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**Gareth Breen**

**THE MINGLED SPIRIT OF THE  
BLENDED BODIES:  
NON-DUALISM AND “THE CHURCH IN  
NOTTINGHAM”**

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UCL Anthropology  
University College London, 14 Taviton Street, London WC1H 0BW

**The Mingled Spirit of the Blended Bodies:  
Non-Dualism and “the Church in Nottingham”**

**Gareth Breen**

**Supervised by Rebecca Empson**

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**Abstract:** In this dissertation I analyse the practices of a group of Christians living in Nottingham who cosmologically and pragmatically tie themselves in with an expanding worldwide Christian Group. I present their “vision” of the Body of Christ as a tangible, analysable reality. I argue that this socio-conceptual reality affords a “nondualistic” (Evens 2008) transfiguration of self and I explore the cosmological and practical contexts through which this transfiguration takes place, showing specifically how it is “imprisoned in [particular types of] action” (Evans-Pritchard 1937:82 in Evens 1982:384). I use my analysis to critique recent moves within the anthropology of Christianity which reduce Christian lives to overcoming the dualistic paradoxes of a “virtual” (Bialecki 2012) or a-contextual (Engelke 2010) research object. I reconsider “the embodiment paradigm” (Csordas 1990; Vilaça 2006) in light of “the Body” of which my informants enter into and become. Lastly, I attempt a modest nondualistic transfiguration of the recursive anthropological self (Holbraad 2012) in light of my ethnography. By comparing the praxis of my informants with recursive analysis I highlight the inescapability of self-sameness when anthropologically engaging with otherness and suggest using “evocation” not as a tool of representation per se but in order to “capture” more otherness for the on-going recursive transformation of the analytical self.

## *Introduction*

### **Mingled Spirit, Blended Body.**

Over his life-time, the Chinese Christian writer Witness Lee (1905-1997) produced a colossal 21,219-page exegetical corpus he entitled *Life Study*. A central theme of this work is “the church” as an undivided, “corporate expression” of God through the prism of humanity. Both in terms of Lee’s rhetorical emphasis, and in terms of the cosmological unfolding of the “divine plan” that he sketches out, the church is presented primarily as “the Body of Christ”, and secondarily as “the Bride of Christ”<sup>1</sup>. Importantly, the corporality of Lee’s work extends far beyond its textual confines: from the mid-twentieth century onward there has been a gradual, transnational aggregation of Christians who take Lee’s work seriously, referring to themselves as *the* “recovered” Body of Christ (localchurch.cc). By their own admission, my informants, living in Nottingham, England, are “growing” as, *and* “building”, this tangible, *Christian*, corporate “reality”, grounding their practice in “God’s plan” as inscribed within the pages of Lee’s books.

I begin my dissertation in this rather dense way strategically. This worldwide group are referred to by sociological and Christian researchers as “The Local Churches” (e.g. Hanegraaff 2009; Richardson 1998; see Appendix 2). They have been variously described as, as “fundamentalist” (Melton 1985); a “mystical version” of Christianity; as having a

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<sup>1</sup> All my quotations of Lee are taken from the website ministrybooks.org: which has a database of all Lee’s works. It has a search engine by which one can find where and how many times Lee wrote said a particular phrase. For example there were over 10,000 counts for “the Body”, over 400 for “corporate expression”; over 5,000 for “bride of Christ”, and over 200 for “counterpart of God”. Aside from the fact that none of the online works have page numbers, I quote Lee so many times in this dissertation that to reference each time would make the presentation excessively cumbersome.

“distinctly Chinese approach” to Christianity (Hanegraff 2009); and even as being “rather square” (Goetchius 1985). While these descriptions are no doubt accurate within certain analytical frames, my theoretical intention is not to categorise but, firstly, to *describe* Local Church (LC<sup>2</sup>) practice primarily *as the practitioners themselves understand it*. I then aim to rearticulate pre-existing analytical frames within anthropology using my “ethnology” (Descola 2005) of this described indigenous practice. Having opened my dissertation thesis by introducing my ethnographic description, I now introduce my central ethnological thesis: namely, that the onto-practical (Scott 2007:18) movement between being the “corporate expression” of God and only secondarily becoming the distinct “counterpart of God”, in these Christians lives, is fundamentally “nondualistic” (*sensu* Evens 2008).

In contrast to the “intergrative” (Handelman 2008) logic often attributed to Judeo-Christian cosmology (cf. Cannell 2006), which presents a ruptured duoverse of humanity and divinity to be mediated (Engelke 2007), dialogically connected (Csordas 1997) or hybridised (cf. Scott 2007), for my informants it is through participation in the dynamic Otherness of “the Body” (*qua* God) that their selfhood (*qua* humanity) is potentiated. Here the Christian life revolves cosmo-ontologically, not around the hope (Kiyazaki 2006) of unmediated contact with a transcendental divinity but, around God’s enjoyment of Himself through the medium of humanity. What makes this conception of the relation between God and humanity particularly anthropologically describable is that God is not primarily conceived of as an absence to be paradoxically presented (cf. Csordas 2004; Engelke 2007; Bialecki 2009), but an incarnated, living, socio-conceptual (but ambiguous) whole to be experienced through specific heterogeneous modalities. Where this “Body” is a tangible cosmos unto itself, I

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term LC, despite the possible detriment to my argument for clarity’s sake.

analyse the content of Lee's theophany not as a set of disembodied, cosmo-theological concepts but as imbricated within a distributed "logocosmy" (Holbraad 2010:78). Rather than being a Christian logic of "the" cosmos, here, the latter is the variegated Logos of a *Christian*, bodily cosmos, which is circumscribed by the particular LC practices I contextualise within my informants' lives.

LC participation *in* "the Body" (*qua* the Other) is phenomenologically prior to the creation of self as a reflexive positionality in relation to the Body. It is the specific ontological discontinuity, between this nondualistic holism (*sensu* Dumont 1985) and the conceptual dualism that my informants cosmo-ontologically<sup>3</sup> encompass within "the mind", that will be the ethnographic fulcrum around which my critical engagement with anthropology will revolve. In this dissertation, I parallel LC activities "of the mind" with the dualism that anthropologists attribute to Judeo-Christian thought (e.g. Evens 2008; Sahlins 1996; Cannell 2006), and use my ethnological distinction between conceptual dualism and nondualistic holism to critique the "anthropology of Christianity" (chapter one), the "embodiment paradigm" (chapter two), and "recursive anthropology" (conclusion). Now having given the basic theoretical outline of my dissertation, I introduce my informants and the "ethnographic politics" (Blanes 2006:224) of my research.

### ***Fieldwork and Methodology***

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<sup>3</sup> I take this word to infer a logic, of the reality of the Body and of what it is to be in that reality. However given that the reality of the Body and oneself within it are unpredictable and ambiguously related, this is a fundamentally dynamic cosmo-ontologic.

Following Lee's death, different "localities" (as local aggregations of the Body are indigenously termed) have continued to emerge on every continent, referring to themselves as "the church in ..."<sup>4</sup> where the blank is filled with the name of the city that the members<sup>5</sup> meet in. The main informants for my dissertation are a group of around forty Christians who meet together as "the church in Nottingham". They consist mostly of families and students who come from a wide variety of geographical backgrounds; for example, northern England, China, Malaysia, Ghana, South Korea, Germany and Taiwan. While the number regularly meeting in Nottingham has remained roughly constant, at around forty, for the past ten years, during that time many have come and gone, travelling to and from localities scattered throughout the world. These migratory dynamics are fundamental to LC ecclesiality, the most effective intragrational (Handelman 2008) and proselytising force within the Body being emigration.

Pragmatically, the "oneness" (Lee 1997) of the Body is maintained through the on-going circulation of emails, phone-calls, money, (Lee's) books, Bibles and people, between localities. In chapter two I discuss the cosmo-ontological pertinence of these pragmatics and the ways in which the "flows" moving in and out of Nottingham presence the Body as a synesthetic "vision", which affords the self as shifting, reflexive positionality in relation to It. Here however I analyse my own shifting positionality in relation to "the Body" as a heterogeneous socio-conceptual whole.

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<sup>4</sup> This is following the New Testament example (e.g. Acts 13:1).

<sup>5</sup> I use the word "members" ambivalently: despite "membership" being fully against the kind of corporate organicism of the Body, LC members often refer to "the members of the Body" in the sense of limbs.

My research into the LC has consisted primarily in interviews with members meeting, or having met in, Nottingham. Aside from this I have around six years' participatory experience in "the church"<sup>6</sup> with my family, from aged-twelve onwards. During this time, I made friends with church members from many localities, spending considerable time in Poland, America, Spain, Norway and Sweden for example, as well as in most localities in England and Wales. I also consumed much of Witness Lee's writings and transcribed verbal messages. In fact some of my source materials are my own notes I made as an LC member ten or less years ago. However, to the extent that myself-in-the-past is relatively "other" to me now, I do not regard the descriptions that follow as particularly "auto-ethnographical" (cf. Ellis & Bochner 2000). I will explain.

I consider not only LC onto-praxis but my analysis (i.e. *my* onto-praxis) as nondualistic. By onto-praxis I mean the practice of being (*sensu* Heidegger 1962) where this being is afforded by the particular practice in question. By nondualism I mean that while the self-hood of my informants is constituted by the Otherness of "the Body"- as both a way of being and a corporeal, transnational multiplicity (Vilaça 2011:245)-, the (analytical) selfhood I assume in this dissertation ought to be constituted by the otherness of LC practice as I ethnographically present it here (Evens 1996; 2008). To the degree that my analysis reconstitutes (however slightly) the analytical self of anthropology (as utilised contemporarily within the anthropology of Christianity, the embodiment paradigm and recursive anthropology) in relation to the otherness of LC practice, including the practice of my-self-in-the-past, the autonomy of my-self-as-analyst from the latter should be evident. Nevertheless, as described

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<sup>6</sup> "The church" a-chronologically encompasses both the corporeal and affinal aspect of this Christian collectivity referred to in the first paragraph.

below, for the “[ex-]native anthropologist” (Narayan 1993) him/herself, making this distinction in the first place is no easy process.

