999, pp xxiii and xxiv

⁸⁰ Harrington 1999, pp 183-4

⁸¹ Harrington 1999, pp 175-6

The only possibility that has not been explored yet, is the combination of ‘life-as’ and ‘subjective-life.’ Now this combination is probably the only one that is purely ideology or theology. And, it is also the least likely one to combine. For now, I will simply say that these two concepts can not be combined. I base this conclusion on defining ‘life-as’ as placing authority without, and ‘subjective-life’ as placing authority within, human beings. So, in their pure forms, these cannot co-exist.

8.1.5 Trend or exception? The issue of polarization

One thing that may be worth discussing is to what extent Trinity is an exception, or if the spirituality we see at Trinity represents a general trend in the West. And, when it comes to the case of trends in the West, Woodhead and Heelas have concluded that spiritually, a revolution really *is* under way. A conclusion with which I do not argue. Then we can distinguish if Trinity is an exception or is a trend in relation to what happens in what Woodhead and Heelas define as the congregational domain, or here: Christianity.

If we rule out the first kind of exception, but say that Trinity is in tune with what happens on the spiritual arena *in general*, outside of the church/congregational domain, the question is how Trinity relates to what happens within the congregational domain. I think, to at least some extent, one could say that Trinity has taken the consequence of the discrepancy between the hierarchical and patriarchal, dogmatic and theistic Christian heritage on one side and the experiences, questions, and needs of modern⁸² people on the other. Several aspects of a modern world with challenges, such as ecological concerns and AIDS/HIV, that are different than what they were less than a century ago, may need answers that are not necessarily to be found in traditional theology. In that sense, Trinity is adapting to a new time with new needs. Adaption can probably be classified as a trend, if not a common one, in church-milieus. That perspective is one side of it. But then, there is another trend, at least in the U.S.A., where conservative, often more or less charismatic and fundamentalist churches experience growth. In Woodhead and Heelas’ collection of texts *Religion in Modern Times – an Interpretive Anthology* (2000), several authors talk about

⁸² The word ‘modern’ is here used loosely, more indicating what might be called a shift in mentality that has happened since about the middle of the 20th century.

fundamentalism as a reaction to or refuge from modern culture. These authors include sociologists and theologians as Nancy Ammerman, John Voll, Carl F. Hallencreutz, and David Westerlund.⁸³ It seems like people react to change in different ways, some think that the 'old' values and ways are to be protected and preserved, others think that change is natural, and that one needs to think in new ways. And of course, people take different approaches that are somewhere in between. However, I think that it is possible to draw a line somewhere, and maybe that line is where authority shifts from 'something/someone out there,' to 'within.'⁸⁴ These different approaches to life and change can easily polarize and become more visible in times of change and instability, which is the case maybe especially in the U.S. the past years/decades, but also in the West in general. I am here thinking of the ideological changes from the middle of the last century (post-modernity), the development into a consumer culture, wars (especially World War 2 and Vietnam) and more recently, the political challenges presented by terrorism and the way to handle or not handle this threat. This summary is of course a short and brief 'sweep,' just to explain my way of thinking. Assuming the polarization hypothesis has some base in truth, Trinity follows one of the two options that one is likely to find in a time of much change, which is the 'adapting and embracing change-option.' But, even though one can in this way say that Trinity is following a trend, or one out of the two options, Trinity is part of a movement that is still relatively marginal.⁸⁵ And, this movement is not supported by the U.S. government/authorities, at least not at the moment, or more aptly, *especially* not at the moment.

