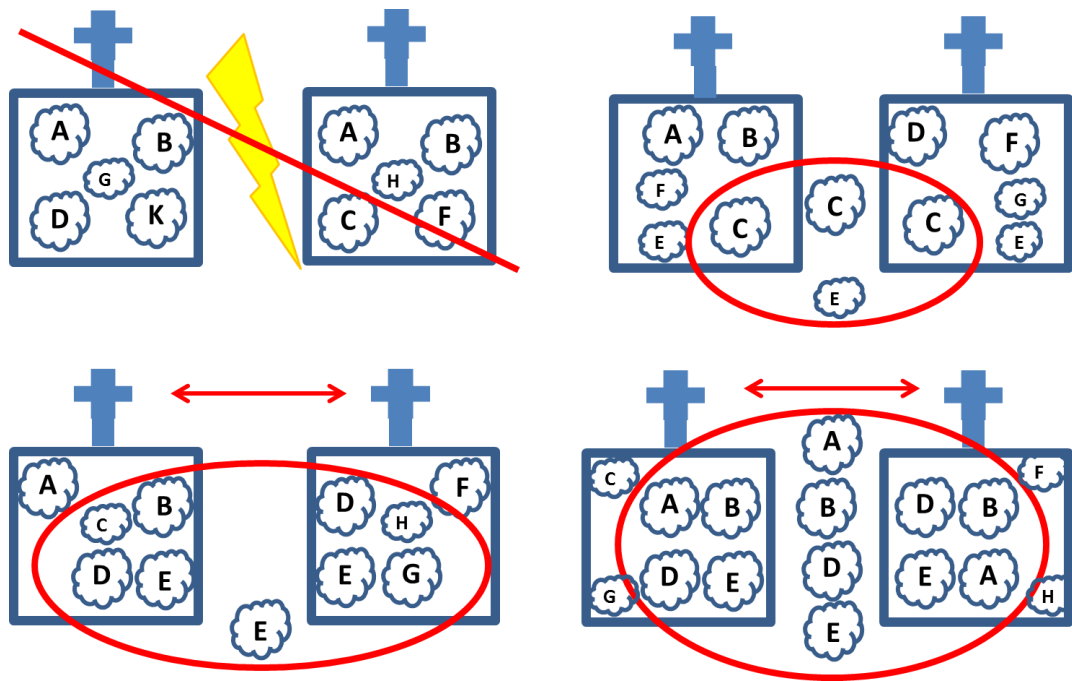


Ecumenical Trends: Three Forms of Ecumenism within Christianity



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Abstract

This paper broadly discusses the concept of ecumenism based off of my personal experiences as a Christian and a series of interviews that were conducted. To understand ecumenism, I introduce ecumenism in relation to other concerns of a congregation and detail its historical and biblical groundings. I also introduce a framework by which to understand faith, and draw on this to make sense of the different ecumenical trends that I noticed within Christianity. These three trends are the governmental faith and order ecumenism, the service-oriented life and action ecumenism and the more exclusive biblical ecumenism. I conclude by speculating on how trends in larger society impact the forms of ecumenism that I have described and provide some thoughts on where ecumenism will go in the future.

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!"
He said, "Nobody loves me."
I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"
He said, "Yes."
I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?"
He said, "A Christian."
I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?"
He said, "Protestant."
I said, "Me, too! What franchise?"
He said, "Baptist."
I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"
He said, "Northern Baptist."
I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist."
I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region."
I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912."
I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

By comedian Emo Philips

Voted 44th funniest joke of all time in "The 75 Funniest Jokes of All Time"
in *GQ* magazine (June 1999)

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Literature Review and Methodology

“When you listen and read one thinker, you become a clone... two thinkers, you become confused... ten thinkers, you’ll begin developing your own voice... two or three hundred thinkers, you become wise and develop your voice.”

— Timothy Keller

Literature Review

Within the anthropological community there are two types of academic canon produced by researchers. Some members provides autobiographical case studies (a.k.a. ethnography) detailing an anthropologist’s approach, study and conclusions about their experiences with whatever group they studied. Their conclusions could range from describing the blunders and boons of their methodology to proposing theories for the wider anthropological community to consider. Other members take these case studies and theories and try to develop universally applicable definitions and theories that can be related to all humans and their religions.

When it comes to the anthropology of religion, anthropologists have difficulty moving from the former (case-studies) to the latter (developing universals) for several reasons. At the fieldwork level there is a question of how Anthropologists should engage with and study members of a religious community. Hans Baer’s article *Dilemmas of Ethnographic Research on Sectarian Movements: A Confessional Account* provides several good examples of issues that Anthropologists encounter when studying religion¹. There is a question of how far an anthropologist can actively participate in religious ceremonies (127), as well as the question of to what extent those studied expect the anthropologist to “convert” and how that impacts their relation with the anthropologist (129). Publication

¹ (Baer 2003)

also can create tension between an anthropologist and its subjects if the subjects do not feel adequately represented (130-132). A very passionate article titled *Fear of Religious Emotion versus the Need for Research That Encompasses the Fullest Experience* is written by Edith Turner who argues that the anthropological community does not regard highly enough the experiential accounts that are recorded by anthropologists (e.g. a healing that an anthropologist received from a healer of the community she studied)² as opposed to their more objective accounts.

As a result of the difficulty in creating a scientific method to study religion there is a lot of difficulty in creating universals. *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, edited by Michael Lambek provides an assortment of articles that leave the reader with more questions than answers³. One of the reasons for this can be found in James Donovan's article *Defining Religion*. Over the course of thirty pages he demonstrates how four different approaches to defining religion result in a diversity of definitions that have varying levels of conflict with each other⁴. The first approach looks to symbols within religions to help explain meaning and associations. The second looks to explain religion through the behaviors and ritual, whereas the third is more interested in the psychological effects of religion. Finally, the fourth approach looks to the functional role of religion to understand what needs it fills in larger society. My thesis draws largely from the second approach as I am examining different ecumenical behaviors.

The anthropology of religion has a vast collection of case-studies, but the key is to find case-studies relating to the topic I am interested in: Christian unity (ecumenism) and the

² (Turner 2003)

³ (Lambek 2008)

⁴ (Donovan 2003)

Ecumenical Movement. Further, since my research would be happening in the Capital⁵ and Leatherstocking regions of New York State, having these case studies be based in the United States would also be helpful. No anthropological literature that I found fit these criteria.

What I did find was T.M. Luhrman's *When God Talk's Back: Understanding the American Evangelical's Relationship with God*⁶ and Thomas J Csordas *Language, Charisma, and Creativity: Ritual Life in the Catholic Charismatic Renewal*⁸. The former studied an individual Pentecostal congregation through participant observation in order to understand how these congregants understood and ritualistically maintained their relationship with God. The latter looks at the phenomenon of the adoption of these practices within larger Catholicism, since traditional Catholic practices and charismatic practices seem oppositional. Unfortunately, in the course of my research I didn't have the chance interview any Pentecostal clergy or laity, and there tends to be a trend that Pentecostal congregations are not involved in the Ecumenical Movement (though I cannot speak as to if they are involved in local ecumenical efforts). Further, Csordas work is confined to a movement within a single denomination, which is very different from looking at a movement between denominations.

I did find some articles that mentioned the Ecumenical Movement, but many of these are either from the 1950's to 1970's when the movement was at its peak or regionally

⁵ A fun bit of trivia: according to one study the Capital Region is the number one "most post-Christian" region in the United States (Barna Group n.d.). I put little weight on this review due to the fact that the behaviors they study apply more to Protestants than Catholics. Since 66% of the congregations in the Capital Region are Catholic, of course they aren't going to have Protestant behaviors.

⁶ My biggest qualm with Luhrman is the use of "evangelical" in her title. Different Christian congregations use this word to define very different contexts, so it is misleading to say that the practices she observes relate to anyone who identifies themselves to be "evangelical." A better word would have been charismatic.

⁷ (Luhrmann 2007)

⁸ (Csordas 2001)

specific to a country outside of the US (e.g. A religious journal with frequent articles about ecumenism called *The Furrow* is located in Ireland). The closest I came to finding an anthropological article was a sociological one, but again, this article was dated to the 1970's.

In addition to what I found anthropologically, I read two books about the ecumenical movement: Alton M Motter's *Ecumenism 101: A Handbook about the Ecumenical Movement*⁹ and Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus and Ann Riggs *Introduction to Ecumenism*¹⁰. Both of these books provide general information about the ecumenical movement (origins, principles...etc.), the latter which I will draw upon in a later chapter. I also read *Disunity in Christ: Discovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart*¹¹ by Christena Cleveland which is a fascinating psychological analysis of the implicit "us" vs. "them" relationships that are present in Christian congregations. I will return to her argument in my conclusion.

Methodology

The difficulty in studying Christianity is that there are so many different congregations that vary drastically and it would be nearly impossible to utilize participant-observation as the basis of my research. In place of this I substitute the experiences that I have had with approximately six congregations and involvement in two para-congregation organizations over the last fifteen years. I complement these experiences with 20 interviews totaling 20 hours and 39minutes. A brief description of each informant and my research intent in interviewing them is found in Appendix A.

⁹ (Motter 1997)

¹⁰ (Gros, McManus and Riggs 1998)

¹¹ (Cleveland 2013)

Originally my intent was to study the impact of the effectiveness of the Ecumenical Movement and whether churches were working together because of it. In four of the first five interviews I did, my informants had never heard of the Ecumenical Movement, so instead I asked them about their church background in order to analyze whether they had been a part of churches that worked with other churches. For the most part, there were only specific contexts in which this occurred, and this held true for later interviews with lay members.

In three of the four following interviews, I talked with clergy to hear their views on ecumenism. One came from a denomination that favored ecumenism and was creating new mechanisms by which it could occur, another came from a denomination that knew of the movement and was not a part of it, and the third came from a denomination that was unfamiliar with the movement. These three traits also held true for later clergy interviews and shaped the changes that I made to my research intentions.

I briefly considered doing a comparative analysis of the Ecumenical Movement in the Leather stocking region of NY versus the Capital region of NY, but I realized that the differences that I was trying to make regional were also related to who I was interviewing. Instead, I broadened my research from looking at the impact of the Ecumenical Movement to how and why ecumenism occurs in general. I defined ecumenism broadly to be “the value of working with other congregations in some capacity” which allowed me to apply it to any congregation that works with any other congregation. As a result, I could then study the forms in which this occurred.

The first question that arose was “what differentiates Christians from non-Christians?” and to answer this I interviewed informants that belong to groups with some sort of Christian origin that are labelled today as “sects” or “cults.” Following this, I noticed that my informants talked about different types of ecumenism. To understand this, I had to develop an understanding of faith and found that the various components of faith that I created related to different types of ecumenism. Developing and exploring this framework is the intent of this paper.

Before proceeding, I do want to inform the reader of some limitations of my research. Because I am not well versed in theology, I avoid attempting to detail specific theological principles. Instead, I define theology as “religious truths” and use it in this abstract form throughout my paper. I also am not meticulous about detailing which informant told me what specific details, but rather synthesize their voices in my narrative and highlight particulars in relevant areas.

These aside, I invite the reader to the next section where I attempt to demonstrate congregations in their larger context and how ecumenism fits into this context.

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Contextualizing Christianity

“Thinking of you where ever you are-

We pray for our sorrows to end
and hope that our hearts will blend
now I will step forward to realize this wish-

And who knows
starting a new journey may not be so hard
or maybe it's already begun-

There are many worlds
but they share the same sky
one sky one destiny-”

— Shiro Amano, Kingdom Hearts, Vol. 2

Christianity is a word that covers a range of people with a range of beliefs in a range of contexts. Unsurprisingly, this ambiguity makes it hard to generalize without some group somewhere crying foul. In order to orient the reader, I will begin by briefly detailing my Christian journey, with a historical emphasis rather than a theological one. I hope that this gives the reader a better sense of how I approach and understand Christianity based on my experiences. Following this, I will introduce Pastor Rick, a key spiritual leader in my life. Finally, I will then draw upon this introduction to demonstrate the overlapping concerns that congregations¹² have in order to provide the context in which to introduce ecumenism.