I left the LC at eighteen years old when I “lost my faith”, as they say. Five years on, my current research has consisted in re-reading Lee’s writing and attending church meetings with fresh eyes. I have conducted semi-structured interviews and researched modalities of church communication, such as blogs, locality sites, and gospel sites, which were never particularly pertinent to my adolescent experience of the group. I have also investigated the relation between “the business side” and “the spiritual side” of the LC through interviewing and reading accounts of ex-members. I found that, while there are certainly institutional opportunities potentiated by participation in “the Body life”, given my analytical method, the lack of financial talk was more important for my research than the “actual” institutional circumstances I struggled to investigate (see appendix 3).

While the above ethnographic and pedestrian immersion form the evidential foundations of this dissertation, a significant part of the writing process has consisted in linguistically and conceptually disentangling myself from my own intuitive understanding of the LC, who have very specific ways of articulating their “vision of the Body”. My early written drafts were cathartic out-flowings of tacit knowledge of LC “ethno-theology” (Scott 2005:101). In them, I un-reflexively enunciated the ecclesiology of the group using the linguistic repertoire of a native. While the biographical diversity of the Church in Nottingham may make any consideration of LC “ontology”- as an underlying “metaphysics of being” (Hallowell 1960:17)- seem far-fetched, my own level of implicit knowledge is hardly rare: many members are/were “church kids” participating in LC affairs several times a week from an

early age. Moreover, as I argue throughout, participation in the Body is an onto-practical creation of self which is *trapped in action*. In parallel, the praxis of ethnographic writing (Clothier 2008) was instrumental in the formation of my analytical self<sup>7</sup>, “the rules of creation [being] immanent to the work rather than being anterior to it” (Rampley 1998:266).

So, while I endorse Bloch’s (1991) argument that the anthropologist’s best analytical weapon is the intuitive understanding s/he builds up through long-term participant observation rather than the explicit “evidence” of statements and quantifications, I also understand that, at least for the “[ex-]native anthropologist”, there are dangers of the over-entanglement between the analytical and quotidian self making one’s discourse intersubjectively communicable to neither other anthropologists (Carrithers 1990:263) nor one’s informants (Engelke 2008:9). The a-contextuality and a-positionality of my “voice” (Blommaert 2005) in my early drafts failed to *actively* link up the separate “webs of meaning” (Geertz 1973:5) of the discipline of anthropology and of the onto-cosmology of LC members, instead dissolving them into each other (i.e. into an unreflexive, solipsistic “subjectivity”). This process taught me something concerning the recent “ontological turn” (Candea 2012) inspired by Viveiros de Castro’s call for the “conceptual self-determination” (2002; Holbraad 2011:16) of the native.

I have argued elsewhere that this analytical move effectively collapses the basic ambiguity and heterogeneous multiplicity of discontinuous<sup>8</sup> indigenous articulation (the *anthropos*) into the continuous speech genre of academic rationalism (the *logos*). Equally however, Viveiros

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<sup>7</sup> So much so that there is a wealth of ex-members online literature and forum groups dedicated to supporting each other in their post-LC lives.

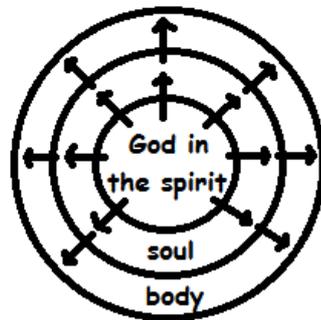
<sup>8</sup> Which conceptual language construes as contradictory (Evens 2008:237).

de Castro champions an anthropology characterized by the “method of controlled equivocation” over “controlled comparison” (2004:3). Most basically, while the latter deals in “synonyms”- words or concepts from different “cultures” that refer to the same thing (i.e. “nature”) differently- the former is interested in “homonyms”- the “same” words or concepts that refer to different things (or “worlds” in Amazonian parlance). Taking on this idea, I suggest that a synonymic false security, symptomatic of the assumption that we understand a word such as “spirit” or “body” because we have heard it in another context, may lead to misrepresentative ethnographic comparison and assimilation. This undoubtedly leads to a total under-appreciation of the imaginative (*sensu* Sneath et al. 2009) capacity of human beings. It is the analytical centrality given to imaginative difference characteristic of “the ontological turn” with which my dissertation is concordant. Nevertheless, as I argue more fully in the final chapter, the nuanced balance between analytical communication and ethnographic evocation is the true “art of anthropology” (Viveiros de Castro 2011).

The density of indigenous terms used already is evocative of the highly specific linguistic (but also material and acoustic) “order of indexicality” (Blommaert 2005:95) employed within this transnational *Christian* collective known indigenously as “the Body”. Basing my analysis upon the “method of controlled equivocation”, I show how the specific linguistic, aesthetic and acoustic repertoires of the LC are intended homonymically rather than synonymically- in relation to inter-denominational “Christianity”, within which the “same” terms are used differently- to point towards and co-create an alternative *Christian* “reality”. I analyse the (self)creation of this “reality” in terms of the indigenous metaphors of “the tree of life”, “a fountain, flowing deep and wide”, and the wall around “the city of God” where the “depth” of the reimagined self and the “width” of the Body it is perpetually becoming are two sides of the same existential (Jackson 2005) search for meaning.

## Chapters Outlined

Witness Lee presents an explanation for the modern “degradation” of “Christianity” which is at least twofold. Firstly, he says, Christians today do not know they have “a human spirit”. The spirit is an entirely separate “organ” to the soul: whereas the latter can only be used to “contact” the “psychological realm”, the spirit (being the “innermost part” of human beings) must be “exercised” in order to be “filled” with God (fig 1). I contextualize this “revelation” within the biographical trajectories that my informants have taken through the denominationalised religio-scape<sup>9</sup> (to appropriate Appadurai (1990)) of “Christianity” into the socio-conceptual “Body”. I focus especially on the autobiographical narrative of one informant, John, which makes clear the kind of existential impact Lee’s biblical exegesis can have. I introduce the notion of nondualism in reference to John and other LC members privileging “life” over “knowledge”. And finally, critically engage with the emergent “anthropology of Christianity” particularly in regard to its potential to analytically “encompass” (Baumann 1995) the endeavours of Christians, like John, synonymically within the orders of indexicality they are attempting to grow “beyond” (Cannell 2006:37) and dig “beneath” (Jonas 2001).



**Fig 1:** This is a picture of the expression of God through the human vessel. Where the spirit (*qua* “organ”) is “enlivened” by entering into the Body, this picture holds true: there is no prior human-divinity separation once this ethno-anthropological reality holds because the Spirit-as-substance within the spirit-as-form is an

<sup>9</sup> This description is analytically parallel to the “fracturing” of the “organic cosmos” depicted as symptomatic of Judeo-Christian cosmology by Handelman (2008).

intrinsically human-divine, “Mingled” Spirit (Pester 1997; see fig. 2). This diagram is copied from the LC’s most widely distributed gospel pamphlet entitled “the mystery of human life” (LSM 1995).

Lee holds that Christians today do not know God’s “desire”, which is to be “expressed” through human being (*qua* both noun and verb). Having shown in the previous chapter that, when “the mind” is emergent from participation in the Body, the space-time of the latter is a fractalization of eternity, I show in chapter two how LC ecclesiality is an embodied becoming, a non-dualistic seeing, touching and hearing God in His Bodily expression. It is secondarily a trans-figuration of self as a member of this Body. I use my ethnological presentation of this kind of embodiment to conclude the chapter by critiquing the “embodiment paradigm” (Csordas 1990; Vilaça 2006) for its potential to analytically eclipse *Christian* praxis as an essentially trans-formative and Other-dependent becoming.

In the final chapter I conclusively circumscribe the relative otherness of LC praxis, firstly by considering the “sameness” (Argyrou 1999) between the latter and “recursive” (Holbraad 2012) anthropological analysis. Both engage with otherness in order to reconstitute the self (be it Christian or analytical) and both use a self-same medium in their framing of otherness: the LC praxis using certain ways of speaking and dressing, recursive anthropology using “the language of concepts” (Evens 2008:xx). The *difference* between the two is that where recursive anthropology aims to engage with otherness and resultantly produces what is (partially) the same, LC practice aims to produce similarity but results always with a celebration of intrinsic, kaleidoscopic difference. I ask whether we can learn from the contrast between these analytical and ethnographic relations between sameness and difference in terms of *newness*. Now I have outlined the guiding structure of my thesis and

presentation, I will begin the next chapter with the more general introduction to the LC I denied the reader at the beginning.

## *Chapter One*

### **Background, Founders and Seekers**

Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide!

*Local Church children's song*

Witness Lee was born in Yantai, Shantung province, China to a third-generation Southern Baptist family. He became a “born-again” Christian aged-nineteen after attending a local rally featuring one of the many itinerant Chinese preachers who sought to inspire grass-root Christian uprisings during the early-twentieth century (Lian 2010:110). In 1925 he joined the Chinese Independent Church and was soon elected a church elder. However, after reading the Christian writings of Watchman Nee (1903-1972) Lee became disillusioned with “Christianity”, coming to see Protestantism as “confused” and “shallow”, and Catholicism as “superstitious” and “heretical” (Lee 1986b). Like Nee, he was especially disappointed with Christian denominationalism, and would emphasise the “ground of *oneness*” as the “proper” Biblical and pragmatic basis for “the church” throughout his life (e.g. Lee 1986a). Remedially, he began meeting with the Benjamin Newton branch of the British Brethren in 1927, who were founded upon the organizational principle of “universal priesthood” (Lee 2005). However Lee was still unsatisfied, later saying of the Brethren that he had “received a great deal of *knowledge* from their teachings, but very little *life*” (Lee 1997:284, my emphasis). It was finally meeting Nee in 1932 that by Lee’s own admission, was the defining moment in his “pathway in the Lord” (Lee 1997).