And so, the answer is 'yes' to the 'trend-exception-issue' in that Trinity has chosen one out of at least two possible reactions, options, or trends in addressing change, and a 'no,' in that what Trinity stands for is still so marginal that it sometimes leads to members and pastors of the congregation getting arrested when trying to voice their

⁸³ The articles of these authors can be found on pp 49-53 in *Religion in Modern Times (2000)*

⁸⁴ Woodhead and Heelas, 2005, p 5-6

⁸⁵ By 'movement' I mean the progressive movement in general (Trinity and the Reconciling movement are good examples), both the part of it with a Christian base or starting point and the part of it that has alternative spirituality as a base. What they have in common is a faith in social justice and an anti-hierarchical/patriarchal base for spirituality and society.

opinions, which is what happened one year at the United Methodist Church's General Conference, thus being somewhat of an exception.

8.2 Discussing with Jan Olav Henriksen

In this sub-chapter, I discuss what seem to emerge like important aspects and questions after working on Henriksen's article (see sub-chapter 4.2). Henriksen uses a good variety of approaches when reviewing *The Spiritual Revolution*, such as systematic theology, sociology of religion, social theory, and social analysis. And thus, at least for me, several questions arise out of his article.

8.2.1 Socialized versus genuine?

I do feel that how Trinity is placed in a table of trend versus exception does effect the way I think of it as a *phenomenon*. And, especially when discussing Trinity in relation to Jan Olav Henriksen's approach to the division between religion and spirituality, or his questioning of the division. For, I do agree with Henriksen in that there is probably not grounds for dividing the two spheres, religion and spirituality, as sharply as is indicated in *The Spiritual Revolution*. As mentioned, what I see as Henriksen's main claim, is that what in Woodhead and Heelas terminology is defined as 'subjective-life,' is not near as subjective as one might think. And, along the same line, this kind of spirituality (new age/NRM inspired spiritualities) is also something people are socialized into – 'subjective-life' does not originate in the subject.⁸⁶ I could not agree more! But, then I experience some strange twist in moving from this view of socialization to saying that the difference between traditional Christianity and more modern spirituality is not as great as it seems. Henriksen claims, as mentioned earlier, that theology does not serve any other purpose than to interpret human life and experience. This postulate is his stated program.⁸⁷ What I experience as a problem, is that this view is not how 'people' experience the church or Christianity to be. When they comment upon Christianity in its local form in their book *Tro i Sør (Faith in the south)*, Pål Repstad and Jan Olav Henriksen find that people (most of which are members in the Church of Norway) emphasize not the religious content per se, but

⁸⁶ Henriksen, 2005, in *Tidskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 77

⁸⁷ Henriksen, 2005, in *Tidskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 81

rather questions of lifestyle and authority.⁸⁸ Also, words like tolerance and openness were important. The interviewees in Repstad and Henriksen's book did not have any consciousness about the meaning and use of the sacraments whatsoever⁸⁹, they did not experience the church as helping them interpret life, but as an institution telling them how to conduct life. From my own experience, talking to numerous people in Norway about religion, the church, and Christianity⁹⁰, it seems that people often feel that the church or the people that go there are judging them without knowing anything about them or their lives. The 'ought to-attitude' (concerning what to believe, how to live) still screams pretty loudly in most people's ears, even though things are changing and most people can and do say something nice (often very nice) about a Christian person they know or a Christian minister. So, to me, Henriksen misses the point both when seemingly defending Christianity or the church, and when placing the emphasis mainly on the socialization factor in modern spirituality. To me it seems that the point is that people want to find a way of experiencing and expressing themselves and their spirituality. And, most of them do not find that in the church, but since they have few alternatives, they grab the crumbs they find palatable and digestible, and leave the rest.

To exemplify contact between the congregational and the holistic domain, Henriksen uses the Norwegian situation, with church members attending or participating in holistic activities.⁹¹ This example is probably a good one, but one that, in my view, partly has its energy in the rebellion against the church, or the lack of an alternative that provides some kind of stable community based backdrop for their lives. It is like the church being the parents, and the members stay in it partly because it gives both something to rebel against, and a stability that they can lean on (the way one lean on parents in the process of growing up and then let go when ready). Trinity, however, has a different function than small independent groups that are typical in the holistic

⁸⁸ Repstad and Henriksen, 2005, p 115-116

⁸⁹ Repstad and Henriksen, 2005: 146-147

⁹⁰ People who know I have been active and worked in church-like settings a lot, tend to jump on me when I meet them, wanting to talk about religion, their grandmother who went to church, how they felt there was not any room for fun in church, and so on (especially if they have had a little bit to drink). When talking to people I do not know, I can just tell them that I have studied theology and had a summer job being a minister, and they're going – talking about the same issues as others who talk to me about religion (as above).

