The Arc of the Moral Universe Bends towards Justice:

Evangelical Christians engaging with Social Justice

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how young evangelical Christians frame the concept of social justice, in particular relating to human trafficking. In the last fifteen years there has been a considerable increase in the number of Evangelicals who are becoming interested in, and participating with, initiatives that have an emphasis on social justice issues. This is a change from evangelical missionary activity which focuses mainly on proselytising and 'soul winning'. My ethnographic research was conducted amongst of a group of young evangelicals who were students at a 'justice based' Christian training school in New Zealand. Fieldwork consisted of participant observation of the course lectures and interviewing fourteen students from eight different countries.

I found the main motivator for the students' interest in social justice were personal experiences they had with God where he 'broke their heart' over issues such as human trafficking. How they then engaged with social justice was mediated by digital technology, especially social media. They were also influenced by changing theology as to the character and nature of God, and what it means to be a Christian in a globalized world. Using Bruno Latour's 'modes of existence' theory and Michael Jackson's Existential phenomenological lens, I argue that social science needs to allow spiritual beings to be 'real' in order to understand the worldview of people like my participants, who order their lives through divine encounters and relationships with God. My findings showed that the literature on evangelicals and human trafficking is insufficient because the experiential nature of evangelical Christianity is not taken into account. Experience, rather than belief, is the primary motivation for interest in social justice for young evangelicals.

Keywords: Evangelicals, social justice, human trafficking, Emergent Christianity, Modes of Existence, Michael Jackson, Bruno Latour, Christianity, Phenomenology.

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AN IMPORTANT NOTE FOR THOSE READING THIS THESIS

The Use of Moving Visuals

The research participants that I interviewed and observed are part of a very experiential world. Many of these experiences take place at large gatherings of Christians and events that are tied into the use of music and singing. I felt this thesis would be better understood if the reader was able to get a glimpse of these evangelical experiences and worldview through the use of small video clips. As such I have set up a webpage for the reader to have open while they are reading this thesis. When you get to a part in the writing with a number attached, like this [1], it means you are to go to that number on the webpage where a video link will be waiting to be viewed. Keeping all the links on one webpage means that the reader will not have to be typing in endless links, especially if reading this in a hardcopy, rather than a digital copy. It is possible that in the future some of these links won't work, but at the current time of writing, mid 2016, they were all functioning.

This is the website address: **http://riveramassey.blogspot.co.nz/**

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> *I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice.*
> *- Theodore Parker*

It was a warm late summer's day as I drove through the backblocks of rural New Zealand to get to my research location. On this very first day I had no trouble finding the house that the course leader, Joy[1], told me to come to. However upon arrival there was no-one there. The house was set back from the road, surrounded by large trees, with a swimming pool and tennis court. It was large, which was good since it had to accommodate the 23 people taking part in this social justice based training school. I knocked on the door but there was no reply. Going around to the back I didn't see anyone, however there were more buildings further down the section. I made my way there and managed to catch the attention of an elderly man who was sitting in one of the apartments. He came to the window and I asked him where the young people who were living in the house in front were. He looked at me and then said haltingly, 'I'm sorry, I don't speak much English'.

I could tell from his accent that he was Dutch, so I enquired in my best, rusty Dutch 'Sprek u Nederlands?' His eyes lit up, 'yes, yes', after a brief conversation he told me that he thought the 'jonge mensen' (young people) had gone up to one of the other training centres that the organization had nearby, but that they would be back soon. He tilted his head to one side and said 'How come you can speak Dutch?' I explained that I had lived in The Netherlands when I was younger. 'Ah, wel je sprek nog heel goed' (you still speak well) and with that encouragement lingering in my ears I left to see if I could locate my mysteriously lost participants.

It was rather serendipitous that my fieldwork began with the words of a language that came from the place where this entire research journey started. In my early twenties I had travelled to The Netherlands to do the same course that my participants were part of. A number of years after my training school I had met Joy through a mutual friend who knew that I was interested in social justice. Joy and I met up for coffee and talked about her ideas

[1] 'Joy' is not her real name; pseudonyms are used for all participants in this thesis.

for starting a course to teach Christians about social justice issues, however that was as far as it went, until I had the idea of this topic for my thesis.

It was exactly twenty years ago, almost to the month, that I had walked through the doors of the same organization that I was doing my research on now, a lot had changed in that time. And yet, when I eventually found my participants and sat in the back of the lecture room with them for the first time, it was as if nothing had changed. There were still the uplifting worship songs, the emphasis on prayer and the Bible and, most significant for me, the strong and intimate bond that the participants had developed between each other. Previously I was part of a similar group that journeyed across five months of spiritual highs and lows, intense friendships and international travel experiences. However now I was an outsider, and that first day I felt as though I had stepped into a familiar world but as a stranger. I felt it in my age, my changed worldview and in my role as a researcher.

Aims and Relevance of Research

The findings in this thesis are based on interviews and participant observation with a group of people who were part of an evangelical Christian training course with a social justice focus. To protect the identity of the organization involved in my research I will refer to the training that the participants were involved in as 'The Course'. The Course involved three months of lectures and a six week service and mission trip to South East Asia.

My main aim was to investigate why a growing number of Christians from evangelical churches are becoming much more interested in humanitarian and social justice based service and mission work. This seems to be a reorientation from models of interacting with 'unbelievers' which are based mainly on proselytising and 'soul saving'. I started off focusing on evangelical Christians, only to realise that this term was problematic because it was not broad enough. As such in this thesis when I refer to 'evangelicals' I am talking more accurately about Christians who adhere to a combination of Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic (PEC) Christian theology. I will expand on these terms further in Chapter Three.

I wanted to study this topic because I am fascinated with how sections of the Evangelical church stream that I grew up in have gone from warning its members *against* participating

in the liberal, 'social gospel' movement to actively *encouraging* them to consider social justice projects.

The second aim of this thesis is to contribute to filling a gap in the academic literature on the self-narratives of religious, especially evangelical, people and why they want to be involved with social justice work, including short term service and mission trips. This gap has been recognised by scholars such as Baillie Smith, Laurie, Hopkins, & Olson (2013). Sherradan et al have pointed out "relatively little research addresses the influence of volunteer religious affiliations and practise, even though large numbers of volunteers serve abroad with religious organizations" (Sherradan, Lough, & McBride, 2008:398). Social science in particular still presents evangelical world engagement as confined to missionaries who are white, western colonisers intent on saving the souls of the poor 'natives' as they run rough shod over indigenous culture (Hiebert, 1997); however, popular Christian theology and praxis in the West is moving on from this type of mission work.

This research is relevant because currently large and wealthy evangelical Christian groups, which emphasise theology that highlights helping the poor and marginalised, are beginning to direct millions of dollars towards development and social justice based projects (Elisha, 2011). These groups have the ability to bypass official Aid organizations, instead partnering directly with local churches in developing countries. An example of this is the American mega church, *Saddle Back*, which has 20,000 members and hosts conferences on AIDS and poverty issues which have attracted high profile speakers such as Barak Obama. In New Zealand there are events that aim to recruit young evangelicals into social justice based service projects, such as 'Let Justice roll down' [1], which was run in 2014 in conjunction with *Tear Fund NZ* and *Willow Creek Church* (the New Zealand branch of an American mega church[2]).

In Australia *Hillsong* Church, which has 50,000 members worldwide, gave AU$10,000,000 to overseas aid and missions programs in 2010 alone (Baillie Smith et al., 2013), and they do this every year [2]. All this 'unofficial' church aid and development work usually happens outside of government or NGO oversight, as such there are implications for the Aid and Development sector if they continue to ignore these non-state actors.

[2] A megachurch is an American term for a church having 2,000 or more people in average weekend attendance.

In a globalizing world new technologies are connecting people on an unprecedented scale. It is important to highlight how these changes are being acted out on and understood by everyday people who want to be part of solutions to the world's problems. It is my hope this project opens a window of understanding on a group of people who want to become part of a global movement of 'world changers' (Campolo, 2004:89). I also trust that this research will give people outside of the evangelical Christian 'bubble' a glimpse into why many people who identify with this particular branch of Protestant Christianity are becoming much more interested in activities usually dominated by humanitarian aid and development workers.

Personal Background

This thesis topic has grown out of interest in why the evangelical church culture of my childhood and youth seems to be making profound changes in its methods and worldview regarding evangelisation. The growing interest in social justice, ostensibly at the expense of traditional, evangelical missionary work, was the impetus that put me on the path to choosing this as an area of research.

I grew up in a family with strong church connections. Both my grandfather and father were pastors and many of my relatives were involved in overseas missionary work. Going to church and evangelical church culture was my 'norm'. I was part of a short term missions trip, when I was fourteen, to the Solomon Islands for three weeks with a group from my church. I have vivid memories of our first night on Malaita as we drove through the tropical jungle on the back of a flatbed truck which stopped by the side of the dirt road. The driver indicated that our first host village was 'up there'. So up we climbed in the dark, slipping and sliding through the mud until we reached the top an hour later to be greeted by the whole village waiting for us with a grand feast, including a pig on a spit. After a few hours of eating, singing and speeches we were led to our accommodation, the chief's house, which he had vacated for us. The wooden houses, on tall poles, swayed in the breeze and the chickens and dogs scrabbled away underneath the house before we were woken at dawn by the ubiquitous village rooster. The 'mission' part of the trip involved preaching in local churches

around the island, doing puppet and drama presentations for the children and participating in a three day Sunday School rally.

After spending a year in Europe during high school as an exchange student I decided to do a missions training course with an international, evangelical organization in The Netherlands. My six month course comprised of three months of lectures on Christian topics such as prayer, and three months of mission work in two large cities in Argentina and Brazil. Much of this was traditional evangelism activities such as street preaching, doing gospel presentations in prisons, drug rehabilitation centres and hospitals, as well as preaching in and working with local churches. After the course finished I joined the organization as a staff member where my role was to help host international short term teams who came to have a 'mission's experience'.

It has now been thirteen years since my long term involvement with missions ended (although I have been involved in some shorter term trips since) and it seems that in the ensuing period missionary praxis has taken on a variety of new forms. This was brought to my attention when one of the young leaders in a church I was attending made a comment while preaching that he felt he didn't have the right to go overseas and tell people what they should believe. Instead he encouraged people in the church to get involved with 'justice based' projects, such as building houses with *Habitat for Humanity*. The organization I did my missions training with is still conducting The Course, but the students can now learn about trade aid, human and sex trafficking, water rights, and the role of economic policies in global inequality. Missionary work these days is just as likely to involve building houses, digging wells, working with a microenterprise collective and trying to stop sex trafficking, as it is to be preaching on street corners.

In the type of church I grew up in, the evangelical Protestant Church, missions work was 'proclaiming the gospel', usually with your mouth. It was fine to do some 'good works' but missionaries were not aid workers. Digging wells was left to professional NGO's. Whilst some other Christian groups, like Catholics and Anglicans, concentrated on providing practical help in their missionary practices, the missionaries I knew about were usually involved in preaching and teaching with the aim of 'winning souls for Christ'.

When I thought back to the statement made by the leader in that church service I began to wonder if this type of view was affecting traditional, evangelical missionary work. Short term mission trips, which have a focus on service work, have become a lot more popular. If people going on these trips do not want to foist their religious views on others by proselytising, what are they doing on these trips? And why are they doing it? In particular why do they think God wants them to do these trips? Has there a change in theology, or how evangelical Christians view God, that is driving this redirection in focus from 'preaching the gospel' to social justice issues such as human trafficking? These are the types of questions that led me to decide on this topic for my thesis.

What is Social Justice?

When talking about social justice I am referring to the idea that it is there are some groups and individuals who have more advantages in life than others and that this is unfair and needs to be corrected (David Miller, 1999). Social justice is about ensuring the 'fair distribution' of resources, rights and opportunities (Cramme & Diamond, 2009). Social justice is not the same as charity. Charity provides food, shelter and so forth; social justice involves a distributive component that aims to share resources, rights and opportunities in an equal manner on a more permanent basis (Agartan, 2014) . It is embedded in calls for employment rights and anti-discrimination laws, amongst other things (Barry, 2005).

Social Justice has been traditionally associated with the State; individuals have moral obligations to the nation state, which is turn has obligations to them, in terms of providing security, equal opportunities and so forth (Agartan, 2014; Banai, Ronzoni, & Schemmel, 2011)**.** However the concept of social justice has now moved into the global terrain, where principals of equality and fairness are taken to be applicable universally (Banai et al., 2011). The concept of social justice in the West has become associated with 'grassroots' organizations, and has moved away from looking to the State to solve inequality, although there is still considerable energy given to trying to make the State implement a fairer society (Banai et al., 2011).

These organizations of 'global egalitarians' (Banai et al., 2011:xii) rely on discourses of transnationalism and connectedness to explain poverty and inequality between the wealthy global 'North' and the poor 'South'. It is understood that the nation state is losing the ultimate authority to control its territory, and is now buffeted by the transnational wealth of multinational corporations and authority of supra-territorial bodies such as the United Nations (Agartan, 2014). Hence the move back to the 'grassroots' where people feel they have a chance to change things at a local level, either in their own communities or overseas through locally based organizations and NGO's who are independent from governments.

My research shows that evangelicals generally don't understand social justice in the framework mentioned above. Although my participants talked continually about the concept of justice, it was from a distinctly evangelical worldview that encompassed individual sin and the rescuing of both the body and the soul. I will expand more on this in Chapter Six.

Mapping the Thesis

When I started researching evangelicals and social justice I was unsure what I would find. I thought that young evangelicals were becoming interested in social justice because of changing theology. But I did not start out with a particular agenda, instead I let what the participants said, and what I observed in the field, guide the themes and issues I explored. In essence this thesis attempts to answer two specific questions. Firstly, the original question: 'why are evangelicals becoming more interested in social justice issues'? The answers that the participants gave when I interviewed them about why they were interested in social justice revolved around experiencing and embodying God. This led me to a second question: 'How can anthropologists understand and frame the realities of people who experience divine beings in a way that allows those beings to be 'real'?' How can anthropology engage with this embodied God my participants described? This second question was not in my mind when I started my fieldwork. It came from trying to explain the experiences of my participants within the framework of a discipline that has generally not given much agency to spiritual entities.

I open this thesis by exploring the second question. I will outline the theoretical arguments contained in Existential phenomenology as to why non-material entities such as gods and spirits should be considered as real 'beings'. Using Bruno Latour's 'modes of existence' theory I argue that scientific secularism is only one way of understanding the world. As discourses of modernity are being challenged in a post-modern world academics need to consider knowledge from other areas, such as religious and indigenous worldviews.

After outlining a theoretical framework I examine background literature on evangelicals and social justice. While it seemed that a focus on social justice is new for evangelicals, Chapter Three shows this is not the case. In this chapter I define 'what is an evangelical' and then go on to discuss the historical trajectory of evangelicalism that highlights active participation in social justice initiatives until the beginning of the 20th century. Changes in theology, due to taking on an industrial modernist mindset, brought about a move away from the 'social gospel' in evangelical Christianity. At the beginning of the 21st century social justice began to make a comeback amongst evangelicals, driven by the 'Emergent' evangelical movement. This stream of evangelicalism emphasises a particular version of God, who is good and wants people to have a good life now, rather than waiting till they die and go to heaven. Seeing God in this way has brought about new theology concerning the Kingdom of God, and how heaven and hell are viewed, that is contributing to the rise of interest in social justice amongst younger evangelicals. These historical swings need to be explored to place the current resurgence of interest into a temporal context.

Chapter Four discusses the academic literature on the topics that came to the fore from my fieldwork. These areas were an interest in stopping human trafficking, individualism, experiencing God, taking action through Short Term Mission Trips, and the influence of social media. Academic literature argues that evangelicals are interested in stopping human trafficking, particularly sex-trafficking, because they see it as a 'moralizing project' and because they are 'anti-sex'. There are particular evangelical traits, such as a focus on the individual, that influences how and why evangelicals interact with social justice issues. This individualism leads evangelicals to have very personalised experiences with God. Once they have had these experiences many evangelicals want to 'do something', including going on Short Term Mission Trips, and taking part in training like The Course. Taking action is made

easier by the Internet, especially social media, where young evangelicals can meet like-minded people and bypass church resistance, or disinterest, in their activities.

In order to be able to 'hear' my participants voices as to how and why they wanted to be involved in stopping injustices I used engaged anthropological methodology, which is discussed in Chapter Five. Reflexivity and the use of bodily experience as a research tool are also concepts I explore. I then introduce my fieldwork site and my participants as well as discussing some of the challenges I faced.

Chapters Six and Seven discuss the major findings that emerged from my fieldwork, which were a combination of practical and spiritual reasons why the participants were interested in social justice. As already mentioned, encounters with God were a core motivating factor for many of the participants and I will introduce some of their, and my, spiritual experiences in Chapter Six. The participant's perception of the character of God and how He[3] views injustice is also explored here. On the more practical side was the influence of social media and the internet on the participants, another was a desire to be an active Christian. They did not want to sit around in church thinking about heaven and debating theology, Chapter Seven explores the 'Active Christian'.

Conclusion

In introducing this thesis it is obvious that my own background and life experiences are an integral part of my research and allowed me an 'insiders' perspective on what my participants told me. It has been an exhilarating, though at times vulnerable, journey back into a life-world that was familiar and in many ways forms much of who I am today. Although my own spirituality is currently in 'flux', doing this research has made me grateful for the good and transformative aspects of the evangelicalism I grew up with. It taught me to value kindness and forgiveness and to try to 'love my neighbour as myself'. I know and have met many good, selfless and passionate evangelicals.

[3] Although there are some Christian groups that use gender-neutral pronouns when describing God, most Evangelicals refer to God using the male pronoun 'he'.

The students that I interviewed and observed reminded me of myself when I did The Course. Their enthusiasm and idealism was endearing and a refreshing change from the cynicism that is easy to fall into when we consider some of the horrors our world is currently experiencing. As an anthropologist I am more inclined to critique, yet being amongst the students on The Course I was moved by their positivity and sense of hopefulness. There are many that would benefit from the joy the students experienced. For this to occur it requires a change in mid-set for those of us who are 'modern'. And so it is time to begin to explore the world of the spirit in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER TWO: THEORY – UNDERSTANDING THE SPIRITUAL

> *It appears infinitely simpler, more economical, more elegant too to stick to the testimony of the saints, the mystics, the confessors and the faithful, in order to direct our attention toward that which they direct theirs… thus no one will be surprised that angels can follow different paths from technologies, demons or figures. The world has become vast enough to hold them all – Bruno Latour (2013)*

Introduction

In order to explain how my participants framed the concept of social justice I had to first determine how anthropology engages with the idea of invisible entities, whether they are gods, spirits, demons, ancestors or other supernatural beings. This is because my participants engaged with social justice activities as a response to what God had told them to do. They had physically experienced in their bodies emotions and voices that they attributed to a supernatural being.

In this chapter I will outline the phenomenological approach I have used to understand and analyse my fieldwork material. I will explore the embodied aspect of experience, as discussed by Michael Jackson, Arthur Kleinman and Mattijs Van de Port. Bruno Latour's 'modes of existence' theory and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's Amerindian Perspectivism are pertinent for understanding how religious experiences are a form of knowledge alongside scientific understandings of the world, especially as we move out of the time of 'the moderns' and into the world of the Anthropocene.

Anthropology and Christianity

Generally anthropologists have meticulously recorded and analysed Christianity in 'exotic' places; the customs and rituals of 'the other' and how they remake Christianity in their own cultural images. From the 19th century anthropologists were writing about religion, such as James Frazer who explored the role of magic and religion in *The Golden Bough* (Frazer, 1890). From Max Weber's and Clifford Geertz's interest in trying to understand the meanings of religion (Engelke & Tomlinson, 2006) to Victor and Edith Turner's work on how

'communitas' is experienced through religious practises (Turner, 2012), Christianity has been no stranger to the discipline.

However, until recently, Western Christianity has been a neglected topic in anthropology (Bialecki, Haynes, & Robbins, 2008). Although Christianity was often documented in other parts of the globe there has not been much focus on how Christianity has shaped the cultures that most anthropologists grew up in. Joel Robbins has suggested that there are two main causes for this. Firstly, "many kinds of Christians are threatening because they challenge liberal versions of modernity of the kind most anthropologists subscribe to" (Robbins, 2003:193). Secondly, Christianity can seem so familiar to anthropologists that they fail to see the 'otherness' that they are looking for in religions not familiar to them, such as Islam or folk religions (Robbins, 2003).

This familiarity seems to have bred contempt, anthropology as a discipline has often been hostile to anthropologists who profess Christian belief or seek to understand research data through any kind of theological lens (Engelke, 2014; Fountain, 2013). Philip Fountain has noted that the 'habitus of anthropology' is to negate faith based worldviews (Fountain, 2013). Bialecki points out, quoting Harding, that "anthropologists have often defined them [Christians] as… 'culturally repugnant others whom it is best to avoid (Harding, 1991:191)'"(Bialecki et al., 2008:1140 ebook). Arnold recounts a rather unpalatable incident that took place in the early 1990s at an American Anthropological Association conference where a meeting of the Network of Christian Anthropologists was disrupted with jeers and verbal abuse from fellow academics who chanted 'here come the Christians' (Arnold, 2006). It seems that the aversion of anthropologists to studying Christianity in their own back yards can be attributed more to personal and cultural reasons than intellectual concerns (Robbins, 2003).

Since the mid 1990s there has been a flurry of interest in what is being labelled an 'Anthropology of Christianity'. There is a growing list of anthropologists who research this niche including Joel Robbins, Omri Elisha, Jon Bialecki, Fenella Cannell, Webb Keane, James Bielo, and Brian Howell. It could be argued that since secularism is now the major 'religion' of the West Christianity has, ironically, assumed the minority 'otherness' that makes it suitable for anthropological attention. This project contributes to the rising interest in

understanding and providing ethnographic description and analysis of Christianity in the West in the early 21st century.

The Embodied God

One of the most significant findings from my fieldwork is that the students I interviewed were interested in social justice because of encounters with a spiritual being, God. The main reason that my participants wanted to be part of social justice initiatives came out of the deeply personal relationships they had with a divine entity who told them to try and stop injustice because it broke his heart. They had experiences in their bodies where they physically felt the presence of God and felt emotions that they attributed to God, including sadness and grief over the injustices in the world; they were *embodying* God. This led me to draw on literature and research on embodiment and how people interpret and experience divine or spiritual beings. Engaging with the work of academics who have explored the spiritual world of their participants in an embodied manner helped me to establish an experiential base to frame the religious experiences of my participants.

We all live in a body, and in reality we can only experience the world through the medium of our physicality. Not only do we mould our lives with our bodies, but in turn our bodies are shaped by life as well. Slavoj Žižek says, when talking about how life impacts bodies, that "it mortifies, drains off, empties, carves the fullness of the Real on the living body"(Žižek, 1989:169). Thomas Csordas describes the relationship of the body to culture as "the body is not an *object* to be studied in relation to culture, but is to be considered as the *subject* of culture, or in other words as the existential ground of culture" (Csordas, 1990:5).

Anthropologist Michael Jackson is of the opinion that 'the lived body' and how it experiences life is one of the domains of knowledge that anthropology often neglected (Jackson, 2013:3). Bodies are not just blank entities that passively imbibe cultural patterns, instead people "actively body forth the world" (Jackson, 2013:71). How individuals work with their bodies to mould and give meaning to their daily experiences is a particular type of knowledge. Jackson goes on to say that when studying religious experiences one will "come up against the limits of language… the limits of our knowledge, yet are sometimes thrown

open to new ways of understanding our being-in-the-world, new ways of connecting with others" (Jackson, 2009:xii).