## *Life and Knowledge*

Lee's writings are exegeses of Nee's basic "revelatory"<sup>10</sup> (Lee 1997) premises. Moreover, the content of these writings are inseparable from the way in which those in the LC understand their own lives and the lives of Nee and Lee. One informant archetypally (*sensu* Eliade 1959) figured Nee as John the Baptist preparing the way for Christ (Lee). He figured Lee's consumption of Nee's writings as his eating of the tree of life (fig. 3). This enabled Lee not only to see the vision of the Body (nondualistically, eating precipitates seeing, as connectivity with otherness precedes separation from it<sup>11</sup>) but also to be cosmo-functionally *grafted into* the tree, which has been nurturing Christian visionaries since apostolic times. In the LC, Lee's "ministry", as an extension of both the arboreal Life of God and of Lee, is firstly recognised as theophanical and secondly as "supremely edible" (Viveiros de Castro 2007:16). The ministry it is often depicted by my informants as the "recovery of eating", and practices of reading and "pray-reading" the Bible are referred to as "eating the Word".

Rather than being a dogmatic assertion, the above is a cosmo-mythical "invention" (Wagner 1981) spoken "from" (Latour 2004:29) the ontological reality of the "Body life" (rather than "about" it). Wagner contrasts the dualistic Western notions of convention and empiricism with Daribi myth-making:

Whereas Westerners confine the bulk of their serious effort within one realm or the other, considering, articulating, and implementing law, theory, and the social order, or testing and describing phenomenal 'nature', myth constructs its understandings across these realms.

The action of myth spends most of its time in a space liminal to them, in what Victor

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<sup>10</sup> Lee saw Nee as an "apostle" (Brook 1996), as do LC members.

<sup>11</sup> "Just taste and [then] see" is a popular phrase and song line in the church in Nottingham.

Turner calls the 'subjunctive mood' of culture; its objects and characters are demiphenomena, woven 'of the light and half-light'" (Wagner 1978:33-34).

Like Daribi myth, reading Lee's ministry and experiencing "the Body" that has been "recovered" through it, which might otherwise be rendered "conventional" and "empirical" respectively, are cosmically continuous with each other. Together they form the "objects and characters" that members weave into the theophanical "action of myth", which in the context of church meetings is not primarily "explanative" but "declarative" (Pester 1997). LC meetings and greetings are full of invocations to "eat the tree of life!", "drink the river of life" and declarations such as "we are one Body!". These are not informative but "nourishing" words which "feed" other members allowing the Body to "grow".

During "sharing" times in weekly and Sunday meetings, these declarations and other idioms of the ministry often frame (Bielo 2007) members' confessional and edifying narratives of their experiences "in the world". The mouths of the Body are a quintessential medium of God's expression and through "sharing" members transform their selves-in-the-world into themselves-as-the-reality-of-the-Body. The "outward" conformism of the LC constitutes then, what Evens might call, "a constraint that constitutes world-making freedom" (2005:50). Where Lee's words are edible (Coleman 2006), this "ontologically productive commensality" (Carroll 2011:25) is not an exercise in *knowledge* but in *life*.

This discursive, existential emphasis on the primacy of life over knowledge is nondualistic: within the cosmo-ontological reality of the Body "knowledge" (self) of the Body is hierarchically encompassed (*sensu* Dumont 1985) within participation in the Life of the Body

(the Other). According to Watchman Nee, the truly “Christian life” is not primarily one of morality, doctrine or following rules: the “*knowledge* of good and evil” was on the wrong paradisiacal tree. Nee attributed these activities to “the mind”, which is a part of “the soul”, along with “the emotion” and “the will” (see fig 1). Without being filled with the divine-human “Mingled Spirit” (fig 2), the soul is valueless or even unreal, as it is autonomous from the “reality” of the Body of God. Moreover, this filling is a deeply pragmatic affair.

James, a Malaysian GP working in Nottingham, made the distinction between “life” and “knowledge” particularly clear to me when, in response to what he saw as my overly-academic appreciation of Lee, he reminded me of *Nee’s* several bouts of serious illness. He emphasised the importance of Nee’s suffering to his “ministry”. Without suffering, he said, “the ministry” is “merely a teaching”. To make a phenomenologically-inclined and necessarily “mind”-based ethnological elucidation: illness is perhaps the most pertinent example of the “intimate alterity” (Csordas 2004) of human being (Evens 2008:262) being an encounter with the otherness of one’s very own body. While I equate life here with the autonomously contingent life of the (sick) individual *body* illustratively, for LC members this “life”, *qua* Otherness, is primarily “the Life of the *Body*” that I describe ethnographically in chapter two.

## Mingled Spirit

**Fig 2:** This is a commonly used symbol on LC blog sites. It re-presents the concept that the spirit which flows around the Body in the “mingled” product of the Spirit of God and the spirit of Man. This is covered in more detail in chapters two and three.

Before proceeding to contextualise the Life of the Body within the lives of my informants, I give some basic cosmogonical background to my discussion so far. In the LC, God is referred to as being “processed” (fig 3). For our purposes what is important is that after becoming the first “Godman”, on resurrection Christ became the human-divine “Mingled Spirit” (fig 2). This release of the “Mingled Spirit” into the world is typified by the water that flowed out of Christ’s pierced side on the cross (Pester 1997:41). The “living stream” of this Spirit is accessible through “exercising one’s spirit [*qua* a “human organ (see fig 1)]”, and through “entering into” the Body around which It flows.

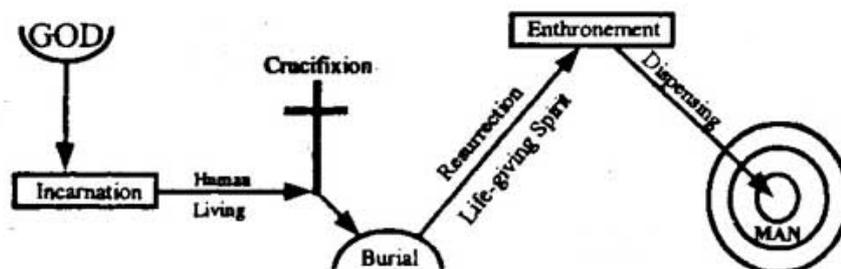
The soul is not valuable as the source of an autonomous attempt to bridge the gulf (cf. Sahlins 1996) between an independent humanity and divinity, but as the prism of the flowing Mingled Spirit which “feeds” and is “expressed” through the Body of Christ<sup>12</sup>. The bodies and souls (including their “knowledge”) of its members are the fabric of this multifaceted expression. For LC members, trying to receive the Spirit through the knowledge of the soul is tantamount to “religion” which dualistically attempts, “from the mind”, to speak *to* or *for*, instead of *from* God. Like Lee, my informants refer to “Christianity” as “degraded” being grounded in the “religious” principle of human “*organization*” and not in the “flow of the divine life” which feeds and breeds the Body as a human-divine “*organism*”.

Christian dissatisfaction with “Christian culture” is increasingly being recorded by ethnographers of Christianity (e.g. Csordas 2007; Bialecki 2009; Bielo 2009). In this chapter I probe the desire for “newness”, “recovery” and “life”, over the “dead weight of tradition”,

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<sup>12</sup> It was his autonomous self-dependence that turned the angel Lucifer into Satan. However, it seemed that Lee recognised autonomy from God as necessary for “getting on” in this world: he named a car-manufacturing business he started used to fund his publications “Daystar”, which is the meaning of “Lucifer” (Lee 1997a).

in the LC to its cosmo-ontological depths. To provide solid ethnographical ground for my ethnological probing, I briefly relate the life of the LC member John, a Liverpudlian building surveyor who spent many years searching for *Christian*<sup>13</sup> satisfaction. I asked him “how did you become a Christian?” and the following is a summary of the autobiographical narrative he related. His first reaction was to answer “I first became a Christian in 1986”<sup>14</sup>. However, John went on to speak for over an hour after that.



“The Mystery of Human Life” [pamphlet] (1998). *Living Stream*

**Fig 3:** This is a depiction of the “processing of the Triune God” featured in the “mystery of human life” pamphlet mentioned above. It labels the seven stages of this process.

He was raised a Roman Catholic along with his sisters by his mother in 1960s Liverpool. He was regularly taken to church services as a child, serving as an altar-boy and playing guitar during “worship”. He stopped attending services in his late-teens however, and while he felt conscientious about this he also felt that there was no way to get any “closer to God” except through joining the clergy. While he did consider this, the idea of “giving [his] life up to the church” was too much and he proceeded to live an unchristian early-adulthood by his own

<sup>13</sup> I italicize Christ to emphasize Christness over Christianity.

<sup>14</sup> Which perhaps suggests the kind of “discontinuity” Joel Robbins argues often characterises the Christian life and should be a focal point of the Anthropology of Christianity, I tackle this later.

admission. The first “born-again Christian” he met was a college associate with by whom he was “impressed” despite his own friends mocking the boy’s enthusiasm.

The next experience he related was meeting a man named Amon on the way to an interview for his first job as a surveyor in 1984. Again he was struck by the “persona” of the man. He remembered especially his reverence for the pope being destroyed as Amon contrasted John Paul II with the Irish politician Ian Paisley, “a genuine Christian”. In 1985 John took up an evening job in a bar where musicians often played and stayed to chat after hours. He became good friends with musician, Ben, and John left his job to “tour” with Ben for six months of the following year.

Ben was a Christian and introduced John to many of his friends, who John said “treated [him] very well”. However, he felt that these people were “on the inside” and had something he did not, finding it difficult to clarify exactly what he meant by this. In 1986 John caught Glandular fever and spent six weeks in hospital, during which time he started to read the Bible. During a phone call with Ben soon afterwards, he admitted to “loving the Lord Jesus” for the first time. He began meeting at a Pentecostal Church, and during this time met his wife-to-be. He described this period as being “wonderful” and “in a different realm”.

However, in 1987 John read Watchman Nee. He conveyed to me the experience of this first reading: “[Nee was] like one who seemed to speak, like, the Word of God Himself”. John was “deeply touched” and realised, “from the first page”, that “God is not pleased with anything but Christ” and moreover that,

God has a plan, to actually wrought; infuse the very element of Christ into all the Christians... And to see that, and to realise that, err, meant that the emphasis on merely the gifts [i.e. glossolalia, prophecy and healing] as it was in, err, the Pentecostal church and movement was a missing, a grave missing of the mark, with regard to God's plan. And one which I could no longer give myself to.