¹² For the purposes of this paper I am avoiding the use of the word “church” due to the range of meanings that it carries. Instead I use the word “congregation” which I feel more adequately represents the nature of Christian communities. As to what exactly a congregation is and what it does, I am reserving that for another chapter.

My Christian Journey

I was Baptized and received my first Holy Communion as a Roman Catholic, meaning that part of my childhood was spent attending Catholic education classes much like my peers since the area I grew up in was largely Roman Catholic. My class was the one that almost didn't get to play BINGO with the old people because we weren't the best behaved. But we did play BINGO and we did dress up and when we received our first Eucharist my mom's side of the family was very proud.

When my parents divorced my Dad married a Free Methodist's pastor's kid and we began to travel forty minutes to her father's congregation. This congregation outgrew its space, sold the old building and met in a school where the stage was constructed and deconstructed each week until the new building was complete. I was involved in the kid's program there until I outgrew it and became involved in Free Methodist Bible Quizzing, an inter-congregational teen competition based on books of the bible. Much of my biblical familiarity comes from this and time spent in high school reading through the bible. Though my mother and Grandmother supported me, I think my Grandmother secretly was disappointed that I didn't go through Roman Catholic Confirmation classes. One tradition that did remain was that every year I would attend an Episcopal Congregation for Christmas Eve service, the congregation where my grandpa went when he was a kid.

Eventually we stopped going to the Free Methodist congregation for some inter-personal and economic reasons and tried out a small Nazarene congregation down the street. It was conservative (the one Sunday school teacher taught my siblings a song called "Man

didn't come from a monkey"), small (about fifteen until Hertha and Bill died), and old (the median age dropped from 50 to 40 when I attended). Things didn't work out.

My family stopped attending congregations about that time and my Free Methodist Bible Quizzing coach would pick me up on her way to a Free Methodist congregation replant. Long story short, an inner-city Free Methodist congregation was slated to close and some members of the other congregation we attended were looking to see if they could make some changes and make it more successful. During this time I continued Bible Quizzing until I aged out and attended a youth group. I also helped out at Vacation Bible School for a few years, a summer kids program featuring games, bible stories, crafts, music and dancing. Though the congregation did turn around for a while, the congregation did eventually close during my senior year of college.

When I went to college I infrequently attended a Presbyterian congregation (PCA). The congregation was again older and the pastor was conservative. However, I found that I really enjoyed the organ and hymns (in addition to the worship-band style of the Free Methodists) and the people were well known for their hospitality, which was true. More importantly, I became involved in a Christian college fellowship where I formed strong friendships with other Christians and went on retreats that have helped me to better understand my beliefs.

My understanding of Christianity is not something that I have because I adhere to one set of principles and that's it. It has been a messy journey. I have had to think through many tough and unpopular topics such as heaven and hell, sanctity of marriage (aka how do we relate to the LGBTQ community), sex, the meaning of love...etc.. If I believe that God

has forgiven me of my sin (and I have and do sin), what does that say about how he values me and how I should value myself? If I believe that God is really in control, what does that mean for how I approach other people's problems, especially those closest to me?

Further, I have had to figure out how I relate to God, or rather how I hear God's voice from the myriad of Christian and non-Christian voices. What is the background of the pastor/Christian I am listening to? Do I like what he or she says because it comes from God, or because it is something that I want to believe? When I read a biblical translation, should I go with the scholarly TNIV/NIV, the poetically classic NKJV/KJV, or the interpretive *The Message*?

Yet another layer is that my faith is very central to me. How do I relate with people who don't believe that their Christian belief is a central identity that they have? If someone says something in ignorance about Christianity should I address it, realizing that explaining it may take a long time, or do I let it go because they really don't care and are just looking to gripe about something? If I meet a Christian who holds beliefs that I strongly disagree with, how do I sensitively learn about, and healthily challenge, those beliefs (and let mine be challenged) without triggering or responding defensively? If a family member regards my beliefs insensitively, how do I respond in a way that is both loving and open, but also sets appropriate boundaries?

I am a Christian who is not afraid to ask questions and I am skeptical about blind faith. I believe that God influences my day to day life and that he wants me to know him more. I have found that Christianity is much messier than it appears, and for many years I was

ashamed of the stupid things that I had heard or seen some Christians do. Parallel to this was a fascination with why different congregations operated differently, which is unsurprising considering my religiously diverse background. During my sophomore year I did a research project on a particular position in Christianity called the Deacon, and I looked at the role of this office in three different denominations. It was here that I encountered the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document, produced by the World Council of Churches, and how I first heard about the Ecumenical Movement. A year and a half later ecumenism became the focus of my thesis.

Contextualizing Christian Congregations

As you can tell from above, I have had a variety of congregational experiences as well as have been involved in para-congregation (a.k.a para-church) organizations. As a result, I have gained insight to a variety of concerns that congregations have regarding their purpose in the larger world. Each congregation will prioritize concerns differently, leading them to have different “postures” toward the world. I will detail some of these concerns below, though this list will clearly not be extensive. To do this, I want to introduce Pastor Rick.

I have known Pastor Rick since I was a child due to having Bible Quizzed with his son and daughter for many years. He has been a key spiritual leader in my life as well as the lives of many others as he is very approachable, a bit of a trouble maker (in a good way of course – usually involving getting kids riled up) and quick to center things on God. A recovering alcoholic, he encouraged me through times when a close family member was in denial about their alcoholism, and when things bottomed out, he was there to encourage them and point them in the right direction. He was also vital in bringing in

other family members who had raised this concern with him and were prayerfully waiting for the right time to get involved, which they now are (much to my delight!). God has done wonderful things in my life through him.

Pastor Rick's house is a cozy home on a quiet street in a suburban neighborhood. He is bi-vocational, meaning that he both works and is a Pastor. When his kids went to college, he began to work in a major city 150 miles away from home and either he or his wife would commute to see each other. Eventually he gave this up to start his own copy machine services business locally. A quick anecdote to describe his personality in business: while on the operating table for a minor surgery he actually sold the physician a copier.

I interviewed Pastor Rick for thesis and found that the following (paraphrased) conversation is helpful in seeing the overlapping concerns of a congregation:

Pastor Rick introduced me to a way of examining congregations to determine whether or not they are healthy¹³ and accomplishing their purpose¹⁴. This was done by examining the tithing habits of congregants¹⁵. Let's say that in a healthy congregation, each adult gives a \$20 tithe per Sunday¹⁶. It is assumed that the longer that a person goes to a congregation, the more they are willing to give (because they increasingly become a part of the community) and the more they are able to give (based off the trend that over time people tend to own their car, house...etc. and have more disposable income).

¹³ Of course "healthy" has different meanings to different Christians. My experience is that a healthy congregation includes a range of ages (kids, teens, young adults, parents, empty-nesters, sweet old people) as well as a range of economic classes. Depending on location (inner-city vs. suburbs) this may also include a range of ethnicities (as opposed to each ethnicity having their own congregation).

¹⁴ The mission of his denomination is: "To love God, love people and make disciples." The vision is "To bring wholeness to the world through healthy biblical communities of holy people multiplying disciples, leaders, groups and churches."

¹⁵ In the Christian circles of which I have been apart, the recommended tithe is 10% of a families' income, provided that it can be done sustainably.

¹⁶ This number is just given as an example. I'm sure that studies have been done to determine what this number actually is, or it may vary by region.

Congregations by their purpose need to reach out to the local community and to invite others to learn about Jesus and to learn how to follow God. Congregations that have a lower tithing level (e.g. \$15 per week per person) probably have newer members that aren't contributing as much (or at all) monetarily to the congregation. Pastor Rick said that it usually takes a year and a half before a person or family considers themselves part of the congregational community, and it may take this long before they begin to contribute closer to the average. Individuals or families that are "needier" (have financial concerns, are more interested in donations and monetary support than spiritual matters, prefer to complain about issues – personal or otherwise – without actually looking for resolutions...etc.) may take longer to integrate into the community and utilize more congregational resources. On the other hand congregations that have an average tithe of say \$30 per person per Sunday probably don't have many new members and possibly are not growing.

Spiritual Concerns

Underlying (presumably) every congregation is an understanding of God and the religious truths that follow from that understanding. Theoretically, all other concerns of a congregation would be weighed against this concern. In other words, matters involving money, politics, social concerns...etc. would be related to understandings of religious truths, provided that religious truths are the highest concern of a congregation. In the narrative above, Pastor Rick's convictions are based on his relationship with God and lead him to have a particular world-view¹⁷. For example, this world-view explains that non-Christians have a fundamental spiritual need to meet God, and the role of the congregation is to invite them to meet God. As people grow spiritually (by becoming a part of the community and learning how to hear God's voice) how they behave will

¹⁷ Regarding my own world-view, I need to emphasize to my reader that throughout the paper I tend to present spiritual matters as something very logical and rational. This reflects the personal way in which I tend to hear God speak to me, for example through patterns and usually in some sort of situational irony. I know for a fact that friends of mine hear similarly and differently to the way that I do. The convenience of my approach is that it helps me to make sense of what I see inter-congregationally, and allows me to develop and propose the theoretical arguments that I make in a later chapter.

change, and that change will be reflected in their willingness to tithe (and support the congregation's desire to invite more individuals to Christianity).

Business Concerns

I think it would be unfair to generalize that congregations are a business, but money is central to the operation of a parish and the institutional congregation¹⁸, so it shouldn't be surprising that money is a concern of and for congregations. The narrative above shows one way in which congregations can use money outside of operating expenses. Another question that Pastor Rick raised in a later part of the interview was whether pastors should be paid more at larger congregations or whether this creates incentives that can detract from their spiritual work. Further questions are raised regarding what programs the congregation should fund. Are youth programs accomplishing their purpose? Should a food pantry be established? What building repairs need to be made? Has the congregation grown to the point where new facilities are needed?

Educational Concerns

It is obvious to say that congregations are teaching institutions, but the extent of their teaching is not simply a pastor's (or preacher's or reverend's or priest's) message on a Sunday. Different congregations have different forms of government (the "institutional congregation" I mentioned earlier) and all the leaders of this government (ideally) work together to promote the spiritual concerns mentioned previously. Further, congregations also teach behaviors. In the above narrative, I mentioned that as people become members of the community it is expected that they will contribute to that community. In the case of

¹⁸ The term "institutional congregation" refers to the part of the congregation that acts as an institution – governed by bylaws based on spiritual beliefs – that works to guide the congregation as a whole. The institutional congregation includes, but is not limited to clergy since institutional positions may be designated to the laity (e.g. a worship leader or a lector).

someone being “needy,” more resources (e.g. time, money, food) will be needed to get the person to a point where they are giving back to the community.

Perhaps the best example that I saw of this is when Bill¹⁹ began to attend my congregation. I assume that he met one of the pastoral staff and was invited to come to service on Sundays. The first time I saw him, he sat on the floor, arms wrapped around his legs rocking back and forth and would raise his hand to ask questions during the sermon. I eventually learned that he was in an addiction recovery program that my congregation sponsored and over time he began to follow norms. I know that behind the scenes he was meeting with a pastoral staff member who was teaching him spiritually, mentally and emotionally²⁰. Educational concerns then tie back into business concerns: What programs should be funded for the benefit of our congregants, and how do these tie in with what is being taught in the pulpit?