Jewish philosopher Martin Buber also saw religion as having a base within the embodied experiences of religious people when they sense the presence of God, which is the core of 'the reality of their relationship' between themselves and God (Buber, 1967:3). This was true for the students I interviewed, the presence of God was at the core of what constituted their Christianity and this was what drove their behaviours and, in many ways, shaped their beliefs, rather than the other way around.

Arthur Kleinman is another academic who has written in favour of considering embodied human experience as a core form of knowledge that can aid humans in 'the art of living', especially during transitional and uncertain periods of life (Kleinman, 2014). What a person experiences is a form of practice, and "practice is never just theory; it is always about how we move among others, how we act upon others, and, best of all, what we do for others. This is the art of living" (Kleinman, 2014:124).

Kleinman had taught about medical and psychiatric conditions for many years as a professor however, when his wife developed Alzheimers, he came to understand disease in whole new way. A medical condition does not live in a rarefied space in academic texts; it is embodied within a person, in this case a person that he loved dearly. Through being his wife's caregiver he learnt about a new form of knowledge and wisdom. Of this wisdom he wrote

> *It needs to be experienced to be effective, and is effective not as an idea, but as a lived feeling and a moral practice that redeems our humanness amidst inevitable disappointment and defeat* (Kleinman, 2011:1622).

When you are open to considering embodied experience as a form of knowledge then gods and spirits can become part of everyday life; embodied in real, daily practices, such as prayer and trying to stop human trafficking. Within the writings of Mattijs Van de Port I found parallels with the embodiment of God that my participants experienced. Van de Port studied Brazilians in Bahia and the rituals they used to both 'open up' to experiencing spirits, and of 'closing themselves off' from the wrong type of spirits;

> *Bahians tell each other, and their anthropologists, that an open body brings some of the best one can experience in life, and some of the worst. In the thoroughly religious society that is Bahia, it is an open, welcoming body that allows for intimate encounters with divine beings* (Van De Port, 2015:88).

Just as my participants were open to experience the voice and emotions of God, who told them his heart was broken, Van de Port's participants "considered an open body the prerequisite to establish a more intense and fulfilling engagement with the world" (Van De Port, 2015:86). Opening up to experience the divine was done through practices and rituals that allowed the seeker to 'manipulate' bodily boundaries and thus encounter forms of consciousness that were not considered to be 'normal' (Van De Port, 2015:88). It was not only people seeking spirits who engaged in these practices, but also Charismatic Catholics and Pentecostals;

> *They in fact seek a very similar, bodily intimacy with the Holy Spirit. Stretching their arms toward the heavens and singing such hymns as 'Come be the fire inside of me'…they too turn their bodies into receptacles for divine presence* (Van De Port, 2015:89).

This concept of open/closed bodies was pertinent to the religious worldview many of my participants grew up with. Evangelicals are often taught that you should close your body to bad moral influences such as drugs and alcohol, but it is good to open your body to the Holy Spirit and your mind to the voice of God through prayer. Van de Port points out that this opening and closing is a continual process of negotiation, a balancing act (Van De Port, 2015). My participants alternated between letting in enough of the divine to be in continual contact with it (God in this case), but at the same time knowing enough about the evil of injustice so that they can understand God's broken heart.

My participants embodying of God led me to another question, which was 'how can anthropologists understand and frame the realities of people who experience divine beings in a way that allow these beings to be 'real'? '. How is anthropology to understand and engage with this 'embodied' God that my participants described?

Allowing Religious Beings Agency

Throughout the entire research and thesis writing process I have inhabited the physical world of academia through attending university and conferences. I have noticed that much of the academic world is leery of examining spiritual experience based on its own merits. More often than not supernatural beings were explained away within a secular, materialist framework (Fountain, 2013). Anthropologist Fenella Cannell has also noticed this tendency saying,

> *I have long found in my own research an uncomfortable gap between my fieldwork experiences of how people account for their own Christian practice and the theoretical models of Christianity which prevail in anthropological accounts* (Cannell, 2005:339).

I found this especially pertinent when I examined the academic literature around how evangelicals engage with the issue of human trafficking. While the authors of these papers had examined what evangelicals were doing about this issue, their explanations for why they were doing it often did not correspond with what my participants told me, or my own personal experiences. This was because these authors usually did not observe or participate in the spiritual life of the evangelicals they were writing about.

The lack of literature on how evangelical's spiritual experiences and social justice are linked led me to search for an ontology that can give voice to the realities of evangelical Christians in a way that retains a sense of the heart and soul of their experiential world. I found this within arguments that are emerging out of the 'ontological turn', which is questioning the modernist, scientific and secular worldview that anthropology has favoured since the early 20th Century. To make sense of the ontological viewpoints I have engaged with I utilised a specific theoretical lens, that of Existential Phenomenology as outlined by anthropologist Michael Jackson. The work of French philosopher and social scientist Bruno Latour was also instrumental in forming the foundation I have used both methodologically and theoretically.

Existential Phenomenology

The theoretical framework that I used to understand the embodied aspects of my participants engagement with God is that of phenomenology, more specifically Existential

Phenomenology. This theory draws on the work of scholars such as Levinas, Arendt, Sartre, Husserl and more recently Michael Jackson. Bruno Latour's work is not usually considered under the umbrella of phenomenology but there are aspects of his arguments regarding religion and religious experiences as a 'mode of existence' that have a distinct phenomenological echo.

Matthijs Van de Port has also linked Latour and Existential Phenomenology when he states that

> *I was struck how Latour's philosophy is permeated with the attempt to open up received ways of knowing in the social sciences… he urges researchers to give up on the securities of being in the know, and promotes a radical uncertainty as a more profitable starting point for inquiry* (Van De Port, 2015:93).

Those who use a Existential Phenomenological lens are interested in gathering and reflecting on lived experience (Jackson, 2013). They reject dualistic Cartesian dichotomies, such as object/subject and mind/body in favour of a more holistic, integrative approach towards knowledge. Jackson explains it this way

> *The focus of existential anthropology is the paradox of plurality and the ambiguity of intersubjective life… that refuses to place ourselves above others through the repression of their voices or views and the privileging of our own* (Jackson, 2013:9).

The secular, scientific worldview is only one way of understanding the world, there are other ways and forms of knowledge that people have used across cultures and time periods to make sense of their lives and societies. Jackson argues that "in order to know what makes us human we have to…do justice to the multiplicity of human viewpoints, representations, strategies and experiences" (Jackson, 2013:20). Religious experiences should be considered as a form of knowledge alongside scientific understandings of the world, especially as we move out of the time of 'the moderns' (Latour, 2013).

Jackson and others also agree with the empirical realism of William James who wrote that if something can be experienced, and results in action, it should be considered to be 'real' (James, 1985). Using James' definition of what constitutes reality opens up space for the gods and spirits that people experience to be considered as real 'beings'. Thus to try and

understand religious people by only looking at their creeds and doctrines, and apart from their spiritual experiences, is 'absurd' (Jackson, 2013:46).

Using these understandings the argument woven through this thesis is that researchers should accept the ontological understandings of their research participants as a reality. They should not dismiss the experiences of their participants as only being outcomes of some wider social or supra-cultural force, such as Durkheim's 'religion as sociality' (Jackson & Piette, 2015)

Bruno Latour and 'modes of existence'

Latour's writings on 'the moderns' and how they define and interact with religious beings has been illuminating for me while describing my participants, and my own, spiritual experiences. When using the term 'moderns' Latour is talking about people who make up contemporary Western societies who have been influenced by 200 years of Enlightenment thought, they are those who are "heading from darkness to light – into Enlightenment" (Latour, 2013:9) .

Moderns think in terms of binaries such as the human/non-human split between nature and people (Latour, 2013:8), where nature is something that can be conquered and moulded into a subjugated entity. Those who are modern see their societies as continually advancing, disregard the past and are striving for freedom from traditions, especially ones that would hold back 'progress'. Since the Enlightenment the West came to inhabit a universe that was knowable, explorable and open to rationalistic and scientific understanding based on what could be perceived through the five senses. There was no room in this new world for 'irrational' religious experiences and supernatural beings.

As such when moderns try to understand religion, Latour argues, they apply a dualistic, 'either/or' binary to the topic, which does not allow for religious entities, such as gods or spirits, to be 'real'. Latour frames it in this way; "on the one hand we acknowledge the most extreme diversity… while on the other we deny them any access to reality. Relativism, in other words, never traffics in hard cash" (Latour, 2013:20). Latour also contends institutions of religion have themselves become 'modern'. They became concentrated on developing

sets of analytical tools to convert non-believers, rather than encouraging inner spiritual transformation; religion became rationalized (Latour, 2013:295).

Religion was not always experienced in this rationalistic way. Before the Enlightenment God, angels and demons were part and parcel of European's everyday lives. Religious beings were present in their art, music and architecture (Latour, 2013:297). Divinities inhabited the soil, the air, oceans and trees, they " formed the common fabric of people's lives, the primary material of all rituals, the indisputable reference point of all existence, the ordinary fodder of all conversation" (Latour, 2014:8). However modernization has 'silenced' the religious beings woven throughout European culture. Latour laments that the language of the moderns means there is no way to talk about these beings anymore that allows them their own ontological reality.

While trying to become more 'scientific' to defend their beliefs, religious institutions had instead capitulated to the modernist 'saviour', which Latour calls 'Double Click' (Latour, 2013:318). 'Double Click' is representative of a peculiarity in Latour's writing style, where he makes concepts into characters. 'Double Click' refers to the action computer users do with their computer mouse when they are opening up a screen; when discussing 'Double Click' Latour is talking about discourses that reduce knowledge to pure, unmediated information. When religion comes under the influence of Double Click it makes it into something that is about having the 'right' beliefs. Latour says

> *The impetus of religion is lost every time someone asks 'but, finally what does it say?' It immediately transmuted into a primordial monstrosity. For the religious mode informs about nothing whatsoever. It does something better: it converts, it saves, it transports transformations, it arouses persons anew* (Latour, 2013:319).

In the quote above Latour explains what he considers the real role of religion, that of bringing about personal transformation. In his unique, descriptive style Latour urges religious people to "stop here… go back the way they came, return to the spirit, to the flow of the Word itself"(Latour, 2013:320). In other words leave behind the type of religion that attempts to explain God in rational, scientific terms; this was never the point of the religious life.

Latour advises his readers that if they really want to understand religion they should not look to religious institutions and their dogma and theology, instead they should consider people's religious experiences.

> *If the investigator wants to hold onto her sanity, she has to look for the religious outside the domain of religion…But then what thread can we rely on to locate the presence of religion-bearing entities? The inquiry must return… to* ***experience*** *itself, even if this seems quite remote from the domain officially recognized as religious* (Latour, 2013:300).*(*Emphasis added)

This is my argument for understanding the knowledge that I gained from my participants. To truly understand religious people means trying to understand their spiritual experiences, and not only drawing on church sermons, books and other language based information; to not rely on 'Double Click' knowledge.

A move to understanding religion through examining religious experiences is especially relevant now the world of the moderns is on its way out. According to Latour;

> *One didn't have to be a genius, twenty years ago, to feel that modernization was going to end… because of the increased intermixing of humans and nonhumans… It is now before Gaia that we are summoned to appear: Gaia, the odd figure made up of science and mythology… the truly global Globe that threatens us even as we threaten it* (Latour, 2013:9).

The 'summons of Gaia' that Latour refers to is climate change. He uses the image of the Greek god Gaia, who was a personification of planet earth; to make his point there is to be no more unbridled growth and progress. Latour says that "the future is shattered to bits… it is the end of modernization" (Latour, 2013:10).

So what comes after the moderns? Latour's answer is the need to recognize there are many different realities and worldviews that were discounted by moderns. These 'modes of existence' should be brought forth to help solve the problems of the new era humanity faces as it becomes 'post-modern' and heads into a geological age of the Anthropocene where natural resources are acknowledged as being finite.

Latour argues that in order to understand other modes of existence we need to move away from a reliance on language as a basis of understanding. This is a modernist trait; "language itself is deficient" (Latour, 2013:19) and

> *there is no use hiding the fact that questions of modes of existence have to do with…ontology. To speak of different modes of existence… is thus to take a new look at the ancient division of labour between words and things, language and being*. (Latour, 2013:19-20).

The modes that moderns have disregarded need to be reimagined and given new language so that:

> *It may allow us to give space to other's values that are very commonly encountered but that did not necessarily find a comfortable slot within the framework of modernity: for example politics or religion, law, values that the defence of Science in all its majesty had trampled along the way.* (Latour, 2013:11)

The main crux of how Latour envisions the mode of existence that is Religion is that it be viewed through an ontological framework which shows "respect for the plurality of experience" (Latour, 2013: 308).

Latour's ideas have been reiterated in the work of another scholar, Brazilian Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. He argues that the subject/object, human/non-human binary categorizing of the world that has greatly influenced anthropology is currently breaking down, and rightly so in his view (Viveiros de Castro, 2014). Like Latour, Viveiros de Castro sees "impending ecological catastrophe" (2014) and the end of capitalism as the vehicle that has caused an 'ontological turn' requiring a new way of understanding knowledge if the human species is to survive on planet earth. The 'mode of existence' that Viveiros de Castro is championing is the worldview of the Amerindians of the Americas, as well as other indigenous peoples.

> *We will have a lot to learn from people whose world ended five centuries ago… the Amerindians who, nonetheless, have managed to abide, and learned to live in a world which is no longer their world 'as they knew it'. We soon will be all Amerindians* (Viveiros de Castro, 2014).

Amerindian worldview does not split humans from nature, or from divine beings; so in advocating for the ontological understanding of the earth in an Amerindian way Viveiros de Castro is advancing the same argument as Latour, the acceptance of non-material beings as having 'reality'.

It is this particular ontological view I argue for here, that the divine beings my participants experience be allowed to exist; that as Latour states

> *They are truly beings; there's really no reason to doubt this. They come from outside, they grip us, dwell in us, talk to us, invite us; we address them, pray to them, beseech them. By granting them their own ontological status, we can already advance quite far in our respect for experience. We shall no longer have to deny thousands of years of testimony; we shall no longer need to assert that all the prophets, all the martyrs… all the faithful have 'deceived themselves' in 'mistaking' for real being what were 'in fact nothing but' words or brain waves. Fortunately investigators no longer have to commit such reductions. We can finally make room for the pathways of alteration… that allow for the processions of angels, the conversion-bearers, to proceed on their way* (Latour, 2013:308).

Conclusion

What has been an interesting part of this research for me was finding a way for God to become 'real' in an academic environment that did not easily allow for this. The theories of Latour, Jackson and others I have studied opened up an exciting realm of possibilities for those who are interested in how people experience unseen, yet felt, entities. 'Digging' into Existential Phenomenology caused me to see how important a solid theoretical base is for trying to unravel fieldwork observations that seem, on the surface, self-explanatory. When one uses experience, not belief, as the ground for understanding evangelical Christians, then whole new areas of ethnographic study are possible.

While academics are wrestling with changing ontologies, there are evangelicals who are also reputing modernized religion. Like Latour they are advocating for a return to the God who transforms, creates and is for the 'whole of life', not just for church on Sunday morning. These new, emerging Christian theologies are playing a part in an increasing number of young evangelicals taking action on social justice issues, particularly human trafficking. In

the next chapter I take the reader on a journey through evangelical history that will help understand the current interest in embodying God through actions of social justice.

CHAPTER THREE : EVANGELICALS: WHO THEY ARE AND HOW THEY ARE CHANGING

> *Protestant Christianity finds itself waking up each morning in bed with a deteriorating modern culture, between sheets with a raunchy sexual reductionism, despairing scientism, morally normless cultural relativism, and self-assertive individualism. We remain resident aliens, OF the world but not profoundly in it, dining at the banquet table of waning modernity without a whisper of table grace. – Thomas Oden*

Introduction

I chose to concentrate on Evangelical Christians and how they engage with social justice issues because this is the world I grew up in, so I thought I would have the advantage of an 'insider's view'. While this did turn out to be true for the experiential and embodied understandings of how evangelicals conceptualise social justice, I found there were many aspects of the evangelical world I needed to find out more about. One of these areas was the historical background to the evangelical movement and how hard it is to pinpoint how an evangelical Christian is defined.

While I have often heard the terms 'Pentecostal' or 'Charismatic' I really had no idea what the difference was between them. I thought all evangelicals were also Pentecostals or Charismatics, some of them were Fundamentalists, or was it all of them? As I started delving into the literature on these definitions and terms I realized that without an understanding of how Evangelicalism has evolved, and how evangelicals have engaged with social justice issues in the past, it is difficult to understand what is driving the current interest in social justice.

When I have sought feedback on my research from evangelicals the biggest 'push-back', and negative comments, have been around how I had defined an evangelical. What the academic literature defines as 'evangelical' is often not what Evangelicals feel describes them, or their particular experiences. While most people I met doing this research fitted into understandings of this term discussed in the literature, they themselves did not seem to like the term, or even understand what it meant. Some were surprised to learn that they were, according to an academic definition, evangelicals. A number of them told me that

they thought evangelicals were 'anti-gay' and anti many other things; they didn't want to be associated with the term.

Some felt that my definitions lumped them together with Fundamentalist Christians, whom they did not identify with, even though much evangelical theology crosses over with Fundamentalism. Others felt that I had not gone back far enough in history to link contemporary evangelicals with Protestant social justice movements in the 19th century. Another observation was that my descriptions of evangelicals applied more to North America, rather than a British or New Zealand context. This is true, and I acknowledge that the material in this thesis is based more on American Evangelicalism. This is mainly because much of the academic literature around evangelicals, social justice, and human trafficking comes from the United States, and many of my participants were from North America.

These comments and feedback made me dig deeper into the evangelical world and shaped much of what came to be included in this chapter. Exploring the evangelical historical timeline has helped to give a holistic framework in which to place the students' stories and the research that I undertook at this particular time. My participants do not stand outside of history; they are part of an ebb and flow of interest in social justice amongst evangelicals that has existed across time and continues today. I thought that evangelicals being interested in social justice issues was a new thing, however, by studying the history of evangelicals I came to see that this 'new thing' is in fact a return to an 'old' thing. The shape of evangelical world engagement for the future will look more like late 19th century Evangelicalism. Just as evangelicals in that time fought against the social degradation of communities brought about by industrialization, so modern day evangelicals are similarly fighting against the global effects of neo-liberal economics through trying to bring God's love in a practical manner to the marginalized and poor.

Trying to Define Evangelicals

This research concentrates on the views of people who come from Evangelical churches; therefore it is important to understand the background, theology and practices associated with this particular branch of Christianity. It is very difficult to come up with a definition of

Evangelicalism that covers all people who identify as such; not that this is necessarily a bad thing since, to quote anthropologist Roy Wagner: "The things we can define best are the things least worth defining" (Wagner, 1981:39). It may even be that the best definition of an evangelical is someone who says that they are. However it does not preclude that there are some specific characteristics that have been noted to be prevalent amongst most people and churches that identify with the label 'evangelical'. David Bebbington, a British historian, is the most widely cited academic on what characterises Evangelicalism (Coleman & Hackett, 2015). He came up with a number of features that he uses to define an evangelical (Bebbington, 1989), although it should be kept in mind that Bebbington's work is now over 25 years old. The definitions and characterizations discussed below build on Bebbington and other academic attempts to define this complex movement.

The word 'evangelical' derives from Greek word 'euangelion' and means "good news" (Coleman & Hackett, 2015). It refers to a commitment of sharing the gospel message of Jesus Christ as "the saviour of humanity" (Merritt, 2015) and was in use from the earliest days of Christianity when the first Christians were still living under Roman rule (Merritt, 2015). *Evangelicalism* can be defined as a movement within Protestant Christianity that can be found across all different Protestant denominations (Hastings, Mason, & Pyper, 2000) and is an "international, transdenominational community with complicated infrastructures of institutions and persons" (Marsden, 1984:ix).

A prominent feature of Evangelicalism is a focus on an individualised, personal *relationship* with God that emphasizes one's spiritual salvation can only come by accepting Christ's offer of redemption from sin through his death on the Cross (Butler Bass, 2012; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014; Hastings et al., 2000; T. Luhrmann, 2012). Another characteristic is an emphasis on the Bible as God's message for humanity and the main source of authority for Christians (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014; Hastings et al., 2000), as opposed to a person, such as the Pope in Catholicism. There is the tendency amongst many, although not all, evangelicals to apply a literalist view of the Bible; in other words that everything in it literally happened, such as the parting of the Red Sea by Moses, the Great Flood of Noah, and Jesus' death and bodily resurrection (Gallagher, 2003).

Yet another characteristic is the emphasis on conversion, missionary work and generally trying to bring those who are not perceived to 'have a relationship' with Jesus into the evangelical fold (Miller, Rosenberg, & Philips, 2006). Billy Graham and his crusade ministry is an example of this quintessential evangelical activity (Hastings et al., 2000). Attached to this work of mission is the importance for many evangelicals of expressing God's love through practical actions of help, compassion and mercy. It is this particular characteristic that this thesis explores.

Evangelicals across the world tend to sing the same praise and worship songs, listen to same popular preachers and pastors and, in the USA particularly, attend the same educational institutions such as Wheaton College and Fuller Theological Seminary (Hastings et al., 2000:218.). To sum up, Evangelicals are those who "believe the gospel to be experienced personally, defined biblically, and communicated passionately" (Dayton & Johnston, 2001:216), as they share their 'good news' with the world.

There are other Christian movements that need defining in order to understand Evangelicalism. One is *Pentecostalism*, which will be explained further on in this chapter, which has a strong emphasis on supernatural manifestations and experiencing the Holy Spirit. The word 'Pentecostal' in taken from the Christian Feast of Pentecost which occurs nearly two months after Easter and celebrates the event of the Holy Spirit being sent to the Apostles, as recorded in the Biblical book of Acts (Coleman & Hackett, 2015). The *Charismatic* movement is was what took place when Pentecostalism started to influence traditional churches in the 1960s. Charismatic Christianity also has a strong emphasis on experiencing God through prophecy, speaking in unknown languages (called 'speaking in tongues'), interpreting visions and so forth. Unlike the Pentecostals, who formed their own denominations, Charismatics have tended to stay within mainline denominations such as the Baptists, or Presbyterians (Coleman & Hackett, 2015; Ward, 2013).

Fundamentalism in Christianity is characterised by strict adherence to a literalist view of the Bible and a strong emphasis on maintaining boundaries of insiders (believers) and outsiders (non-believers) based on 'correct' theology (Coleman & Hackett, 2015). Karen Armstrong, a former nun and world renowned academic on the subject of religion has described Fundamentalists, including the Christian version, in the following way;

> *They are embattled forms of spirituality, which have emerged as a response to a perceived crisis. They are engaged in a conflict with enemies whose secularist politics and beliefs seem inimical to religion itself… it [is] a cosmic war between the forces of good and evil* (Armstrong, 2000:xi).

What has been confusing during this research is that not all Evangelicals are Charismatics, Pentecostals or Fundamentalists, but many use practices and teaching from all of these movements. There are Evangelical Charismatics, Pentecostal Fundamentalists, Charismatic Pentecostals, Fundamentalist Evangelicals and just about every other combination available. It has been noted that many people who identify with these streams of Christianity do not appreciate the use of "dry academic terms as ways to describe their religious experiences" (Coleman & Hackett, 2015:6); they are in a personal relationship with God, and it's how they *experience* God that matters to them the most.