John had seen "something of God's desire", which was not only incompatible with the particular Christian practice he was engaged but with the (contemporary) practice of Christianity itself. He left his church soon after "with no animosity towards anyone", though many of his friends were confused, considering his exceptional enthusiasm, at his sudden departure.

Through Ben, John met "Lindsey" who'd spent his life as a church minister but then, like John, having read Watchman Nee, became dissatisfied with "Christianity" even giving up his "preacher's licence". John spent a period of around twelve years fluctuating between attending Christian churches and "meeting" with Ben, Lindsey and a network of other dissatisfied Christians in each other's houses. In 2001 a friend in this fusing and fissuring network contacted some "brothers" in Anaheim California "representing the Local Churches".

After a tense period, the original group and John, with his own and with one other family, split permanently. John was gradually integrated into the LC (in his words, "the church" or "the Body") through the regular visitations of "brothers" from different localities, who initiated him into the pragmatics of the "Body life". Within a year, John had taken his first

aeroplane flight aged forty-four, to tour America visiting localities; and a Taiwanese and a Ghanaian family had migrated to Nottingham. From then on he and his family have been all over the world: Moscow, New Zealand, Poland, Holland, Turkey and elsewhere regularly visiting and going to “conferences” to be “blended” with LC members. I described this as a kind of vista exploding open after the prolonged isolation of his search and he thought this was very apt.

This vignette conveys a sense of the struggle, thought and choice which may befall a life in ecclesiastical flux (Bielo 2009; Robbins 2004; Bialecki 2009) where dissatisfaction is felt toward being a Christian in Christianity but in which the search for satisfaction is still essentially *Christian*. This existential indeterminacy *may* be analytically attributed to the “late-capitalist age”, a time in which, Appadurai says, “habitus...has to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life worlds that are constantly in ‘flux’” (1996:44). Appadurai analytically divides this flux into “scapes”, and John’s experiences *could* be analysed as the situated encounter with the “religio-scape” of Christianity.

However, I see an important “disjuncture” (Appadurai 1990) between the existential reality depicted by Appadurai and the one conveyed through John’s narrative. The individual Appadurai describes aims to “reinforce” his/her habitus in the face of flux-like difference (i.e. otherness). However this is to make a primary ontological separation between self and other. If God is the “Other” (Csordas 2004; Evens 2008) to the Christian self, John looked to find himself *in* the Other. He did not only move through, toward or against otherness but through the otherness of the people he encountered: he consistently *became other to himself*. This is evident in the way that the otherness of Ben’s friends constituted John as an “outsider”, this

other-designated positionality motivating him to become other to his (current) self; or again, how the Pope became something different to John after his meeting with Amon, reconstituting John-as-a-backsliding-Catholic into John-as-appreciative-of-the-“genuine[ness]”-of-an-Irish-Protestant.

Moreover, Appadurai’s depiction leaves little room for genuine choice: his habitual individual only “chooses” him/herself, which, given that everything self-originating is pre-conceivable, is to make no real choice at all. In contrast, according to my analysis, in John’s life, the self is “a peculiarly human and existential modality of fundamental ambiguity in which the self remains, as a condition of its being, always other to itself” (Evens 2008:xx). Each time the self steps into its other, another other steps in to define its selfhood. Rather than being something that one detachedly resists, otherness constitutes us as human: “by 'getting in one's face', the other virtually 'elects' one...to decide what is owing to the self and what to the other” (Evens 2008:xxi). Here the flux of difference is not opposed to but constitutive of, a definitively dynamic self.

My analytical objection to taking an Appadurian approach is summarized well in Wagner’s words: “every time we make others part of a ‘reality’ that we alone invent, [we deny] their creativity by usurping the right to create” (1979:16). In the next chapter I describe and discuss the LC creation and creativity of the Body as Christ as a “living reality”. The Body is the “vista” that John enters at the end of the vignette, and is ontologically discontinuous from the “Christianity” of his previous life. He does not move to different places within the same ontological reality but into different ontological realities from the “same” place (which is perhaps the world Appadurai describes). “Globalization”, as Appadurai depicts it, is a

particular academic onto-conception (Tsing 2000), and to encompass one's informants within it is to relativize their existence from the outset (Latour 2004:457, footnote 13). If nothing else, such an approach ignores a wealth of ontological creativity (to us, "alterity" (Holbraad 2008)) available for anthropological analysis.

Despite the disjuncture between John's reality and that of Appadurai's habitual self, neither I nor John would deny that we are "thrown" (Heidegger 1962) into a world "others have made" (Tsing 2000:344). LC members cannot present themselves, to a universe of thought (Dumont 1970) where there is only one nature and many cultures (Latour 2005:5), as anything but one interpretation of Christianity among others. That LC members must operate within a world of pre-existing orders of indexicality is an accepted fact of life. For example during a gospel outreach session, I witnessed a person react to an LC member's advance by saying "sorry, I'm not religious", to which the LC member replied "great, well neither am I!" to no avail. For Its members, the Body is a "fountain flowing deep and wide" with the "newness of life". However they must also proselytically operate within an "empire of signs" (Barthes 1983) which semiotically encompasses the Body within the realm of Its cosmological inferior: "religion".

We might take seriously then, in this particular case at least, the classic Christian concept of being *in* but not *of* "this world", *this* world being one saturated (Farnetti 2012) with the spatio-temporal order of indexicality John refers to as "Christianity". LC members refer to themselves as "*nondenominational*", seeing denominationalism as epiphenomenal of an order of being grounded in the autonomous mind, rather than in the "reality" of the Body. This often discursively manifests itself in references to the "deep truths" of "the ministry", as

opposed to the “baby-talk” of Christianity, as one informant put it. On asking Magnus, an Estonian-born Swedish man who has often visited the “saints in Nottingham”, “how did you first come to know and meet with the church?” he contrasted the “real Christians” of the Body with those his mother had met elsewhere:

She contacted the Estonian Church in Stockholm, Swedish missionary church, Swedish state church and various denominations and free groups. Every time she returned home she told us children about how she felt these Christians whom she met in these groups were superficial.

Baumann (1995) has written ethnographically of the phenomenological shallowness of *interdenominational* initiatives, which assume a philosophy of “the Light is one but the lamps are many”. Like multiculturalism, these initiatives relativize the onto-practical truths of social groups, which become only derivations of some generic, conceptual Truth. The practices of individual groups are reduced to ecumenical knowledge *about* those practices, and in fact, Baumann shows, participating groups cosmo-ontologically encompasses other groups as derivations of their own conceptually-irreducible, onto-pragmatic system of truth.

The indeterminate specificity of the “reality” of the Body was conveyed discursively to me by Stefan, a Romanian who has completed the two years of “training” encouraged for LC members and is well-known by the Nottingham Christians. His first experience of the LC was on attending a “young-people’s conference” (see chapter two) in Poland. He said that he “was captured by the vision of the Body, seeing so many young people that love the Lord and enjoy Him together”. Informants often refer to the particular, “wonderful” sight, sound and atmosphere of the Body (of bodies, souls, spirits and the Spirit (see fig 1)) how it captured and continues to rejuvenate them.

The difference between the Body and “the world” was once demonstrated to me analogically using the force of gravity at an LC young-person’s conference I attended. The “speaking brother” warned the conference attendees of the dangers of being “pulled into” the (un)reality of the mind and onto the “wrong tree”. He had an assistant stand on a chair and, where gravity represented the force of the mind (and the empire of “Christianity”, “religion” and “the world” emergent from it), showed that it was easier for the assistant to be pulled down than for him to pull the “speaking brother” up<sup>15</sup>. Entering the Body is to enter a different realm of being: the flows between It and the world must be cut and the flowing Life of the Body be contained (Pedersen & Hojer 2012). Nevertheless, despite the cosmo-ontological, synesthetic particularity of the Body, the threat of knowledge to Life, being a potentiation of the human soul is something every LC member must deal with.

Southwold (1983) has critiqued the scholastic study of Buddhism as ideological. He gives the example of “attaining Nirvana”. While this end to the cycle of rebirth and suffering is academically conceived to be the ultimate goal of any true Buddhist, he describes the ambivalent replies to his questions concerning the attainment of this final state. He suggests that to *desire* Nirvana would be self-defeating given the quintessential role of releasing oneself from desire within the noble truths (1983:63-65). Southwold concludes that the Buddhist writings are not “true Buddhism” as they are commonly conceived to be but rather “Buddhism in Life”, or “village Buddhism, is. In fact, the latter is only turned into paradox through the “language of concepts” and “law of non-contradiction” ruling the written

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<sup>15</sup> This is at the heart of LC ambiguity concerning the “all inclusive Christ” which is also at danger of leaky out of the vessels of the Body which might be infected by the “disease of division” (Lee 1986b). Their gospel outreach could be characterised as “keeping-while-giving” (Weiner 1992).

Buddhist texts. Likewise, Nee's contrast between life and knowledge is manifest ambivalently in practice.

One friend in "the training" excitedly told me about all the "truths" he was discovering through studying Lee's writings, he was especially taken up with Lee's "wicked" book *Christ Versus Religion*. However, he was also worried about how his accumulation of knowledge might be at the expense of his participation in "Life". Lily, an Iranian who went to high school and university in California, has completed "the training" and moved to Nottingham a year or so ago, referred to knowledge as the coat of paint veneering a clay pot, which must be "burnt" into "one's very being" through the "furnace of Life". I suggest that this ambivalence between the knowledge and the Life of the Body is an instance of a wider existential dynamic, *necessary* to the palpitating Life of the Body.

The ambivalent relation between knowledge and Life is existentially continuous with that between "*becoming* God" and *being* the Body of God. LC members often discuss "overcoming". For them, "hell" is existentially replaced with the "outer darkness". This is a period of one thousand years suffered outside of the consummated Body (*qua* Bride) metonymised by the Revelatory image of the "wedding feast" (Rev 19:9<sup>16</sup>). The "overcomers" are those that have enough "oil in their lamps" (i.e. Spirit in their spirit) to enter the feast (as a members of the "matured"-Body-cum-Bride) and to escape this fate of cosmic exclusion. However, the implicit competitiveness of this eschatological trajectory is onto-practically resisted (Savage-Hanford 2012). No-one I have met would even say

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<sup>16</sup> All Biblical references are from the *Recovery Version Bible*.