Political Concerns

Part of the teaching of congregations will be how to interact with the public sphere, all that is outside of the doors of the congregation²¹. For some (I can’t say what percentage), this interaction can be political. Shortly after the conversation I narrated above, Pastor Rick and his wife began talking about how the welfare system (e.g. New York State Benefits Card) creates dependency on the government. Congregations have a responsibility to teach people how to trust in God’s provision and to do what they can to provide for themselves. At the government level, this means not to live off of taxpayer

¹⁹ All names in this paper outside of my own are pseudonyms

²⁰ The family member I mentioned previously was referred to this program, though shortly after it was discontinued due to lack of funding.

²¹ My wording here implies congregation parishes as areas of refuge and sanctuary from the world. This idealization will vary by congregation, but I think that it is safe to say that congregations do see a divide between the way the world is (sinful, broken) and what it should be (concepts of perfect world). Along this divide they detail the role of the congregant’s response in this world.

money and getting to a point where they are paying taxes. At a congregational level, this means moving from solely accepting congregational support (food, money...etc.) to accepting what is needed as well as giving back to the community (e.g. through tithing).

Charitable Concerns

Another way of interacting with the public sphere is through charitable programs, and I would say most congregations support these efforts in one form or another. The charitable program mentioned above was the addiction recovery program (which was paid for by congregation resources and utilized the parish as a space). However, in addition to congregation-sponsored programs, there is an abundance of non-profits, para-congregational organizations and missionary programs that vie for monetary support from congregations. I've noticed that congregations tend to pick an area of focus, sometimes represented in their name. For example, some congregations I've attended specifically call themselves a "Community Church" (e.g. Grace Community Church) to emphasize their interest in supporting or sponsoring programs in the local community. The Christian and Missionary Alliance denomination on the other hand emphasizes the importance of missionary work.

Ecumenical Concerns

Against the backdrop of these (competing) concerns I can now introduce another: ecumenism. Simply put, a congregation that prioritizes ecumenical concerns values positively engaging with other congregations in some fashion. The narrative above does not mention ecumenical concerns, which is unsurprising considering the nature of the topic. In a sense, its absence represents the current state of ecumenical concerns; they are often simply another item on the agenda of Christian congregations and for many, though not all, it's a low priority. The following section will provide the reader with a greater

understanding of ecumenism conceptually, where it came from and the ecumenical climate of today.

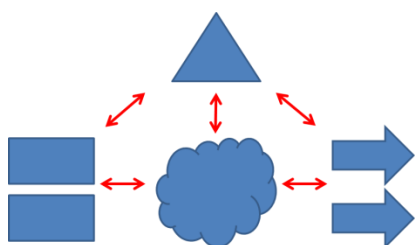
Developing a Framework

“A scattered dream that's like a far-off memory... a far-off memory that's like a scattered dream... I want to line the pieces up... yours and mine.”

— Shiro Amano, Kingdom Hearts, Vol. 2

Background: Constructing the Institutional Congregation²²

After compiling and transcribing my interviews I found that I needed some way to describe the nature of religious beliefs and their relation to the institutional congregation. In other words, how does believing X (a theological idea) relate to what the institutional congregation teaches, and what is the application of that teaching?



To the left I have attempted to represent this idea in a visual form that will present itself throughout this paper. At the center of the image is an idea bubble, which represents theology. Theologies, for the purpose

of this work, are statements of religious truths. These truths are supported by doctrines, which are represented on the left by the square boxes. Doctrines are commonly drawn from (but are not limited to) two sources: biblical texts and traditional texts. On the right, the arrows represent applications, meaning the action that congregants (both clergy and laity) are supposed to take because of the theologies that they hold. Above all of these I have placed a triangle to represent God, who influences Christians in each of these areas. All of these items combined represent faith.

An example should be helpful to the reader for better understanding the relationship between these components. A broad theology, a religious truth, is that the Christian faith

²² The term “institutional congregation” refers to the part of the congregation that acts as an institution – governed by bylaws based on spiritual beliefs – that works to guide the congregation as a whole. The institutional congregation includes but is not limited to clergy since institutional positions may be designated to the laity (e.g. a worship leader or a lector).

needs to be spread to others. Doctrinally, biblical texts such as Jesus' "great commission"²³ and statements by religious leaders about evangelization²⁴ or mission work will be used to explain why and how this is to occur. As a result, individual congregants and/or the congregation as a whole will develop ways in which to do this. For example, the institutional congregation may provide evangelism training or develop a program where congregants and community members interact (such as cleaning up a local park). It is expected that at each level, God's influence will be present. Doctrinally and theologically, the institutional congregation may find that evangelism is something that they feel God is emphasizing (through that mysterious medium of prayer) and that evangelical efforts are blessed in their application (people are becoming Christian and joining the congregation).

Now, I do hope that the reader is not deceived. Each of these components is not something that can be examined in isolation, but rather that each must be looked at in



relation to the others. Representing this pictorially makes things look a bit like a rocket ship, but there is some truth in that faith is active. Also, I hope that the reader is not

misguided in thinking of faith as something that moves from the left of the image to the right of the image (from thinking to action). Each of these components influences each other and is in flux. For example, a congregation may theologically believe that sexuality and marriage must be limited to a particular context (namely, between a man and a

²³ Then Jesus came to them and said "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18, NIV).

²⁴ There is a fundamental difference between evangelization and proselytization. Evangelization involves an invite to become Christian, whereas proselytization involves coercion (e.g. through force, threats...etc.) to become Christian.

woman after marriage), meaning that they theologically and doctrinally oppose the LGBTQ community. However, members of their congregation may be involved in the LGBTQ community or LGBTQ events, so other theologies (e.g. the theology of loving your neighbor) may take precedence over the theology of the sanctity of marriage.

I have now introduced a very important concept that is central to my argument. Clearly institutional congregations do not believe in a single theological principle, but rather have a series of overlapping theologies that exist in relation to one another. In the previous chapter I detailed a series of concerns that congregations juggle. I argue that each of these concerns is actually a theology. Congregations will relate a religious truth (or more likely truths) when thinking through concepts of money, politics, charity, education and business. Justification of beliefs will be drawn back to biblical and traditional sources and these beliefs will shape how congregants act out on their faith individually and collectively.

Ecumenism then is a theology. It is one that recognizes that there are other Christian congregations in the world and that there is value in working with them. This theology relates to others in particular ways (e.g. it is more important, equally important or less important) depending on how the institutional congregation prioritizes it. It has a biblical and historical (traditional) grounding, and depending on its relationship with other theologies within a congregation, it will influence how a congregation relates to other congregations (its practical application). The following section covers historical and biblical grounding.

Historical and Biblical Groundings of Ecumenism

Historical Groundings: Division and the Ecumenical Movement

In this section I will attempt to provide the reader with a brief history of division and the movement for unity within Christianity. This history is drawn from Jeffery Gros, Eamon McManus and Anne Riggs *Introduction to Ecumenism*²⁵.

The tenants of Christianity are drawn from the teachings of Jesus Christ and his followers nearly two thousand years ago. Gros, McManus and Riggs put it succinctly as follows:

“The Gospel as preached by Jesus the Jew and spread by his Jewish disciples was embedded in the faith and culture of his native land and people. Soon after Jesus’ death and resurrection the Christian proclamation came to expression in Hellenic culture, principally through the work of Paul. Gradually Christianity found itself embodied in the variety of cultures of the Mediterranean basin and, later, in Armenia, Persia, India, Gaul, Britain and Ethiopia (10).”

Originally, Christianity was a growing faction within Judaism (thus why Jesus and his disciples were Jewish, not Christian). Eventually, conflict emerged between the religious leaders of Judaism and the followers of the disciples, resulting over time in the creation of a new religion. The name “Christian” was coined in a gentile (non-Jewish) city called Antioch²⁶ and eventually spread to encompass those who followed the new religion. Apostle Paul, a former Jewish leader turned Christian through an encounter with God, was the principle agent in the spread of Christianity throughout the time period. It is obvious from his writings that various congregations were adopting the Gospel – the

²⁵ (Gros, McManus and Riggs 1998). Gros speaks from a Catholic perspective. The Catholic tradition has had a long history of scholarship, and I hold this to their credit.

²⁶ See Acts 11:26

teachings of Christ – to their own cultures and that divisions were arising both within and between congregations²⁷.

Ecumenical Councils – gatherings of Christian leaders - were called throughout history to address conflicts or to clarify doctrine. The earliest councils met together to clarify the fundamental principles of Christianity as a result of “spiritual, cultural, and heretical movements” (11). Eventually, structures emerged to unify the leadership of the growing number of Christian congregations. By the sixth century political, social and theological tensions caused both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Oriental Orthodox²⁸ to split and form their own denominations.

A further divide occurred between the “Latin West” and “Byzantine East” over a growing difference in practices between the two groups. Formally, an excommunication occurred in 1054, but the sacking of Constantinople (the religious and political center of the Byzantine empire) by crusaders in 1204 from the Latin West was the “final blow to unity and trust” (16). The result was the development of the Byzantine Orthodox denomination (which later included the creation of the Slavic Orthodox Tradition with its religious center in Moscow) and the Roman Catholic denomination. Until more recent times, the Roman Catholic approach to Eastern Orthodox denominations was to encourage individuals and congregations to adopt Roman Catholic practices in a policy known as *uniatism*.

In the 1500’s divisions occurred that resulted in the divide between the Roman Catholic Denomination and modern day Protestant denominations. The Lutheran denomination

²⁷ Reading the books of Acts, Romans, Ephesians, Corinthians, Colossians, and Galatians should illustrate these differences.

²⁸ These are the names given to these traditions today

was the result of the leadership of Martin Luther and the Reform denominations that developed through the work of John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli. These denominations further developed over time to include Dutch reformed, Scottish Presbyterian and British Congregational traditions. Conflicts within the British Congregational tradition eventually resulted in the Baptist denomination and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) denomination. England developed its own denomination under King Henry the VIII that came to be known as the Anglican denomination.

In the 1700's John Wesley spearheaded a revival throughout England and the American Colonies which resulted in the creation of the Methodist denomination. Over time, tension over social and theological issues caused the rise of various denominations within the Methodist and Baptist traditions. The Holiness denominations, developed as a result of further "Wesleyan movements" (24). Principles of the Holiness movement eventually led to the development of the Pentecostal denomination in the early 1900's. In this same time period, Thomas Campbell and Barton Stone attempted reconciliation (arguably ecumenical) between the various denominations by creating a denomination with principles that theoretically could apply to all Christians. This resulted in the creation of the Churches of Christ, the Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ. Also during this time, the Seventh-day Adventists arose due to fears of the approaching second coming of Christ. According to Gros, McManus and Riggs, American principles of pluralism and individuality were the reason that the rapid development of new denominations was culturally acceptable (24-25).

The beginning of the twentieth century brought with it a desire to create unity between the various denominations of Christianity. The birth of the modern²⁹ Ecumenical Movement occurred at the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910. The purpose of the conference “was to inspire Christians from various churches to cooperate in preaching the Gospel to the world” (26) though some leading members at the conference believed that simple cooperation would not be sufficient to heal past divisions. “Anglican speakers urged that the omission of Catholic and Orthodox members should be rectified in future conferences (26).”