For the purpose of this research I use the term 'Evangelical' as an umbrella term to refer to Christians who display the characteristics listed in the first part of this chapter such as a literalist view of the Bible and an emphasis on conversion and mission work. I am also including in this definition Christians who use supernatural 'gifts' such as healing that are deemed to come from the Holy Spirit and are common in Pentecostalism and the Charismatic movement.

Historical Background

In exploring the changing focus from proselytising to social activism, the contemporary evangelical social justice movement needs to be placed within an historical context. While anthropology has in the past been more concentrated on the 'ethnographic present', it is now common to acknowledge that there is an "inherently shifting, historical, dynamic character of all cultural forms" (Coleman & Hackett, 2015:3); this is also true in the case of Protestant Christianity.

Evangelicalism has its roots in Pietism, which was a Protestant movement that emerged amongst a group of Lutherans in Germany in the 17th century (McGrath, 2005). Pietism emphasised action based Christianity and a transformed life, as opposed to dwelling solely

on correct beliefs. It was “the heart, not only the head, that needed to be renewed by faith” (McGrath, 2005:18). Pietism was brought to the USA with Lutheran immigrants and became the impetus for a series of religious revivals in the New World.

There have been three major revivalist periods documented by historians that were characterised by mass conversions and emotional experiences such as convulsive laughter and tears (Armstrong, 2000:78). Those influenced by the new teachings were encouraged to go out ‘into the world’ to try to bring about change in society (Olsen, 2007). The ‘Great Awakening’, as it has been termed, came in a number of waves throughout Great Britain and the United States from the late 18th century onwards, mainly embodied through dynamic preachers such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and brothers John and Charles Wesley (McGrath, 2005). Social movements that were in part inspired by this revivalist wave included the Clapham Sect in the early 19th century which was one of the driving forces behind outlawing slavery in Great Britain, the temperance movement, and the women’s suffrage movement (Miller et al., 2006). There were also groups of revivalist inspired Christians who campaigned for child labour laws, welfare and union rights, and penal and education reforms in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Armstrong, 2000; Wallis, 2008).

In 1901 the Pentecostal movement was born in California. Called the ‘Azusa Street revival’ and led by African-American preacher William Seymour, congregants of a small, storefront church in Los Angeles began to have supernatural experiences such as healings, shaking, falling over, prophesying and speaking in unknown utterances (called ‘speaking in tongues’) (Bass, 2012). These phenomena were attributed to a ‘move of the Holy Spirit’ and were compared to the first church period of the Bible in the book of Acts where Jesus’ disciples received similar types of spiritual, supernatural ‘gifts’ after Jesus had ascended into heaven. Traditional church doctrine had taught that these gifts had ceased after the original disciples had died, but Pentecostalism shattered that paradigm and was soon growing at an exponential rate, attracting mainly the poor and working class of society (Reich, 2014).

Today the Pentecostal movement is the fastest growing denomination of the Christian religion, especially in Africa and Latin America (Gordon & Hancock, 2005; Jenkins, 2011) . It is predicted that in predominately Catholic Latin America, Pentecostalism will surpass

Catholicism as the prime Christian identity in this century, with the majority of Latinos who leave Catholicism moving to Pentecostal churches (Pew Research Centre, 2013).

Although the Pentecostal movement was popular amongst the minorities and the working classes in America during the early to mid 20th century, it was not the dominant form of Protestant Christian expression. This role was played by 'Mainline' churches, which included Anglicans/Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists and some branches of Quakerism. Mainline churches are those that have strong roots in the Protestant Reformation and were established prior to the beginning of the 20th century (Armstrong, 2000). These churches tended to focus on social justice and working in their local communities to alleviate poverty and suffering. At the beginning of the 20th century Protestants of all denominations were "committed to the progressive ideal" (Armstrong, 2000:169).

It was at this time that the term *'Social Gospel'* became prevalent. This is an important concept to understand, since some of my participants talked about it. Armstrong describes the Social Gospel as

> *An attempt to return to what they saw as the basic teachings of the Hebrew prophets and of Christ himself, who had taught his followers to visit prisoners, clothe the naked and feed the hungry… Liberal Protestants tried to baptise socialism… Conservatives would later become very critical of the Social Gospel, and would argue that it was pointless to save a world that was doomed* (Armstrong, 2000:169).

The backlash against the Social Gospel came from a group called 'the Fundamentalists'. This group came together in the early 20th century because they were perturbed at the 'liberal leanings' of the Mainline churches that they considered were 'selling out' to the world (Armstrong, 2000) and were not trying to 'save souls'.

In an age where scientific theories were becoming the backbone of Western societies, the Fundamentalists set out to construct a theological base for Christianity that relied on their own interpretations of science to prove God existed and could be defended in an enlightened manner (Armstrong, 2000; Luhrmann, 2012). If Darwin could come up with the 'Origin of Species', they could come up with the literal, rationalist origins of Christianity.

They got their name from a tract they published and distributed called 'The Fundamentals' which sought to set out a theological statement as to what 'real' Christians should believe and practice. This included a literal interpretation of the Bible that covered a seven day creation of earth, the virgin birth, and Jesus' miracles that mainline churches said were metaphors and teaching stories (Luhrmann, 2012).

The Evangelical movement this research examines was birthed from the 'Charismatic' stream. This branch of Protestant Christianity formed in the 1960s (Stetzer, 2013) from a 'coming together' of the literal biblical worldview of the Fundamentalist churches, the individualist salvation message and missionary emphasis of evangelical churches, and the emotional, personal and experiential type of Christianity that Pentecostalism offered. It became popular amongst a mixture of Mainline church and Catholic Christians who were seeking a more supernatural form of Christianity (Poewe, 1994). This unlikely combination was helped along by one of the greatest social upheavals of the 20th century, the hippy movement, or 'Summer of Love' that began to spread through the Western world in the 1960s and 70s (Luhrmann, 2012).

Just as many young people during this time were seeking to break free from 'the establishment' and look for love and peace, many young Christians took the opportunity to start breaking away from their old, 'Mainline' churches. Christian young people in the 1960s began to form Christian communes and informal groups with an emphasis on *experiencing* the love of God, rather than doing only good works or parroting theological viewpoints. These young Christians were called 'Jesus Freaks', and the era referred to as the 'Jesus People' movement (Luhrmann, 2012; Bass, 2012).

California, in the United States, was the centre of this movement. From there many influential churches and pastors were born, such as Chuck Smith from Calvary Chapel and John Wimber from the Vineyard church. These churches took the movement across America and around the world. Although it was begun by young Christian hippies, these 'Jesus Freaks' got older and the movement became more institutionalised. Now the average Charismatic Evangelical tends to be white and middle class (Luhrmann, Nusbaum, & Thisted, 2010; Luhrmann, 2012; Robbins, 2003), unlike people who still adhere to more

'pure' Pentecostalism, who are more likely to be brown, non-Western, and poor (Reich, 2014).

During the 1960s and '70s it seemed the Fundamentalist Christianity of the earlier 20th century had died out. In the late 1970s, however, there arose a political movement amongst a group of Christians in the USA that came to be called the 'Moral Majority', led by Rev Jerry Falwell, which was opposed to secular humanism (Coleman & Hackett, 2015:11). This popular movement brought Fundamentalist Christianity back into the spotlight and was quite different to experiential based 'Jesus People' movement. It was characterised by an emphasis on maintaining conservative moral values, particularly relating to abortion and homosexuality, and aligning political support of its followers with the Republican Party (Wallis, 2008). Progressive Christian leader Jim Wallis commented that "after thirty years much of America became convinced that God was a Republican, and the enduring image of Christianity became the televangelist preacher" (Wallis, 2008:30).

Evangelical Christianity in the USA was strongly affected by this movement. Evangelical Christianity in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand was not influenced as much. This was due to the different cultural contexts that excluded the joining of evangelicalism with political ideology, which become common in the USA. But many of the Fundamentalist ideals and fear of the Social Gospel affecting American evangelicals filtered down to non-American evangelicals, mainly through the prolific publishing efforts of American conservative, Moral Majority supporting pastors and leaders.

The current emphasis on returning evangelicalism to a social justice and 'action based' type of Christianity can be partly understood as a reaction against the Moral Majority style of Christianity (Markham, 2010). In the 21st century there is a growing movement of evangelicals who have been called 'new' or 'emergent/emerging' evangelicals by the increasing number of scholars studying them (Bielo, 2009, 2011, 2012; Burge & Djupe, 2014; Ganiel & Marti, 2015; Hawtrey & Lunn, 2010; Markham, 2010). I will use the term 'Emergent Evangelicals' when referring to this particular movement.

Emergent Christianity

This version of evangelicalism is being driven by mainly middle class, tertiary educated Christians, and well as younger evangelicals (Markham, 2010). They are disenchanted with the Fundamentalist version of evangelical Christianity represented by Moral Majority conservatives such as American television host Pat Robertson and his politically Right Wing circle, who oppose social welfare and are uncritical of free market economics (Bielo, 2011; Elisha, 2011; Lee, 2013).

Many of these emergent evangelicals are embarrassed by the church culture of their youth that spent much of its time opposing such things as women's rights and homosexuality while endorsing nationalism, war and the Republican ideals epitomized by George W. Bush (Campolo, 2004; Elisha, 2011; Friedman, 2006; Miller et al., 2006). A leading Christian blogger, Rachel Held Evans, muses in her personal memoir "Somewhere along the way the gospel had gotten buried under a massive pile of extras: political positions, lifestyle requirements and unspoken rules… Sometimes Jesus himself seemed buried beneath the rubble" (Held Evans, 2010:2284 e-book). Some of the students I interviewed talked about this. They wanted their churches to move beyond concentrating on a narrow range of 'culture war' issues such as opposing gay marriage, to include social justice issues such as human trafficking and economic inequality.

This is especially true for young evangelicals who are being exposed to movies like 'Amazing Grace', which chronicles the fight of British Member of Parliament, Wilbur Wilberforce, for the abolition of slavery in the 19th century. My participants were shown this movie during The Course and a number mentioned it as a source of inspiration to get involved with justice issues. Wilberforce was a member of the 'Clapton Sect', mentioned earlier; many emergent evangelicals interested in social justice trace the movement's roots back to groups like this. Often, when I mentioned to evangelicals that I was researching the rising interest in social justice, they would reference Wilberforce to point out evangelicals had always been interested in social justice.

Paul Markham found that "these 'new evangelicals' share similarities with early evangelicals dating back to the eighteenth century – the most notable being their fervour for personal and social transformation" (Markham, 2010:2). Emergent evangelicals are also

rediscovering the work of socially progressive evangelicals from the 1960s and 70s such as Jim Wallis and Ron Sider, who founded the organization 'Evangelicals for Social Action'. Progressive pastor Tony Campolo summed up the new movement well when he said:

> *I want it to be known that there are millions of us who espouse an evangelical theology, but who reject being classified as part of the Religious Right– we don't want to make Jesus into a Republican* (Campolo, 2008:17).

How Emergents are changing Evangelicalism

Missionary Work

The Evangelical branch of Protestantism has been characterized by an active interest in missionary work. To be a missionary generally involved someone commissioned by their church or denomination to go elsewhere to tell others about God, in particular the evangelical version of God, who wanted to save people from their sins. While some missionaries worked in their own countries, most went overseas to regions where it was presumed that the people did not know God, and as such were 'lost' and on their way to hell. Evangelical missionary efforts emphasised personal salvation, conversion and piety (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014; L. Miller et al., 2006). This individualistic orientation has been noted time and again (Bielo, 2014; Chaves, 2013; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014; Gallagher, 2003) amongst Evangelical Christians and will be discussed further in a next chapter.

A salient feature of evangelical missionary activity, especially amongst churches influenced by the Charismatic movement, is the tendency to allow non-seminary trained people to go into the mission field. These missionaries have little formal training, except for what they may have received in their local churches, or a short term course. This can be attributed to an understanding that God is directly accessible through prayer and bible reading, so He will guide the missionary personally in what they should do, rather than relying on theological training or denominational rules.

The organization that ran The Course emerges from this history. While it offers many different types of training in various Christian topics, its cornerstone course is the five

month mission's training school that my participants were part of. In the evangelical world these types of organizations are called 'para-church' groups. They are not churches in and of themselves, but attract people from many different churches, usually evangelical ones, to pursue the particular area of Christian 'ministry' they are dedicated to.

Many Evangelicals have been strongly influenced by a theology called Dispensationalism, which has had a major effect in the way they have viewed missionary work. Dispensationalism has been attributed to John Nelson Darby, who was associated with the Plymouth Brethren in England in the early 19th century (Elisha, 2011). Dispensationalism understands the future has already been ordained by God and cannot be changed. It is characterised by literal interpretation of the Bible, a focus on biblical prophecy and the nation of Israel, and a habit of trying to predict when Jesus would return. It rotates around curtain biblical passages which focus on the 'End Times' return of Christ, and a particular interpretation of the biblical book of Revelation, where Jesus will return to earth and judge the whole of humanity on whether or not they have accepted his message of salvation for their sins (Armstrong, 2000).

This particular view of how the 'end times' would play out tended to make Evangelical missionary activity focused on preaching salvation to those who had never heard the 'good news'. This was with the intention of saving their souls from the coming apocalypse when Christ would return, which was presumed to be at any time (Miller & Yanomori, 2007). This is not to say that Evangelical missionaries did not tried to help others practically, as is evidenced by the schools, orphanages and clinics built by them. However much of this help, due to the short-term temporality inherent in dispensationalism, did not usually seek to address political or structural inequality (Bialecki, 2009).

Omri Elisha's research on the moral discourses of charity work amongst a number of evangelical mega churches in the USA underscores the difficulty evangelicals have had when trying to combine mission work and social justice initiatives (Elisha, 2011). Elisha's participants were evangelicals who were trying to get their churches interested in working with social justice projects. However many were frustrated, as some of my participants were, and felt that there was a lack of sustained commitment by evangelicals to work that targeted 'poor, distressed and needy populations' (Elisha, 2011). One of Elisha's participant

pointed out, “We’ve always been good at proclamation evangelism—preaching sermons and handing out pamphlets and such—but we’re terrible at loving people” (Elisha, 2011:6). Elisha goes on to suggest that the influence of dispensationalist theology is still strong amongst many evangelical congregations; this theology causes them to be sceptical, and even hostile, towards social justice initiatives that “suggest that humanity is capable of redeeming itself on its own through social and political reforms” (Elisha, 2011:16).

As my research shows emergent evangelicals do not see mission work in this way. Anthropologist James Bielo’s research findings parallel mine where he found that:

> *Emerging Christians reject evangelical styles of witnessing: handing out Bible tracts, street preaching, delivering the finely tuned personal conversion narrative, presenting the Gospel via logical apologetics, and using church events as an entre´ into the Christian community. A single problem unites these methods: they lack a meaningful, lasting personal commitment. Being missional means seriously cultivating relationships – not before or after a conversion attempt, but in place of it* (Bielo, 2009:226).

Rather than being missionaries, emergent evangelicals are interested in being ‘missional’. To be missional does not mean to be a missionary, in the traditional sense. Many of those interested in being missional take a rather dim view of traditional missionary work seeing it at worst as imperialistic, associated with dubious attempts at colonization and as promoting westernised cultural values (McLaren, 2006). At best it is seen as a genuine attempt by sincere people to tell the ‘natives’ about God but was invariably coloured by the missionaries’ own Enlightenment-based understandings of civilization verses savagery (Hiebert, 1997).

The concept of being ‘missional’ is that all Christians are supposed to be taking God’s love out into the world, not just a few specialised missionaries (McLaren, 2006; Tienou & Hiebert, 2006). McLaren outlines what it means to be ‘missional’;

> *[It] eliminates old dichotomies like ‘evangelism’ and ‘social action’. Both are integrated in expressing and sowing love for the world… those who want to become*

> *Christians we welcome. Those who don't we love and serve, joining God in seeking their good, their blessing, their shalom* (McLaren, 2006:118).

Being missional concentrates more on using ones skills and abilities to help others to have better lives, through such professions as teaching, medical care, legal representation or social work, rather than through only preaching and proselytising. I observed this view was encouraged in the course lectures, with students being told that they needed to have something practical to offer to people experiencing injustice and that good intentions were not enough. To be 'missional' is also understood as going out into the world as an embodiment of Christ, who did good works and was interested in widows and orphans (Vanderwerf, 2011). It is embedded in a privileging of community and relationships, rather than linguistic attempts at conversion of strangers.

Introducing Post-Modern theological debates

Many emergent evangelicals have grown up in an era where ideals of absolute truth and certainty are more difficult to believe in than for their parents or grandparents (Bielo, 2011; Ganiel & Marti, 2015). They are beginning to introduce, or in many cases reintroduce, theological arguments into evangelicalism that are influenced by a worldview that does not see issues in a binary dichotomies such as truth/lies.

One issue beginning to affect evangelical Christians is scepticism about the power of language to define and create. This scepticism has also become prevalent in the humanities and social science, including anthropology. I discussed this in Chapter Two through the ideas of Latour and how language use needs to change in order to understand new modes of existence (Latour, 2013). Traditionally evangelical Christianity has been strongly based on a literal interpretation of the words of the Bible, and the use of literature and the spoken word to spread the 'good news'. There are certain branches of evangelicalism that concentrate on 'words of faith' which see words as having power in and of themselves. Words spoken in faith will bring wealth and health, as well as salvation, when they confess verbally that 'Jesus Christ is Lord' (Coleman, 2006). Tanya Luhrmann found "evangelical hesitation arises from the very idea that humans can reach for God without language… Jesus was that word, and to critics, without that word we find our stilled minds no more than empty vastness" (Luhrmann, 2012:167).

For emerging evangelicals there is wariness towards how language has been used to define and encapsulate 'truth'. McLaren points out that "language can be a window through which one glimpses God, but never a box in which God can be contained" (McLaren, 2006:171). Emerging theologians are also very aware of how text is set in historical and cultural contexts. Taking the text outside of these contexts can warp, twist or change the original meaning, which introduces a paradoxical element to reading the Bible, or trying to understand what the text 'really' means (McLaren, 2006).

Jesus did, however, talk about engaging in specific actions and practices, for example to 'visit those in prison' and to 'clothe the naked' (Matthew 25:35-37 ESV Bible). Emerging theology thus puts the emphasis on doing what Jesus *did*, and said to *do*, rather than trying to define theological terms and abstract concepts without much real-world application. Robert Jones noted that "when progressive leaders talked about Jesus, they emphasized his life, example, and teachings; they might say, "Jesus was killed because of the radical way he lived.""(Jones, 2008:81). Emergent author Brian McLaren further states that "actions speak volumes about God that could never be captured in a text or a sermon" (McLaren, 2006:171).

The Kingdom of God

Tied closely to the concept of being missional is the idea those participating in social justice initiatives are helping to bring the Kingdom of God to earth. The 'Kingdom of God' is a major theme in the New Testament of the Bible where Jesus continually talked about his Kingdom, and what it looked like and entailed for his followers. Such verses as "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33, ESV Bible) and "blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43, ESV Bible) are examples of Jesus' teaching on the subject.

Often in evangelical thought it was understood that when Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God he was referring to heaven, an otherworldly paradise where God's followers would go when they died (Wright, 2008). In many Protestant Christian groups, especially amongst Pentecostals, it was, and is still, common to see life on earth as a waiting time before 'real life' would begin after death, when one would go to heaven (Miller & Yanomori, 2007). Christians who emphasise that the Kingdom of God refers primarily to Heaven do not have

much of a reason to want to make the world better, since it will all burn up anyway when Jesus returns (Bielo, 2011).

Many of the contemporary evangelical organizations who are fighting human trafficking make no mention of heaven, hell, or eternal judgement in their publicity. Various theologians have noted that amongst evangelicals who are interested in social justice there is a diminishing emphasis on heaven and hell (Butler Bass, 2012; McLaren, 2006; Wright, 2008) and an increasing stress on 'the here and now' (Tienou & Hiebert 2006; Bulter Bass, 2012). Markham argues that there was a distinct "present-focused eschatology" amongst his participants, who made no mention of 'saving souls', hell, heaven or the afterlife either (Markham, 2010:16), which is indeed a sharp turnaround for evangelical missions orthodoxy.

Amongst emergent evangelicals the emphasis is on the Kingdom of God being located on earth, more so than in heaven. Theologian Diane Butler Bass has referred to this as a change from a 'vertical' understanding of the universe, where God is up above in heaven, to a 'horizontal' orientation where God dwells on earth, amongst and within his people (Butler Bass, 2015). Within this emerging theology evangelicals have more emphasis on the idea that God has not set the future in stone. Instead he has given humans the ability to mould it through doing His work on earth and in doing so bringing 'heaven to earth' (Wright, 2008). Butler Bass emphasises this when she states;

> *Why do Christians serve others? Christians do not act charitably to earn heavenly credit; rather Christians find Jesus in their neighbours and such proximity enables greater insight to live fully in the world* (Bulter Bass, 2012:187).

God is good

The God experienced by many young and emergent Christians is understood to be loving and all humanity is considered to be 'made in the image of God' (Butler Bass, 2012; Friedman, 2006) and deserves to be cherished.

> *All people have dignity and are equal in God's sight; and therefore they have rights—whether they are poor, women, or children* (Miller & Yanomori, 2007:5).

This view is grounded in the Bible from such verses as Galatians 3:28 which states “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (ESV).

God is also often portrayed as a good father, one who wants to look after his ‘children’, particularly those who follow him directly. God is “not a potentate trying to keep serfs under control, but rather a parent inviting us to grow and mature” (McLaren, 2006:321). The theme of God as Father and his followers as his ‘children’ is deeply ingrained in many contemporary evangelical teachings. One of the most popular worship songs worldwide in 2016 was “You’re a good, good Father” by Chris Tomlin [3]. Since God is good and compassionate he wants people to not only go to heaven but to have a reasonable quality of life before they get there.

So what does this ‘good life’ look like for emergent evangelicals? God wants people to be in healthy relationships (Freidman, 2006), he wants human to flourish and experience holistic development in all areas of life (Chalke, 2003; Hartropp, 2010; Campolo, 2004). He also wants peace and justice that will restore people to a state of well-being (Lee, 2013) and “liberation of the whole person”(Yoder, 1987:49). He does not want them to be enslaved by human traffickers or abducted from their families to be used as soldiers.

Modernization and the explosion of global wealth in the post World War Two era means that having a ‘good life’ is now something that is also possible to obtain, that life on earth can be made pleasurable. One does not just have to hang on to the hope of a good life that will only eventuate after death (Wright, 2008), instead “ the world is no longer a place from which to escape—the sectarian view—but instead as a place they want to make better”(Miller & Yanomori, 2007:30).

Backlash against Emergent Evangelicals

As social justice has become an increasing focus for younger evangelicals there has been a backlash amongst a section of older, conservative evangelicals who are concerned at this trend. They label it an infiltration of ‘liberalism’ and ‘secularism’ since it de-emphasises dispensationalism, the spoken gospel salvation message, and the coming ‘End times

judgement' (Carson, 2010; DeWaay, 2010; Elisha, 2011; Johnson, 2008). Some are scared that Christians will become 'tainted' by working with non-Christians on humanitarian projects , while others are concerned that "their main focus is the transformation of society and no longer on people's salvation from sin, death and the power of the devil" (Prill, 2011).