*categorically* that “brother Lee” himself was an overcomer. By setting up the growth of the Body as the accumulated divine becomings of a collection of individuals, I suggest, the dynamic holism that pumps the cosmo-ontological Life around the Body would be relativized.

In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger writes of the necessity of “theyness” to *Dasein*. Being thrown into the world with others we come to experience being as “being-with-one-another”: we come to exist not on our own terms but in reference to, in respect of, others” (Steiner 1991:89). This invokes in us an existential “averageness” and “alienation” where “everyone is the other and non-one is himself” (ibid:90). As within a Body of overcoming *individuals*,

*Dasein*-with-others transpires in an echo-chamber of incessant, vacant loquacity, of pseudo-communication that knows nothing of its cognates which are, or ought to be, ‘communion and ‘community’ (ibid:93)

However, Heidegger says that the fear and “angst” experienced within this order of “inauthentic” being is necessary in making one aware of ones loss of self and leading one to strive towards “authentic being”. In the case of the LC, this being is “communion” in and with the Life of Body. This Bodily Life is not a transcendent absence “which floats above falling everydayness. Existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon” (Heidegger 1962:224 in Steiner 1991:96). Moreover, this existentially dynamic relation between knowledge and Life is a far cry from the “impossible religion...Christianity” described by Hegel where “the Divine”...is supposed to be present in consciousness only, never in life” (Hegel 1975:301 in Cannell 2006:8), which leads me to my chapter-concluding critique.

### *Christians and Christianity*

On first impression, Magnus' distinction between the "real" and "superficial", and Lee's between "life" and "knowledge", would appear analytically mappable onto the "incommensurable" (Bialecki 2009:116) Christian notions of eternity and temporality, transcendence and immanence, divine absence and human presence, which the anthropology of Christianity, has made the "problems" at the "axes" (Bialecki 2012:312) of its research object (cf. Hann 2007; Bialecki et al. 2007; Bielo 2007; Cannell 2006). However, the analytical difference between my analysis of "the Body" and the anthropology of Christianity will be at the heart of my critique of the latter in the following pages.

Engelke centres his several analyses of the Christian practices of the Zimbabwean sect, "the Masowe apostolics", upon the "problem of presence" (2004a; 2004b; 2007). He describes how these Christians desire a "live and direct" (2004a:76) connection with God but are stuck in the paradoxical situation of presencing the a-contextual, transcendent divine within particular mundane situations. Thus while the Masowe are proudly "the Christians without Bibles", "the Book" being caught up with the particulars (deMartino 2012) of colonialism and "African culture", the prophets themselves, in attempting to "overcome mediation" (Engelke 2010:822), become the "living texts" of mediation. He parallels this dilemma with the mathematical "subtractive ontology" according to which Badiou argues,

Mathematics is; mathematics provides Badiou with a language for describing the general situation of all conceivable situations, regardless of their particular contexts or contents.

Mathematics, we might say, is nothing, and no thing. (Engelke 2010:814).

Unlike “Christianity” as conventionally characterised, which is concerned with “the [divine] One” who can only be such in relation to a logically prior multiplicity, mathematics is truly universal because *Number* as a mathematical principle is utterly transcendent and encompassing of any particular *number*. Accordingly where God is for the Masowe, like mathematics for Badiou, utterly transcendent, Engelke shows that (to appropriate Derrida) it is the impossibility of ever presencing God “that extends the domain and the play of [Masowe religious practice] infinitely” (1978:280 in Bearn 2000:448). The point where my analysis shifts in relation to Engelke’s is in focusing, not upon ontological impossibility, but upon precisely the opposite. I.e. upon the onto-praxis which takes my informants “beyond” (Cannell 2006:38) these problems “of the mind”, where self and other are onto-primordially distinct, into “the reality of the Body”.

Cannell’s (2005) paper “the Christianity of Anthropology” turns her ethnographic description of American Mormons into an anthropological critique of the discipline. She describes the “continuity” between divinity and humanity and the reversibility of time in the Mormon “imagination” (342) according to which over time “Gods begat mortals who became Gods, and they in turn were the progenitors of other worlds, other mortals, and other Gods” (349). In contrast, with its intellectual origins deeply rooted in “orthodox” intellectual Judeo-Christian logic, anthropological analyses of Christians lives (e.g. Bloch 2002) have assumed a radical polarity between not only humanity and divinity, but pre-modernity and modernity, time before and after, and religion and economics. However while, in contrast to Engelke, Cannell celebrates the Mormon cosmological reality of a continuous, though heterogeneous, relation between divinity and humanity, where “spiritual and physical transmission [serve] as...supporting metaphors for each other” (350), she perhaps neglects the possibility of dynamic otherness in life.

Cannell ethnologically replaces a discontinuous ontology with a continuous one without ethnographically allowing for a basic existential ambiguity from which a plurality of “ontologies” (Candea 2008:177) might be potentiated through different onto-praxes (i.e. participations in otherness). This may be due to her research object however and she seems to recognise this fundamental ambiguity on the level of analysis when she asks: “what in any situation is Christianity, and how can one possibly discern its lineaments from that of the surrounding social context in which it lives”. The situational possibility of “Christianity” being more than “one thing” and the impossibility of “discern[ing] its lineaments” without also discerning the lineaments of the analytical self, is the basis of my ethological and anthropological critique.

Bialecki also uses Badiou’s philosophy ethnologically within his description of anxious Californian Christians searching for “divine inbreaking” (2009:118) in their thoughts: “As they explain it, what constitutes “talking to God” is a careful act of self-monitoring, attempting to find strands in one’s own subjectivity that point to an unstated exterior origin” (116). Like Badiou, they search for “a different order entirely than that of the current moral and ontological order” (118). However what is particularly relevant here is the relationship of Other to self. As it is the dualism of these Christians that is the self-perpetuating source of their anxiety: connection with the divine is a secondary onto-logical move, being imagined as the *negative* of the certain lineaments of the (Cartesian) thinking self. Likewise, Engelke’s Masowe are nervous about contact between the self and the Other assuming their Christian selfhood prior to any particular contact. To me this suggests that the “problems”, or paradoxes, of “Christianity” highlighted above are in fact symptomatic of a conceptually dualistic potentiation of particular lines of Judeo-Christian thought.

From the perspective of the Body, Engelke and Bialecki's analytical approaches, or at least the ethnographic realities they ethnologise, never leave the (un)reality, of which the (dualistic) mind is the foundation and according to which self onto-logically precedes other. The Body is an "ontologically alien" (Bialecki 2009:118) reality only from this perspective. I have often heard in the LC injunctive declarations such as "get out of your mind", and we need to be "crazy lovers of the Lord", "crazy speakers" and "dreamers" (often archetypally connected to the biblical figures of king David (who danced in the street) and Joseph, son of Jacob (who dreamt)). These are injunctions to get out of "the realm of the mind"- where paradox and disconnection lies- and into the "realm of the Body". Through these discursive onto-praxes, LC members shift their being from being embedded within an impossibly "extensive" ontology of humanity *and* divinity (Viveiros de Castro 2002) into an "intensive" ontology rooted in the onto-praxical ground of "Mingled" human-divinity (Viveiros de Castro 2009). To analytically encompass the latter in terms of the former (i.e. "Christianity") would miss the ethnographic point.

My analysis so far draws inspiration from Robbins' call for taking "theological, analytical, and discursive" discontinuity of Christian self-reckoning seriously (Robbins 2007:11). I am particularly drawn to Chua's (2012) article which tentatively heeds his call in a discussion of the dis/continuities for Malaysian Christian converts between their Christianity and the "traditional religions" (*adat gawai*) of their still-practicing elders. She argues that the discontinuity here is not primarily in terms of process (as does Engelke 2004; Robbins 2004; Robbins 2007; Cannell 2006) but *positionality*:

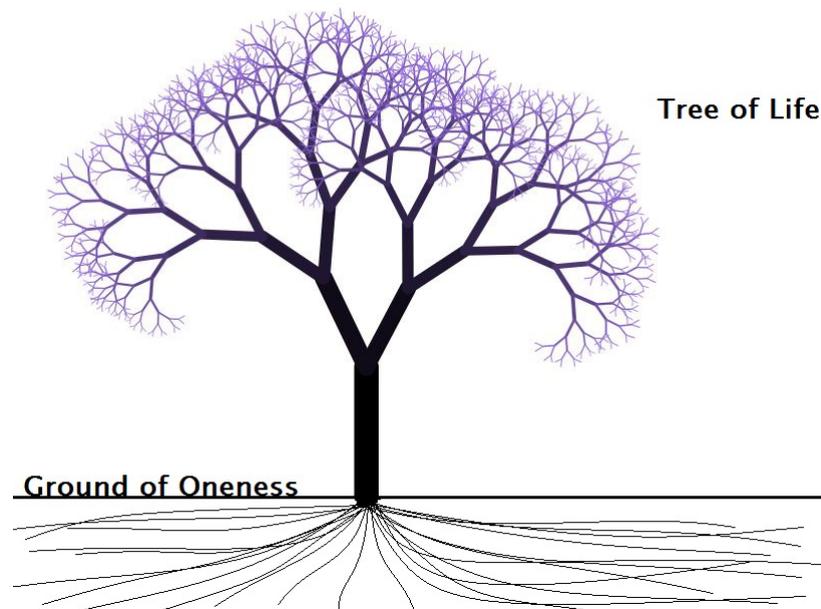
From being "horizontally" responsible to their social peers (including the *adat gawai* spirits), Christian Bidayus now also have to deal with a "vertical" set of relations: with God, on the one hand, and Satan, on the other...[who]...Like *adat*...serve as ideal-types

through which the morality of human behaviour can be gauged. All Christians can do is navigate their way between them. (516)

LC members differentiate between being “in the mind” and “in the spirit”, both as stages in a (daily) process and as irreducibly distinct onto-logical and onto-praxical positionalities: each encompasses the other within its un/reality. However, unlike Biduyah tradition and Christianity, the mind is not equally and oppositely separate from the spirit but is only “real” when onto-praxically enlivened by the Spirit. What is wrong with the human world is not that it is inescapably ruptured from its divine counterpart but that it is engulfed in the stagnant water of its own reflection, as opposed to the “living stream” of Life. The emergent onto-praxical reality from this stream can even be *sketched*, as it is mind-full-of-spiritly envisioned, as a fractal universe in which the members of the Body become Christ by virtue of being fractal relations within His arboreal Body (fig 4).