Over the course of the following years, nations began to develop institutional councils to bring leaders of the various traditions together in dialogue. By the 1950’s, these councils congregated into four main “international streams.” “Life and Work to promote joint social service and action; Faith and Order to seek theological basis for church unity; the International Missionary Council for common proclamation; and the World Council of Christian education” (27). In 1948, the Life and Work and Faith and Order councils merged to form the World Council of Churches (WCC). 1961 marked two significant events: first, the year that the WCC merged with the International Missionary Council and second, Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostal traditions joined the World Council. Ten years later, the World Council of Christian Education also merged with the World Council of Churches. The purpose statement of the WCC (developed 1998) is as follows:

²⁹ Note that I say modern because there have been avenues of unity between congregations and denominations in the past. Most often times these avenues were in the form of collaboration on social justice and ministry, but there were also institutional attempts at unity. The Evangelical Alliance and the call to unity expressed by the US Episcopal Church in 1888 are examples of this. However, none were as long term or accomplished as much as the current Ecumenical Movement. (Gros, McManus and Riggs 1998, 26)

"The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic [sic] fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe".³⁰

Though the Roman Catholic denomination has been, and still is, active within the WCC, they are not an official member³¹. Roman Catholic policy during the early parts of the Ecumenical Movement still followed the idea of uniatism, meaning that the purpose of ecumenical dialogue would be to try and convince protestant and orthodox congregations and denominations to rejoin the Roman Catholic denomination. However, in 1949 this view shifted as the leadership of the Roman Catholic denomination recognized the Ecumenical Movement as divinely inspired. Following this, successful conversations with other traditions laid the groundwork for the Roman Catholic denomination to enter into the ecumenical dialogue. On November 21st 1964 the Roman Catholic denomination published a document titled "The Decree on Ecumenism" which outlined an approach to Ecumenism based on a Catholic Perspective. This publication happened during a significant event in Roman Catholic history known as Vatican II, where the Roman Catholic denomination gathered together to consider tenants of Roman Catholicism in the face of the twenty-first century³².

Vatican II occurred during what I would describe as a golden age in global ecumenism. The early 1950's to early 1970's contains a rich literature of ecumenism that represented congregational and denominational interest in ecumenical dialogue. One book from the

³⁰ (Self-Understanding and Vision 2013)

³¹ (Frequently Asked Questions 2013)

³² One of my informants told me that previous to Vatican II, a Catholic would have to go to confessional if they attended a Protestant service. Thanks to Vatican II, this is no longer the case.

period, which I will use in the following section, has a twenty two page appendix of readings relating to the Ecumenical Movement and concepts of ecumenism.

I will now pause my narrative to describe the biblical grounding of ecumenism.

Following this, I will finish this section by describing the state of the Ecumenical Movement today.

Biblical Groundings: Jesus and Images of Unity

The most common bible passage that is related to ecumenism comes from the book of John, one of the four books in the bible that details the life of Jesus. The background to this text is that Jesus is in prayer to God, knowing that he will soon be taken to be killed. Previous to this section he has prayed for what God will accomplish through his death and he has prayed that after his death God will provide protection for his disciples (his twelve closest followers) as they go out and teach others what Jesus taught them. The focus of the prayer then changes as follows:

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me³³.”

Before analyzing, I want to remind the reader that what is stated above is *a* teaching (or series of teachings depending on how you look at it) of Jesus. How important it is in relation to other teachings depends on the congregation. Congregational theologies may

³³ (John 17:20-23, NIV)

choose to draw from this passage as a part of their doctrine, or they may privilege³⁴ other passages over it. If congregations do prioritize a theology of unity, then the next step is trying to discern what Jesus means by “complete unity.”

In his book *Ecumenism The Science of the Church Universal*³⁵, John Mackay provides an analysis of a variety of images that Jesus uses to describe himself in relation to his followers (a.k.a. Christians). Four of the most relevant are the king of a nation, shepherd of the flock, cornerstone of the building and head of the body³⁶. Note that though each of these groupings is plural by nature, Jesus does not say that he is the head of multiple nations, flocks, buildings and bodies. All Christians then are theoretically one under him. Ecumenism works both publically and institutionally to make this unity visible as a testament of Jesus’ leadership in what is called the “universal Church” or “catholic Church”³⁷.

Historical Groundings: Accomplishments of the Ecumenical Movement and its Condition Today

The golden age of ecumenism has resulted in over sixty years of bilateral (between two denominations) and multilateral (between more than two denominations) conversations. Perhaps the most significant accomplishment of this dialogue has been the creation of the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM) document that was produced by the World Council of Churches in 1982. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry are all significant

³⁴ “Privileging” means that a congregation opts to focus on certain parts of the bible over others. For example, Martin Luther (founder of Lutheranism) didn’t feel that the book of James was a canonical necessity.

³⁵ (Mackay 1964). Though it is written during the time period of the Ecumenical Movement, Mackay’s book details more of the principles behind ecumenism and even lists the various forms it could take. The most common form of ecumenism that I have encountered is conciliar (through the use of councils), which is essentially the Ecumenical Movement. Mackay’s lists the following other forms: Dramatic, Confessional, Regional and Cooperative.

³⁶ Longer descriptions of these metaphors can be found in Appendix B

³⁷ Not to be confused with the Catholic church

practices to each Christian congregation, and the purpose of the document was to accurately represent the broad areas of convergence and conflict between member congregations/denominations of the World Council of Churches:

“[The BEM document] reflects the research and reflection of outstanding theologians from Orthodox, Old Catholic, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and most Protestant churches....the study clearly identifies points of historical differences. Yet, at the same time, the study offers a rich and balanced perspective of the major topics, which move beyond narrow views of historic polemics...The text has produced more than 100 formal responses from churches³⁸.”

Over the last twenty years however the Ecumenical Movement has slowed as new challenges have arisen³⁹. The first challenge is a realization of how important identity is to denominations. Avis uses the phrase “theological worldviews” to describe the effect these identities have on ecumenical conversation, and from my own experiences I am hardly surprised to see that this has become an issue⁴⁰. Another reason that the Ecumenical Movement has lost momentum is due to the rise of pluralist and secular movements that has resulted in a decrease in congregational involvement of society in general. Avis argues that ecumenism and missions (faith-based work to invite others to Christianity) fundamentally need to go hand in hand, but congregations/denominations may see them as separate initiatives and reallocate resources toward missions that they originally set aside for the ecumenical movement (22-23). Another issue that was mentioned to me by one of my informants is that the Ecumenical Movement was built on denominationalism – meaning that each denomination brings its representative congregations to the table and provides a convenient structure by which to have institutional dialogue. However, we are in a time period where denominational

³⁸ (Fitzgerald 2004, 200)

³⁹ (Avis 2010, 21)

⁴⁰ In fact, it’s exactly why the World Council of Churches needs to hire Anthropological Ecumenists!

congregations tend to be in decline and the largest congregations tend to be non-denominational.

Applying the Themes of the Ecumenical Movement to Ecumenism in General

In the beginning of this chapter I introduced ecumenism as a theology. Having now provided its doctrinal origins I can now turn to its theologies and applications in the course of the next four chapters. In these chapters the Ecumenical Movement will not play as significant of a role as not all forms of ecumenism that I encountered are directly related to the movement. However, the movement provides both an excellent mirror and point of comparison when looking at ecumenism generally. By mirror, I mean that the highs and lows of the Ecumenical Movement are reflected in some of the ecumenical communities that I studied. By comparison, I mean that some ecumenical communities have actually defined themselves *against* the ecumenical movement for reasons that I will detail later. I will now turn my attention to answering the question, What makes Christians, “Christian?”

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What Makes Christians “Christian?”

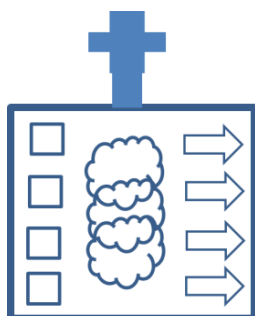


There are several ways in which I could have attempted to determine what beliefs make a congregation “Christian.” Each congregation has a set of bylaws to determine congregational government as well as a canon of some sort, both of which contain the theological views of their respective congregations. These sources are usually available online where they can be downloaded, codified and compared. Another way could have been to ask Christians (both clergy and lay) what they thought were the central beliefs. Though both of these are valid, I feel that they provide too much of an inside perspective. Also, as a Christian interviewing Christians, it is much more likely that these interviews would have been filled with commonly held beliefs, symbols and language making it difficult for me to identify points of interest.

Instead I turned to four denominations that have been identified by Christianity as “sects” or “cults:” Jehovah’s Witnesses, Unitarian Universalists, Christian Scientists and Unificationists. These denominations lie in the gray area between Christianity and other world religions. As a result, in interviews with members of these denominations I encountered beliefs that are both familiar and strange. Comparing their understanding with my own began to define the boundaries that institutionally keep these denominations from being identified as Christian. I will now briefly introducing the framework by which

I will compare these groups with Christianity and then move on to the comparisons themselves.

Introducing the Framework



Having introduced the reader to the institutional congregation, I will now describe its representative image. Similar to the last section, boxes represent doctrines, idea bubbles theologies and arrows applications. I overlapped the theologies to remind the reader of the difficulty in determining where one theology ends and another begins. Also remember that the doctrines on the left and applications on the right may be related to one or more of the theologies. Notice that I have intentionally left out the triangle which represents God's influence and have separated the images. This is done for clarities sake.

This framework will prove useful in discussing what theologies are central to determining whether or not a congregation is "Christian." Since Jehovah's Witnesses congregations, Unitarian Universalist congregations, Unificationist congregations and Christian Scientist congregations are structurally linked in some capacity, I will refer to them as denominations in the following sections.

Jehovah's Witnesses



Jehovah's Witnesses are one of the most well-known groups for their evangelical style, though they are readily labelled as a cult due to the nature of some of their practices. Over brunch at Denny's I met with a childhood friend who had been recently baptized as a Witness. Together with her boyfriend, Arnold, also a Witness, we caught up

on life until conversation turned and I began to learn about their beliefs. Veronica had forwarded me the link to a video about the history of the Witnesses, which I will summarize briefly in the following paragraph:

Jehovah's Witnesses originated as a bible study student group, whose leaders disputed traditional Christian theologies such as the trinity and hellfire. Over the course of five years, early leaders utilized a methodology where they used "scripture to interpret scripture" meaning they used particular sections in the bible to interpret other sections in the bible. Following this, early Jehovah's Witness leaders attempted to bring their revelations to other Christian congregations, only to be rejected. Their work continued over the years and through the hands of new leaders they developed into the international denomination/religion they are today.

Instead of "churches," Jehovah's Witnesses hold their meetings in Kingdom Halls, and each Kingdom Hall is assigned to a particular geographic region. The structure of meetings focuses first on bible study followed by discussion of evangelical techniques. Speaking of techniques Jehovah's Witnesses have two distinct positions dedicated to evangelization⁴¹: pioneers and missionaries. Essentially the difference is that pioneers evangelize locally (within their communities) whereas missionaries travel abroad to fulfill this role. Evangelization is a central tenant to Jehovah's Witness beliefs due to their theological understandings of the "end of times." Based on an interpretation of biblical prophecy, Witness leaders predicted that 1914⁴² would bring about significant events within the world that would mark the returning reign of Jesus Christ. Events such

⁴¹ Similar to my definition in an earlier section, evangelization involves invitation, proselytization involves coercion.

⁴² October 1914 was the start of World War I.

as genocides, famines, wars and earthquakes since 1914 fulfill the signs given of this return. Jehovah's Witnesses believe then that, as the last days are upon us, it is their obligation to tell as many people as possible about the good news⁴³. What is the good news?