There seems to be a growing gap between older evangelicals who think like this and their children and grandchildren (Burroughs, Darling, & King, 2014) who are more in line with the emerging views discussed in this chapter. Emergent evangelicals have a desire for an active, adventurous faith on earth and are not content to just sit around and wait for death and heaven (Campolo, 2004).

Conclusion

Through examining the historical journey of Evangelical Christianity I see that it is currently in a period of change regarding how its adherents are choosing to engage with the world. These changes are not totally new, but rather an extension of arguments and theological debates that have characterized different factions of the movement, especially between progressive/emergent evangelicals and Pentecostals and Fundamentalists.

Evangelical Christians have, in periods throughout history, been at the forefront of movements for social change that have brought about substantial improvements for the betterment of societies. However, in the last thirty years the voice of the Fundamentalist based Moral Majority movement has dominated the public arena. This has meant that for many non-Christians in the 21st century West this is how they have come to view all Evangelicals. This has been brought home to me when I have talked with fellow academics while presenting papers on this research at conferences in New Zealand and Australia. Most of them admitted to not knowing much about Evangelicals, but what they did know was based on seeing snippets of televangelists, news reports covering anti-gay protests or the Tea Party political movement in America, or commentaries on evangelicals by American talk show hosts such as Jon Stewart or Stephen Colbert. Even though the Moral Majority movement is based in the United States its impact on Evangelicalism worldwide has been considerable, evidenced in any Christian bookshop globally, and on the internet.

There is a growing movement of evangelicals who are not content to be associated with the Conservative, fundamentalist version of their faith and have been strongly influenced by a globalised world that values higher education, pluralism, diversity and open-mindedness. Many of the students on The Course fitted this description. None of them directly identified with the label 'emergent Christian', but they talked about many of concepts that have come out of the movement. In the next chapter I move from history to the contemporary period of the 21st century where I explore how scholars are engaging with evangelical interest in social justice.

CHAPTER FOUR: EVANGELICALS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

> *Mention the word 'evangelical missionary' and many Americans conjure up an image of redneck zealots forcing starving children to be baptized before they get a few crusts of bread.*
> *- Nicolas Kristof*

Introduction

I discovered when I started doing background research there was very little academic literature on evangelical Christians and how they engage with social justice, except around human trafficking. Evangelicals themselves are writing an increasing amount of material on social justice, but the academic world has been largely silent. Research has been done by Omri Elisha on evangelicals and charity work, and James Bielo about emergent evangelicals which was discussed in the previous chapter. Their findings overlapped with mine in a number of aspects, but represented a different group of people from my participants.

In this chapter I discuss the academic literature I found on how evangelicals are engaging with social justice issues. The literature that I reviewed came from the issues highlighted during my fieldwork, especially the interviews. These were topics important to the students, and to understanding why they were interested in social justice. In particular one area of social justice that my participants were interested in, human trafficking, has been widely written about. Most of the academics discussing this topic have come to the conclusion evangelicals are interested in human trafficking, especially sex trafficking, because of moral objections to sex work. I argue in Chapter Eight that while this is partly true the literature has missed an important factor that drives evangelical interest in stopping sex trafficking, which are their experiences with God. I also discuss the role of individualism which is pertinent in how my participants understood the causes and remedies for issues of injustice.

How evangelicals experience God has been the theme of anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann's work. I use her ethnography to compare and contrast how her participants experienced God with my own research. The role of social media in shaping the participants views on social justice was another area which was strongly evident during my fieldwork but there is no academic literature I could find on this. Here I examine literature that looks more generally at evangelical social media use. Once the participants has experienced God and learnt about

social justice issues through the Internet and Facebook they wanted to take action. This often led them to taking part in a Short Term Mission Trip (STM). A number of researchers have written about this increasingly popular phenomenon, which is not only relevant for evangelicals, but for many other streams of Christianity.

Evangelical Interest in Human Trafficking.

There is now a considerable amount of academic literature discussing evangelicals who are interested in stopping human trafficking, particularly sex trafficking. Much of this literature argues that these evangelicals are moralistic, colonialist and are 'anti-sex'. An example of this is Elizabeth Bernstein, who sees evangelical interest in stopping sex trafficking as a not-so-new form of moral panic around sex. In her view evangelicals see all sex labour as a form of slavery and they take part in anti-trafficking efforts as a way to police sexual immorality (Bernstein, 2007). This argument is based on research done amongst commercial, unionised sex workers in the USA, and observation of evangelical anti-trafficking organizations. She also suggests that evangelicals wanting to stop sex trafficking were performing a "neoliberal sexual agenda" (Bernstein 2007:137) which concentrated on the 'deviant individuals' rather than trying to change the social systems that drove people into sex work in the first place.

Another argument is that evangelicals focus on sex trafficking, and ignore the much bigger problem of labour trafficking because of a fixation on women's moral purity (Zimmerman, 2011). Academic and former sex worker Claudia Cojocaru is of the opinion that evangelical anti-trafficking efforts depict "all labour migration for sexual commerce as sex trafficking" (Cojocaru, 2015:1). In this evangelical narrative all prostitutes could be considered victims of sex trafficking, which ignores the agency of those who are willingly participating in sex work (Berman, 2006; Bernstein, 2007; Zimmerman, 2011). This point is also highlighted in Bielo's work (2014). He studied how a group of evangelical men in the USA framed the issue of human trafficking. Some of the men in his research saw females as having "little or no agency: an adult stripper and a 14-year-old sex slave are imagined in much the same way. It is men and men's decision-making that guide the course of social change" (2014:247).

There are those that think evangelicals working to stop sex trafficking are not providing an impartial form of help, they are instead perpetuating a 'white saviour' role of wanting to save "poor, brown, third-world females" (Campbell & Zimmerman, 2014:149). The rescue model anti-trafficking agencies use is thought to be ineffective, and that not all the women who have been 'rescued' were happy about it, since they lost their form of income (Soderlund, 2005).

Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick suggests that evangelicals engage with human trafficking in the same way as they understand salvation, rescuing individuals from slavery one person at a time (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014). He calls this framework of understanding a 'salvation schema' where

> *Contemporary evangelical abolitionism is a globally oriented and externally focused moral project that draws inspiration and energy from the analogous salvation of individual victims from sin (*Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014:6).

Choi-Fitzpatrick argues that the 'individualistic evangelical' is an important concept when framing how evangelicals understand the causes of and solutions to human trafficking. Bielo also found this individualist orientation in his fieldwork where the evangelical narrative,

> *frames trafficking as a problem of individual male desire and moral failure. Stopping the problem begins with the act of individual pledges. If men can end their personal addictions to pornography, young girls will no longer be trafficked* (Bielo, 2014:242).

As will be seen in the next two chapters my participants did discuss rescuing individuals and the role of pornography in human trafficking. But overall they did not fit into the model of moralistic, 'white saviours' that are presented in the academic literature.

Evangelical individualism

Evangelical theology tends to concentrate on the relationship between God and the individual. Earlier in history, during the medieval period, the concept of the individual in the West was framed in terms of an entity that existed partly on its own but generally as part of 'an indivisible whole' as evidenced by the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Williams, 1961). The Protestant Reformation introduced the idea of an individual having a

separate soul which could have its own relationship with God, unmediated by the priest or the pope (Bialecki & Daswani, 2015). The concept of the autonomous individual, who has agency to live "by his free enterprise" (Williams, 1961:98), is now so taken for granted within Western societies it is hard to conceive we ever thought otherwise. As such one of the defining features of evangelical Christianity in the 20th century that has been noted by many scholars is a focus on an individualistic faith, whether that is individual piety (Wuthnow, 1999), or a focus on individual belief and experience (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014; Luhrmann, 2012; Butler-Bass, 2012).

Unlike Judaism or Islam, evangelical Christians cannot inherit faith or salvation from their parents, family or even church; salvation comes through an individual's commitment to 'follow Jesus' (Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014). There is an evangelical saying 'God doesn't have grandchildren', which means you can't get into heaven through the faith of your parents. As discussed in the last chapter this meant evangelical missionaries focused on getting others to make this personal commitment, so that their souls would be saved. Individual experiences with God are very powerful and are an important part of why young evangelicals take up actions of social justice, such as human trafficking.

Experiencing God

It became clear during my fieldwork that the students engaged with social justice issues based on the evangelical framing of a 'relationship with God'. I knew this from personal experience, yet I have come to understand that deep 'experiencing of God' is not something well understood, even by people from other streams of Christianity.

Many evangelicals emphasis having a personal relationship with a divine being called 'God'. This differs from Catholicism which has historically mediated the connection with God through the words and edicts of priests, bishops and the pope (Shea, 2004). It varies from many Mainline Protestant churches that are more focused on doing the good works that are talked about in the Bible than maintaining an intense 'relationship' with God. This 'having a *personal* relationship with God' aspect of evangelicalism is so important that many

evangelicals, even currently, do not consider Catholics as fellow Christians, seeing them as being in need of 'saving' (Shea, 2004) .

Psychological anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann researched how a group of American evangelicals experienced God in her book "*When God talks back"* (2012). As someone coming from the same background as the participants that Luhrmann writes about her work resonates with me. It gives an accurate portrayal of the evangelical, especially Charismatic, stream of Christianity. She explored how a group of modern citizens in the 21st Century can maintain faith in an invisible entity, especially when,

> *faith asks people to believe that their minds are not always private; that persons are not always visible; that invisible presences should alter their emotions and direct their behaviour; that reality is good and justice triumphant* (Luhrmann, 2012:xii).

Luhrmann was fascinated by how prayer worked, since she had previously studied homeless women in Chicago who heard 'voices' (Luhrmann, Padmavati, Tharoor, & Osei, 2014). She wanted to find out if those who used prayer to communicate with God, where they talk to God and God talked back to them, had similarities with her homeless, schizophrenic participants**.** She found prayer was different. Unlike the voices of her schizophrenic participants, which consistently belittled them (Luhrmann, 2012), the voice of the God evangelicals experienced during prayer was loving and kind.

Her participant's relationships with God were very intimate; they talked to him about their daily lives and asked him about the littlest details. God could get you a car-park and tell you what colour to paint the kitchen table. He can also tell you who to marry, or to go overseas on a Short Term Mission Trip. Luhrmann says;

> *These Christians speak as if God interacts with them like a friend. He speaks to them. He listens to them. He acts when they pray to him about mundane things, because he cares… when I first encountered it, I imagined that people thought of God as if he were a supernatural buddy with a thunderbolt* (2012:xix).

This type of interaction with God was common and normal amongst my participants also. Learning to talk with God and to hear his voice is not easy. It requires learning skills such as sitting still, concentrating on one's inner thoughts and working out the difference between

your own thoughts and the voice of God (Luhrmann, 2012). It has been argued for many evangelical Christians it is not the assent to a set of written beliefs that is at the core of their faith (Jackson, 2009; McLaren, 2006). Rather it is the experiences they have with God that keeps them being Christians, even during hard times when their faith doesn't seem to make sense in a modern world. Luhrmann found that "they feel God's presence, they hear God's voice. Their hearts flood with an incandescent joy" (2012:222). Evangelicalism is, at its core, experiential (Bulter Bass, 2012; Luhrmann, Nusbaum, & Thisted, 2010)

An increasing emphasis on experiences is leading to a diminishing emphasis on correct theology and beliefs. As prominent evangelical pastor Rob Bell asks

> *Are we the ultimate arbiters of what can and cannot exist? Or is the universe open, wondrous, unexpected, and far beyond anything we can comprehend* (Bell, 2012).

While they may have been less sure of concrete theologies, many young evangelicals are becoming stronger in the view that they need to 'do something'.

Action

Taking part in actions around social justice issues is now coming to be seen as "a moral imperative of serious faith" (Bielo, 2014:235), and praxis is seen as being "prior to theology" (McLaren, 2006:100). Markham's research amongst young evangelicals interested in social justice showed they were not particularly keen on pushy conversion tactics or traditional forms of evangelism (Markham, 2010). One of his research participants said;

> *To be honest with you, I'm not sure I'm even concerned with someone giving their heart and life to Jesus anymore. I really am just concerned with just loving God and loving our neighbours as ourselves… I really am just interested in serving people* (Markham, 2010:16).

Markham's findings echo Bielo's, who found that younger evangelicals especially "reject evangelical styles of witnessing" (Bielo, 2009:226). With a move away from verbal proselytising to action based world engagement there has been a rise in a very particular evangelical activity; the Short Term Mission Trip.

Short Term Mission Trips (STMs)

Evangelical churches and organizations (such as Christian universities, student groups etc.) are now propelling large numbers of Christian young people into STMs both locally and overseas (Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009). Short Term Mission Trips have also been encouraged by the rise of cheap overseas travel. It has been estimated that by 2006 around 1.6 million Americans annually were taking part in STMs (Priest, Dischinger, Rasmussen, & Brown, 2006) and numbers continue to increase (Hancock, 2014; Howell, 2009; Priest et al., 2006; Trinitapoli & Vaisey, 2009).

These trips are often the first time young evangelicals get to visit a developing country or interact with people different from themselves in terms of class, ethnicity and culture. As such they make a lasting impression and often spur the people who take these trips to want to 'do something' to change the poverty that has so shocked them, like my participants. Priest points out, "American pastors and their congregations are among the most 'overlooked globalizers' of our world" (Priest et al., 2006:434).

Short Term Mission Trips contribute to participants forming a globalised mentality, which is mediated through their Christian worldview. People who are involved in STMs are encouraged to experience ""God's global heart", and to become "world-changers"" (Hancock, 2014:157). During fieldwork in one of the morning teaching sessions I heard the exact phrase 'world changers' used. It conveys the understanding that God is global, international and supra-cultural; that "the gospel and the message that binds us together… transcends culture" (Baillie Smith et al., 2013:129). Evangelicals have a faith-based view of what global citizenship entails, and that they enact when going on a STM. One of Baillie Smith's research participants summed it up this way;

> *I think there is an increasing teaching in the church of a global citizenship in the sense of, we are… fellow citizens in the kingdom of God… there is a genuine attempt at the moment, in the church, to actually recognise its innate racism. They wouldn't use those terms. But actually… we are from all nations, tribes, and things like that* (Baillie Smith et al., 2013:129).

God is seen to be present all over the world; he is a God that loves all people everywhere, which will be discussed more in Chapter Six. Becoming a Christian global citizen and engaging with 'God's global heart' (Hancock, 2014) ties into the importance of being an active Christian; not only at home and within church, but also out in a world of poverty and injustice. Evangelical cosmopolitanism is starting to be seen in popular worship music, such as Chris Tomlin's "How Great is Our God" [4]. The music video for this song was filmed at a large evangelical conference in the USA but includes verses sung in Hindi, Indonesian, Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Zulu and Mandarin.

As young evangelicals become more globalized they are learning about social justice issues, and actions they can take, increasingly from sources that do not include their local church. They are instead turning to the internet, particularly social media, as their main platform of engagement and knowledge.

Evangelicals and the Internet

There is a growing literature on how the internet is changing and forming religious practices in the 21st century, especially how social media is used to circumvent, or get round the authority of traditional church leadership (Lawrence, 2015). Although Christian institutions and churches are increasingly involved in social media there are still attempts to keep control of the medium by censoring what goes on the social media platform, or removing divisive material (Lawrence, 2015).

The Internet can be a "threat to offline authority" (Campbell, 2013:6), since it allows people to browse and in essence 'pick and choose' between different sources on spirituality. These sources are outside of conventional religious supervision, such as a pastor or priest (Campbell, 2013:6). An example of this was a group of young pastors who used social media to raise support for a document to be presented to their denominational board asking for a change in policy on how climate change was viewed (Banerjee, 2008). They used the medium of social media because their local church board refused to allow them access to a higher authority. I could not find scholarly literature on Christian's use of social media to raise awareness of social justice issues, so there is a gap in this area of knowledge. A number

of Christian authors champion the use of social media for advocacy work such as Burroughs et al who says “many, myself included, are working to implement social media such Facebook, Twitter, and online petition sites to change the face of modern slavery” (Burroughs, Darling, & King, 2014:9)

Conclusion

Social justice is an area of growing interest and engagement for young evangelicals yet there is a dearth of research on this topic. This has to do with the fact that it is taking place in Western countries and, as I discussed in Chapter Two, anthropology has tended to avoid Western Christianity as a field of research. Whether or not the academy is taking notice many young evangelicals are being inspired by their experiences with God to take action and go out into the world to be a ‘global citizen’.

As they travel around the globe and record their thoughts and STMs through social media young evangelicals are stepping outside of traditional church boundaries by expanding their advocacy work into a digital arena. With new technology connecting those who are interested in social justice together, an increasing number are taking action on social justice issues such as human trafficking. While academics have noticed this trend towards evangelical engagement with human trafficking, the methodologies they have used to examine the phenomena have often missed the voices of those they are discussing.

In order to ‘hear’ my participants’ voices I used a methodological lens that was engaged and reflexive. To know why they wanted to be involved in stopping human trafficking meant listening to *their* words. I examine this in the next chapter, as well as introducing these ‘new’ evangelicals, who turned out to be not-so-new in how they understood and engaged with their faith and social justice.

CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY AND REFLECTIONS ON FIELDWORK

> *Anthropologists are taught to seek to understand before we judge. We want to understand how people interpret their world before passing judgement on whether their interpretation is right or not. And so I will not presume to know ultimate reality. I will not judge whether God is or is not present to the people I came to know… The anthropological attitude demands humility and there are questions I cannot answer… an anthropologist can describe only the human side of that relationship, the way humans reach for God. - Tanya Luhrmann (2012)*

Introduction

Before beginning my research I knew I wanted to use methods that would be able to reflect the world of my participants in a way they felt described *them*. For this reason I have used a reflective approach to writing up the whys and hows presented in this chapter. Although what is discussed here is labelled methodology, in many ways the methods have been highly influenced by theoretical elements, especially regarding experienced spirituality. As such the methodological approach I have used acknowledges that the researcher accepts the ontological views of the research participants.

Especially when dealing with the area of religious experiences, which are attributed to unseen and invisible entities , it is important that empirical, materialist notions of what constitutes 'reality' are suspended to allow for other, more experiential, 'modes of existence' (Latour, 2013). The question becomes what is the reality or 'truth' for the participants, and what consequences and actions result from these worldviews; not whether or not a participant's story is empirically true (Jackson, 1998). This is the approach I have taken here.

Engaged Anthropology

My research lens is qualitative and used the methods of personal interviews and participant observation. It seeks to apply a reflexive and engaged anthropological perspective. Engaged methodologies aim to give equal voice to the experiences of its participants, and not just to the voice of the anthropologist. Methods of doing research with this perspective tend to

value participatory collaboration (Johnson, 2010). It is an anthropological stance that seeks to be involved with people, not just be an observer of the 'other '(Farmer, 2003).

It was important to me that the views and 'voices' of the participants were kept central in my writing and that they were also producers of knowledge, not merely suppliers of 'data' (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Low & Merry, 2010; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). I concur with the words of anthropologist Hilary Foye who writes, "research [should be] underpinned by the conviction that ethnographic inquiry should neither entail 'a hostile gaze' (Scheper-Hughes, 1992:28), nor an insensitive rummaging through other people's lives" (Foye, 2011:39).

Unlike the positivist model of research, which showcases the voice and the interests of the researcher (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), I see my position as one where both the participants and the researcher gain from the experience of researching. While doing fieldwork I tried to keep my approach reasonably flexible and was open to unexpected opportunities for reciprocity that arose, such as accepting the daily offer of lunch after lectures and helping out with meal preparation and cleanup. I recognize the honour afforded me in being allowed to do fieldwork at The Course; so I have used methods that favour the "grounded-in, lived experiences of people" (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006:13).

Reflexivity

Using engaged anthropological methods requires reflexivity. Reflexive researchers understand that they influence their own work continually and are not an omnipresent entity who has no effect on the knowledge gathering process (Clandinin et al, 2007; Weibel, 2001). They question scholarly authority that has, in times gone by, been used to reduce human experiences to mere objects to be studied and picked apart with scientific detachment. The reflexive researcher understands that they have a position of power in regards to the information they obtain, they have the final say as to how this knowledge is shared and presented (Kirby, Greaves and Reid, 2006). Because of this the participants need to be given a 'voice' within the presentation of the research where the reader can hear their actual words. This is why I have included large sections of verbatim interview text. As researchers we need humility and the understanding that our insights are always incomplete and uncertain (Brown, 2014; Jackson, 2009). I was aware of the need to be

particularly reflexive during the course of this project because so much of my own personal history and life experiences are similar to the participants'.

The use of qualitative methods fitted this research well as I was trying to understand what had driven these particular people to undertake a course in Christian social justice. I was reliant on word based information such as personal stories and verbal explanations regarding theological and experiential concepts that are particular to evangelical Christians. Using ethnographic methods of in-person interviews and participant observation allowed me to dig deeper into the evangelical worldview than would have occurred by using other methods, such as surveys. I found this out when I tried to interview a research participant through email. Because I was unable to reshape the questions, as I did a number of times during the in-person interviews, I did not really get the information I was seeking.

Bodily experience as a research tool

My own experiences of growing up in the evangelical world gave me an advantage as an 'insider'. Because of this knowledge I knew that using flexible methods that could bend easily to the experiential nature of this research site would work well. As well as interviewing and participant observation I have utilized the technique of subjective bodily experience as a method of research. This is where the researcher tries to understand the worlds and lives of their participants by being mindful of how one's physical body intersects with aspects of their participant's worlds and lives. Jackson explains this method in the following way;

> *one must adopt a methodological strategy of joining in without ulterior motives and literally putting oneself in the place of the other persons; inhabiting their world... to participate bodily in everyday practical tasks was a creative technique that often helped me grasp the sense of an activity by using my body as others did… to recognize the embodied character of our being-in-the-world is to discover a common ground where self and the other are one.* (2013:70)

During a conference I attended while writing this thesis I heard another academic refer to using bodily experience as a source of knowledge as 'crossing the ontological gap'. This is

where the researcher has the same bodily experiences as their participants, the knowledge gained becomes contained and 'known' within one's own body.

Doing this fieldwork took my body back into an environment that was very similar to a life-world I have inhabited before. I found my body and mind were easily able to recall the daily rhythms of living inherent in The Course structure and how to interact with others who were on The Course. I know what it feels like when God speaks to you, what it is to experience 'the broken heart' of God and the physical sensations that accompany these encounters. As will be become clearer in the next chapter I have indeed 'crossed the ontological gap'. This intimate and personal understanding of the embodied experiences of those who participate in these types of Christian courses is, in itself, a methodological tool I was able to use.

In considering the use of personal bodily experience as methodology, I was inspired by Luhrmann's ethnography (2012). As discussed in the last chapter she carried out a three year study with a group of middle-class, educated Americans who came to have an intimate relationship with an invisible being they called 'God'. Although she was not a 'believer' Luhrmann took part in many church activities including prayer groups, bible study groups and weekly church services. She was not just an observer but an active participant. She used the spiritual exercises taught in the church to learn to pray. Through using these particular Christian spiritual practices she was able to gain a personal understanding of how a mind and worldview can be shaped by these types of exercises. At the end of her ethnography she writes;

> *I have said that I do not presume to know ultimate reality. But it is also true that through the process of this journey, in my own way I have come to know God. I do not know what to make of this knowing. I would not call myself a Christian…but I have experienced what I believe the Gospels mean by joy… It changed me. I came to call my own experience of joy and love, with respect to CS Lewis, my furry lion problem* (Luhrmann, 2012:325).