The sap that flows around this fractal spatio-temporal tree is the Mingled Spirit, which feeds the Body and constitutes the members as “brothers” and “sisters” (sometimes “aunts” and “uncles” too). Like the kinship of the Malays described by Carsten (1996), this cognate reality is created and creative through consubstantiality: shared blood is circulated through “eating” “food” which originates from the same source (the Malay hearth and Christ respectively). Moreover as with the Amazonian *Wari*’ tribe (Vilaça 2011:247), this commensality is *resistance to metamorphosis* into a being autonomous from God. Now having conveyed the reality-creating aspects of LC practice, which are always trapped in action, I proceed to ethnographically evoke this reality as it has been ethnographically

encountered. I further my argument by showing how newness of self is dependent upon pragmatic participation in the Body, from which knowledge is emergent.



**Fig 4:** The roots are the “pathways” of Lee, John and others who enter the realm of the Body. The smallest branches are the individual; the medium sized ones the “localities”. The Tree of Life is the Body as the nondualistic manifestation of spirit as humanity, or rather the Body *is* human space-time *as* the fractalization of divinity. This tree metaphor must be supplemented with the “fountain” metaphor at the beginning of this chapter as the roots are not statically “plugged into” the tree but are constantly moving (upwards) in that direction. The roots sprout from the “the ground of oneness”, having their source in the “same” “constraint” of “Life”.

## *Chapter Two*

### **The Body as Other**

Indeed, that is the charm about Christ, when all is said: he is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into his presence one becomes something.

*Wilde on Christ, De Profundis p.179*

In contrast to the Augustinian “legalistic” tradition of Western theology, for LC members Christians do not become “adopted” children of God (McGrath 2011). Cosmologically, Christ became the substance of Life that gushed out of his Body on the cross, and through being filled with this human-divine substance Christians become his full-blooded children (Phillips et al. 2009). While from the perspective of the mind the cosmos is fractured between absolutes, from the perspective of the spirit the cosmos is a continuous living organism. As is constantly reiterated across LC localities, the Body is not an organisation but an organism which is constantly “kept alive” through the “flow of the Spirit”. Through participation in the Body the members become God “in life and nature” and when attendees at a meeting are not “exercising their spirit”-i.e. participating enthusiastically- they are said to “stop the flow”. Onto-cosmologically, it is through “blending” bodies that the Mingled Spirit flows.

### ***The Body and Nondualistic Holism***

When I asked if she could clarify the notion of “blending”, Lily (from chapter one) referred me to, and explained, Leviticus 2:1-16 where the Israelites’ preparation for a sacrificial meal offering to God is described<sup>17</sup>. Here the component parts are crushed together and then

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<sup>17</sup> It is my understanding that the Old Testament is not really cosmogonical at all for the LC members as its value is solely in being archetypally precursive to the New Testament.

blended into a paste using oil. Where the parts are the dispositional differences between “fellowshipping saints”, these dispositions are not ground away but *into each other through participation*, which potentiates the flow of the Spirit (the oil). While this may seem rather exegetical, Lily gave a pertinent example of this onto-logic in action. She spoke of a “brother” who, whilst “the saints” were reading of the Biblical Persian conquest of Babylon in a weekly meeting she attended, said something like “oh those blooming Iranians”. This split Lily in two: on the one hand she thought about the offence this comment caused her-self-in-her-(Iran-containing)-soul; on the other, she felt the comment potentiates the onto-affective repositioning of her-self-in-the-Body in relation to the commenter (*qua* the Body) and resultantly in relation to this “old [Iranian] self”.

Cyclonically, horizontal participation in God’s Body potentiates the flow of God around the Body, which like the “global flows” discussed by Tsing (2000:349), carves out valleys of selves. The pragmatical contributions to the dynamic Life of the Body are characterised by members as, each bringing their “portion of Christ”. One might envision the Body as a fabricated lampshade in which each member harbours a section of the shining light of Christ. However, having this portion in the first place is worked out through “blending”, which constitutes oneself as a reflexive positionality in relation to the Body. To give a sense of the “blending work” of the “Body life” as an (almost) everyday reality, I now describe the specific modalities of LC practice.

The Nottingham Christians meet around five times a week. Thus “coming into” the LC is often a life-changing event. In the words of Rose, an English house-wife in the church in Nottingham: “I could never have imagined that my life would turn out like this”. As Webb, a

medical student from Hong-Kong who met in Nottingham for around two years before going back, more self-consciously put it:

Even I would consider myself a religious freak, because I do spend lots of time in the church...Monday brother's meeting, Tuesday prayer meeting, Wednesday and Friday home meeting and Lord's day [Sunday communion].

There are also weekly "young people's meetings" and "sisters meetings" with different meetings being held at different households. As well as these local meetings "the saints" often attend international "conferences" and "trainings" in London. In these, a series of "messages" are given over a weekend by various "blended brothers" (those who have "eaten" the most so "see the most", according to Lily) who draw out themes from the Bible made explicit by Lee. Trainings are usually directed at a particular demographic, for example the "college-age training", "middle-age training" and "elders' training".

Those in Nottingham regularly meet up for "blending meetings" with other localities such as "the church in Leeds", "Birmingham" or "Liverpool". "Video trainings" are conducted within localities across the world at around the same time using recorded messages given by church "elders". There are also children's trainings attended by Nottingham adolescents: the "winter school of truth" runs annually for a week in London, as does the "European Young People's Conference" just south of Krakow, in Poland.

The "vision of the Body" is "made real" through the implicit LC linguistic repertoire, the physicality of bodies attending LC events, the musical style of LC hymns and the aesthetics of Witness Lee books. These "tonalities" (Latour 2004:30; Stafford 2009:120) of being are

reiterated through digital media: Lee's whole corpus is available online and many of those in Nottingham use Facebook, blogging, and a LC email service to "stay within the flow" of the Body. Whenever a new "locality" is "raised up" it is celebrated through disseminated promotional videos and emails, and is often referred to as the birth of a "shining lampstand" for the "radiant", Bodily expression of Christ.

When I asked, Lily explicitly referred to "culture" as something to be "dealt with". However, Stefan referred (perhaps a little idealistically) to both his lack of and saturation with "culture" through participation in the Body:

I was born and raised in Romania, but by coming in the church life, I learned to be with other people of other cultures, colours...So I learned to eat all kinds of foods and talk all kinds of languages, adopting more of other people's life style and being more open minded. This kind of resulted in marrying a Chinese sister who lived in Canada for the last part of her life. In many ways you can say that I have no Romanian culture but that I integrate a lot of other cultures into my culture, so that I would be open to eat and hang out with people of other colours and cultures and backgrounds.

Stefan implicitly recognises "culture" as potentially both autonomy from God and the prism through which God is "enlarged", the whole *raison d'être* of God's Being. Losing one's "culture" (like Lily's Iranianness) is like a Deleuzian "forgetting" of "secondary difference" (Deleuze 1994), or "knowledge" in LC terms. However this is only to re-participate in, and become, the intrinsic multiplicity and otherness which forms the fabric of the Body (Deleuze's "primary difference"). Worship (rarely a word used) is ideally loud and excited but controlled. Songs are sung through once and then again along demographic lines organised by "sister-brother" or "young-old" stanza alternations, or even singing in different

languages. Just as there is an explicit recognition linguistic and sexual difference within these meetings, so there is also a recognition of hierarchical difference in the titles of the events and meetings I have listed: “brothers”, “sisters”, “elders”, “young-people”, “children”, locality and season are all celebrated categories of holistic, intra-dependent difference.

I asked Lily whether she was worried about being “blended away” or “losing her identity” through her incorporation into the Body of God. In her answer, she used the metaphor of the wall running around the circumference of the millennial City of God (see Appendix 3). Where the members of the Body are the “living stones” (1 Peter 2:4-5) of this wall, one is what one is by virtue of one’s position within the wall. She assured me that she did not “want God to make a bunch of Christ-robots”. She emphasised that *only she* could occupy her particular place in the wall, not because this was a pre-destined space reserved for her “in heaven” but exactly by virtue of her growth as the Body.

I argue that the logic of the wall-metaphor is not only metaphorical but deeply onto-praxical: according to Lee, the cultivation and growth of the Body must be pursued upon “the ground of Oneness” where each individual acts as a “functioning member” the whole, envisioned Body. The ground of oneness however is also cosmologically, and on my observation existentially, “the ground of locality” ([churchinlondon.org](http://churchinlondon.org)), i.e. members of the Body are themselves only by virtue of where they are. Interpreting this nondualistically I suggest that where self-as-part (humanity) is conceived only in relation to the primary Other-as-whole (divinity) the self is defined by its positionality (fig 4).

### *Embodying the Body*

Csordas' (1997) depiction of "the Bulwark prophecies" makes a key contrast with the embodiment of the Body I have depicted here. The "Bulwark" is a metaphor for the Charismatic Catholic Renewal Movement. Csordas records three prophecies in which the word-image arose. He linguistically deconstructs these prophecies to show that the prophet, as a mouthpiece for the voice of God, speaks omnipresently, referring to the "Bulwark" in past, future and present tenses. However the voice of the prophet is still present in parallel: each prophecy refers to the next, recognising the mundane temporality of the human mouthpieces.

If we read Csordas' depiction in light of his general theory of religion we might see the prophecies as a dialogic (Bielo 2009:225) celebration of the "intimate alterity" of human being (2004). Following Merleau-Ponty, Csordas assumes the body to be both subject and object, however he says that,

"the phenomenologists' error was to make a distinction between the object and the subject of religion when the actual object of religion is objectification itself, the rending apart of subject and object that makes us human and in the same movement bestows on us—or burdens us with—the inevitability of religion" (2004:167).