“God wants people to enjoy life on earth. He created the earth and everything on it because he loves mankind. Soon he will act to provide a better future for people in every land. He will relieve mankind of the causes of suffering...*Read Jeremiah 29:11...*

No government has ever succeeded in eliminating violence, disease, or death. But there is good news. Shortly, God will replace all human governments with his own government. Its subjects will enjoy peace and good health...*Read Isaiah 25:8; 33:24; Daniel 2:44...*

Suffering will end only when God clears the earth of bad people. (Zephaniah 2:3) When will that happen? God's Word foretold the conditions that now threaten mankind. Current events indicate that God's time to act is close...*Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5...*⁴⁴,”

Individuals become members of the Witness community by becoming baptized, and in order to be baptized there are certain beliefs that must be understood and accepted. If a baptized believer isn't acting in accordance with his or her faith, and the matter is serious enough, the member may be disfellowshipped, meaning that current members will not speak to them unless they repent of what they have done wrong and rejoin the Witness community⁴⁵. This as well as social restrictions against smoking cigarettes, celebrating holidays, accepting blood transfusions and associating with non-Witnesses⁴⁶ are often

⁴³ (Jehovah's Witnesses 2005)

⁴⁴ (Jehovah's Witnesses 2012)

⁴⁵ There are some built in mechanisms in which, in cases of emergency such as death or hospitalization, Witnesses will talk with disfellowshipped family members.

⁴⁶ I should clarify, Witnesses are told that their friends – the people they hang out with, go to for advice when problems arise, arrange social gatherings with...etc. – need to be other Witnesses. Witnesses can talk with non-Witnesses; how else would I have been able to conduct this interview?

reasons why Witnesses are considered a cult. Also, their refusal to accept any political position or to fight in the military has caused them to be labelled as unpatriotic⁴⁷.

I will now return to the framework presented above to compare Jehovah's Witnesses faith with traditional Christian faith. Since Witnesses began as a bible study group, doctrine is the best place to begin analysis. I mentioned earlier that the early leaders spent five years "using scripture to interpret scripture." The significance of this is that these early leaders were rejecting any pre-existing interpretation of the bible and its messages (what I call tradition) in order to get back to the "true" interpretation of the bible.

Some of the theologies that formed as a result of this interpretation were in conflict with some of the theologies that Christian congregations held at the time and still hold today. One of the most significant theological differences has to do with belief in the concept of the trinity. Christians hold true the idea of the trinity – that God (the father), Jesus (the son) and the Holy Spirit (the counselor) exist simultaneously as three persons and one entity. Though the word trinity doesn't exist in the bible, particular biblical sections are used to support this concept. Witnesses on the other hand have gone beyond interpretation of the bible to developing their own translation (the New World Translation) which they feel is more true to the text's original meaning. In this translation, instead of texts describing Jesus as the same as God, Jesus is a god created by God at the same time that God created the earth. Another area of theological divergence (among many) is regarding the interpretation of the end of the world.

⁴⁷ After the research that I have done I challenge these notions as too simple-minded and feel that Jehovah's Witnesses are targeted due to the nature of the deviance rather than the actual harm caused by their deviance.

Witnesses also have theologies that are not accepted by traditional Christian congregations. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses get their name because they believe that Jehovah is the true name of God that is given in the bible. One of the accomplishments of the New World Translation is that Jehovah's name is replaced in biblical texts where Christian translations have the word LORD. To Witnesses, "LORD" is a title and therefore inappropriate since God wants us to call him by his name.

Mentioned above are the behavioral reasons why Witnesses are considered a cult; some of which conflict with Christianity. For example Witnesses will not celebrate Christmas due to the pagan origins of the holiday and the lack of command by Jesus to do so. Christians on the other hand celebrate the "true meaning of Christmas" amidst commercialization with varying degrees of success. Both groups celebrate Easter, though in different forms as Witnesses completely reject the pagan origins of the Easter Bunny. On an interesting note, some Christian congregations do not celebrate Halloween due to its pagan origins, and in this case they and Witnesses agree.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not typically identify as Christian, but rather will say that they are part of Christendom as a whole. This distinction recognizes Jehovah's Witnesses roots from Christian sources, but Witnesses would say that they have returned to the truth whereas Christians still have fundamentally false theological beliefs.

Unitarian Universalist

UU

Vince, my musically inclined and sweet housemate with a taste for conversation, told me about his understanding of UU's⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Unitarian Universalists call themselves UU's, thus my use of this shorthand here.

from his experiences as a kid and went with me to visit a local UU congregation. I will combine this with a wonderful resource provided by the Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashua New Hampshire on their website⁴⁹.

Vince's family went to a UU congregation together when he and his brother were kids, though none of them attend regularly today. Similar to Christian congregations, youth programs varied at Vince's church depending on the age of the kids. Whereas young kids heard a small message and played with blocks, older kids would listen to the teacher would talk about the importance of certain (usually Christian) leaders or discuss a real life situation and how to respond to it. Younger teenagers learned about coming of age topics (sex, gender differences, puberty, adulthood...etc.) which transitioned into an older group that primarily volunteered around the community or discussed pop culture movies. The main point of divergence is that the UU denomination is not biblically based, meaning that they don't strictly teach their lessons primarily from the bible (e.g. UU Sunday school teachers could talk about Mohammed or Buddha as a religious leader) nor would they ensure that kids were gaining a certain level of biblical literacy.

These differences carry over into UU services, which are tailored to the community that a UU congregation is serving. Vince's UU congregation was structured like that of a Catholic or Episcopalian congregation where the music tended to be from a hymn book, sung by a choir, and during different parts people stood, kneeled or sat. At another UU congregation that he and I both attended together the music was more contemporary and jazzy (involving a pianist, violinist, and clarinetist) and in Vince's words was more

⁴⁹ (Unitarian-Universalist Church of Nashua, New Hampshire 1994)

“touchy-feely.” When I asked him why there was such a difference in practice between the two congregations he responded:

“Because the focus of the religion is not so much on belief... You don’t have to go there because you believe one thing in particular. You don’t have to go there because you believe anything at all. You can be an atheist and go because you are brought together by the communal values, sense of community... The potential diversity in belief has led to the diversity in practices... say if a lot of people like the structure of, for example a Catholic mass or there are a lot of believers in some parts of Catholicism... that is the reason a church may decide to have a catholic-structured mass (plus or minus a few details and all that). If another group of people is open to all beliefs and aren’t tied to any one of the religious perspective, but can relate to all of them, they focus on the lesson and use...as examples a section from New Testament, torah...etc.”

This holds true with what the UU Church of Nashua New Hampshire publishes in their section about beliefs, creeds and doctrines. UU’s have no formal creed or doctrine outside of the seven principles, which is prefaced with the statement “The Principles are not dogma or doctrine, but rather a guide for those of us who choose to join and participate in Unitarian Universalist religious communities⁵⁰.” Specifically, these principles are:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part⁵¹.

⁵⁰ (Unitarian Universalist Association 2014)

⁵¹ Ibid.

So though congregations of the UU denomination may draw from Christian sources in practice (music, prayer, structure), institutionally they hold no official theology in common with Christianity largely because they don't have a theology. The above are not religious truths, but principles of guidance. Christians would believe in some of the above and could participate with UU's on (e.g.) social justice issues, but the centrality of theology to Christian congregations and the lack thereof (institutionally) of UU's makes it obvious as to why they are not Christian.

Christian Science



Lewis and I have been friends since freshmen year, bonding over late night runs, video game adventures and intelligent conversation. Regarding the latter, Lewis is one of the most thoughtful and logical people I have ever met, having the ability of boiling down economic or mathematical theories (his majors) into understandable concepts. A memorable example of how his logic-oriented brain wowed a room was when he suggested we take the contrapositive of a biblical verse during a Christian Fellowship meeting. Simply put the contrapositive of the statement turned out to be much stronger than its original and our STEM friends were geeking out while the liberal arts friends were trying to understand what in the world just happened.

Lewis grew up as a Christian Scientist, but as this denomination overall is shrinking he was the only one in his Sunday school class. Lessons were very conversational and thought provoking, where the teacher would present an idea for Lewis to absorb and discuss. Often times, his teacher would also bring up real life examples to the lesson, or encourage Lewis to think of applications for the day's lesson.

Eventually we came to talking about some of the differences in belief between Christian Scientists and what he calls traditional Christianity. Lewis gave the example that Christian Scientists do not believe in the fall of man, nor in disease, death or sin. To the protestant traditions that I have been a part of the existence of death and disease were common thoughts (partially due to the age of the congregations I went to), let alone sin. Sin was a common word because it was so central to what was taught: man sinned against God⁵², God punished him by banishing him from the Garden of Eden (a.k.a. the fall of man), God allowed for reparation through animal sacrifice through an established office (priests), eventually God sent “his only begotten Son [Jesus] that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life⁵³,” Jesus died for our sins which granted us freedom from sin, and finally we are to tell the whole world that they may be free from sin. The concept of sin is so important that all Christians theoretically should have the sense that it is “doing bad things” (though if you try to ask what “bad things” are sinful, you probably won’t get a complete coherency in response).

So how do sin, death and disease not exist? According to the teachings of Christian Science founder Mary Baker Eddy, Christianity places the divide between God and humanity (the fall), assuming that man through his perceptions can understand “reality” or “the universe” (words Lewis uses interchangeably). Christian Scientists however believe the real divide is between humanity and reality, meaning that humanity cannot adequately perceive the world around us. Without a fall, humanity then is in perfect

⁵² See the first three chapters of the book of Genesis.

⁵³ John 3:16, KJV

relation with God, and therefore sin, death and disease – all of which arose because of the fall of man in Christianity – do not exist⁵⁴.

Christianity's belief in the fall of man and Christian Scientist's belief in a misperception of reality are conflicting theologies. The reason for this is not due to biblical translation since Christian Scientists use the King James Version (which is common in Christianity), but rather is due to interpretation. Christian Scientists study and advance the work of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the denomination, whereas Christians would not consider her to be part of the traditional canon. In fact, I'm not sure how one would even go about reconciling these two world-views and yet Christian Scientists are actively working to be a part of the Ecumenical Movement.

I was surprised to find a community blogging section on the Christian Scientist web page that dedicated many of its posts to promoting both ecumenical and interfaith work. Alongside podcasts and flyers, there were blogs featuring the World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches, ways to engage with other Christians, personal experiences, and advice over common misunderstandings. The following is taken directly from a flyer promoting involvement in ecumenical work:

“‘Ecumenical’ means Christians searching for unity in response to Jesus’ prayer that we be one. As more Christians are asking what Christian Science is and why we think we’re Christian we are finding an increasing need to be better informed about other Christians and our relationship with them.

“To meet this need, a special workshop has been prepared to share with Christian Scientists. “Yes we’re Christian. No we’re not a Cult!” is the name of this informative session that can serve as an introduction to ways we can work more

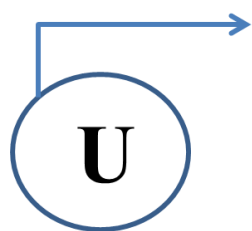
⁵⁴ If the reader is interested in learning more, please go to <http://christianscience.com/> for resources and the ability to be connected to knowledgeable leaders.

effectively with our Christian friends, understanding both their misconceptions about Christian Science and how to address them prayerfully and effectively.

“The talk focuses on why Christian Science fits into the contemporary Christian world, why it is wanted and needed, and how Christian Science is Biblically-based, as described by its Discoverer and Founder Mary Baker Eddy⁵⁵.”

It doesn't surprise me that Christian Scientists engage with Christians theologically (Christian Scientist pastors developing relationship with other pastors) and interpersonally (members developing relationships with members of other congregations) as the following group does the same. I am surprised that there is engagement institutionally through the National Council of Churches considering the sharp contrast in theological beliefs. Though I can't give a full explanation, the head of an ecumenical organization told me that he felt the National Council of Churches has lost its purpose and focus in the wake of dwindling resources for ecumenism. I agree with this view as I can't think of other councils that would accept Christian Scientists into ecumenical dialogue.