⁹¹ Henriksen, 2005, in *Tidsskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 76

arena, in that it stays in the bigger structure of the United Methodist Church in the hope of influence and some change, and gives what it believes in a voice. Trinity is not leaning on the United Methodist Church, neither is it in opposition to all that the United Methodist Church does. Therefore I think Trinity is a better, or if nothing else at least a different, example in showing that there is indeed contact between the congregational domain and the holistic domain, maybe mainly at a structural level, and that the spiritual revolution takes place also within the larger structures of the church.

8.2.2 Phenomenon – and socialized vs. genuine

Now back to Trinity as a phenomenon. Is it just an exception? In that case it may not be so relevant for discussions with Henriksen. But, if it is part of a more deeply rooted trend, then I feel it makes more sense to use the congregation in discussion with Henriksen. And so, in my opinion, Trinity is part of a trend, a trend that is likely to survive well, according to Woodhead and Heelas' Spiritual Revolution Claim. But so far, it is a trend that has a lot to do with geography, and it is a relatively marginal trend. But, it seems to me there is a couple of question that crystallizes after battling with Henriksen's article. Which is: Is there any reason to assume or conclude in such a way as to indicate that the structures around already established Christian churches is a better and more 'valid place' to live out one's spirituality? Is that somehow more 'real' than the approaches found in more modern spirituality and its arenas? As already mentioned, Henriksen's own viewpoint is that theology is supposed to be a help in interpreting life. Is one particular theology then better than another one? Looking at Henriksen's article as a whole, I cannot see that this is his position. However, I experience somewhat of a negative attitude to modern spirituality. Then again, I may have misread Henriksen's article.

Another question is: Is there nothing that can be called subjective or 'real' in the sense that they are genuine, in the human expressions and experiences of spirituality?⁹² The word internalization may be a way into a middle road here. Very simply put, internalization implies that whatever is around a person (buildings, culture, language,

⁹² Henriksen, 2005, in *Tidskrift for kirke, religion og samfunn*, p 77

religion) is being internalized and affects what this person in return expresses or creates. According to the respectively American and German sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, this process is dialectical and continuous.⁹³ Taking this position of internalization, which seem to be somewhere between the positions of viewing religion and spirituality as either mere socialization or as genuine, it is possible to still think that there is some substance with which the external things are being melded. Maybe, and this seems reasonable to me, the internalization process is 'easier' when the external factors are those of modern spirituality – does it somehow mirror something that people experience as authentic and true – or are we just really socialized into the post-modern world more than we are aware of, to the extent that we cannot separate what is what?

Regardless of the answer to that question, the complex reasons for being who we are, can in my opinion not escape the fact that not heeding or being true to ourselves at some basic level, is in the long run unhealthy. A statement that may yet again reveal my own preferences and position, internalized post-modernity personified. Also, this Thesis is really sociology, not systematic theology, even though I give myself some morsels of a normative allowance.