While Luhrmann learnt spiritual practices *during* her research to help her become part of her participant's world, I learnt them *before* doing my fieldwork. Many of the spiritual

practices the students used I had experience with and this enabled me to slip back into that space once more while doing fieldwork.

The Fieldwork site

My main fieldwork took place at a course that was being run under the authority of a large, international, Christian organization which operates in a number of locations throughout New Zealand, and around the world. The organization runs many different types of training courses and the people who come to do them generally identify as evangelical Christians, as that is the main theological slant of most of the teaching on the courses. However any person is welcome to do The Course, providing they consider themselves a Christian, and can provide a reference from their local church congregation. The organization is not a church in or of itself; it is a 'parachurch' organization, which means one that is independent of any particular church denomination or institutional church structure. Parachurch organizations focus on areas that are relevant to Christian life but require specialist knowledge or training that church congregations cannot provide locally, such as missionary or theological training.

The organization's courses run from permanent housing that has been established to accommodate staff and students. These buildings are in varied locations, both in inner city areas and rural countryside and throughout the Western and developing worlds. There are usually a number of permanent staff, and staff who are only there to work on specific courses. Staff are not paid, they cover their living expenses from donations from their local churches that have 'sent' them as missionaries to work with this organization. Usually staff members are from a number of different countries, as are the students who participate in the courses.

The particular course I observed was the organizations 'foundation' course. It aimed to teach students the basics of a Christian's 'journey with God'. The Course is offered at nearly all locations where the organization operates. It generally runs for five to six months and consists of three months of lectures on Christian topics such as prayer, the Bible, and aspects of God's character. Most times The Course is run with a theme attached to it. Some

versions are centred on certain sports such as surfing, or hiking, others are to learn certain spiritual practices, such as a prayer. Others concentrate on particular skill sets, for example, there is a version of The Course for medical and health professionals. The theme for The Course that my participants took was 'justice'. This meant that as well as receiving teaching on the Christian life they also attended lectures on social justice issues such as human trafficking, genocide, ethical consumption and trade-aid, and child soldiers.

After three months of lectures the students leave the site of The Course for a six to eight week practical service trip where they put what they had learned during the lectures into practice. The location of these trips varies widely, as do the activities that the students partake in. These can include such things as street evangelism through the presentation of Christian drama pieces, handing out evangelical gospel tracts, building houses, running children's programs, painting buildings, visiting prisons, working with local churches, helping out at orphanages, taking programs at drug rehab centres and many other activities.

Fieldwork Experiences

My fieldwork took place in New Zealand in March 2015. My main source of information was recorded interviews with fourteen participants from eight countries who were students and staff on The Course. I also used the tool of participant observation which entailed spending six days at the course location over a two week period. I chose this particular research site because I wanted to be able to learn from evangelical Christians who were interested in social justice issues and were all together in one geographic location.

When I first became interested in this subject I contacted the leader of The Course through email, since I had previous personal contact with her. I outlined the thesis topic and we set up a meeting through Skype. She was interested in my research and willing to let me interview students who were coming to attend The Course, which was starting five months later. I drafted a letter outlining my research project and goals for the organization's leadership to consider. I was given verbal permission to conduct fieldwork on the condition that I did not name the organization or the specific location where the research took place.

The Course had been running for seven weeks by the time I arrived in mid March 2015. Twenty three students had come from a number of different countries around the world to attend. I had not arranged interviews before I arrived. Instead I sent the group a video outlining my research and asking them to consider being interviewed as I was coming to observe The Course. On the first morning the course leader, Joy, introduced me and reminded the students about the video they had seen. I also introduced myself and reiterated what I had said in the video and asked them to approach me if they would like to be interviewed. By the end of the first day I began to think that my flexibility in this area may have been a mistake. While I had four interviews set up I was not sure how to get more. It was Joy who helped me out by encouraging the students to sign up for an interview with me, 'be proactive' she told them.

The students were extremely busy with full schedules which changed frequently. I found this out when I had set up a day of interviewing only to discover they had decided to take an impromptu trip out of town, however these interviews were able to be rescheduled. This was all part of 'going with the flow' and being flexible, which Joy had told me was a feature of the way The Course was run. The students' busyness meant they often only had a short period of free time to speak with me, although Joy had told them they were able to take time out from the schedule to be interviewed. I spent a lot of time 'hanging out' in the communal lounge, and having lunch with students. It was through this informal banter and conversation that led me to getting more interviews, quite often right there and then. On the other hand I felt silly just hanging around by myself, doing nothing, while the life of The Course ebbed and flowed around me.

The Course took place in a large house with spacious grounds in a rural area where the students were both living and studying. I did not stay at the fieldwork site, instead lodging forty minutes away and driving back and forward to the location every day. Interviewing took place at different locations around the house and grounds, depending on where the quietest place was. I used a covered deck area near the main teaching classroom, an unused classroom, one of the student dorms and the gym. The recordings often included background noise, such as other students singing, guitar playing, a bunch of bees that flew past, and a group of 'boy racers' in loud cars who happened to drive by.

All participants were given an information sheet explaining the project and they also signed a consent form. I used a recording device and asked a list of questions relating to the Christian life of the participants, which included why they wanted to do The Course, and how they thought God was related to justice issues. The questions were reasonably broad to give the students plenty of leeway to add examples or discuss tangential issues, but most of them stuck quite closely to answering the questions. As time went on I became more skilled at drawing out more detailed responses from the students and asking impromptu questions relating to their answers. Most interviews were around thirty minutes long, although some were closer to an hour.

I interviewed thirteen females and one male, aged between 17 and 34. The gender breakdown could be put down to the fact that there quite a few more females on The Course than males, and the males were less forthcoming about being interviewed. The participants came from India, Singapore, Germany, Denmark, Switzerland, USA, England and Canada. Later on in this chapter I will introduce them in more detail. Of the fourteen interviewees twelve were students of the course and two were staff members. The only eligibility criteria to be interviewed were being a student or staff member on The Course. Originally I had on the information forms that students had to be over 18 years old to participate, however a number of the students were 17. After consultation with my supervisor it was decided that 17 year olds could be included, since this did not require extra ethics permission from the university.

I enjoyed interviewing the students, who were very open to my questions and overall a great bunch of people. The feeling of solidarity with the students made me feel conflicted as I was aware that in the future I would be applying an academic, theoretical lens to their very personal spiritual experiences. In my journal I wrote “I don’t want to misrepresent them and the beauty of their experiences through some dry, sucked out, academic theory”. I was also reminded of what it felt like to be ‘in a relationship with Jesus’ through observing the participants and hearing how much their faith shaped their lives. My own faith journey had taken a different path from these students that meant I was no longer part of that particular ‘life-world’, however I had been for many years previously. Being back in an atmosphere of a strong, evangelical setting brought up all sorts of unexpected sensations.

As part of the participant observation I sat in on six mornings and one afternoon of teaching sessions, where I took notes and observed the participants during their learning. On the first day of my fieldwork we spent the morning watching the movie '*Blood Diamond*' (Zwick, 2006) starring Leonard DiCaprio as a diamond smuggler and mercenary in Sierra Leone. After it ended the students were asked what impacted them most about the movie. This led into a discussion which ranged from child soldiers, to diamond trafficking, economic production systems and ethical consumption. If I closed my eyes I could have been sitting in a Development Studies lecture at university.

The students were passionate and engaged with the topics, leaning forward and speaking earnestly about what could, and should, be done about these horrible injustices that they had witnessed in the film. However, this is where they began to depart from typical development discourse. It was suggested that while the child soldiers in the movie had experienced unspeakable atrocities they could be redeemed because God knew their real identities, which was to be his beloved children. A number of the students were impacted by the role of greed and 'evil', suggesting that prayer and 'spiritual warfare' (an intense type of prayer which attempts to combat evil spirits) be used to fight these sins. Several people pointed out that they should be praying not only for the victims of injustice, but also the perpetrators of the violence, since God has mercy on all. I was familiar with the prayer and spiritual warfare ideas, since this had been a common feature of The Course when I took it. However the interplay of Development Studies discourses and how God thought about injustice was definitely not something that was explored when I did The Course twenty years ago. Furthermore there was no way the leader of my course would have let us watch a movie with so much violence or swearing in it as '*Blood Diamond*'. No one even mentioned the 'foul language', which was such a no-no during my evangelical upbringing.

On the second day we watched a documentary called "*The Dark Side of Chocolate*" (Mistrati & Romano, 2010) which followed an investigative journalist through West Africa as he attempted to trace the supply chain of cocoa beans. In particular he was interested in how young children were taken across international borders to work in slave like conditions on cocoa farms in the Ivory Coast. As on the previous day, after the documentary finished, a discussion ensued on issues brought up by the film. Joy talked about the UN Conventions on the Rights of the Child and other types of legislation that was trying to address the injustices

around cocoa and chocolate production. There was also talk of the role of corruption and worker's rights. A list of websites was shown to the students where they could get more information on worker's rights. They were also given the addresses of the major chocolate makers and asked to write a letter to them asking how they were seeking to comply with the Harkin-Engel Protocol, which was designed to phase out child labour in West African cocoa farms. Students were encouraged to put up links to some of the websites on fair-trade chocolate on their social media pages. The discussion then turned to the topics of fair-trade and buying ethically. A bowl of fair-trade chocolate was handed around for us to taste. Joy reminded them that now they knew about how chocolate was produced they were responsible to make ethical choices in their shopping. The session ended with a prayer; "God, you are ethical. You want us to be like you, to be good stewards of your resources. Those kids are also our kids, help them and us to be world-changers. Amen".

The final session of my first week was an outline of how this particular justice version of The Course came about. This lecture helped fill in a lot of the 'back story' about how and why this justice course was started. Joy told how God had spoken to her personally to start the course because he (God) needed people to be his 'hands and feet' and to 'tell the stories of the oppressed'. She used scripture verses from the Bible, quotes from Martin Luther King, and described a number of Christian organisations where she has gone for training in justice issues. Joy hoped that the students would come out of The Course with a 'heart that was broken' for the injustices in the world, but also with 'joy and hope' that they could bring change because;

> *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1, NIV Bible).*

She exhorted the students to identify with, and fight for, others with fewer freedoms. She also told them to go and get training in a specific profession, such as social work, law, or teaching, so that they would have some practical skills to help others. It wasn't enough anymore to just be 'a missionary'. This was a departure from what I was told on my course, where we were all encouraged to join the organization and it didn't matter what our skill set

was because God just wanted us to tell others about Him and, since everyone had a voice, we were all suitable candidates.

The second week that I observed was rather different to that of the previous. There was a guest speaker who spent the week preaching on a common evangelical Christian topic, in this case how God was a good father and how to have a more personal relationship with Him. While during the first week I could have easily been in a university lecture, this week was more like being in a church service every morning. There was not much student interaction or discussion, the speaker stood at the front and spoke, although it was in a more informal manner than in a church service. The speaker was older and presenting more conventional evangelical theology. It seemed somewhat removed from what had taken place the week before. At lunchtime the students were discussing what the speaker had said, some of them were trying to reconcile his more traditional view with what they thought about justice issues. It was interesting to watch them wrestle with these concepts and I could see that they were thinking about it, and not just accepting what had been said by the speaker. I found these lecture sessions difficult to concentrate on and my mind wandered easily. By this stage I was tired and sitting through three hours of preaching a day was not something I was used to anymore!

On the last day that I was at the course location I provided a special morning tea for the students as a 'thank-you' for the hospitality they had offered me. They were very pleased and a number hugged me and wished me well with my research, some asked if I had any time left in my schedule to interview them, which unfortunately I didn't. My last session with them was an afternoon one which was on the justice topic for the week, which was persecuted Christians, presented by Joy. We watched a video about persecution against Christians that was taking place around the world, especially in Iraq with the rise of ISIS and their attempts to wipe out Christians there. Students were again encouraged to use social media to 'get the word' out about what was happening to their fellow believers. After this session I said my goodbyes and drove off down the road for the last time.

Upon returning to the university I transcribed the interviews and then went through each interview and colour coded the responses into groups of common themes. I then ranked the groups according to how often that particular response was mentioned in the interviews.

For example in Question One, which asked 'why did you want to do this particular course?', the most common answer was because of the justice emphasis of the teaching, thus this was ranked number one answer. After this process I went back through the interviews as a whole and drew out common overall themes such as 'the broken heart of God' that will be discussed in the next chapter.

What worked and what didn't

The informal style of the research design worked well for this research topic and I would not change this aspect. More structured methods may have constrained the number of interviews I was able to get. One thing that I did change was some of the questions that I asked in the interviews. Because of the young age of many of the students they could not answer one of the questions that asked them to contrast previous evangelical missionary engagement with contemporary Christian understandings of social justice. As one student said to me, "Wow, did they used to do that? I didn't know".

After the first day of interviewing I went back to my accommodation and removed this question and reworded some of the others. I also realized during the transcription period that I had not ask them to define exactly what they meant by the term 'justice'. As such, there was a lot of talk in the interviews about justice but this was as some kind of pre-defined entity that I did not ask them to describe. To deal with this I have instead used literature of organizations that the participants mentioned as being an influential on how they learnt about justice issues, this includes books from an evangelical viewpoint on justice, and online material.

Coming into this research project I had thought that this type of course was a representation of a new way of thinking for evangelicals regarding social justice, especially around human trafficking. My reasoning for this was that evangelicals were taking up new ways of thinking about the theological aspects of social justice, as evidenced by the 'Emergent Church' movement, which I discussed in Chapter Three. However I found that rather than being a 'new thing', different from previous missionary activity, it was rather a reinvention of 19th century evangelical theology concerning social justice, but with some distinctly modern twists. There was no mention of specific Emergent Church material during the interviews, although many of the concepts from this style of Christianity have filtered

down. This caused me to reconsider my research question and highlighted the need in anthropological research to concentrate on what the participants had actually said, and use that as a guide to what literature I needed to follow up with.

More Fieldwork sites

As I was reflecting on my fieldwork towards the end of writing I realized that, while I had one main fieldwork site, I have spent the last two years engaging with this topic in many different places. There have been conversations at conferences, in churches, on buses, in planes, at university, and countless other places where people have told me their views on evangelical Christians and social justice. I have had in-depth and interesting discussions with theologians, pastors, university professors, former aid workers, a Muslim mental health worker, school teachers, activists, and many others.

More than a year after doing my original fieldwork I spent a weekend with a group of Christians who had quite differing views on social justice from my original participants. Some of this group were evangelical Christians, others had been in the past but now were just 'Christians', and others were from a different stream of Christianity altogether, particularly Catholic. All these different sources have shaped what has come to be in this thesis in some way, either by challenging my pre-conceptions or confirming them. In this way the 'field' that this thesis draws from expanded over the time to become very large, crossing class, ethnic groups and religions.

Ethical Considerations

Positionality of Researcher

I came to this research having the dual identity of being both an insider and an outsider of the group being researched. I was an insider in respect to having the same religious background and having, in the past, done the same course as the participants. I was also an outsider by not being a member of that particular course and having the role of a graduate student researcher. This duality enriched the research as I had an understanding of the

'language' and background narratives that those without an insider perspective may not have picked up on (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Weibel, 2001). I found that the students felt free to engage with me using evangelical language, since they knew I would understand what they meant; one even commented she would have phrased some of her answers differently if I had been someone without a Christian background.

It may be presumed that having the role of a 'semi-insider' during a research project such as this 'colours' the research, as I could be overly sympathetic towards the students or be unable to 'step back' from the research material in an objective manner. Those are risks I took in choosing this topic. I would argue, however, that being an insider gained me many advantages including easier access to participants, more cooperation and reflection from the students, and a heightened awareness of how my own background and life experiences needed to be examined as a factor that influences my research processes. This is an aspect of fieldwork that affects most ethnographic researchers, such as the types of roles they play in the field and how personal relationships can affect knowledge creation (Sin, 2009).

Confidentiality

A key concern that I was aware of was trying to maintain the anonymity and privacy for the students, and of the organization that ran The Course. As mentioned, one of the conditions that the organization stipulated was not naming them or the location of the course. The participants themselves were not overly concerned about maintaining their personal anonymity, but I have still used pseudonyms.

During the course of the research gathering there was one session I sat in on where information was shared that was intended for the participants only and pertained to some future plans of the organization that was running The Course. Although I was not asked to exclude this information I have not included it out of respect for the privacy of the organization. I also have excluded some information that was discussed in informal conversations, since those people had not given me consent to include personal information they had told me. However, I have still taken these conversations into account when reflecting on and writing about general themes that were present throughout my research gathering experience.

Introducing the Students

When I arranged with Joy to come and interview the students I had no idea how many of them would be open to being interviewed, what the gender ratio would be, or the ages of the students. I presumed that, while there would be a number of international students, most would be from New Zealand. When I arrived and settled myself into the classroom for the first lot of morning lectures I noticed that most of the students were quite young, and there were many North American accents. They trickled haphazardly into the lounge that had been converted into a classroom, and sat themselves at tables or on chairs along the back wall. Many brought in cups of coffee with them, and all had either a notebook or electronic tablet, and a bible. There were a lot of young women and a smaller number of young men. I wondered at the prevalence of females, but remembered that it was the same when I had done The Course. I asked some of the students why they thought there were more women than men during casual conversation. It was suggested that maybe women had less pressure on them from family to 'get a real job', so they were able to explore alternative options and take longer 'gap' years.

Many of the students where indeed on a 'gap' year, a break after high-school or university to consolidate personal interests or take time out before heading to further study or the job market. Doing The Course was, for many of the younger students under 25, a Christian version of the traditional gap year, or 'OE', albeit with a lot less alcohol or bar hopping than a typical Western student. For the older course students, aged 25 to 33, The Course was more a time of reassessment, for both their spiritual and professional lives. Most of these students had either left jobs or taken extended leave to do The Course. Of the two couples on the course, both were in this category, while the rest of the students were single.

I found out during my time doing fieldwork that none of the students were from New Zealand, although a number of them where living in New Zealand on a long term basis. Joy, who was herself North American, did not know why this was. It had also been similar previous times she had run The Course, with few New Zealanders taking part. She wondered whether or not Christian 'Kiwis' were not as interested in social justice, or if they preferred to do their training overseas. Of the students I interviewed six were from the USA, two were from Denmark and one each from Switzerland, India, Germany, Canada, England and

Singapore. Of the students on The Course that I didn't interview, most were from Canada, the United States and United Kingdom. Even within these country definitions there were variations. For instance some of the students were the first generation of their family to grow up in North America. Another small group of students were from one country but had spent formative parts of their lives living overseas due to missionary and diplomatic parents, or on student exchange.

This means that while I did fieldwork in the physical location of New Zealand, The Course took place in a transnational zone of a number of different cultural groups. Since it was run in English, and the majority of the students spoke English as a first language, there was a distinctly North American flavour to the community culture. This was seen through most of the student discussion being dominated by English speakers and times in the lectures where some of the students who spoke other languages sought clarification on certain words or concepts. During the interviews a European student commented that the American loudness and forms of joking had taken some getting used to, although they did not mind it as much now. All of the profiles I share use pseudonyms and the individual countries are not named so as to afford a form of confidentiality.

The Students

Adele was from a Western European country and had grown up in a Christian family, although her family only went to church occasionally. Her parents sent her to a Christian boarding school where her faith became personally important. It was at this school that she began to have a desire to do volunteer work and to "fight injustice". Adele had attended a Bible training school in her country, however she wanted to do something active rather than just learning theology. She chose The Course because she wanted to come to New Zealand, but she had also enquired about doing it in the USA. Adele was particularly interested in helping refugees from the Middle East who are coming to Europe. She was hoping to study psychology or social work at university after she returned home.

Like Adele *Greg* was also from Western Europe, he was the only male interviewed. He had grown up in strong Christian family, was very involved with his church, and had attended theological college. He had come to The Course because he wanted to learn about justice issues, since this wasn't addressed in the church he was from. He also wanted to get some

practical experience in helping others after spending four years in academic study. Greg was particularly interested in the plight of persecuted Christians and abortion.

Originally I thought *April* was American; however she was from Western Europe and had spent considerable time in the USA as an exchange student. She had become a Christian through her American host family, since her family at home were not Christians. While in the USA she attended a large Christian conference and heard about human trafficking, which has been her passion ever since. Upon returning to her home country she had trained to be a nurse, as well as working with a church there. She had come to The Course because of its specific focus on human trafficking and after it had finished she was planning to go back to the USA to work with an organization that focused on this issue.

Dara was from Western Europe. Her family attended a traditional Lutheran church while she was growing up, however Dara started going to a more 'lively' church when she was a teenager. She felt that she had been drifting away from God in her adult years, and doing The Course was a way of getting to know God more personally. A friend had done The Course in New Zealand and told Dara about it, and she wanted to do it in English, so had chosen to come to New Zealand. Dara was a manager at an institution that gave job training to disabled people. Her work had given her six months sabbatical, and she was returning to her job after The Course finished. She had become interested in justice issues because of working with vulnerable people in her job. Economic injustices were of special interest such as ethical production of clothing and environmental pollution.

Just as Dara had taken her personal interest in injustice into her workplace, *Nina* was active in a professional capacity in her local community at home through running poverty prevention programmes. She was also an activist against human trafficking, and a community worker with 'at risk' teenage girls. Nina was from Western Europe and had grown up in a Christian family and was very involved with her church. Nina had come to The Course to learn more about God and for a period of reflection on her future, with the possibility of joining The Course staff for a period of time. She had also done a number of short term mission trips overseas. She became interested in social justice after attending a Christian conference in her country.

Rae was from North America. She had come to New Zealand to do medical training with the organization that ran The Course, but had instead ended up doing a version of The Course that focused on prayer. After the prayer course finished she stayed on in New Zealand as a staff member of the particular course where I did my fieldwork. Rae grew up in a Christian family. She attended university for a period of time before coming to New Zealand, but wanted more clarity about her life-path before committing to further study. Rae was passionate about stopping human trafficking and had done a lot of personal research about the problem.

Rose, like Rae, was from North America and had come to New Zealand straight out of high-school to do the medical training programme run by the same organization as The Course. During this time she met Joy and was asked to be a staff member on The Course. Her sister had already done a version of The Course, and this was how she knew about it. Rose grew up in a Christian family and had been very involved with her church as a youth leader, bible study leader and so forth. She also did volunteer work at a summer camp for foster children and "loved working with kids". After The Course ended she was planning to go home and get involved in helping at-risk children, especially foster children.

Abby was one of the youngest members of the course, being still in her teenage years. She was from North America and a first generation American, her parents having emigrated there from the Middle East. Abby came from a strong Christian family who were involved in police work and the armed forces. She had become interested in justice issues from doing a short term mission trip with her church. Abby was really interested in stopping human trafficking and in orphan care. It was her hope that in the future she would be able to return to her parents' country to help children affected by war and poverty.

Erin, at 17, was the youngest person I interviewed. She had come to The Course from North America after finishing high-school, where she had become interested in social justice issues through a human-rights club at her school. Erin's family were not Christians, however they had sent her to Christian summer camps. After going through a hard time she had decided by herself to become a Christian. A friend had done The Course in Australia and Erin thought this sounded like a good way to get to know God better. Erin was particularly

interested in 'Fair Trade' and ethical consumption. Erin was starting university after The Course finished and was interested in studying law.