Unificationist



Over breakfast, Ronda and I discussed the differences between Christian and Unificationist congregations. Talking about faith is something that had come up frequently in the past as we ran errands downtown, which is unsurprising considering my interest in this topic and hers in multi- and interfaith initiatives. Similarly to Christian Scientists, Unificationists view the fall of man differently from traditional Christian groups. That difference plays a large role in overall Unificationist theology, which was revealed to its founder Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

⁵⁵ (Christian Science 2014)

Unificationists believe that the fall of man was sexual in nature. God, having created Adam and Eve commanded them to abstain from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which metaphorically represents sex, until they had reached maturity. The serpent of the garden, a jealous male figure, seduced Eve who then seduced Adam. This sin against God (not abstaining) is called original sin. Since original sin was through a sexual act, it has been passed on to all of humanity through reproduction and has spawned other types of sin.

This belief is very different from traditional Christian belief about the fall of man. Instead of viewing the eating of the fruit as a sexual metaphor, Christianity views original sin as defiance of the creator (for one of the few commands given to humanity by God was to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) who wanted to have an intimate relationship with his creation. However, since the creator is fundamentally just, he cannot be in the presence of sin and therefore develops forms of atonement, originally animal sacrifice and later through the death of his son Jesus, as mentioned in the previous section.

As a result of this difference in view of original sin, Unificationists have a different view on the role of Jesus. Much of Unificationist theology emphasizes the importance of family. In the beginning when Adam and Eve sinned, they were the first broken family and that brokenness has been passed on to all of humanity. Jesus, when he died, had never had a family and therefore his work was incomplete. His death covered all sin *except* original sin because of this. However, Jesus taught that he would return, and Reverend Moon claims to be this second coming of Christ, fulfilling what Jesus could not

by having the perfect family. As a result, practices have been developed by Reverend Moon that are both foreign to, and considered cult-like, by Christianity.

As part of an effort to reestablish marriage in a Godly way, Reverend and Mrs. Moon hold matching and blessing ceremonies. Matching ceremonies are when single Unificationists gathered together to be matched by Reverend and Mrs. Moon. Once matches were made, those matched would talk and pray together as to whether or not to accept the matching. If the couple does decide to get married, they perform a small ceremony where they pray together and are prayed over and they sign a piece of paper to signal their engagement. Following this, they await a blessing ceremony. I should point out that both the matching and blessing ceremonies are not compulsory by any means, but are left up to the choice of the individual. Ronda's parents, who were early members of the Unificationist denomination, met and married this way. Ronda on the other hand met her fiancé through family connections and had a matching ceremony with their family, which is just as accepted as the more formal matching ceremonies. The key to both forms of the ceremony is the belief that you are putting absolute trust in God – whether through Reverend Moon or directly – that you will be matched with your future spouse.

Blessing ceremonies are open to both engaged Unificationists and previously married Unificationist couples who have not already been a part of the blessing ceremony. The purpose of this ceremony is to restore the families participating to the lineage of God (instead of the lineage of Satan and Adam and Eve) through the forgiveness of original sin. This does not mean that families who have undergone the blessing ceremony are free from all types of sin. The ceremony overcomes original sin and each family must work

toward overcoming other sins. However, as families overcome sins generation by generation they become less sinful. The example given by Ronda is that a husband's parent could be an addict. As a result, the husband will be susceptible to same temptation and sin. However, if he overcomes this sin, then it will not be passed on to the next generation.

From the differences described it's easy to see why Unificationists are not considered Christian. When I asked Ronda whether she identifies as Christian her response was "most of the time yes, but with hesitations." Her acceptance of the identity "Christian" hinges on what "Christian" is defined to be. Many pastors would argue that Ronda is not a Christian either based off of beliefs that Ronda holds (e.g. Reverend Moon as the second coming of Christ) or beliefs that she does not hold (e.g. that the death of Jesus Christ was sufficient to cover all sin). Instead, Ronda holds a middle ground "gray area" meaning that depending on circumstance she may identify as Christian or as Unificationist.

Similarly to Christian Scientists, Unificationists have an interesting relation to ecumenism. The original name of the Unificationist denomination was the Holy Spirit Movement for the Unification of World Christianity. In other words Unificationists originally did not see themselves as separate from Christianity, but rather believed that they fulfilled the theologies present in Christianity. In this way, Unificationists were a movement intended to bring revelations to all Christian congregations in such a way that they would be reunited. For example, when Ronda was a child her Unificationist congregation only held services every other Sunday, and on off weeks, families would attend other services to build relationships with those Christian communities. Ronda's

parents attended a Pentecostal congregation, and the pastor of the Pentecostal church would go to her house and have discussions about faith with her parents. Ronda and her siblings found they had little difficulty alternating between Sunday school classes however:

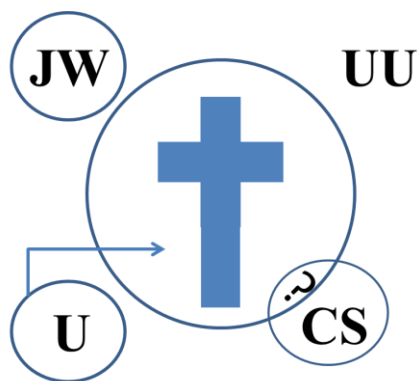
“The actual difference was during the service. The first time I saw people speaking in tongues I was like, ‘What is happening?’ Now I am a mover and a shaker so I didn’t know whether I should join them or...But I saw my parents were standing so I decided I should just stay put...There is nothing for or against speaking in tongues in the Unificationist church... I asked my mom and she said, ‘That’s how they feel called by God in that moment. That doesn’t have to be how you interpret what God is saying to you. It’s just how these people are connected to God.’”

Currently, Ronda told me that there are two views on how to proceed today with this mission. Some favor continuing to identify Unificationists with a movement and hesitate to establish more, or more strongly establish current, Unificationist congregations. Others believe that the movement will best be advanced by establishing strong congregations that are dedicated to maintaining Unificationist traditions and teachings so that they can be better handed down to following generations. Regardless of how the Unificationist denomination moves forward, it will not result in the unification of all Christian congregations. Rather, I expect that it will remain on the fringes of Christianity because of such fundamental differences in theology as a result of the interpretation provided by Reverent Moon.

What makes “Christians” Christian?

Returning then to the original question posed: what in fact makes a Christian,

“Christian?” As it turns out, my answer to this question will not be as unique as my methodology of getting to the answer.



To begin most simply, Christian congregations have theologies which are presented as truths, not guiding principles. Further, the bible plays a central role in establishing these truths. To understand the relation of the bible to these truths, there is an accepted traditional canon. What I mean by this is that there

are particular authors and leaders who have been understood to provide accurate insights into the meaning of biblical texts. Early Jehovah's Witnesses, Unificationist and Christian Scientist leaders set aside these interpretations to begin anew, and in so doing they developed theologies that conflict with those held by Christians.

The most conflicting theologies revolved primarily around two topics: the origin of sin/fall of humanity and understandings of who Jesus was and the purpose of his life. I described in the Christian Science section the Christian understanding of the origin of sin, which is rejected by Christian Scientists and reinterpreted by Unificationists. Jehovah's Witnesses as far as I can tell have the same narrative.

However, understandings of the purpose of Jesus' life and who he was do differ from Christianity in all four denominations. Unitarian Universalists who do draw from Christian sources generally do not believe Jesus to be the son of God (Unitarianism), but rather that he was a divinely inspired teacher, nor do they believe in the existence of hell (Universalism). Jehovah's Witnesses similarly differ on these two points. Though they would agree that Jesus was the son of God they reject the Trinitarian relationship of Jesus with God. Witness understanding of Hell is that it is simply another name for the grave and do not believe that unsaved souls will be eternally condemned to hellfire. I am not

sure as to Christian Scientist belief about Jesus, but I do know that it would not be for salvation from sin since sin does not exist. Unificationists do believe that Jesus died for sin, but that he can only provide salvation from all but original sin.

So my answer is to return to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) document introduced in the previous chapter. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry are practices that are shared by all Christian congregations, and though there are probably congregations that would disagree with the core theological beliefs detailed in BEM, I would say that their numbers are few. I have chosen some representative passages from this document relating to beliefs regarding Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry respectively:

“Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and in his resurrection. It is in corporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord; it is entry into the New Covenant between God and God’s people. Baptism is a gift of God, and is administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. St Matthew records that the risen Lord, when sending his disciples into the world, commanded them to baptize (Matt. 28:18–20). The universal practice of baptism by the apostolic Church from its earliest days is attested in letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, and the writings of the Fathers. The churches today continue this practice as a rite of commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people⁵⁶.

“The eucharist is essentially the sacrament of the gift which God makes to us in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Every Christian receives this gift of salvation through communion in the body and blood of Christ. In the eucharistic meal, in the eating and drinking of the bread and wine, Christ grants communion with himself. God himself acts, giving life to the body of Christ and renewing each member. In accordance with Christ’s promise, each baptized member of the body of Christ receives in the eucharist the assurance of the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:28) and the pledge of eternal life (John 6:51-58). Although the eucharist is essentially one complete act, it will be considered here under the following

⁵⁶ (World Council of Churches 1982, 1)

aspects: thanks- giving to the Father, memorial of Christ, invocation of the Spirit, communion of the faithful, meal of the Kingdom⁵⁷.

“The Church is called to proclaim and prefigure the Kingdom of God. It accomplishes this by announcing the Gospel to the world and by its very existence as the body of Christ. In Jesus the Kingdom of God came among us. He offered salvation to sinners. He preached good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). Christ established a new access to the Father. Living in this communion with God, all members of the Church are called to confess their faith and to give account of their hope. They are to identify with the joys and sufferings of all people as they seek to witness in caring love. The members of Christ’s body are to struggle with the oppressed to-wards that freedom and dignity promised with the coming of the Kingdom. This mission needs to be carried out in varying political, social and cultural contexts. In order to fulfil this mission faithfully, they will seek relevant forms of witness and service in each situation. In so doing they bring to the world a fore-taste of the joy and glory of God’s Kingdom⁵⁸.”

The above passages detail a specific understanding of the nature of Christ, his purpose, and the compulsion of congregations to both uphold this belief and to tell others about it. None of the four denominations explored in this chapter would be able to believe the same, which is why they are not considered Christian.

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⁵⁷ (World Council of Churches 1982, 8)

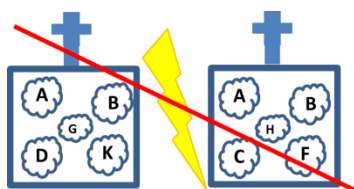
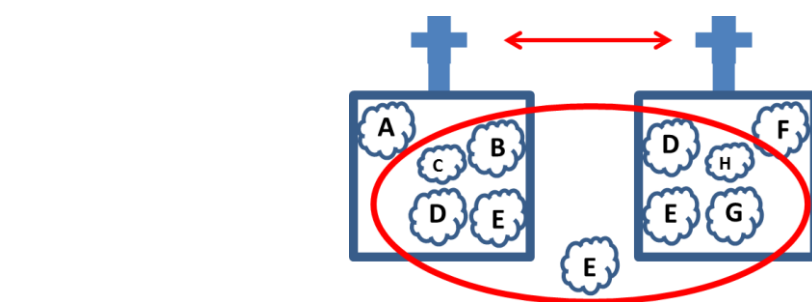
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Faith and Order Ecumenism



This and the following two chapters will only include an analysis of those congregations that have a theology of ecumenism, defined broadly as valuing being in relationship with other congregations. In other words, if a congregation doesn't value ecumenism, then my analysis in the following pages cannot be applied to them. I do not have specific numbers relating to how many congregations this eliminates from my analysis because it is difficult to quantify. For example, the Catholic denomination has spent the past fifty years working to normalize ecumenism as a day to day consideration of the institutional congregation so theoretically it should be present in every Catholic congregation. On the other hand I would imagine that non-denominational congregations, who by their name do not structurally identify with other congregations, would be less inclined to prioritize ecumenism. However, it is just as possible to have an ecumenically oriented non-denominational congregation as it is to have a Catholic congregation that is more interested in its own community than developing relationships with others. Not only does this subjective analysis make it difficult to quantify what percentage of congregations prioritize ecumenism, but ecumenism also has different meanings to different congregations. In this and the next two chapters I will be exploring three of these meanings.