That being said, I do agree with Henriksen that there is a need to distinguish between (or explain) some of the kind of freedom they talked about in the romantic period in the 1800s from what now seems to be a larger cultural shift in this and the second half of the last century. One of the elements or large differences, is the situation for women - the romantic period did not have any real freedom for women, what real freedom was there, was just for men, and maybe a very few radical, wealthy women. Second, what freedom was there, even for men, was in reality just for wealthy men – most people had more than enough surviving, even though the principles of the romantic freedom maybe were not in theory too different from what is to be found in the post-modern era. In the Western world most people are now wealthy enough to spend at least some time and money exploring the world, spirituality, culture, and themselves in ways no other generation has been able to before. Third, an element that

⁹³ Berger and Luckmann 1987, p 79, found in Furseth and Repstad 2006 p 58

may distinguish the post-modern era from the romantic period, is a much looser societal- and family structure, giving room for more individuality – heeding the family honor or tradition is not an important part of the Western culture anymore. One might discuss the ‘chicken-and-egg’ aspect here: It is hard to distinguish what lead to what. It is not even too important, at least not here.

8.3 Feeling rules – discussing with Linda Woodhead

As already mentioned, Linda Woodhead’s article is a reply to Henriksen, but a slightly different kind of reply than mine. Woodhead’s main issue is to maintain the division between the ‘subjective-life’ and ‘life-as’ and to deepen the understanding of the theoretical basis, backdrop, or grounds for the book. She does this by introducing the term ‘feeling rules,’ or ‘socio emotional profile,’ as described earlier, in sub-chapter 4.3. I do experience Woodhead’s distinction as a meaningful one. When talking about patterns of worship, I would like to look at Trinity as compared to the patterns Woodhead found and that she talks about in her article, as a way of placing Trinity in the emotional universe of the sociologist.⁹⁴

In her article in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, Woodhead does not use the expressions ‘congregational’ and ‘holistic’ much, which were much used in *The Spiritual Revolution*. As the title of the article indicates, she is focusing more on the theology, in using the terms ‘holistic spirituality’ and ‘Christianity,’ but as expressed in ‘feeling rules,’ or ‘socio-emotional profile.’ At least that is how I read and understand it. And, I think this approach is a better one, even though Trinity still does not fit any of the categories. But, at least then we can pinpoint it and say that it is actually the Trinity theology that (to a large extent at least) distinguishes it from other congregations, and thus, the division between ‘life-as’ and ‘subjective-life,’ as used in *The Spiritual Revolution*, is maintained. It is just that when it comes to Trinity, that line can be drawn neither between congregational and holistic, nor between Christianity and new-age/ modern spirituality.

⁹⁴ Woodhead, 2006, in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p 51-52

It is interesting to discuss the focus Woodhead finds on ‘wellbeing’ in holistic spirituality. It would be interesting to know in what part of the holistic domain this attribute is most prevalent. For instance, is it more important in the health/therapy-related parts of the domain, or is it as prevalent in the more specifically spirituality-oriented parts such as meditation groups or for instance initiation- or other rituals? However, the word ‘wellbeing’ is not used at Trinity, at least not much, or in a way that I have noticed. It is not really a part of my own vocabulary, and so I think I would have noticed if it was at Trinity.

The reason for ‘wellbeing’ not being focused on at Trinity, may be because of some difference in ideological or structural background, it may be too ‘this-worldly’ to be used in a Christian congregation, even a holistic and ‘subjective-life’ oriented one. Not that this choice would be conscious, but still, the cultural and theological background may play a part here. Then, of course, Trinity uses elements from other faith traditions very consciously and does not see that as a problem. But then, some of the difference between vocabulary and rituals may be that while as rituals are consciously chosen, vocabularies are often developed on a more subconscious level. It could also be that the focus at Trinity really is very different, and that when it comes to this aspect, Trinity does not fit within the definitions of holistic spirituality made by Woodhead in her article.

In my experience, even though Trinity has a strong focus on everyone’s individual life- and spiritual path, Trinity does not have focus just on people ‘feeling good about themselves,’ which may be translated as ‘wellbeing’. There is definitely some mission, some goal.⁹⁵ And, even though ‘wellbeing’ is not an important word, there are other words that are important at Trinity that may point to what aspects of the individual that are given focus there. These words may also indicate similar intentions as ‘wellbeing.’ Such words, that are somehow affirmative of the subject, can be ‘experience,’ ‘authentic,’ ‘healing,’ ‘strength,’ ‘trust’ (in self/life/the universe/God).