Mary was from North America. Like Erin she had not grown up with parents who went to church, but in a multi-faith family with a Buddhist father and a Catholic mother. In her teenage years she started going to a church youth group and "began a relationship with Jesus". She became interested in social justice after God spoke to her while she was praying about his heart being broken over injustices in the world. Participating in a short term mission to Mexico where she learned about human trafficking also increased her passion for social justice. Since Mary was an accomplished rock climber she originally thought of doing a sport version of The Course, but decided to concentrate on the justice version instead. She had done training courses on social justice in her country and was a volunteer youth mentor with troubled teens, teaching them rock climbing and parkour[4]. Mary wanted to continue mentoring work and stopping human trafficking after she returned home from The Course.

Brooke was particularly interested in human trafficking. She had heard about it as a teenager through a speaker who came to her church and, like April, had come to The Course to learn more about this specific issue. Brooke said her dream job was to work for an organization that was trying to stop human trafficking; however in the meantime she planned to go home to North America and enrol in university after The Course finished. She planned to major either in journalism or International Studies. Brooke grew up in a Christian family and was very involved with her church.

Kim was also very involved with her church. She had grown up in a Christian family and was having a gap year before starting law school, after finishing undergraduate study at a North American university majoring in International Political Economy. Kim had spent time in three African countries during her studies, as well as participating in frequent short term mission trips to Mexico. Doing these trips, as well as her study, meant that Kim was very interested in social justice issues, and had come to The Course specifically because of its justice focus.

[4] Parkour is a sport developed in France that uses movements derived from military obstacle course training. Practitioners aim to get from one point to another, usually in an urban environment, using only their bodies and no other equipment. Parkour includes running, climbing, swinging, vaulting, jumping, rolling, and other movements as deemed most suitable for the situation.

She was interested in child welfare and this had been the topic of the research she undertook in Africa. Kim was planning to major in Human Rights Law after The Course.

Vicky was also well travelled, and being in her early thirties was one of the oldest students I interviewed. She grew up in Asia in a multi-faith family with a Catholic father and a Buddhist mother, however her father was in charge of her spiritual training, and so she had attended Mass on a regular basis. Vicky went to the UK for post-graduate medical studies and was introduced to Protestant Christianity through a university friend who invited her to an Evangelical church. While Vicky values what she has learnt in her Evangelical church she is also grateful for her Catholic roots and draws on this theological tradition as well. Being a medical doctor and having travelled widely and worked for the likes of the UN Development Agency and other aid organizations Vicky had seen injustice up close. She had come to New Zealand for further medical training and been offered a job, however it was not starting for another six months, so she had taken the intervening time to do The Course to get a more Christian view on social justice. Vicky had decided not to do the service trip that was part of The Course, opting instead to go to a Pacific nation that had just experienced a cyclone to offer her medical services there.

Like Vicky, *Cathy* was also from Asia. She had grown up in a strong Christian family and had learned about justice issues from her father, a doctor and journalist who often advocated for the marginalised in their community. She had come to New Zealand for her job as a software engineer, then left this job to do The Course. She was not sure what she was going to do when the Course finished, but thought it may involve missionary work. Cathy had been involved in justice activities before coming to The Course, both in her home country as a women's rights activist, and in New Zealand with 'Women's Refuge'. Before coming to New Zealand Cathy has been involved in two serious car accidents in which she sustained multiple injuries, including being in a coma. She felt the reason for these accidents was to 'bring her back to God', since she had not been following Him as closely since leaving home.

As can be seen from these profiles the students were very diverse, coming from different countries, forms of Christianity and varying personal backgrounds. Many already had some formal education, or were intending to pursue this after The Course. I was also struck by the amount of community and social justice type work the students had already done before

deciding to pursue further training in New Zealand. These were not people who were spending their days sealing themselves off from the world in a Christian bubble, their varying forms of active engagement show that globally young Christians are attempting to change and impact both their local communities and further afield.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methods I used. My research lens has sought to use engaged and participatory anthropological understandings to give more 'voice' to the participants and less power to the researcher to define and control the way the results are interpreted. Being able to 'tune in' to my own body's reactions is also an integral methodological means I have used on this project.

Doing fieldwork in a location where I was both an insider and an outsider at the same time was an interesting experience that brought out conflicting emotions. This particular positionality was, however, helpful in providing more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the answers to the interview questions than may have otherwise occurred. The anthropological tool of reflexivity was an important part of how I processed, not just the role of researching, but how to *be* a 'researcher'.

The use of participant observation and interviews worked well to find out how these students understood the concept of social justice. In saying this I realized after the interviews were concluded that the students had taken the research question in another direction. They had not given some of the answers that I anticipated when I first started thinking about this topic of evangelical Christians and social justice. It was good then that the research design was flexible and able to accommodate these changes by allowing me to go looking for other material that could speak to how the students actually seemed to understand social justice.

CHAPTER SIX: EXPERIENCING THE BROKEN HEART OF GOD

> *We cannot understand how God becomes real to someone until we understand that a person's experience of God emerges out of a vortex not only of what they are taught intellectually about God, but also of what they do practically to experience God. – Tanya Luhrmann (2012)*

Introduction

The aim of my research was to try and understand why a growing number of evangelical Christians were becoming interested in social justice issues. This is a change in focus from activities that favour preaching and other word-based engagement with 'non-Christians'. There were two main answers to my questions that came from the fieldwork. In this chapter I focus on the first one; that the students' experiences with a divine being, God, led them to take action on injustice.

I wanted to understand about how the students thought God viewed in/justice issues. A major theme that came out of the interviews, and through observing the lectures, was that God was very sad about injustice, that 'his heart is broken'. In fact this was the driver that had triggered most of the students' interest in social justice in the first place. Experiences they had with God caused them to come half way around the world, spend a lot of their own money, and six months of their lives, investing in learning about God's heart for social justice.

From my own spiritual journey I am very aware of how these types of experiences shape evangelical Christian worldviews. I was reminded during fieldwork just what a powerful impact it makes on a person when they encounter a divine being. In order to understand why young evangelicals are engaging with social justice issues it is important to consider how non-material beings, and the encounters people have with them, can be the driving force for not just individual salvation, but also for collective social transformation. These experiences of embodied divinity don't just happen in the back blocks of Papua New Guinea or in the forests of the Congo; they are also happening in places like inner city New York and in rural New Zealand.

Experiencing the Spirit – My Story

The Caribbean

It's hot and the tropical air barely moves within the packed church. I am sitting in the middle of the congregation with my family as the praise music rises to a crescendo and bounces off the wall into a sea of Spanish 'Hallelujah's' and 'Gloria de Dios's' (Praise God). The music finishes but the crowd of over 200 stays standing as the guest speaker bounds onto the stage. He points to five seats lined up on the podium; "God has told me he has a word for five people in this room today". My heart begins to beat slightly faster; I slide down in my seat. "During the worship he has shown me who these people are", he comes down off the stage and begins to walk down the aisle of the church. I know he is coming for me, a voice in my head is saying 'he means you'. I am thinking, in my Western, logic rationality, 'Don't be stupid, there are hundreds of people in this room. You are a foreigner, why would God want to speak to you?' I am comforted by the fact that I am right in the middle of the row and not on the aisle. But I know he's heading towards me.

I shut my eyes and try to look absorbed in prayer, but I sense he has stopped at the end of the row. I crack open an eyelid but try not to look at him. He points at me and says in English "you in the middle, God wants to speak to you. One of those chairs is for you". I swallow dryly but I can't get out of it, all eyes have turned to me. I make my way out of my seat and up onto the stage. I sit down and am joined by four other trembling congregants. The speaker comes back up on stage and starts talking to the congregation. A lady stands behind me and quietly translates into English. "He is saying that God has new things for the people on the stage. He is asking the congregation to join in prayer so the words of God will come to you". The crowd is back on its feet. There is a pause, for a few seconds there is total silence. I am sitting with my head down and my eyes on the floor, feeling extremely embarrassed in front of all these people. I want the ground to open up and swallow me.

Then a murmur starts slowly, the voices of people asking God to speak. It gets louder and louder, soon it is a wall of sound and it feels like a tidal wave coming towards me. I brace myself and then a wave of love and sadness and empathy crashes on

over my crouched body. I begin to shake, first with cold and then with heat. It feels like someone has poured soothing molten liquid over my body. Although the sound is still going it fades into a far away space and all I feel is peace and that I am loved. I feel a hand laid on my shoulder. Someone comes near my ear and says quietly in English "God says you can let it go, you don't have to carry it anymore. Let it go, let it go". She then repeats the same sentence in Spanish. Suddenly a picture appears in my mind. I am curled up like a baby, and I am very afraid and I'm falling. Hands appear beneath me and catch me. I am safe, I am loved. And suddenly I am crying, I am weeping like a dam has broken and everything inside is gushing out. As the waves of love from the congregation wash over me, and the flow of God's love joins in, I sob and sob and sob. I am no longer embarrassed. The lady comes round to the front and I see her face for the first time, she hugs me and smiles. "God knows what you needed". It is over. I float back to my seat. It's like I've taken a divine shower and been washed clean and made beautiful. The words continue to echo in my mind for weeks after, "You can let it go, you can let it go".

In describing how I have experienced God in the past I want convey what it can be like to experience a divine being. Since experiencing God was such an integral part of the student's lives by reflecting on my own encounters I was able to put myself 'in their shoes' during interviews.

'God hates injustice'

When I asked the students 'how do you think God views injustice?' the answer was often summed up in one sentence, 'God hates it'. Of the fourteen students interviewed, six used this exact phrase. Another common reaction was that it 'broke his heart'. I knew what they meant by this, but realize that it is not the type of statement that many non-evangelicals can identify with. Trying to put into words how one experiences something that is of spirit, and not cerebral, was a challenge; both for me writing it and for the students when they described their encounters to me.

The only reason many of them even told me their deeply personal experiences was because they knew I had also done The Course, and as such would be able to understand what they were describing. They knew I would not discount what they told me, or 'write it off'. They were well aware of what academics think about spiritual experiences with God, and did not want to be seen as weird or strange. In sharing these stories I honour the vulnerability they showed and argue that it is these types of spiritual encounters, which are common amongst evangelicals, which provide the grounding for how they engage with the world.

Cathy was one of the students who had experienced God in a rather direct way. She was involved in a serious car accident where she sustained severe injuries and should have died; indeed her friend in the car with her was killed.

> *No-one was pulling me out from the wreckage but a bus passed by and there was a missionary couple on the bus, they felt like the Holy Spirit was telling them to get down and pull that woman out. The bus stopped but it refused to wait for them. They pulled me out, as a result of that accident my legs were completely gone. The doctors had to put metal rods into my thighs, for two and a half years I walked with those. I was not supposed to start walking in less than six months but God helped me. I was walking within one and a half months.*

Because of experiences like this Cathy had no problem giving up her job when she felt God was telling her to go and do The Course.

> *So now I'm here and I've left my job. I don't know what I'm going to do after this. I'm waiting for him to speak and I trust that he will and that I'm in the right place.*

'His heart is broken'

Mary had been deeply affected by a personal encounter with God where he told her how heartbroken he was over the injustices in the world. She had spent a number of months crying, often in the strangest of places, as she could literally feel the pain of other people in her own body. She felt she had had a small taste of how God, who sees all acts of injustice, must feel.

I started seeing all these injustices in the world and I started to feel everything. I woke up in the morning and I started bawling my eyes out and I was like 'what the heck?' Then I would go to school and come home and cry and go to sports and then come back and cry. I was filled with this overwhelming burden of 'why is the world like this, why are there kids suffering?' I feel like when he broke my heart, that it was a little part of his heart that I got to feel and it just destroyed me, so I can't even imagine what God feels towards all this stuff. I remember this one moment that I was showering and I felt like death was all around me and I was on the floor crying in my shower, and I was like 'God, how do you deal with this every day, a thousand times bigger than what I'm feeling'. I think it sickens him no end the injustices here.

Brooke had similar experiences to Mary, however it had happened during prayer times while at The Course.

Last week we did intercession [an intense form of prayer] and I started bawling and I think that's how God feels about it [injustice] and I think he hates it. I think it breaks his heart to see that going on. People being treated in such a bad way, it's not good.

These experiences highlighted the importance of the students' personal relationship with God. They talked consistently about emotions and feelings that they attributed to God and how He *felt* about injustice, in particular how He felt towards those who were seen to be victims of injustice.

Brazil – My Story

Our team reached the main square of the city. It was a restful place, especially since it was after midday and the hot sun meant most of the locals from this seaside Brazilian town had sought shelter inside for their afternoon siesta. "Right" said our team leader, "we are going to walk around the square and pray and see what God wants to say to us about this city. What does he want us to do here?" My Swedish friend, Julia, and I wandered off, but as much as we tried to pray we couldn't. I was beginning to feel unwell and I had a growing pressure on my chest. It felt like something heavy was sitting on it. I sat down on a seat, "this is really hard work" I said to Julia. She was finding the same thing. "I feel like we are missing something,

some important key" she said. We watched the others circling the square, they seemed equally distracted.

Julie noticed a statue right in the middle of the square, "we should go and look at that". We wandered over and had a look. The statue was an adult and child holding hands who looked very sad. We had some Spanish language skills between us which helped us to read the Portuguese writing below the statue. It informed us that this square was the site of the first slave market in Brazil. The slaves had been off-loaded here as the first stop after being kidnapped in Africa. On this very site families were split apart, mothers torn asunder from children; couples split up never to see each other again. As I stared up at the statue my chest was getting tighter and heavier. I could almost hear the crack of the whips and the money being exchanged between slave seller and owner. No wonder it was so hard to pray here. What kind of ghosts and tortured spirits inhabited this square? I felt so sad, so horrified. It was like I was taking on some of the pain that seemed to still be floating around the square. My heart hurt, it felt like it was breaking. Surely God's heart was breaking as well. On the course we had been encouraged to ask God to break your heart with the things that broke his. That was happening right here in this square, on the other side of the world from my comfortable home life. As we walked away from the square the pressure on my chest got lighter and lighter and by the time we got back to the bus-stop it had disappeared altogether. This is how it feels to experience God's broken heart.

One of the most frequent comments from the students was 'God's heart is broken'. During intense group prayer times many students, like Brooke, had felt deep emotions of grief and loss that they believed came directly from God's heart. When interacting with God through prayer they felt He was very sad; some cried and wept, others felt a heavy weight as if something physical was sitting on them, others felt physically sick, they felt like their hearts were broken.

One student said "I think his heart longs for those whom injustice is towards", while another said "I feel like his heart is broken about what is going on in this world". They also talked

about how God had 'moved their heart' or 'given me a huge heart' for certain justice issues, or even to do the course to begin with.

April spoke about how she had been attracted to The Course because of its promotional material that highlighted the heart of God;

> *The website said 'does your heart hurt' and they had Micah 6:8 ["He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God"], which completely spoke to me and I thought 'I have to go here'.*

In a similar vein Adele commented that she had wanted to do the course to "challenge myself about what is on my heart", while Cathy said that "the Lord gripped my heart". Not only was God heartbroken but the students felt that their hearts had been broken as well. "My heart also really broke for those people" said one, while another commented that, "I actually have a heart against poverty, it breaks my heart".

Others used the expression 'it wrecked me', to describe the emotional impact of confronting injustices, such as Abby who talked about how,

> *thirty minutes from my house is so much poverty…there is one town in my area that is the third richest in the country or something and then we have so much poverty just half an hour away. Seeing the injustice of that just wrecked me.*

Another student said "I feel like He's [God] wrecked me here", referring to how their worldview had been challenged and changed regarding 'God's heart' for in/justice. Being 'wrecked' is understood to be a difficult, but good and necessary life experience that will prepare one for better service unto God by having an understanding of how God *feels* about injustice.

It became evident that many of the students had learnt how to interact with God in this personal way from a young age. One of the questions the students were asked was to describe their Christian 'journey', in other words how they came to be a Christian. Of the fourteen participants, nine were raised in actively Christian, Protestant families. 'Active' is defined as attending church and church activities on a regular basis. For those not raised in

active Protestant Christian households the main reason they gave for coming into an 'active faith' was through the influence of extended family and friends who had invited them to church or an evangelical youth group. Most of those raised in active Christian household talked about how their faith became personal or 'my own' during their teenage years, usually after a difficult period or event had tested their childhood beliefs. Adele was an example of this,

> *When I was younger I had a really hard time because my sister was becoming more and more sick, she has anorexia. So it was really hard at home because of that, so I moved out. I was really struggling with my faith at that point because I was thinking, 'where is God?' and 'why does He allow all this stuff'. But then I went to a bible school where I got a renewed faith, you know, and then I came here and it's just totally different. It's like being set free in a whole new way.*

Justice is part of God's character

A frequent reflection from the students was that God has told people to look after the widows, orphans and the poor. They referred to Bible verses such as James 1:27 which states "religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress", or Matthew 25:34-40 which April referred to when she said,

> *I think it is our call to go and serve those people. Matthew 25 talks about that, 'I was thirsty', give drink, give food, give clothes, just all that stuff*.

Another common comment was that justice was part of God's character, as Adele stated "God IS justice" and Cathy reiterated "It is in the character of God, justice".

A number of students mentioned God's mercy and that he was concerned not just for victims of injustice, but also for the perpetrators of it. In her community work Nina had come across many heart wrenching situations where it would have been easy to blame a specific person. However, at The Course she had come to realize that,

Whether it's the one who is really suffering or it's the one who is causing the suffering; He wants all of those people to be rescued.

Erin had come to a similar conclusion, she felt that before coming to The Course she would have erred more to the side of justice being served, but had come to realize some situations required mercy as well:

I think it's a weird balance between justice and mercy because it's hard to wrap your head around but the people that are acting out these injustices, God loves them the same as he loves me.

However, even though God was seen to be merciful there was also an understanding that God's justice involved some kind of punishment for those who continued to commit injustices. Greg remarked,

I know that someday He [God] will punish the injustice that people do those things…He will stop the violence, He will stop the evil. You can look forward to that.

Brooke was blunter;

His wrath will come upon those people who are causing it.

While Brooke and Greg talked about God's wrath and him stopping evil they did not specifically say how they saw this playing out. In other words there was no mention of the Rapture, the return of Christ, or a literal hell. This is significant in that the students' interest in social justice was not being driven by a fear of divine punishment or a focus on the End Times, which has been an emphasis for evangelicals during the 20th century. I did get the impression that Greg was referring to Christ's return, however he did not explicitly state that.

Whilst many of the students had felt overwhelmed by the suffering of the world, by opening themselves up to a relationship with God they were able to counteract these crushing emotions. They had hope that they could be part of stopping some of the injustices they had come to know about. It was because the students knew a particular version of God that they had this hope; their God was good.

God is no longer angry

The God of the students on The Course was perceived to be good, loving, kind and merciful. Adele pointed out that "God cares for everyone, and he wants us to fight injustice". Nina said,

> *I think it's really hit me anew about God's love for everyone. As we have prayed for people like the child soldiers and things like that it's been a fresh revelation of the fact that all these people are victims and God's love isn't more for the child soldiers than it is for the leaders or the commanders, or whatever, but his love is as intense for every person.*

Emphasising that God is good has not always been the focus in many branches of Christianity, either Protestant or Catholic. In a famous sermon called 'In the hands of an angry God', well known 18th century Puritan preacher Jonathan Edwards said "The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked" (Edwards, 1741). One only needs to view some of the paintings in churches and museums around the world to understand that traditionally God was to be feared, he had the 'keys of life and death' and sinners would be punished by eternal fires in the pits of hell. The idea of this type of angry God was not evident amongst the students.

The speaker on the second week of The Course also emphasised a loving God saying that God wanted to 'make people whole' and 'give them hope', that His love was unconditional. Through knowing God's love the students could change the world by bringing this love to others through acts of kindness and service. The theme of his teaching was how God was like a good father. Rose said,

> *You can actually have a relationship with God and it's not a dictatorship, it's a relationship, a father-daughter relationship and He wants the best for his daughter.*

Seeing God in this way has led to different streams in evangelical Christianity, such as 'prosperity' churches, that emphasize a God who wants to give personal health and wealth. Many evangelicals who are interested in social justice are more focused on health and

wealth for not only individuals but also for whole communities. This is because salvation is now being understood as encompassing the whole of the person, and not just their soul.

The God who saves everything

As discussed earlier evangelicals in the last forty years have often been more interested in saving people's souls than participating in social justice activism, but the students did not talk about 'salvation' or 'saving souls'. What they were interested in was interactions with others which affect all of a person, including their economic and class position, their material wealth and their health, amongst other things.

The students made references to the concept that God wants a good life here on earth for people. Cathy said,

> *In Deuteronomy 10:17-18 where they say that God defends the cause of the fatherless, the widow, he loves the foreigner residing amongst you and he gives them food and clothing. So God does that, and we have God in us, what are we doing? Are we doing these things for others?*

Greg had completed a number of years of theological training. Despite being well versed in official church doctrine he had gained a new perspective on how Christians should engage with the world while attending The Course;

> *Jesus actually wants to bring freedom to this world and he wants to set people free before he returns and not just in heaven. I hadn't thought about that a lot before but now I'm starting to think 'oh yeah, Jesus wants us to make a difference in the world' and it's good to feed people and to set them free from captivity. It's not an unspiritual thing to do.*

These types of statements from the students indicate a changing view on what constitutes 'salvation', the Kingdom of God as being more on earth than in heaven, and a diminishing emphasis on the 'End Times'. There is an increasing focus on imitating and modelling the *works* of Jesus, rather than only concentrating on the *words* of Jesus. This is often referred to as 'being the hands and feet of Jesus' (Butler Bass, 2012), which was a term Joy used in a course lecture; in other words focusing on right *praxis* rather than right *belief*.

Over the time I have spent on this research I have noticed that discussion about where to locate of the Kingdom of God (on earth or in heaven?) and what constitutes salvation are currently a 'hot' topic for many evangelicals. While many, such as the students at The Course, were still wrestling with how to combine certain theological beliefs with the notion of social justice, others I met had given up on wrangling with evangelical theology all together. However there is one central Christian idea that most people I have discussed Christian social justice with are still thinking about. And that is 'what to do with sin'?

Injustice is caused by sin

So if the evangelical God is good, kind and loving and his heart is broken by injustice how do evangelicals frame the causes of injustice? I asked the students 'why do you think injustice occurs'? Their answers strongly suggest that evangelical Christians think differently about causes of social justice issues than many non-evangelicals. The most common answer to why injustice occurs was that it was the result of sin, particularly the sins of greed and selfishness. They also said that not following God or obeying his laws/rules contributed to injustices. A selection of comments from the students included the following:

> *I guess as sin came into the world…a lot of these kinds of things, things like greed, we have allowed those things in.*
>
> *I think the logical answer in my mind is that we've strayed from God … if we were all striving to be righteous and holy none of this would be happening.*
>
> *I could start with sin but I guess it's a specific kind of sin; it's like selfishness because everyone tries to do the best only for themselves and sometimes without limits.*
>
> *I guess ultimately because of sin, because sin is in the world. It stems from sin but I think specifically from greed.*

When the students talked about 'sin', as well as greed and selfishness, they also saw abuse of power as a sin that caused injustice. Cathy had grown up in a community where there were large gaps between those with power, and those without, she commented that

Someone is always trying to force someone else to do something they want… because of evil intentions… the one in power will always subjugate the one who isn't in power. That is sin.

April was of the opinion that human trafficking was caused by this sin as well.

People are misusing their power… it's the greed for power and money. I'm pretty sure all those human traffickers are rich… they have just really fallen from everything…I would say because of sin that they are this way because I think they have been hurt too, so it's like a cycle.