I will begin my analysis by looking at those congregations who prioritize ecumenism in such a way that they seek to form governmental unity with other congregations, also known as faith and order ecumenism. Congregations that seek governmental unity are doing so because of a desire to allow Christians of their respective congregations/denominations to practice together. The Ecumenical Movement has created space for theological engagement and many points of convergence have been discovered. This goes back to the BEM document mentioned in previous chapters.

Paul Avis, an Anglican ecumenist, proposes a series of stages of governmental unity. During my research, I noticed that these stages corresponded with different ecumenical communities that I was studying. I am in no way saying that each of the communities that I studied is actively working through the stages in an attempt to become more unified. I doubt that this is the intent of the first two case studies below. What I am saying is that if congregations are to be compared based on the amount of governmental unity achieved (which is one of the goals of faith and order ecumenism), then this framework acts as a helpful guide. The stages are as follows:

1. Members and leadership of congregations reconcile previous differences to a point where dialogue and understanding can redevelop as a norm.
2. The leadership undertakes steps to discuss theological points of convergence and conflict.
3. Congregations recognize each other as members of the universal church under the leadership of the same God and acknowledge that differences in practice do not undermine this recognition.
4. Congregations begin to reconsider and adapt doctrine and practices based on what they have learned (through self-reflection) from each other and from the ecumenical movement.
5. The ordained leadership of one congregation/denomination is recognized as having the ability to perform similar leadership in others.

6. Christian leaders are ordained such that they are recognized as leaders in two or more congregations/denominations (“joint ordination) that may eventually lead to the creation of institutional unity between different congregations/denominations⁵⁹.

I will begin with an often overlooked for of governmental unity: denominations.

Denominations

Denominations are often not considered an ecumenism endeavor because congregations are already institutionally connected. Though I wouldn’t say that the ecumenism that occurs between congregations of the same denomination is remarkable, it does still have some significance. Remember that what holds congregations together in a denomination is in fact *leadership structure*, not theological belief. Don’t get me wrong, theological belief certainly plays a huge role as theological disagreements beget new denominations. However, each denomination holds a certain amount of theologies as essential and tolerates a diversity of beliefs about other theologies. So within a denomination there is theological diversity that is held together via a common form of congregational government. To use Avis’ stages, they are clearly fully unified.

The unity that denominations create should also not go underappreciated. According to Thalita, one of the key researchers behind the internationally known *Congregational Life Survey*, denominations generally are in decline (meaning that as a whole they are losing members and closing parishes) whereas non-denominational congregations seem to be growing. Further, non-denominational congregations have a much higher percentage of “mega-churches” (congregations with members in the thousands) than denominational congregations. Torin mentioned to me how the decline in the strength of denominations could possibly impact the Ecumenical Movement. Denominations provide a structure by

⁵⁹ (Avis 2010)

which a group of congregations can engage with another group of congregations in dialogue. As these structures weaken the question arises as to whether other structures will connect non-denominational congregations to make this dialogue possible.

I do know of, though I have not studied in depth, some structures that are developing between non-denominational congregations. For example, anyone with an ILUM bible institute certification can be accepted at any non-denominational congregations which recognize the certification. This is in contrast with denomination-specific seminaries that were common at the height of denominationalism. However, even these are diversifying to provide more general ordinations that can be accepted by more than one denomination. So, arguably structures are emerging, but I am not sure of what extent these structures are creating unity.

Joint Declarations

Throughout this chapter I highlight the structural governmental unity that faith and order ecumenism can create. However, I do not want to overlook very simple forms of governmental unity that faith and order councils accomplish. These councils have representative members from congregations or denominations and consult together theologically and issue declarations of theological convergence. These declarations can be both internal (intended for the congregational communities) or external (intended as a representative declaration of all the congregations on a particular topic). Congregations engaging in this activity are most likely at stage three, though potentially could be at stage two.

Villa⁶⁰ Clergy Association

Elizabeth, who will be mentioned in greater detail in the following section, and another Campus Christian Fellowship minister that I interviewed, Rudy, live in Villa. Their Episcopalian congregation along with a Presbyterian (USA) congregation, Methodist congregation and Baptist congregation were all looking to develop a youth program. When they realized the common need, they decided to consider creating a joint program. The details are being worked out by the Villa Clergy Association to which they all belong, including how each congregation should contribute to the program (e.g. payment of youth pastors, use of facilities,...etc.). Since the program is in its early stages, it's hard to measure its success.

Utilizing the stages of unity, this is clearly an example of stage four: "congregations begin to reconsider and adapt doctrine and practices based on what they have learned (through self-reflection) from each other and from the ecumenical movement." Any earlier stages would not make sense in this context as there must already be reconciliation and acceptance of difference (stage 1), theological dialogue (stage 2) and recognition of the other as authentically Christian (stage 3). This last stage is important because the education of the next generation is not something considered lightly by most, especially Christians considering what seemingly trivial issues have caused divisions in the past. The creation of a joint youth program means changing the doctrines and practices of the participating congregations. Instead of each congregation funding their own program that advances their own theologies, there is a cooperation that necessitates a self-reflection to determine the essential theologies upon which this program is based.

⁶⁰ Pseudonym

Greater Townville⁶¹ Clergy Association

Townville's ecumenical community represents stage five. The community has been around for at least thirty-five years, and though Pastor Roger (a local pastor of Townville) doesn't quite know how it came to be founded, he does know that it started out with the clergy from the center of town. These clergy represented Reformed, Methodist, Catholic and Episcopal congregations and over the years they have grown to include additional congregations of these denominations as well as Catholic, Pentecostal, Assemblies of God and Wesleyan congregations. There are some congregations that do not participate in the ecumenical community, as well as some that come and go depending on the priority of the leadership.

There are two primary activities that the congregations participate in. The first is Lenten services that are held every Wednesday of lent as well as Holy Thursday, Good Friday and a sunrise service on Easter Sunday. Each week a different congregation holds the service and a pastor from a separate congregation speaks at the service. This service represents the various congregations coming together in a form of "common worship⁶²." Since the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is central to the celebration of Easter, Lenten services are recognition between congregations of the shared beliefs that keep them together instead of the beliefs that separate them. This has been going on since the beginning of the ecumenical community.

A later development between seven of the congregations was a common food pantry instead of the already existing individual initiatives of each of the congregations. This

⁶¹ Pseudonym

⁶² Easter is a significant holiday within Christianity that represents the fulfillment of Jesus Christ's purpose on earth which is to die for humanities sins and to rise again from the dead to show his power over death and sin. By these congregations recognizing this together they are showing their unity in belief in Jesus Christ.

pantry addresses both the food and financial needs of different members of the community, as well as helps the congregations who found that their services overlapped. Another example of how the congregations worked together was in response to Hurricane Sandy, when about six or seven vehicles between the congregations brought generators down to New York City.

The reason that I would say that Townville is at stage five is that the leaders of one congregation during Lenten services are performing a leadership capacity in others. This capacity is most certainly limited in various respects (for example, a reformed pastor would not be able to preside over the distribution of the Eucharist at a Catholic Mass) but it is still there. I have more to say about this community, but I will save that for the conclusion.

The Formula of Agreement

The Formula of Agreement represents the final step in Avis' stages. The story begins with the Lutheran-Reformed dialogues that began in 1962 between the two traditions⁶³. These dialogues were bi-lateral and were intended to determine areas of overlap and similarity between the two traditions. Eventually, four denominations: Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America and the United Church of Christ explored the possibility of entering into "full communion" (another term for complete unity) and published an article titled *A Common Calling* that detailed this exploration. In 1997, the four denominations did decide to enter into complete unity as detailed in the document.

A Formula of Agreement:

⁶³ (Reformed Church of America 2014)

The term "full communion" is understood here to specifically mean that the four churches:

- *recognize each other as churches in which the gospel is rightly preached and the sacraments rightly administered according to the Word of God;*
- *withdraw any historic condemnation by one side or the other as inappropriate for the life and faith of our churches today;*
- *continue to recognize each other's Baptism and authorize and encourage the sharing of the Lord's Supper among their members;*
- *recognize each others' various ministries and make provision for the orderly exchange of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament;*
- *establish appropriate channels of consultation and decision-making within the existing structures of the churches;*
- *commit themselves to an ongoing process of theological dialogue in order to clarify further the common understanding of the faith and foster its common expression in evangelism, witness, and service;*
- *pledge themselves to living together under the Gospel in such a way that the principle of mutual affirmation and admonition becomes the basis of a trusting relationship in which respect and love for the other will have a chance to grow⁶⁴.*

Note that though complete unity seeks to governmentally unite congregations, it does not call for congregations to completely sacrifice their history in order to become a super denomination. Instead, it calls for the structures of the institutional congregations to harmonize. This means that all Christians that are a part of these four denominations can celebrate central Christian practices such as Baptism and the Eucharist (Lord's Supper) together and that clergy from one denomination are considered ordained in the other three (instead of only having limited leadership roles). This negotiation between recognizing other ordained clergy yet retaining tradition does create some interesting quirks. For example Torin, an ordained Presbyterian cannot read certain parts of the bible in the Lutheran Denomination due to their understandings of its significance.

⁶⁴ (A Formula of Agreement 1997)

Regardless, it is hard for me to completely describe the potential cultural significance of this. At the lay level, instead of placing a value system on practices (the way that our service is structured is better than yours) there is recognition that an acceptable diversity in practice exists, and that the commonalities in belief overcome difficulties caused by this diversity. The obvious benefits to this are that members and ordained alike can now live in “visible unity” by doing things together that they could not do previously.

Complete unity between the denominations also provides economic benefits. Currently the *Formula of Agreement* congregations are piloting what is called a *Joint-Congregational Witness*. The backstory to this agreement involves two congregations from different *Formula of Agreement* denominations. Congregation A has been losing membership over the years yet still had a large building to maintain. They had a significant endowment which they could have drawn from to do this, but they felt that doing so would not have been good stewardship of the money. Instead, they decided to move in with Congregation B (a *Formula of Agreement* congregation) and sell the building to another congregation (not a *Formula of Agreement* congregation) that could take advantage of the full size gym and classrooms. The laity of congregations A and B quickly and easily merged, but the government structures have remained separate. The purpose of the *Joint-Congregational Witness* then is to try and merge these two governments. This is the first time that this has occurred, and it is expected that it will act as an example to other congregations across the country once completed.

Both the *Formula of Agreement* and the *Joint-Congregational Witness* are significant examples of how ecumenism can create institutional unity. However, I do raise the question of how different these congregations were theologically to begin with. For

example, I have heard of another case where a United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation accepted a non-denominational pastor to be pastor of their congregation. This came out of my interview with Fred, a member of the non-denominational congregation (congregation B). Long story short, congregation B was looking to relocate to an inner city and was considering buying the UCC parish. However, after looking at the parish, they realized that they could utilize the basement (and help maintain the building) while the UCC congregation continued to utilize the main service center. Eventually, the pastor of B became the pastor of both B and the UCC congregation. The two congregations do hold a joint service once per month, but they have no compulsion to merge.

If the *Formal of Agreement* denominations are more relaxed regarding whose ordinations they choose to accept then taking the steps toward complete unity as Avis describes is certainly much easier. Yet it still took thirty-five years to develop the *Formula of Agreement* and another fifteen to have a *Joint-Congregational Witness*. This leads me to wonder what it would take for something like this to happen between, say, Catholics and Pentecostals congregations.