⁹⁵ See chapter 6.5.1, and also the interview material.

What I found in my fieldwork was that Trinity is a congregation with a distinct inward directed Sunday service. The theology, with its focus on the individual spiritual path, and the weight given to individual experience, points very clearly inward. Trinity has outward elements in the community aspect and in its focus on social justice issues. Also some hymns from the United Methodist Hymnal are used now and then that really straddles the line of what is in line with what the congregation stands for. But, the God/spirit- related aspects are inner related, with a healing- and a type of encouraging approach. I guess that what has been the pastor Sid's goal all his years as a minister actually is visible, 'feelable' in the service, namely his focus on the people every Sunday leaving the service with some sense of hope. Linda Woodhead says that the main emotions of worship she found in Kendal were an outer directed emotion of love, and inner directed emotions of guilt and sinfulness.⁹⁶ Trinity does not fit this pattern. Mainly because it does not foster the inward directed emotions of guilt and sinfulness. The inward directed emotions are of faith, self-acceptance, love, and hope. Trinity fosters some of the outward directed emotion of love, as something we can receive and as something we can pass on, but not love as something we must somehow accept sinfulness or guilt to 'deserve,' or as something we are obliged to give. Trinity does not have, probably and most importantly, an equation of 'God's love leading to the sacrifice of Jesus leading to our freedom from sin,' which is often the emotional 'logic,' or in Woodhead's word, 'profile,' of a traditional Christian worship service.

In answering questions about feelings generated by the Sunday service, most of the interviewees used words like 'peace,' 'centeredness,' 'love,' 'joy,' and 'community' to describe their emotions (see chapter 7.8.1), and these were feelings that very much went inward (except for the community-feeling that is), affirming the self, connecting to spirituality, to the 'God-seed within.' And so clearly, the interview material as well as observation and experience of the Sunday service are on Woodhead's 'holistic spirituality-side' rather than the Christianity-side.

⁹⁶ Woodhead 2006 in *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, p 51

In this chapter, discussing the theoretical material in relation to the empirical material, I have ended up first desiring to modify Woodhead and Heelas theory, or at least the pairs that seemed too rigid. Then I discuss Henriksen and his review of *The Spiritual Revolution*, which also points to some of the same, that spirituality and religion really are not that far apart. And even though that was part of my point in discussing with Woodhead and Heelas, I do not join forces with Henriksen, since I experience that he does not take neither modern spirituality nor the rigidity of the church he represents/ belongs to sufficiently into account. Thus, I end up with Linda Woodhead's answer to Henriksen, where she defends her stand in keeping the two worlds relatively separate. And, even though I do agree in Woodhead's approach in using the term feeling rules, I still experience that their theory is too tight, and though it may apply in Kendal, there are definitely exceptions, like for instance Trinity.

9 REFLECTIONS ON FINDINGS IN RELATION TO RESEARCH HYPOTHESES. AND REFLECTING ON ‘BRIDGING THE GAP(S)’

It may be time to go back and look at my research hypotheses (chapter 3), and reflect a little on what ‘reality’ looked like as compared to what I thought I would find. It is almost a little disappointing, but so much of what I found out was pretty much as I expected. However, I found things and themes I would not have thought to give weight that ultimately became very important, which may originate in the theoretical basis of my thesis rather than in the congregation itself. In the following I touch on both of these issues, both what was different, and what I experienced as becoming important or more important. In this chapter I also reflect on some of the questions asked in chapter 1, and look at to what extent, and especially *how* Trinity ‘bridges the gap’ between holistic and congregational. The other questions I examine, is if the Spiritual Revolution already has happened at Trinity, and if Trinity possibly is the American exception that Woodhead and Heelas were looking for.