The sin of being power hungry then led to the sin of dehumanizing people perceived to be different from them. Rae had taken a paper on social injustice at university and combined what she had learnt there with her Christian view that God saw all people equally:

A lot of injustice happens, in particular in relation to human trafficking and slavery, because people tend to dehumanize other races based on appearance. Human trafficking functions really well on a global scale, first of all because of globalization and there's so much contact between countries. So you can traffic a person from the Middle East to America and there's the language barrier. There's everything that is against them and they are 'the other', so it just becomes really easy to take away all of their rights.

Nina also tied globalization and consumerism into dehumanization, where people treated other humans as though they were material goods that could be sold or disposed of.

Consumerism has filtered into not only material goods but how we live our lives in other ways as well. It's like, 'I want, I get'… so that means we can just dispose of things when we don't want them and we get what we want when we want it. That happens all over the world with the various injustices when there is war or something someone wants something they don't have or... the greed and stuff.

Kim had encountered through her university study how misuse of power and injustice were linked. In particular that corrupt governmental systems and lack of trustworthy law enforcement was something that contributed to the sin of injustice.

> *I guess a culture of greed, wanting more money and more stuff and so people find that it's easy to exploit other people, especially helpless people for money…In a lot of countries where there are corrupt governments or governments that don't have a lot of resources. It's very easy, even if systems are put in place to stop injustices, to get around it because there is no enforcement; there are no means to enforce it.*

Some students linked the sins of greed, selfishness and being power-hungry to living in a 'fallen' or 'broken' world, which refers back to the biblical story in Genesis of 'the fall' when Eve ate the fruit of good and evil. Adele stated "it's because we live in a broken world… and a lot of people are not seeking God".

The Sins of the Individual

The answers to the question 'what causes injustice?' show that overall an individualistic worldview is prevalent amongst the young Christians I interviewed. Sin was seen to be the main cause for injustice and sin resides in individual humans, who were selfish, greedy and power-hungry. Even structural sin, such as corruption and human trafficking, was still being committed by sinful individuals.

During the interviews a group of students mentioned how they found that thinking of ways to help individuals overcome injustice was helpful to them. This concept of 'one for one' had been an important part of their learning process. Greg explained what 'one for one' meant;

> *If you think of a whole group you will just be like 'it's so overwhelming' so I have to force myself to think how I can make a difference in one person's life or how can I highlight this problem to one of my friends. So that's my way of trying to think about it.*

Abby commented that she had felt overwhelmed by the statistics around human trafficking and modern day slavery, but the 'one for one' concept made her realize that "if you can help one life that's a big deal".

If the problem was sin, then one way to try and stop the world's injustices was to contribute to changing the individual who was causing the injustice. April gave an example of this when she said

> *I feel like we can change so much by changing the hearts of men 'cause they are feeding into pornography and that feeds right into human trafficking…God is showing me, 'you know what, you need to go into prison and talk to those people. Show them mercy and love so that when they get out they are changed and they are not going to go back to human trafficking anymore'*

For the victims of injustice, providing help was also focused on the individual person. Dara combined economics and her interest in injustice with her profession. She saw her work with disabled people as a way she helped advance justice in the world, and how enabling someone through giving them a job was a way of giving them back some agency in their lives.

> *The production side can be a solution because it can help to employ women who came out of human trafficking or sex slavery and that's what I'm doing in my work, because we employ disabled people and we see the worth behind the work and how work can help with different issues. So that was interesting for me.*

For many of the other students, especially those interested in helping victims of human trafficking, physically rescuing the individual from their situation was a solution to injustice they wanted to be involved with. Brooke described her dream job as,

> *working for an organization that fights human trafficking and showing God's love to those women. So bringing them out of human trafficking and staying with them through the whole process of change and everything.*

How the students understand the causes and solutions of injustice was intimately entwined with a traditional evangelical Christian worldview regarding sin. What did seem to have changed though was what types of behaviour were considered 'sin'. Whereas in some evangelical settings there would have been moral concern surrounding the sale of sex involved in human trafficking, this aspect was not present amongst the students. Instead they were concerned with the greed and selfishness of those who took advantage of those who were trafficked; they named greed, selfishness and a desire for power as the sins that needed to fought and overcome. This is a move from focusing on personal moral sins that

can send *you* to hell to a concentration on sin as being moral behaviours that hurt and dehumanize *others* and cause them to have a low quality of life.

Human trafficking is seen to be a problem caused by individuals, who are either traffickers, or enabling it by consuming the products of trafficking through buying the services of prostitutes or pornography (Bielo, 2014; Choi-Fitzpatrick, 2014). As such the solution is also seen to be individualistic, rescuing human trafficking victims one by one. This sounds, on the surface, not much different from the 'salvation model' evangelicals have often used to engage with 'the world', however there were differences. The students did not use the term 'salvation'; they talked about wanting to help 'rescue' people. Salvation, for the students, encompassed the whole person, including their bodies, and not just their souls. These bodies needed to be rescued, not from hellfire, but from physical places that were just as destructive, such as the brothel and the exploitative garment factory.

Conclusion

It is impossible to fully understand why evangelicals want to become involved in social justice issues unless their spiritual, embodied experiences with God are taken into account. The students' relationship with God was at the heart of their desire to be an active Christian and trying to stop injustices and the God that they experienced had a particular disposition. He was a good God who was also seen to be a loving father who wanted to help the downtrodden and marginalized so they could have a good life on earth. It was because the students saw God in this way that they wanted to do something to help *now,* rather than being solely focused on preaching to 'save souls'. This change in how God is viewed, from an angry God who is to be feared to a good God who offers unconditional love, is at the centre of why these young evangelicals became engaged with social justice issues.

The concept of 'sin' and the need for individual rescue and salvation is still an integral part of the evangelical experience. What has changed is that sin has moved from being something that affected only the spiritual soul to being something that encompasses the physical body. While there is still a focus on the individual's body, there is a growing realization that sin also affects the communal social body. This realization is, however, still

submerged beneath a discourse of saving 'the one'. This means that while evangelicals, like the students I interviewed, talk a lot about justice issues, they are not encompassing the definition of social justice that I outlined in the Introduction, with its emphasis on changing social structures.

Individual experiences with God led the students to feel his emotions of sadness and grief over injustices. They heard his voice leading them, and it told them to go out and 'do something'. In the next chapter I explore where this voice sent them and how they sought to be active Christians in a world that needs God's hands of peace and love.

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE ACTIVE CHRISTIAN

> *We do not want to be fat happy Christians in a fat happy church who only want to get into heaven – Joy (Course Leader)*

Introduction

There are many issues that are currently going on in the world that were seen by the students to be unjust. They were particularly concerned about human trafficking and were passionate about doing something to stop this, and other injustices that are cruel and unfair. The students had come to The Course because they wanted to learn more about how to combat injustice, how to stop it, and what God thought about injustice. They wanted to be 'active Christians'.

In this chapter I discuss the second answer to my questions that emerged during fieldwork, which is a strong emphasis on 'doing something' for God. Much of the material here explores the practical aspects of why the participants wanted to be on The Course and how they felt they could contribute to stopping injustices. It is not enough to be able to quote Bible verses and have the correct theology anymore, nor to preach to people in the street or hand out tracts; one needs to get out in the world and 'do something'.

Young evangelicals, like The Course students, who want to engage in social justice issues are finding information from a number of different sources. In particular use of the internet highlighted how new technologies are changing the way people engage with faith issues. With the rising use of social media young evangelicals are able to get round institutional church barriers that traditionally kept them from 'heretical' viewpoints. This wealth of knowledge, combined with cheap and easy travel options, is enabling evangelicals to become 'active' Christians.

Being an active Christian

The late afternoon sun shone through the wicker fence as I leaned back in my chair and fiddled with the recorder. Cathy sat down and adjusted her dress, she was outgoing and

friendly, having introduced herself to me the first morning I arrived and offered to be interviewed. With a twinkle in her eye she tilted her head, “have a guess where I’m from”. It was kind of hard to tell, “The Philippines?” I suggested. She laughed, “no”. “Indonesia? Malaysia?” wrong again. “No one ever gets it right” she said. She was from a tribal area of a country that I never would have guessed, hence the fun guessing game she liked to play with unsuspecting foreigners when she was abroad. Despite being a fun-loving person Cathy, like most of the other course students, was extremely serious about learning how to combine her Christian faith with action and activities that would contribute to social justice. It was this focus that had caused many of them to enrol in this version of The Course, instead of one with an emphasis on sport or prayer.

When I interviewed Kim, who had already spent a number of years researching child welfare issues at university, I was fascinated to hear how her experiences in a number of African countries had shaped her future plans. For Kim choosing to do The Course was an easy decision,

> *Justice has been a focus of my life for the past five or six years and so there was no other stream that I looked at. I wanted to do a justice one because of that.*

Rae was a thoughtful and intelligent young woman who had travelled widely and took time to answer my questions. She often read about and researched topics she was interested in and tried to gain a deeper understanding of why injustices occurred. Similar to Kim it was the justice theme of the school that had brought her to The Course.

> *I have, for at least eight years, been aware of human trafficking and sex slavery, so when I came to New Zealand and heard about the justice course I immediately started thinking about it.*

The students wanted to be active Christians and to do something to stop the injustices they had learnt about rather than just ‘sitting around in church’. I explored this idea with Nina while we both tried to balance our lunch plates on our knees.

> *I guess it [coming to the course] came more from a place of wanting to be an active Christian and to, in some ways, be an answer to my own prayer.*

Nina was already very involved in volunteer programmes in her local community back home, but she wanted to extend this action even further, and on a more full time basis.

Adele was a direct and confident person, who knew why she had come to New Zealand and what she thought. Our afternoon interview under the outside deck was short and to the point, also because English was Adele's second language. She said:

> *As Christians we are called to do something and not just hear about God…I really just wanted to be able to have an impact on people's lives and actually fight some of the injustice in the world.*

Since the students said they were wanting to be more 'active' Christians I wanted to know what they felt they could contribute to help advance a more just society, both in their local communities, and globally. The most common way that they felt they could contribute to justice work was by raising awareness of different justice issues and advocacy work. Advocacy avenues that were mentioned were through social media and blogging or discussing with friends. One of these students was Dara, whom I interviewed in one of student dorm-rooms late one afternoon. A multi-talented, well-travelled European Dara felt that,

> *I'm not a strong extrovert who stands up every time in front of the church or whatever but I can inform… I don't like to do that on Facebook, but more when you have a discussion with friends.*

I spent time with Rose in a student lounge. She was bubbly and friendly and had spent a lot of time working with children in varying capacities. Rose also thought that advocacy was something she could do as an active expression of social justice;

> *I really want to fight the injustice in [home country], and get more awareness going… Because once you hear it you can't say you didn't know. Getting more awareness in the churches, even in schools, like 'do you know what is going on in the word today?' Like we live in our own little bubble… so I want to bring more awareness when I get back home*.

Another common area where the students thought they could contribute was through professional or work skills that they already possessed. Examples of these skills were medical knowledge (two students were trained health professionals); research skills gained from university education, counselling and mentoring expertise, and management skills from working in a large organization.

Mary was a talented and skilled sportswoman; as we talked in the gym, surrounded by exercise equipment, she explained her area of expertise.

> *I have such a passion for coaching rock climbing and parkour because I love to see kids believing in themselves and to know that they can do a movement. It's good mentally because there are obstacles you need to prepare for. You need to be physically fit to do this jump or this movement but it's in your head so much more. So seeing guys put that into practice and get over the fear, not only in the parkour life but also in their own life, of being able to block that fear and move forward from that.*

There were also students who were planning on doing further training in a profession that could led to helping victims of injustice; specific careers that were mentioned were law, journalism, psychology and social work.

Another area where a group of students felt they could contribute was by turning some of their own personal experiences into a tool to help others. These students had experienced various forms of abuse when they were younger, such as Rae who said;

> *There are certain things in my personal story that I think make me more prone to having compassion on people oppressed by injustice…I have somewhat of a relational point, I can personally understand the effects of the injustices.*

This group of students felt they could help others through such activities as fostering children, becoming a counsellor or youth mentor and working at Women's Refuge. For the students the emphasis on Christian action was seen to be practical and offering a concrete form of help, whether that was through raising awareness of justice issues or through the use of some other skill.

The student's focus on their Christian faith as an active praxis was highlighted during the interviews. Although they were interested in theology, which I observed during their discussions in the lectures, correct theology was not as important as what were the right and correct actions that they should take to stop injustices. A number of the students said that one of the transformative aspects of The Course was that they had had a number of their strong, concrete beliefs challenged and that they were not as sure about some of their beliefs as they had been when they entered The Course. One student said

> *I feel like I have a lot less opinions, less certainty. I used to think that I always had to have an opinion, like 'I stand on this for abortion' or 'I stand on this for a God of justice' but this course has made me sit back and say 'man, let's just have a look at that'. I do not know everything. I'll never know everything.*

As someone who has grown up in a similar 'stream' of Christianity to most of the students I interviewed the acceptance of uncertainty regarding doctrine, and the de-emphasis of what are 'correct' beliefs was a definite change. I think this change is happening in response to the increasing exposure that young Christians in particular are having to global issues; both through the internet, and through meeting people different from themselves, such as refugees. Being exposed to situations of injustice has raised issues for them that cannot be explained well by the current doctrinal models prevalent in Evangelical Christianity. It was because of this 'disconnect' between the teachings of the Church and their everyday lives that many of the students had ended up at The Course to begin with.

Growing Outside the Church Walls

A large number of the students felt frustrated with the lack of action and engagement around social justice issues, especially human trafficking, within the institutional structures of their evangelical Christian faith. Rose pointed out that;

> *I was always asking 'why aren't we talking about this [justice issues] in the church'… a lot of churches only want to do biblical teaching and not life teaching, but I'm like 'you do both'.*

Greg was very intelligent and thoughtful. As we talked on the deck during my last day of fieldwork he admitted that his years of studying theology had not answered all his questions;

> *I wanted to make a difference and wanted to learn more about it [justice] because in my church we teach about how to deal with abortion and all that stuff but there's not a lot of focus on justice, or doing justice. I wanted more information but I couldn't get it at home so I had to go somewhere.*

Other students mentioned that they felt many of their fellow Christians lived in a 'church bubble', hence the need to go somewhere else to learn about justice issues from a Christian perspective. An example of this was Dara;

> *I started to realize a few years ago that many Christians are living in their church bubble and it doesn't really matter what happens around them… I have friends in the church that don't even know anything about politics or economics, and for me, as a Christian, you have to be part of every part of life, and so justice is one part of this.*

Some of the students were also aware that their churches were sceptical of the growing social justice movement within evangelical Christianity. Cathy talked about the mystified reaction of her local church when she told them she was leaving her job to go and do this particular training course with its focus on social justice, particularly human trafficking. She said;

> *That is my gripe with the church… I explained to them there are twenty seven million trafficking victims around the world and we are Christians sitting right here… They [church members] keep talking about Christ dying on the cross, they keep talking about salvation; yes, I think we are overfed with that.*

Another student talked about how many evangelicals seemed to be afraid of the 'social gospel', even members of their own family;

> *We used to be really afraid of a thing called the 'social gospel'… people were so afraid that if we said that Jesus really wanted to set us free it would mean we would have to have a riot against the government...I had an interesting time when I talked*

> *to my dad the other day… I had the sense that he thought, 'we don't have to save the world because Jesus has already saved it'… It's so common for me and for the society that I'm from to think that if you start thinking about people's physical needs you'll forget about the spiritual need, and I don't know why. I think these two things can go hand in hand.*

This statement highlights one of the reasons social justice as an idea has often been problematic for evangelicals in that they link it with societal disobedience and resisting the 'powers that be', in this case the government. There is often teaching in evangelical churches that God has ordained those in government to rule, and as such, while one may disagree with certain policies, it is better to pray for the leaders and leave God to change their minds. Combined with dispensationalist notions of 'it doesn't matter anyway because Jesus will come back soon' I argue that these particular theological teachings are part of what has differentiated Catholic social action from how evangelicals view social justice.

While writing up this thesis I attended a workshop on 'Social Justice as a Spiritual Practice', where this point came up. At the workshop were people who had a Catholic perspective on social justice and for them activism involving protests and marches were normal. They were fascinated to hear from those of us who had grown up in the Evangelical stream of Christianity that we were discouraged from these types of action. The students I interviewed were beginning to take on some ideas of social justice, but the concept of communally opposing structural causes of injustice was not something they considered. Rather it was individual actions towards individuals who were suffering injustice that they were most interested in, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The interviews also showed that many of the students felt that their churches were not engaging with the social justice topics they encounter through their social media channels. In fact 'church' was the last source mentioned when I asked what they had used to learn about social justice. I often had to ask them specifically if their local congregation had been part of their learning around these issues, since they did not mention it as a source. Abby pointed out;

> *Our church supports 180 orphans living in a garbage dump in Ethiopia so we've definitely talked about that a lot and then recently human trafficking has been a big*

thing. My pastor has been on this big human trafficking push but really we never get down to the root causes.

For a number of students educational institutes were where they had become interested in social justice issues. Erin, for example, talked about joining a human rights group at her high school,

We had a school assembly about sex trafficking and we had 'Invisible Children' come and speak" ['Invisible Children' is an organization that raises awareness of child soldiers in Uganda].

Rae mentioned that she had done a course at university that left a lasting impact;

My university had a class on modern day slavery and the abolitionist movement, it was the first time the class was offered and it filled up in ten minutes. I was lucky to get a spot in it and we spent a whole quarter just studying what is human trafficking, what is slavery. That was really impactful for me and brought me up to date with the current situation.

The comments of the students about their experiences of church and social justice shows that the institutional evangelical Church does not seem to be engaging with issues that young evangelicals find relevant. Instead students learnt about social justice at university and high school. The prominence of educational institutes as a place where they learnt about social justice is worth highlighting since evangelical churches have often discouraged their youth from going to university. It was seen as a place where they could lose their faith. The number of students attending university shows this is changing. It should be pointed out that while many of the North American students attended Christian universities, this is not the case for European and Asian students, usually because there are not many Christian universities outside of North America.

Influence of Social Media

By far the most common source of information that the students used to learn about justice issues was social media, blogging, YouTube and other web based material. Most of the students had contact with specific Christian social justice orientated organizations and

NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations), particularly through the use of social media feeds such as Facebook, Twitter, and emails. For Rae,

> *A lot of what I know comes through social media, that a really big tool that people use, it's the one I use when I want to get the word out about something.*

Rose commented that,

> *'Not for Sale' had links on their website that we could follow... I don't read very much, I look at the Internet and read blogs and stuff…I hear about something and I'll be like 'I want to know more about that' and I'll Google it.*

Brooke was enthusiastic and chatty during our interview, explaining her passion for stopping human trafficking and her desire to work full time helping girls who had been trafficked into sex work. Her dedication was evidenced by the fact that she was signed up to over sixty Facebook 'feeds' from different Christian justice groups, especially those working against human trafficking such as '*A21 Campaign*'. Organizations the students mentioned were '*Not for Sale*' and '*Elisha's Rising'* (anti human-trafficking organizations), *World Vision* and *Micah Project* (anti-poverty and fair trade emphasis) and '*Open Doors'* (an organization working with persecuted Christians). These organizations were often introduced to the students through friend's social media pages.

The internet also played an important part in how the students came to be at The Course in the first place. Nearly all of them had found The Course after consulting internet search engines with terms and keywords such as 'Christian justice training'. Brooke said,

> *I found it online. I just Googled [organization's name] and that was one of the first one's that came up. New Zealand, that's awesome. There is actually another course somewhere else and I'd emailed them and they never replied but then these guys responded within 24 hours so I was like 'ok'. I guess God, this is where you want me to go.*

By using social media the students were mediating their own information and knowledge gathering, this was something that was traditionally done by church leaders. Although the students that I interviewed were not trying deliberately to undermine their church leaders,

they had bypassed their authority and knowledge by moving to an online source to gain knowledge of human trafficking and other social justice issues. This suggests that the internet is changing the 'top down' structure of Christian religious institutions and the way they form and mould believer's lives.

Changing World Engagement

The organization that ran The Course where the students were training was in fact focused on training missionaries, generally short term ones. For many evangelicals, to be considered an 'active' Christian often entails doing missionary work. As mentioned in other sections of this thesis, evangelicals have become known for a particular style of missionary work called 'evangelism' that emphasised preaching in the street and handing out literature on how to be 'saved'. I wanted to know what the students thought about this type of evangelism, since it had been a feature of the training course I had done. It turned out that many of the students were not very interested in it. This reiterated to me that there has been a shift away from direct, confrontational proselytizing, especially amongst younger Christians. The most common response given was that this style of evangelism made them feel uncomfortable and did not appeal to them. Abby said;

> *It definitely didn't appeal to me as much as I thought it would. I think I would rather do hands on stuff… I don't think I could get up in the middle of the street and just start talking. I've seen it a couple of times and it just seems a little bit ridiculous to me.*

As far as Cathy was concerned:

> *I found that very intrusive, there are some people who are really good at it, but it's not my comfort zone*.

Vicky came from a Catholic background and during our afternoon interview in the empty lecture room we discussed her global travels in her work as a doctor. She found the idea of evangelicalism, as I described it, strange.

If I walk past someone and they are preaching on the street, and condemning people, I know that you are not talking about the God I love and believe in. You're not sending out the right message about what Christianity is about.

A couple of the students said that if The Course had been concentrated on using these types of practices they wouldn't have done it.

However, a number of students said that while they were reluctant to use these evangelistic methods in Western countries, they had used a version of these methods when on STMs in developing countries. In particular 'relationship building' was mentioned, which is trying to meet people and build some rapport before talking to them about Jesus. They would also pray first, then speak to people they felt God was directing them to. Cathy described the difference by saying;

In my thinking 'traditional evangelism' is more like walking up to someone in the road and saying 'hey, where you are going after you are dead?' So rude and obnoxious and 'in-your-face' instead of building a friendship. From the first question you are pushing that person away.

They were definitely still interested in telling others about Jesus, but felt that this had to be done in a respectful and timely manner and in the context of a personal relationship, rather than through directly preaching or confronting people with 'the truth' of the gospel message.

Short Term Missions Trips

A common way that the students got to meet people who were victims of injustice and be active Christians was through participating in STMs. Mary had been deeply affected by an experience on a STM to Mexico;

I worked in the Zona Norte district which is right by the Red Light District. I got to see first- hand what human trafficking looked like and got to walk through and talk with some of the prostitutes and that just wrecked me completely…I was sixteen or seventeen at the time and for me I've always lived in my happy little life. I didn't

even know about prostitution until about four years ago and then here I was standing the middle of a Mexican street and it was happening right there.

Abby described her domestic STM;

I did a missions trip, like an inner-city missions trip. I did that with a youth group. We just did a lot of helpful stuff, like we delivered furniture to people in need. Just seeing the injustice 30 minutes from my house, people in so much poverty, it just wrecked me. I saw how real injustice is, it's not just an overseas thing.

Of the fourteen students I interviewed nine had done some type of STM, both overseas or in their own countries. These trips had the effect of making them want to learn more about injustice issues from a Christian viewpoint, and were one of the things that had led them to doing the course. Mary said

I heard about it [The Course] on the short term mission trip. They told us about it and I was like, 'I have to do one of these'.

As part of The Course the students went to South-East Asia for six weeks on a STM, which concentrated on helping out Christian organizations already working in these countries. They were given practical work to do, such as painting buildings and helping out with children's programmes, as well as working with local churches

I found amongst the students there was an understanding that they were part of a global community, and that this concept was at two levels. Firstly, due to the internationalised makeup of the course students themselves, they were learning from each other within their own small slice of multi-cultural humanity. Brooke said

I love this [the course], because you're with so many people from so many different cultures, different minds, different hearts, so you can come together. Like I can go up to someone and say, 'hey, what do you think about this verse?' and then like 'oh that makes sense' and I would have never thought that.