So according to Csordas, "religion" is the "cultural elaboration" (2004:174) of the structure of own "primordial" (2004:176) becoming. However in considering the Bulwark prophecies as a celebration of human being awareness of itself as both subject (prophet-as-interlocutor-with-God) and object (prophet-as-mouth-piece-of-God) he neglects to engage with the on-going, indeterminate transformation of the prophet as both God and self-in-relation-to-God. Moreover, while his emphasis on the otherness of the self is confluent with my ethnology so

far it leaves little room for analytical innovation. Where our analyses are focused upon a comparativism of (ethnographic) others “culturally elaborat[ing]” on the “structure of [their] existence” (Csordas 2004:172) rather than upon the self-becoming of the analyst him/herself (though see Csordas), both analyst (as an ethnographically absent observer) and informant (as an “inevitable” celebrant of her/his primordial own self-becoming) are frozen in their positionalities and cannot become anything radically new. This will be the topic of my conclusion.

## *Conclusion*

### **Recursive Anthropology, Nondualism and Sameness**

So far I have shown that for LC members “Life”, as action and re-action within the ontological practical reality of the Body, nondualistically precedes “knowledge”. I argued for example that while the self-monitoring of the Vineyard Christians described by Bialecki makes humanity (*qua* self) and divinity (*qua* otherness) primordially separate entities (chapter one), the “blending” of the LC makes otherness logically prior to the self, which is a positionality in relation to it (chapter two). In parallel I have inferred and below conclude that, my analysis has been emergent from the continuous praxis of fieldwork and ethnographic writing.

An anthropology which constructs comparative frames (such as Christianity as a Deleuzian “virtuality” (Bialecki 2012) or religion as the celebration of the otherness of self) prior to ethnographic research assumes a prior distinction between self and other. Where the analyst categorically predetermines the ontological context of the other (for example as a Christian actualising Christianity as a virtuality or elaborating upon the primordial structure of their existence), the other is in a strong sense only an extension of a pre-decided self. In contrast, according to nondualism, the anthropological self is always reconstructed in relation to the otherness of its ethnography. However, so far, I have not made any explicit contrasts between an LC member and the nondualistic anthropologist that would construe them as relatively other in the first place, so here I briefly highlight the differences.

While I have spoken of the Body as Other, it will be evident that this is, from our perspective, a highly circumscribed otherness. I have described the specific modalities within which LC

blending occurs. However, might the same be said of anthropology's relation to otherness? I take the example of "recursive anthropology" (Holbraad 2012). Most basically this approach sets up the fieldwork endeavour as an openness to co-occurrence, contingency and contradiction (Holbraad 2008), in other words otherness. Once fieldwork is over with, it is the job of the anthropologist to "make sense of" (Holbraad 2009:82) the data s/he has collected. According to this approach, the contradictions we come up against are due to the inadequacy of our "conceptual tool kit" (Holbraad 2011). Our analysis should therefore consist of reshaping those tools so that the data does make sense so that, in effect, the resultant analytical self is emergent from the other.

However, this tool kit ultimately uses only "concepts" as its "technology of the [anthropological] imagination" (Sneath et al. 2009). To elucidate, I use Evens' distinction between Abraham and Odysseus: whereas Abraham sets off into the unknown land, Ur, never to return, Odysseus travels to mysterious lands only to eventually return to his home in Ithaca. In one sense the recursive approach, so far, is Abrahamic: otherness sets the terms for the on-going reconceptualization of self. But here also lies the utterly Odyssean aspect of this recursivity, for the voyager never truly departs from her ship. The self never departs from the medium of its becoming: "the language of concepts" (Evens 2008:xx). While the empty ethnographic stage is set, the performers must ultimately dance to the rhythms of non-contradiction.

Like the LC goes, logical primacy is given by the recursive anthropologist to otherness and (analytical) self-hood is only an emergent positionality in relation to it. However, also like the LC this otherness is trapped within a particular kind of action of the self. Just as the recursive

anthropologist must reconceptualise the other in the language of concepts (the self) so the Body is circumscribed within the aesthetics of the LC. What is different however is that while the LC aim to “blend away difference” only to celebrate the intrinsic difference (e.g. age, gender, language) of the God-ordained human condition (somewhat like the anthropologist as characterised by Argyrou (1999; 2002)), recursive anthropologists aim to encounter difference only to encompass it within the medium of the same. Within this difference between approaches to difference I find my concluding question: how can we make anthropological openness to otherness less self-bound?

My answer is perhaps rather simplistic: I suggest that we preserve the foundation of the ethnographic encounter in “basic ambiguity” of its otherness (Evens 2008:294-296). In other words, that we trust the irreducible newness of ethnographic praxis to yield its own analytical “form”, tonality and “content” (Argyrou 1999:31). While the absence of an analytical agenda to this conclusion may suggest an elision of the *disciplinary* aspect of anthropology, it is also an empowerment to the anthropological self, which is not bound to return to the medium its departure but free to otherly-become.

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## Appendix 1: The Local Churches in Images



Witness Lee

<http://contrast2.wordpress.com/2010/09/25/the-false-gospel-of-witness-lee-and-the-living-stream-ministries/>



<http://www.localchurch.cc/churches.asp>

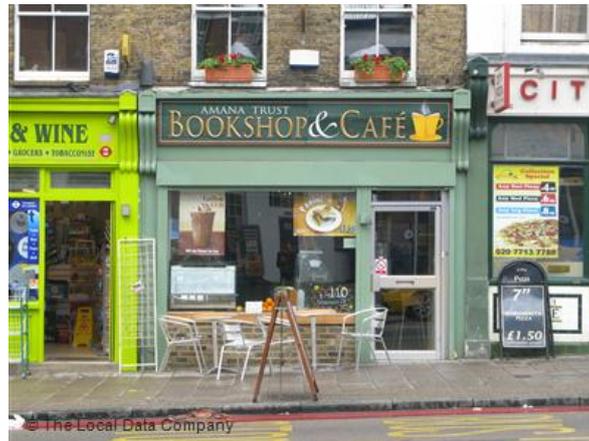
This is a photo of an international blending conference in 2004 on “the Church in Malaysia” website. It is featured, with other photographs like it, under a section entitled “blending the world”.



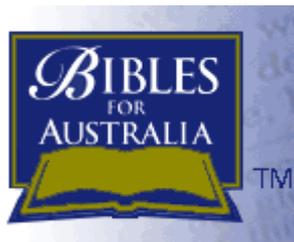
[http://www.oocities.org/emdie\\_oz/underconstruction.ht](http://www.oocities.org/emdie_oz/underconstruction.ht)

The publishing company *Living Stream Ministry* is the sole distributor of Witness Lee’s works. Many LCers in America are multi-millionaires (I have stayed in their mansions) and they sometimes go into joint business ventures to raise money for the church. This material-economic side of the Body undoubtedly “affords” (Gibson 1986) the reality of the Body but the relation is indeterminate (Sneath

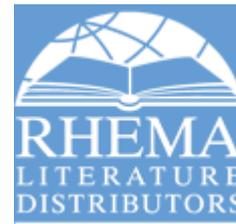
et al. 2009). My informants, and many LCers online, take pains to emphasise that Lee’s publishers (see appendix) are distinct from the church.



Amana trust is a large charity that owns tea shops that sell Witness’ works worldwide. Gospel meetings are often held in these. They also organise and fund many of the conferences and trainings I have referred to. This money comes from donations and from the revenue garnered from Lee’s works. This teashop is on Pentonville Road.



<http://www.biblesforaustralia.org.au/recovery.ht>



<http://www.rhemabooks.org/eng/AboutWhoWeAre>

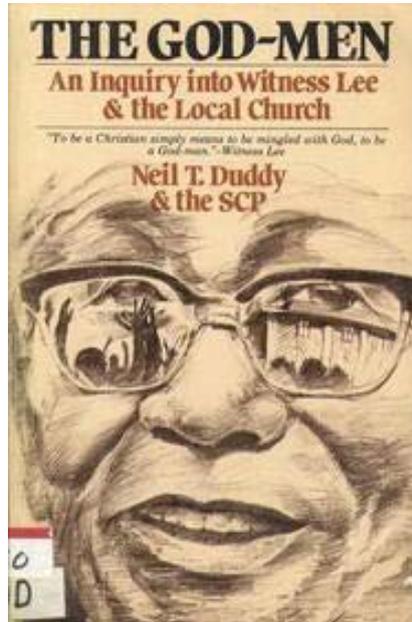
*Bibles For...* and *Rhema* are other charities that fund the distribution of Lee’s works, though the university “campus-” and “gospel-teams”.



<http://www.churchinyorbalinda.org/photos/>

This is the typical format of a weekly meeting, this is a “young-peoples’ meeting in Yorba-Linda, California. Sunday communion is held around a table holding the bread and wine, the chairs are arranged in straight rows and the attire is more formal.

## Appendix 2: The Local Churches in the Christian Media



<http://www.paperbackswap.com/God-Men-Inquiry-Neil-T-Duddy/book/0877848335/>

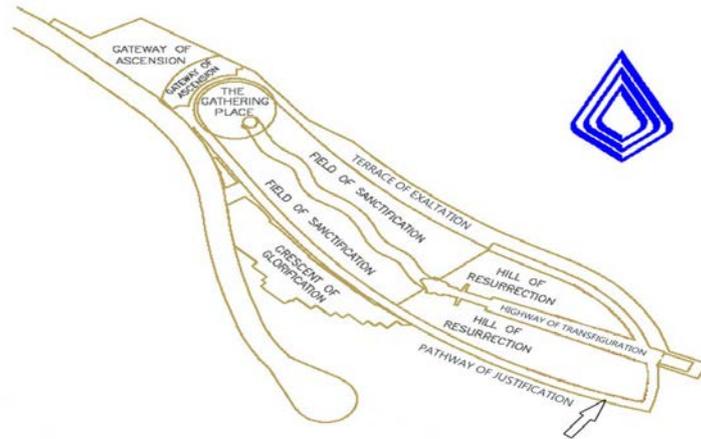
Slanderous books like this one represent the general American-Christian reaction to the Local Churches, after Lee first emigrated from East-Asia.