9.1 What was different?

One of the things that struck me early on in my fieldwork was that the educational level among the members of the congregation is even higher than I had thought. Mainly, there was a higher amount of doctorates than I had imagined. I think this fact has some implications for how ‘available’ Trinity and what the congregation stands for is to people. However, which occupations were overrepresented, was like I thought: therapists, health care workers, teachers, academics, and artists. Something I had not considered and was completely unaware of, was the problems the pastors and leaders experience as a lack commitment and/ or loyalty among many of the members. This problem gives the church somewhat of a function of an institution providing services, rather than being a spiritual community, with some carrying more than their load and thus ‘providing services.’ But I had not thought about this problem, and it changes some of the thoughts around the structures around Trinity, and also around holistic communities. It makes me want to know if this is typical for a community with this type of ‘clientele,’ which probably is not too far fetched of an idea. When it comes to theology, Trinity has an even more pronounced and defined mystic, nature-,

and earth-based theology than I first assumed. Trinity is more clearly ‘less traditionally Christian;’ the theology is more clearly defined as not being the traditional Christian one.

9.2 Different emphasis

I expected to find some emphasis on salvation or redemption; or least some version of it. But, as it turned out, and as can be read in chapter 7.2.2, hardly any really gave it any emphasis or were interested in talking much about it. Two of the members touched on it. One did not think sin or evil was taken seriously enough at Trinity (in a theological sense, that “God doesn’t take sin lightly”), the other one thought there was some salvation, but in a spiritual sense. Along the same line, many of the interviewees were not really interested in or thought it important to define and systemize their faith and spiritual experiences. I had expected a clearer sense of theological identity. The identity I thought was there, I found more in relation to social justice, the reconciling movement, and other ethical issues, and to just ‘being different’.

9.3 Does Trinity Bridge the Gap?

Or: Is it true for Trinity that there is little or no contact between the ‘congregational domain’ and the ‘holistic domain?’ As have been shown repeatedly in this thesis (for instance chapter 8.1.3, 8.4 and 8.5), Trinity really does bridge the gap between ‘congregational’ and ‘holistic.’ Several aspects of the gap are being bridged:

The theological gap: Having talked much about Trinity theology earlier (see chapter 6.5), I only summarize here: Trinity has a holistic, mystical, earth-based theology based in Christian tradition, embracing and using elements from other traditions in their Sunday services. Ultimate truths are not presented; everyone’s spiritual path is about as sacred as the Lord Herself. But, Trinity is also a congregation within the United Methodist Church and is thus congregational in form and structure of organization. Theologically Trinity, thus, in some ways have crossed the bridge – if Christian theology is to be defined only as what is produced in traditional theology. With a more liberal view of Christian theology, Trinity is just very liberal, and bridges the gap.

The ideological gap: This gap is being bridged in that while still believing in the structure of the church community, with projects to work together on, on loyalty and commitment, Trinity also has a strong leaning in the direction of ‘holistic ideology,’ which is giving direction to what the community is to use its energy on or towards. This can simply be that instead of gathering money for an evangelization project or a missionary project, the congregation goes together on getting money for the booth on the annual Gay Pride Festival in Austin. Or, the offering a given Sunday is for another social justice related cause, or for the Food Pantry that they have at church. Trinity also goes along with or supports more typical holistic ideology, or maybe rather focuses, in that ecological concerns are important. The importance and closeness to nature is also typical in the holistic domain, and also at Trinity. This focus can be called both ideology and theology.

The cultural gap: This gap is a somewhat tricky and complex one, since culture is a lot of things. It is language, it is appearance; it is what themes are given focus and so on. As I reflected on in sub-chapter 6.3, Trinity’s members bear many of the characteristics of someone belonging in the holistic domain when it comes to language, occupation/education, ideals, and so on. Another fact is that there are more women than men at Trinity; but, this is true also for most conventional Christian congregations.