Secondly, the idea of being a global citizen was present in how they viewed justice work and wanted to help others, especially because of increasing contacts with people who are suffering injustices. As can be seen in Abby's comment earlier, there is a growing

understanding that the world is connected and poverty and injustice is not just 'over there'. Adele had come into contact with Middle-Eastern refugees at her university, and was sad at how difficult it was for them to deal with the immigration system of her country;

> *My heart really broke for those people and the injustice that we are living in a good country. We have welfare and money enough to protect them and are still saying no and making their lives horrible and they live in fear of what is going to happen next. So that injustice is also very heavy on my heart… because it changes everything when they become your good friends.*

From the use of the internet to stories of interacting with people from different cultures and religions it was plain to see that how young evangelicals are gaining knowledge and information is changing rapidly.

Stopping Human Trafficking

There was a variety of different justice issues mentioned by the students that they were interested in. These included refugees, orphans, child soldiers, domestic violence, foster children, gender inequality, fair trade/economic justice, persecuted/tortured Christians, general poverty, underprivileged children and abortion. However the justice issue that most students were interested in taking action on was human trafficking (nine out of the fourteen interviewees), with three of those specifically mentioning sex trafficking. Nina said

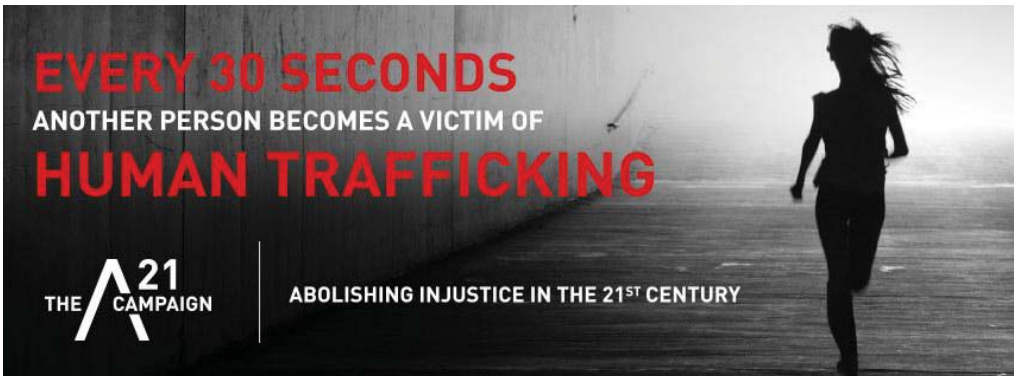
> *For quite a few years I've had a passion for justice, particularly human trafficking so I've been involved in an anti-trafficking charity back home… I went to an event that was an awareness event about human trafficking and it was at that event that I was like 'I can't not do something about this'.*

Brooke was also interested in stopping human trafficking;

> *I heard Christine Caine from A21 Campaign speak. She talked about human trafficking and shared her testimony and from that point forward I was like, 'I'm going to fight human trafficking' and so I have always had a heart for human trafficking.*

The organization that Brooke mentioned, A21 Campaign, was the most popular organization referred to as a source of information on human trafficking by the participants. It was also where April learnt about the issue;

> *A big source for me was the A21 Campaign, they have a really awesome website with facts about human trafficking and about a lot of countries in Europe. They have whole hand-outs to go into schools and teach kids about human trafficking.*



Christine Caine, the founder of A21 Campaign, is a former evangelical pastor from Australia. Organizations like A21 run 'safe houses' for rescued trafficking victims throughout Europe, Asia and USA, 'rescue' human trafficking victims in conjunction with local police forces, and provide work skills training and repatriation for those who want to return home [5]. When examining the social media sites and media clips promoting A21 is that you would be hard pressed to even identify that they are Christian. There are very few overtly Christian symbols used, such as crosses, and the language used is more akin to the human rights movement than religion. These are the new 'missionaries' that young evangelicals are wanting to emulate; sites of injustice are the new 'mission field'.

Organizations like A21 are drawing the support of thousands of Christian young people who have connected with the issue of human trafficking through presentations at Christian youth concerts and conferences, including a number of the students on The Course. April attended one of these conferences in the United States, called 'Passion', along with approximately 35,000 other young Christians. Passion conferences run worldwide every year and have a strong emphasis on raising awareness and money specifically against human trafficking. At one Passion conference in 2013 three million dollars was raised for anti-trafficking efforts (Malhotra, n.d.). Popular Christian music artists perform at conferences like Passion and

have helped spread the word through such songs as Matt Redman's 'Twenty Seven Million' [6], which refers to the figure that is often quoted as to how many human trafficking victims there are in world.

It was noteworthy that while two students specifically mentioned abortion as a topic they were interested in, there was no mention of the other issue that has often been a 'hot button' topic for evangelicals, that of homosexuality. None of the students mentioned gay marriage as an issue they were interested in, even though at the time I did my fieldwork the USA was in the process of legalising gay marriage and my Facebook feed was full of debates over the issue. Rose commented that she wished her church would move away from the issue of gay marriage and concentrate more on the poor and marginalized. This lack of interest in protesting against gay marriage would suggest that the students did not perceive it to be as much of a threat to the world as human trafficking, or economic inequity; a definite change from the past 30 years.

Conclusion

Despite the students having different nationalities and personalities there were similarities in their understandings of social justice. For the students at The Course one of the main reasons they wanted to be involved in social justice issues, including human trafficking, was a desire to be an 'active' Christian. Although their local church congregations were still behind in their engagement with social justice this is no longer a problem in a world where technology such as the internet is shrinking geographical boundaries and bringing together people with the same interests. Combined with the ability to be able to travel to other countries on short term mission trips, and exposure to refugees and other immigrants coming from developing countries into the West, these young Christians are becoming cosmopolitan, globalised citizens with a strong sense of social justice.

The desire to become an active Christian comes from a deeper source, the 'broken heart' of God, and the understanding of sin as being behaviours that keep people in poverty and from living a full life where they have agency to order their future. These two, particularly

evangelical, characteristics should be considered main drivers as to why young evangelicals want to become ‘world-changers’.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION – AN EVANGELICAL FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

> *I'm looking for a second reformation. The first reformation of the church 500 years ago was about beliefs. This one is going to be about behaviour. The first one was about creeds. This one is going to be about deeds. It is not going to be about what does the church believes, but about what is the church doing. - Rick Warren*

When I set out to study this topic I thought that there had been a fundamental change in how evangelicals were engaging with the world. I thought they had abandoned much of their past orthodoxy and taken up new theologies that allowed them to engage with social justice issues. This has turned out to be partially true, but not in the way I thought. It was the experiences they had with God which turned out to be driving the change in theologies, rather than new theology in and of itself. These experiences were a problem when I came to apply anthropological theory because of the way the discipline has 'written off' spiritual experiences as anything other than what my participants thought: that they were engaging with a divine being. I believe it is due to a lack of understanding by many academics about spiritual experiences that the literature on evangelicals and human trafficking largely failed to correspond with what I found amongst the students I researched.

Evangelicals and Human Trafficking

While much of the literature on evangelicals and human trafficking picked up that fighting human trafficking is a moralistic project, they have missed the core that is driving the action; evangelicals' embodied relationship with God. Most social scientists have not tended to cross the 'ontological' gap between themselves and those whose lives are shaped and formed by their spiritual experiences. While there are certainly valid points to the arguments mentioned by Bernstein and others that I discussed in Chapter Four, I found they did not apply well to the young evangelicals I interviewed and observed.

In the six days of course lectures that I attended there was no mention of the type of consensual sex work Bernstein (2007) referred to. The students were mainly interested in young women and underage boys and girls, who were sold into sex work unwillingly or through trickery and were kept at this work through the use of violence and intimidation. It

was the aspect of someone being forced into an exploitative situation against their wishes that was the defining feature that the students wanted to change. At first it did appear that the students, as argued by Cojocaru (2015), Berman (2006), Bielo (2014) and Zimmerman (2011), did not consider the agency of those who were willingly involved in sex work. Upon closer reading of the transcripts I saw that some of them were aware of the issue of agency for sex workers. Rae, for example, mentioned that if girls wanted to stay in the sex industry of their own free will there would be no point in trying to bring them out of it. Only the girls themselves were able to make that decision. Whether or not sex worker agency is actually possible in brothel 'rescue and raid' model used by a number of anti-trafficking organizations is debatable. The point is that the students were aware of the complexity surrounding the issue.

The students were not only concerned for people who had been trafficked for sex. They also discussed children who were taken from their families by militias to be soldiers in parts of Africa, and child labourers in India and the Ivory Coast. The Course material and teaching covered a number of labour issues, such as child labour in the chocolate industry, and exploitation in the garment industry. This shows that they were aware of labour trafficking, and were not interested only in sex trafficking, as argued in much of the academic literature.

The argument that evangelicals who are trying to stop sex trafficking are trying to be 'white saviours' was generally not applicable. While many of The Course students were 'white', a number of them were not, and not all of them were from Western countries. They most definitely did not see themselves as 'saviours', rather as vessels carrying the love of *their* saviour, Jesus Christ, who had a broken heart and wanted human trafficking victims to have a good and fulfilling life. It could be argued by academics that no matter how the students saw themselves, that they were still being 'white saviours'. But this then makes the researcher into some omnipotent force who has the power to interpret for the participants what their actions mean or don't mean. In this case I will defer to the students and how they understood the social justice activities they undertook. As such, at least for the group of young evangelicals I observed, the argument that all evangelicals are interested in fighting sex trafficking because they want to in some way morally regulate sex work did not apply.

Embodying God in a Globalised World

It was obvious that for many of the students the embodied experiences they had with God were a defining factor that was highly influential in the framework they used to understand and engage with social justice, both as a concept and as a form of praxis. These experiences are not something new; they have been an integral part of evangelical Christianity since it began. So why did these divine experiences led to an interest in social justice rather than 'soul saving', which was the focus when I did The Course?

One of the main reasons for the change in focus is not because evangelicals are becoming less experiential, if anything experiences with God seem to be increasing. The experiences are not different, but how they are taken out into the world and embodied are being shaped by different forces than in the 1990s or earlier. Rather than embodied divine experiences being interpreted by a church authority such as a pastor, they are being interpreted through a different knowledge 'grid'. This 'grid' for the students was made of a combination of ideas from social humanitarianism learnt at university or school, and personal, emotional connections with marginalised victims of injustice during STMs overseas or at home. The local church had a small, and for many, insignificant role in how they engage with social justice. These "struggles for control of mediation" (Cannell, 2006:17) are nothing new in Christianity but are being exponentially heightened by new technologies such as the internet and social media. My research supports that of Lawrence (2015) and Banerjee (2008) which found that the internet allowed for bypassing of the local church and connection with the globalized social justice community.

Once the students had gained knowledge and understanding of social justice issues they still needed to fit what they found into their evangelical Christian worldview. There have been some changes to areas of theology, which on the surface look small, but in fact produce significantly different praxis when it comes to missionary and service work. In particular a 're-homing' of the Kingdom of God from heaven to earth, a move from an angry God to one who is a good and loving father, and a de-emphasis on heaven, hell and the 'End times' were changes I observed. The omission of talk of hell in my findings was especially noticeable in that only two students mentioned God's judgement; in this case they talked about human traffickers, who would be punished by God for their bad deeds. None of the

students talked about heaven, hell or 'saving sinners'. This echoes research done by Markham(2010) and Bielo (2012) which also found that evangelicals engaged in social justice are deemphasising the 'End Times' and eternal punishment in hell.

These changing theologies have brought about a shift in how mission work is done and how evangelical Christians, like the students, engage with the world. This change involves moving away from direct proselytizing to relationships based more on social justice activities. When the threat of punishment and hell are removed, right praxis, being 'God's hands and feet', and helping others have a good life now, becomes the main emphasis for how evangelicals should engage with 'the world'. An emphasis on what constitutes 'right' actions rather than 'right' beliefs has come about; because when you are a global citizen who interacts with people from different ethnic groups and religions on a regular basis how can you even know *who* is 'right' and 'wrong' anymore? However, for the students the idea of 'saving' was still intact, although the language has changed from 'saving' to 'rescuing'. The concept of salvation has been redefined from *saving* only the soul to *rescuing* the whole person; a lessening of the dichotomic, Cartesian view of the split between spirit and body.

Anthropology and Spiritual Beings

Just as the students on The Course were changing and shifting their theologies, anthropology also needs to undergo a theoretical transition. Through using the ontological ideas and theories of academics like Jackson and Latour it is no longer possible to consign divine entities to the dusty pages of history with the argument that religion will be dying out soon. As can be seen by current world affairs, particularly around the rise of religious extremism, it has become clear that religion is not going anywhere. It has become more important than ever to understand what motivates religious people.

Divine beings, and the experiences that people have with them, cannot be accurately understood within the framework of secularism and 'the moderns'. They cannot reside within a worldview that is based on binaries. Instead they need to be given their own 'mode of existence' where they are allowed to dwell as a reality, since they activate people, such as the students of The Course, to action. The academic argument needs to move away from

‘what is truly ‘real’’ to allowing for multiple life-worlds that may overlap, and encompasses the many different layers of reality that human live with and experience all over the world every day.

This thesis, while setting out to explore one question, has ended up leading me to another, just as important, question. As the world moves into an era of renewed religiously based turmoil will the academy be willing to open itself up to new ways of understanding religious people? Could evangelicals with a social conscience be part of the antidote to religious extremism and contributors to other big issues facing humanity, such as climate change?

The model of understanding the world based on Enlightenment rationality is nearing its end. If humans are to survive as a species, and if the planet it to survive us, we need all the wisdom sources that are available to us. We need to consider the modes of existence that secular modernity made unavailable through stripping them of reality. For if we fail to do this we commit the ultimate sin, that of being so sure we are right in our privileging of materiality we miss that we were wrong. It is certainty in science and its methodologies over the last two hundred years that has brought humanity to the environmental, economic and social predicaments that it is experiencing today. It is time to let divine entities back into the networks of contemporary life so that they can “invite us to live another, totally different way. This is called, accurately enough, a “conversion”” (Latour, 2013:309).

Reflections

In reflecting on the overall experience of being in ‘the field’ I think that it yielded interesting answers, and a few surprises. It was good to get out of the formal, academic setting of the university, drive off into the countryside and interact with a group of engaging and diverse people who were passionate about social justice and wanting to become ‘world changers’. My hope, in using the methodological tools that I have, is that their stories were told and represented in a way that accords them the honour and respect they deserve. It is difficult to convey in words how the participants, and myself, have experienced God. For this reason the website I set up, and have links to throughout this thesis, is an important tool to give the

reader a small taste of what the students experienced at Christian conferences and the emotional ties they felt towards victims of injustice.

I have come away from this research with a new appreciation for the active and vibrant worldview of young evangelicals. It has caused me to consider what can be done to better link the energy of social justice minded Christians with academic knowledge and best practice to help those in need. I have also been encouraged to see that the 'social gospel' is no longer feared like it was when I was younger. Being exposed to other types of Christianity while doing this project has shown me the evangelical world may not be my 'best fit', but there are other streams of Christianity that I can make my 'home', especially as an academic. In many ways this research has helped me to realise that there were good parts of my youthful faith that can be woven into the growing vessel of my current, and future, spirituality. My research has changed me and allowed me to 'move on', and for that I am profoundly grateful.

To Conclude

When I drew together the threads of the broken heart of God, salvation as a holistic enterprise and being an active Christian there emerges a unique paradigm how social justice was understood and acted upon by the students at The Course.

They engage in social justice directly out of their relationship and experiences with a divine entity, 'God'. He speaks with them and tells them to 'do something' about social injustices, He tells them that His heart is broken. Not only does he tell them, they also have physical and spiritual experiences where they feel His emotions and how much He hates the bad things that are done to His children. Since everyone matters to God and He loves them very much, so also must they matter to His followers, who want to embody God and take His love out into the world.

If you want to make God happy you must fight against the injustices in the world that are causing His children to live substandard lives. Human trafficking is a sin in that it enslaves precious humans whom God loves, His daughters and sons. No good parent would want their child subjected to exploitation by others. Since God is a loving father who wants His

children to have good lives, He wants to save them not only from their own sins but also from the sins done unto them by others, such as greed and violence.

The students felt strongly that it is not enough anymore to wait for heaven for the exploited and poor to get the justice they deserve, there are tools available in the here and now to remedy this situation. Through the use of social media one can raise awareness of social justice issues. You can also jump on a plane and go to places where these things are happening, such as Cambodia or Thailand, where human and sex trafficking is perceived to be rife, and try to stop these practices.

However one cannot just concentrate on the physical realm of fighting injustice, since the human is not only body but also soul. The students were still invested in 'soul change'. For if someone is greedy, or selfish, or lusts after power, or is a man who cannot control his sexual urges, then injustice will continue to be perpetuated. The understanding is that if, one by one, humans can be changed on the inside through 'the power of God' then injustice will disappear. Only then can the arc of the universe finally start to bend towards justice.

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APPENDIX ONE

"The arch of the moral universe bends towards justice"

INFORMATION SHEET - PARTICIPANTS

Researcher Introduction

Hi, my name is Catherine Rivera-Puddle and I am currently working towards a Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey University, based in Palmerston North, New Zealand. As part of my degree I will be writing a Thesis based around research done on the topic of the Evangelical justice movement. Through this information sheet I am asking you if you would consider being a participant in my research project.

Project Description and Invitation

The aim of the research is to explore what factors are contributing to a substantial increase in the number of Evangelical Christians who are becoming interested in social justice issues such as sex and human trafficking, and microenterprise collectives. This seems to be a change in focus from previous Evangelical missionary activity which used to focus more on evangelization techniques such as street preaching, handing out literature and direct 'witnessing' (this is called '*proselytizing'* in academic language). My interest in this topic stems from having spent some of my earlier years involved in missionary training and evangelism efforts and seeing a change in emphasis from mission work to justice issues within the Evangelical world over the last twenty years.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

I want to interview Christians who are interested in justice issues, and particularly Christians who have decided to take an active part in tackling injustice head on. If this describes you I would be most grateful if you would consider being interviewed for this research thesis.

Research Procedures

As a participant you would be asked to participate in the following ways;

- Answering a number of questions on justice, injustice, and how God see this issue.

Data Management

The data you supply in your written answers will be used to help write my Master's thesis exploring current Evangelical Christian practices and theology as relating to justice. My findings and conclusions will be written up and will be handed into the Department of Social Anthropology at

Massey University. It is also possible that the thesis will be made available to interested organizations, presented at conferences or published in academic journals.

The recorded interviews and transcripts will be stored at my house in a hidden cabinet. Data stored on computer will be password protected as will data on a portable hard drive. People who will have access to this data will be myself and my supervisors, Dr Robyn Andrews and Dr Carolyn Morris. You will not be named in the thesis, you will be given a made up name.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study (up till 16 July 2015)*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;*
- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;*

Project Contacts

Catherine Rivera, Ph (06) 3561654, cjrivera@hotmail.co.uk or Dr Robyn Andrews, (06) 356 9099 ext. 83653, R.Andrews@massey.ac.nz. Please contact either myself (Catherine) or my Supervisor (Dr Robyn Andrews) if you have questions regarding this research project.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone (06) 3505249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX TWO

MASSEY UNIVERSITY

"The arch of the moral universe bends towards justice"

INFORMATION SHEET - ORGANIZATION

Researcher Introduction

My name is Catherine Rivera and I am currently working towards a Master of Arts in Social Anthropology at Massey University, based in Palmerston North, New Zealand. As part of my degree I will be writing a Thesis based around research done on the topic of short term mission trips with a justice focus.

Project Description and Invitation

Through this information sheet I am asking your organization if you would consider helping me to find research participants that are taking part in your training courses or service projects and allowing me access to your courses for the purpose of observing the training sessions. The aim of the research is to explore what factors are contributing to a substantial increase in the number of Evangelical Christians who are taking part in short term missionary / service trips which have an emphasis on social justice issues such as sex and human trafficking, microenterprise collectivism, trade aid and so forth. This seems to be a change in focus from previous Evangelical missionary activity which used to focus more on evangelisation techniques such as street preaching, handing out literature and direct 'witnessing'. My interest in this topic stems from having spent some of my earlier years involved in missionary training and evangelism efforts and seeing a change in how missionary work is viewed, understood and practised over the last twenty years.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

Participants are being recruited from Christian organizations, such as yours, that are involved in training and sending people on short term mission trips with a justice based focus. This recruitment has been enabled through personal contacts that I have with people working for these organizations. The criteria to be a participant organization in this research is that you offer courses, training and/or short term missions/service trips with a Christian, justice based focus.

Research Procedures

As a participant organization you would be asked to participate in the following ways;

- By allowing me to observe a number of class/training sessions which your students are involved in. In anthropology this is called 'participant observation'.

- By allowing me to ask for student participation in my research through the use of recorded interviews with willing participants. These hour long interviews would be asking such questions as why the student/participant was attracted to the training course/mission trip, how they understand the concept of justice from a Christian perspective, what sources they have used to inform themselves about justice issues and so forth.
- By allowing me the possibility of interviewing some of your staff as to their understanding of justice issues, how they perceive missions has changed in the last few years and so forth. These would be recorded interviews.

Data Management

The data that is supplied by the participants in the form of recorded interviews, which will be transcribed to paper, will be used to help write my Master's thesis exploring current Evangelical Christian missions practices and theology. My findings and conclusions will be written up and will be handed into the Department of Social Anthropology at Massey University. It is also possible that the thesis will be made available to interested organizations, presented at conferences or published in academic journals.

The recorded interviews and transcripts will be stored at my house in a hidden cabinet. Data stored on computer will be password protected as will data on a portable hard drive. People who will have access to this data will be myself and my supervisors, Dr Robyn Andrews and Dr Carolyn Morris. Each participant and your organization will be sent a copy of the final research project. Each participant will be interviewed and identified in the thesis under a made-up name to protect their identity. The organization and the name of the course/training school will not be disclosed, the geographic location of the organization will also not be disclosed, except for the fact that it is in New Zealand. All attempts will be made to guard the anonymity of the organizations and participants involved, however participants should be aware this can never be 100% guaranteed.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- *decline to answer any particular question;*
- *withdraw from the study (up till 16 June 2015)*
- *ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;*
- *provide information on the understanding that your organizations name will not be used;*
- *be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded;*

Project Contacts

Catherine Rivera, Ph (06) 3561654, cjrivera@hotmail.co.uk or Dr Robyn Andrews, (06) 356 9099 ext. 83653, R.Andrews@massey.ac.nz Please contact either myself (Catherine) or my Supervisor (Dr Robyn Andrews) if you have questions regarding this research project.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher please contact Professor John O'Neill, Director (Research Ethics), telephone (06) 3505249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX THREE

Interview Questions

1) What made you apply to do The Course?
2) Can you give an overview of your Christian journey up to this point?
3) How did you get interested in social justice issues?
4) What sources have you used to learn about social justice?
5) What specific issues are you interested in and why?
6) What do you think you can contribute to justice based work?
7) How do you think God views injustice?
8) Why do you think injustice occurs?
9) What has The Course contributed to how you understand social justice?
10) What do you think of evangelistic methods such as street preaching, handing out tracts etc? Would you these types of evangelism methods? (* This question was not asked to all participants)