<http://graceandrealivty.wordpress.com/2013/02/14/discernment-ministry-is-the-local-church-movement-a-cult/>

This is the front page of a Christian Research Journal issue, mentioned in the main text.

### Appendix 3: Local Church Diagrams



<http://www.graceterrace.com/en/site/index>

A map of “Grace Terrace” a cemetery built soon after Lee died (the arrow points to his burial site). On online video guide of the cemetery shows by each grave there is an interactive database of the deceased’s life for contemplation and encouragement.



New Testament Recovery Version (1985), Living Stream Ministry.

The millennial City of God, referred to in the text is in a sense dualistic where “the nations” are only witness to the self-contained, internally-sourced expression of God.

## Appendix 4: Selected Interview Transcripts

### Stefan

*How did you first come to know and meet with the church?*

I came to come and know the church (in the Lord's recovery, cause I was born in a Christian seeking family) by going to a Poland camp in 1998. I was invited by some saints in Romania, and I went there. I was captured by both the vision of Christ and the vision of the Body, seeing so many young people that love the Lord and enjoy Him together. There were many relationships that were started there, and they continued throughout the years, by email, Skype, even mail. Since then we started to meet with the saints, firstly me and my dad, and then most of my family. We gradually came in as we attended video trainings, conferences, and as we visited the saints and were visited by the saints. Also, we got into the morning revival book together, enjoying the Lord every day both in the Word and in the ministry.

*How does the church relate to your family, friends and the culture you grew up with?*

Since I was raised up in a Christian family, the church has been my family also, so when I came into the church life I spontaneously loved the saints and felt at home in the church life. My friends - were all in the church life, and now I have at least 3000 friends on Facebook, most of them are in the church life. The culture: I was born and raised in Romania, but by coming in the church life, I learned to be with other people of other cultures, colours, etc... So I learned to eat all kinds of foods and talk all kinds of languages, adopting more of other people's life style and being more open minded. This kind of resulted in marrying a Chinese sister who lived in Canada for the last part of her life. In many ways you can say that I have no Romanian culture but that I integrate a lot of other cultures into my culture, so that I would be open to eat and hang out with people of other colours and cultures and backgrounds.

*How has your experience of the church differed as you've lived in different localities?*

In every locality the church life is a bit different, but it is in essence the same. People are different, and there are other kinds of arrangements and customs in every locality, but in essence we are one and we believe and enjoy the same thing. We enjoy the Morning Revival, the Bible, and eating and drinking Jesus with the saints! You can say there are outward things we do, but actually if there's no inward reality people don't stay or remain. The emphasis is on a personal relationship with the Lord, and as long as you have this one, you will also desire to have a personal relationship with other believers to be built up with them. Even though people are different in each locality, the essence of what we do, read, and practice is the same based on this inward reality.

## Webb

### *How did you first come to know and meet with the church?*

I know the lord when I was in Hong Kong. I remembered I was studying in Secondary school (we called it form one in Hong Kong, age 12). My friends Timothy who is a church kid in the lord's recovery invited me to his home meeting and introduce the lord to me. At that time I felt like the lord has nothing to do with my life. Seriously, I felt like wasting my time in the church activities and meeting strangers that I don't even know. There so much more fun out there than stupid bible study. Of course I went to other churches as well invited by other classmate but I found it very socialising only. I felt like the church is a place for people to chill around and kill time. I went there a few times and I made myself disappear. Not attracted by church life at all till I was 17. I have a major medical issue which cause me to become partially blind. This is really hurtful for me as I haven't really come across something that major in my life. Nothing could help me at that time and even my parents could not help me. At that time, what I can do is to ask help from this god, someone I believe exist somewhere around the world.

After I recovered, I went back to Timothy and asked him to bring me back to the lord's recovery. That dude were so different from my other 'Christian' friends. I know that if I need to find god, I need to find him and that is the year I got baptised and saved. I always ask very simple questions to myself. 'What is the meaning of my life?' 'What am I made for?' 'Why am I here?' The reason I stayed in the lord's recovery is that I cannot find anything better than the church life and Christ. I sometimes doubted the existence of god but when I reviewed my life after I got saved. I felt the existence of him and the more I got close to this 'God', the more I felt save and relax. Nothing I could found to replace him at the moment. In Hong Kong, I believed a lot of people considered themselves as atheist. Some people think themselves as Buddhist or Christian or Catholic. But I felt like most of the them are just putting the name in their mouth. I dun see a lot of serious religious people around me or in Hong Kong. I think most people are just money-worshiper. Even I would consider myself as religious freak, because I do spent lots of my time in the church. Monday, Brother's meeting, Tuesday, Prayer meeting, Wednesday and Friday Home meeting and Lord's Day. Who does that? NO one I know around me does that. I think the good point about the lord's recovery is life. To be completely transformed by Christ, we never just say we believe. We have to take action, to have a transformation of our life.

### *How does the church relate to your family, friends and the culture you grew up with?*

As mentioned before, I believe most of the people nowadays is atheist. Sometimes people use religion as a tool to get what they want Some people may just wanna socialize some people wanna meet up people in church as their potential boyfriends or girlfriends Some parents used the name of church to increase the opportunity for their kids to enter good schools. Church became a place of financial business, which is mentioned in the bible as well. My dad and born and raised in Hong Kong and got baptised into the Catholic Church when he was a baby. The Catholic Church in Hong Kong do a lot charity back into the seventies and eighties. You could have a lot of

social benefit if you are a catholic. So there is a good reason for my grand mum to get him baptised that early. However, never I saw him getting into the church and pray.

My mum was born in China and brought to Hong Kong after he got married to my dad. I would considered her as a traditional Chinese housewife. She does the ancestor thing in Chinese tradition which you burn the paper offering to your ancestor during special festival and asked for blessing from them I will say almost eighty-percent of Chinese traditional family does that. I never believe in this at all as I dun think the ancestor has this power to give the blessing to us. And I always felt the burning of paper offering as ridiculous idea and was so 'man-made' tradition. After I believe into the lord, my family started to have some changes as well, as they also shakes a little bit of what they were believing. They still do the same thing of burning the offering as the tradition does. But I felt like they are starting to change their mind because they couldn't find the peace they are looking for. I think the most major things I treasured and what make me different from other who is not in the lord's recovery is the value of life. People around me and even serious Christian loves money. I am serious, people really loves money here. All they talked about is money, houses, what school their kid got into, what car they are using. I am seriously not care about this at all. I know it sounds boring to you but I will say 'There must be something more superior than these man-made stuff'

*How has your experience of the church differed as you've lived in different localities?*

Church life is mostly the same in different countries in the lord's recovery. As they almost having the same practice and teaching. People could be different in different countries as they have different cultures. In Japan, they have their own 'Shinto', and they have such a strong cultural background. I heard of the saints preaching gospel in Japan and no one will get his hands to take the leaflet. They are very confident and being so proud of their own country. You could have a glance of the condition after earthquake in Japan in March, the Japanese got recovered pretty quickly because the citizen are trusting their government so much and they believe so much on their culture. That's why it is so difficult for the lord's recover to expand in Japan. People in Muslim country are born to be Muslim, they have no choice. They cannot change their religion as that is printed on their id. They would have loss all of their social benefit if they decided to change their religion or even married a woman/ man which is not in Muslim. So what will you choose I have the feeling that people in the western countries will considered themselves as 'post-Christian'; Like I went to Sweden last month for a conference, I am so surprised that not a lot of people knows god or even they do, they dun have church life.

**Magnus**

*How did you first come to know and meet with the church?*

It was through my mother. I followed, observed her seeking for "real" Christians in Sweden from 1991-1997. We were originally from Estonia (Soviet Union at that time). Since the "state religion" was atheism, one was not

supposed to be a believer. This put a lot of pressure of practising Christians and made them really stand out - my mother was such one. Once we migrated to Sweden in January 1991 my mother started to actively contact various Christian groups. She contacted the Estonian Church in Stockholm, Swedish missionary church, Swedish state church and various denominations and free groups. Every time she returned home she told us children about how she felt these Christians whom she met in these groups were superficial. One day she came after being to a church meeting in Church in Stockholm. This time her reaction was different. She told me: "Marius you got to come to a meeting for here they talk about interesting things". I was rather shocked by her statement. Anyway I followed her to one meeting in late 1997 and that's the way I started to meet with the church and praise the Lord I'm still meeting!

*How does the church relate to your family, friends and the culture you grew up with?*

Most of my immediate family meet with the church. Some are in Sweden and some in the UK. My mother was already saved when she met the church (my father died in 1989). I was saved in the church life but my two other siblings (sisters) were saved somewhere else. One of them meets with the church and one doesn't meet at all. None of my friends are in the church life. However they have heard about it and some of them have been to our meetings. It took my long time before I could adequately testify to my friends. They all know today that I am active Christian and that I meet with the church in Stockholm. The Sweden where I grew up during my teenage years is a very secular and atheistic country. All the Christian views and values are almost extinct. Instead of God they believe in man-made welfare system which takes care of an individual from the birth to death. It's hard to be a Christian in such environment! The Swedish culture is anti-God and everything related to God is ridiculated and mocked. The only positive with this may be that it drives you closer to God.

*How has your experience of the church differed as you've lived in different localities?*

I have experienced the church life in about 5 different localities as I used to live in these localities. (Apart from that I have visited another 25 localities all over the world.) The striking thing is that the church life is very similar although its "takes place" in different countries with different cultures, social classes, living standards, ethnical groups etc. If you yourself are clear what the church is about then it's easy to see the similarities. If you are not so clear you will instead see the outward differences. I.e. in USA I stayed in a home that is valued about 10 million USD and where the family had at least four cars. In UK I stayed with a family who lived in a council house and could not afford to have the heating on and used public transport to travel. There may be outward differences but people's vision is the same. I may put it in this way: by living in the different localities you need to live in the local way but by the vision. The vision is that God wants to work Himself into man so there would be on earth a group of people that live and express God. In every genuine local church you visit you will find some who live according to this vision. You will also find others that are one their way to see the same vision and they are cared for by the first ones.