The language among Trinity members is typical for the holistic domain. It is not just the words that are used, but the subject matter that is talked about. It is a fair guess that probably as many as 90% of the congregation is or have been in therapy, most of which will casually mention their therapist or something that happened or was talked about there if you have a longer conversation with them. As mentioned earlier, words like ‘centeredness’ and ‘healing’ are common, as is ‘meditation,’ (both the word and the concept) and also words like ‘natural,’ and ‘authentic.’ Many will also talk about and emphasize it if they have found some special organic store, or a store with an unusual selection, maybe made out of natural materials. Also as mentioned earlier, the political tendency is in a clear liberal direction, which is also a trait of the holistic

domain, and many of the members are very much up to date on what happens on the political arena, as is also typical of the holistic domain.

One of the structural differences is that the holistic domain typically has *practitioners*. Trinity is a congregation, and thus does not operate with practitioners. It is organized as a traditional Methodist congregation. However, one of the occupations that are over-represented at Trinity is therapists. It would have been very interesting to have interviewed all the therapists that go to Trinity, asking if they considered what they do as spiritually significant for themselves, and/or for their patients. But, back to the cultural gap: As mentioned earlier, other occupations are also overrepresented at Trinity, and these occupations are also more typical of the holistic domain. I have earlier mentioned that people at Trinity dress casually, and this is probably also typical of the people in the holistic domain: casually, with more fabric than necessary, and often slightly artistically. This last part would be true for some of the Trinity members, but not too many. Most people dress pretty straight forward, but casual. So, in concluding, I think that culturally too, Trinity bridges the gap between congregational and holistic, again leaning in the direction of being more holistic than congregational.

9.4 Has the spiritual revolution already happened at Trinity?

If Trinity is a micro-cosmos mirroring religion and spirituality in the Western world, then yes, I think one could say that the spiritual revolution has happened at Trinity. And, maybe thinking about Trinity that way is not so far fetched. At Trinity, many of the ideals of the spiritual revolution are ‘up and going’ – they live much of the philosophy or ideals of the spiritual revolution. The individual aspect of the sacred nature of everyone’s spiritual path, the wholeness perspective and our connection to everything that lives, the faith in equality, it all points to Trinity having internalized the spiritual revolution, albeit within a structure that is fairly traditional and congregational (see chapter 6 and 7).

9.5 Is Trinity possibly the exception or the American example for which Woodhead and Heelas are asking/looking in their book *the Spiritual Revolution*?

It does seem that Trinity is the American example of a congregation that has implemented many of the elements that are typical of the spiritual revolution, for which Woodhead and Heelas are asking/looking. Trinity is probably one of a few examples though. Austin, the city where Trinity is and where I used to live, is a small liberal island in the huge Bush-state of Texas. Had Trinity been almost anywhere in Texas than Austin, it would probably stick out like a sore thumb.

So let it be said, that even in the U.S., Trinity is unusual. Many, many churches in the U.S. are somewhat liberal, especially with in the mainline denominations, and the U.S. has a great number of Evangelical and other conservative churches. The South in the U.S. is similar to Norway in that it is the most conservatively Christian and the most religious part of the country. The south is called the Bible-Belt. And so, while the U.S. has quite a few reconciling and or 'holistically bent' congregations, most of them are on the east coast and the on the west coast, in particular in California when it comes to the west. Even though there are quite a few congregations like Trinity in the U.S., they are relatively few, when looking at how many churches there actually are. Some that have many similarities to Trinity are not connected to a larger structure like the United Methodist Church, but are separate enclaves that are not concerned with influencing and remaining a part of a larger structure.

But, back to the question of whether Trinity is the American example for which Woodhead and Heelas were looking. I do think Trinity is this example, and I also know of a few more congregations that are similar to Trinity, and that would also function as good examples of churches that are bridging some of the gap between holistic and congregational. One of them is St. Frances in the Foothills in Tucson, Arizona.⁹⁷ But, I do not think there are all that many.

⁹⁷ See <http://www.stfrancisumc.org/>

9.6 Trinity and the future, my thoughts

Being a member of Trinity, it is hard not to have any thoughts about what will and may happen to Trinity in the future. And even though it may not really fit in any of the chapters in this thesis, I will say something about it here: Trinity is a congregation in change, which will, sometime within the next ten years, go through some kind of transformation. Right now it is somewhere in the middle, and as pastor Susan said, “We’re leaking in so many ways for so many different reasons.” It seems to me that part of the reason for this ‘leaking’ or ‘draft’, is that Trinity has not been willing to define itself clearly. Now one could say this lack of definition is exactly what Trinity’s strength is, and maybe it is so, but then the congregation may have to live with being somewhat of a transit church or a refugee camp.

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Interview guide

Themes to talk about:

- Why they are a part of Trinity – what brought them there? Maybe the concrete story of how they happened upon Trinity?
- More on what they find and experience there as compared to other churches they have been to before, also what they don't find at Trinity
- Social, racial and religious background. Their own and their parent's occupation. What kind of, widely understood, tradition are they a part of?
- Sexual orientation/gender identity. Thoughts on this in connection with the congregation as such. How important is it that Trinity is a reconciling congregation?
- Thoughts on ethics. Start wide, narrow in? Do they think their thoughts are unusual or mainstream in the Trinity world?
- Thoughts on dogmatic themes, start wide (creation, creation spirituality, images of God, heaven/hell), then into
- Redemption/atonement
- More specific: What do they find redemptive? In what way, if any, do they think of Jesus as the redeemer? What is being redeemed? What and who is Jesus? What does he represent? How important is this to them?
- Confront with Anselmian and Christus Victor themes and see what their reflections on these are. (If the situation permits it, if the interviewee is at ease and in good humour, and not least, has any notion of the concepts)
- What do they think is the most common way to think about these things in the congregation?
- How about Buddhist and Native American elements in the service (mainly if they attend the morning service)?
- Do they have previous experience with elements like these, or other types of religious/spiritual practice, for instance from when they went to college?
- What kind of things do they find problematic at Trinity? Do they for instance experience conflicts with what they learned in childhood or in other churches? If so, how do they handle that? What strategies do they come up with?
- For those who have diverted sharply from what they grew up with, did this break happen before or after they started going to Trinity?

- Do they (as members of Trinity) have an identity of being different, counter culture or part of something that matters? Do they think of Trinity as being distinctly and counter culture? (Be careful in asking these questions, don't 'put words in their mouths'!)
- How do they practice their religion?
- Is there anything about Trinity that 'rubs you the wrong way'?

In-case-there-is-little-response-questions:

- How would you describe a regular Wednesday Night Alive? What about is it you like? Or dislike?
- What do you think about the service you attend? Any reflections on why you choose the 9am or the 11am service?

Additional for the pastors:

- Motivation for working at Trinity
- Identity as pastors at Trinity – different than other pastor-jobs, in other churches?
- Where have you been before?
- Preaching about redemption and atonement – any 'sleeping dogmas' here?
- What, if any, is the connection between redemption and reconciling?
- What do they think of as their main job, task and goal being pastors at Trinity?
- Job or 'calling'? Or both? For Sid: Why are you still here? Why haven't they moved you to somewhere else?
- Their thoughts about the congregation, what do they think people find there that they don't find other places? What kind of people do they think seek out Trinity?
- What are the particular challenges for Trinity? Also: As compared to for other congregations?
- What is the worst thing about Trinity? And the best?

Interview guide – feeling rules

- What kind of feelings does the service generate in you?
- What kind of emotions do you think the service is *trying* to create? What are you supposed to be left with, so to speak, after the service? What about the classes? What are you supposed to be left with there?
- Is it inner- or outer directed? Explain
- What feelings or experiences are not encouraged, or not accepted, if any? Are there any taboos?
- Gender dimension to the feeling rules?
- Does it feel different/ is it different at Trinity than what you have experienced before, other places? If that is the case, in what way?