The Capital Region Theological Center

There is one other significant result of the adoption of the *Formula of Agreement*: the creation of the Capital Region Theological Center (CRTC). The *Formula of Agreement* congregations in the capital region (Albany-Schenectady-Troy, NY) decided that this region was missing a place that offered continuing lay and pastoral education. Torin described how local *Formula of Agreement* congregations began to pool their resources to develop a curriculum and seek funding. Eventually, the initiative became recognized

by the Lilly Foundation, a pharmaceutical company, which awarded the CRTC a \$300,000 grant under the title “Sustaining Pastoral Excellence Program⁶⁵”. As a result, the CRTC’s purpose has expanded to provide more than education resources (e.g. administrative resources) and has grown in membership. In addition to acting as an ecumenical center for members of different congregations to come together it also promotes interfaith dialogue and discussion⁶⁶.

In a video published by the CRTC two pastors, Reverends Alfred Twyman and Kathy Donley, discuss the center and the ways that they have benefitted from it. Twyman talks about the role of classes and how it is humbling to sit in a room with colleagues and grow theologically. Classes range from a variety of topics as shown by the most recent class/events brochure⁶⁷:

- “Finding Sacred Common Ground: Three Abrahamic Traditions”
- “Forming Christians: Baptism and Beyond”
- “Introduction to Old Testament I: History, Israel’s Faith & Our Future 2014”
- “First in our NEW ‘Faith & Science Series’”
- “Welcoming the ‘Other’: Hospitality... Welcome... Inclusion”
- “Empathy in Action: Introduction to Pastoral Care”
- “Why Can’t We Talk? Civil Discourse as a Habit of the Heart”
- “‘Fire in the Soul’ Art Retreat”
- “Church Finance”
- “Leadership Development”

The first listed is obviously interfaith, followed by what I would classify as three classes that are more theologically based (their purpose is more to shape belief and understanding) whereas the last six focus more on how to appropriately apply theological belief (in other words, correct practice). Part of what makes these classes so valuable is

⁶⁵ <http://www.lillyendowment.org/annualreports/2011/LE11Grants.pdf>

⁶⁶ (Capital Region Theological Center 2014)

⁶⁷ (Capital Region Theological Center n.d.)

that the Center brings several key Christian leaders to the region, making it easier for pastors especially to interact with those that they have read. These classes in essence provide a space where congregations can engage theologically and perhaps even move through the stages.

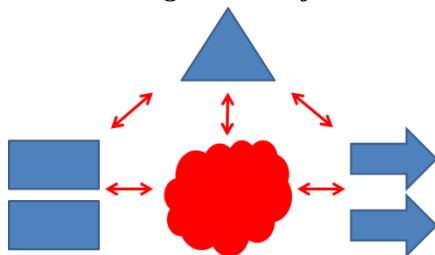
Another aspect of the video that I noticed is the emphasis of both reverends in highlighting the importance of engaging with others. Donley describes her congregation as “adaptive” meaning that they are looking for new ideas. Perhaps more significantly, she describes how seeking new ideas is “part of the times” as opposed to the 1950’s and 1960’s, implying this was a time when either congregations or denominations primarily kept to themselves⁶⁸. Twyman comments on how in the past congregations would view the church as a “sanctuary” from the world. He instead stresses the importance of having a public “ministry” and a public “theology” that engages with a changing world (due to technology) and that interacts with “whoever comes to our door” (people from other faiths, non-believers...etc.). At the CRTC he not only engages with others from his faith background, but also connects with pastors, rabbis and imams from a variety of traditions who come together to take classes. Along these lines, Donley says that she thinks that ecumenical dialogue really isn’t an issue anymore, but that interfaith dialogue is something that comes up more frequently and is generally more relevant⁶⁹. Coming from a background where I hadn’t even heard the word ecumenism before sophomore year in college, it is very interesting to hear it described in such a normalized way. Ecumenism presupposes engagement with the public sphere (thus why Twyman and Donley describe

⁶⁸ Interviews I have had with other pastors confirm that in their childhood denominational identity was stronger than it is today.

⁶⁹ Perhaps this is why nothing was listed under the “Ecumenical Resources” tab on the CRTC website.

an isolated congregation as an idea of the past), and when one meets individuals from other world religions it seems to trivialize the differences between Christians (introducing the new importance of interfaith dialogue). I will return to this in the conclusion.

The Limiting Nature of the Theology of Ecumenism



Throughout this chapter I have utilized Avis'

framework to describe various states of unity between

congregations. I now want to compare Avis'

framework with the faith framework that I introduced

in earlier chapters. Avis views the end goal of ecumenism in a governmental sense: that the vision of complete unity is that ordained pastors of one congregation or denomination can preside over services in other congregations. As I've shown above, there are ecumenical communities in the later stages of the ecumenism he describes. As I've said before, just because communities are represented in these stages does not mean that their end goal is higher governmental unity. However, if they do believe that unity should be represented through governmental structures, then chances are they will work through these stages.

Faith and order ecumenism (a.k.a. governmental unity) does however create certain relationships within the faith framework. The assumed application of ecumenism is the harmonizing of structures of government. This does not mean the creation of a super-denomination, as that would usurp the unique governments that have historically developed in different denominations. Rather, since governments are dedicated to performing similar activities in all Christian congregations (such as Baptism, Eucharist

and Ministry⁷⁰) then allowing for these activities to be done together represents the unity that Jesus prayed for. In this case, the theology of ecumenism limits congregation or denomination specific theologies for the sake of governmental unity.

For example, to understand why the congregations of the Townville Clergy Association worked together, I asked Pastor Roger about the role of theology. His response was that theology is central in that all the congregations share deep historic Christian doctrines which promote unity between the congregations, for example the virgin birth, incarnation, deity of Christ, atonement on the cross and physical resurrection. Other doctrines are peripheral and more decisive and therefore are not as stressed. Knowing that same-sex marriage is a hot-button issue within and between congregations I asked if it has had any effect on the community.

“[Same-sex marriage] continues to be a problem; one of those non-negotiable issues. You can dance around many other areas and find common ground or a means of compromise, but it’s an area that is avoided. . In our group, everyone would condemn homophobia or gay-bashing, and everyone would affirm civil union.[However,] roughly half would maintain that marriage is a specific sacrament of the church and to be reserved for a traditional union of one man and one woman, and therefore could not support same-sex marriage. In this particular association we are split half and half. We don’t argue over it, but instead say we can worship in spite of it.”

This same theme is repeated in the other communities. In Villa, the desire to have an ecumenical youth group overcomes the desire to teach youth in a strictly Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian (USA) or Episcopal way. In the *Formula of Agreement* congregations, a desire to be united in Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry overcame the need that these be performed in a Presbyterian (USA), a United Church of Christ, an

⁷⁰ else they are not Christian as we saw in the last chapter

Evangelical Lutheran or a Reformed way. At the Capital Region Theological Center, dialogue surrounding the diversity in Christian belief is so normalized that interfaith dialogue is new topic.

Not all congregations however are comfortable or willing to engage with this form of ecumenism. It is a slow ecumenism that takes years to develop as we have seen with how long it took the four denominations to sign the *Formula of Agreement*. Even though this form of ecumenism claims not to overlook congregational differences, many other congregations view it as too compromising. Luckily, ecumenism has another form that is the topic of the next chapter.

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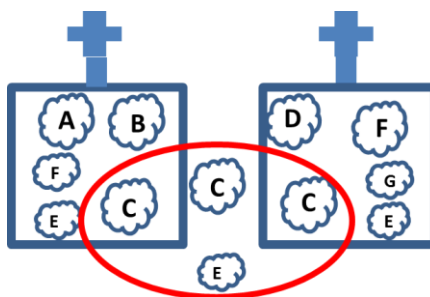
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Life and Action Ecumenism



In the previous chapter I described faith and order Ecumenism using Avis' six stages to compare the level of unity reached by various denominations. However, this ecumenism assumes that governmental unity is the mechanism by which complete unity is achieved. Not all congregations would be comfortable or willing to dedicate resources to this type of unity, but rather engage through another form of ecumenism: life and action. Life and action ecumenism occurs as a result of commonly held theologies relating to Christian living and how this living inspires forms of service in the larger community. Below I will detail six case studies relating to this.

Case 1: A Simple Nursing Home Ministry

The first is a very simple example described to me by Pastor Roger. Three pastors from three separate small towns wanted to establish a nursing home ministry where four Sundays each year members from the three congregations put on a program for the residents. From Pastor Roger's experiences, this program usually consisted of the singing of seven or eight hymns familiar to the residents, a quick 7-8 minute homily, prayer, personal testimonies by volunteers (2-3 minutes explaining how long they have been coming to church and where they are spiritually) and time to talk with residents individually.

The general importance here is that multiple congregations are engaging over a common concern (from a common theology) to develop and support a program. The three pastors wanted to extend their ministry to a local nursing home. They knew that many of the residents were Christian, or at least grew up in a Christian environment, since hearing old Christian music is welcomed by the residents. The nature of this ministry could only be undertaken by Christian congregations, which creates the setting for the ecumenical activity.

Case 2: Cityville⁷¹ Ministries

Cityville Ministries self-identifies as a life and action ecumenical organization that partners with fifty-four congregations from fifteen denominations. Annually, they sponsor an HIV/AIDS resource center, a walk to raise money for local and international hunger relief efforts, a food pantry, summer kids and lunch programs, and two days of community service. I had the opportunity to interview the current executive director, Reverend Pallish. He told me that Cityville Ministries was established because other ecumenical organizations locally primarily were involved in faith and order ecumenism.

In the first case, the clergy of multiple congregations worked directly together. In this example, a para-congregational organization coordinates joint efforts between these congregations. This doesn't mean that there isn't direct engagement between congregations since this could occur at the days of service or other events. Reverend Pallish told me that at one point the organization was considering becoming interfaith since a Jewish congregation and a Mormon congregation had approached the organization to ask for membership. Theologically, they too valued the service work

⁷¹ All organizations in this section are pseudonyms

accomplished by the organization and wanted to support it. However, this would fundamentally change the theologies that the organization is built on. It is a Christian organization with a doctrinal statement of faith. Theologies of this faith are what is shared amongst members and is what would have to be generalized to include other faiths.

Case 3: Inter-Congregational Events and Campaigns

The above two cases represent long-term programs that bring Christians together. The following have been grouped together because they tend to be temporary.

- Political Demonstrations – Pastor Jeff, the pastor at one of the congregations I have attended over the years, mentioned that he attended a million man march as a demonstration against abortion. Jaqueline, another student I interviewed, mentioned that she went to Catholic school and that she could get extra credit if she protested abortion clinics.
- Conferences –Inter-denominational conferences (having no particular affiliation to a congregation or denomination) are often held in a central location and all local congregations are invited to send members to these events. Marie and Doug mentioned women’s conferences and I recall that one congregation I visited was promoting the Iron Sharpens Iron Conference. Some conferences are also hosted by a particular denomination, but these tend to invite congregations from within their denomination instead of from outside of it.
- Speakers – Many of the above points relate to speakers since conferences have speakers, though Marie and Doug mentioned a few other interesting ways that they could be used to bring members of congregations together. On a more local level, members from different congregations may jointly host an event where each congregation invited also has a speaker at the event. Since each congregation will have a personal connection to at least one speaker, it’s more likely that many will attend. On the other hand, a congregation or group of congregations may be interested in bringing a major Christian speaker to an area. In one city, several congregations worked together to promote and coordinate an event to bring Rick Warren to speak, however, once the activity passed many of the congregations fell back out of touch. Marie and Doug also mentioned a music festival that was put on for several years, but once the leader of it stepped down it fell to the wayside.

Here, ecumenism occurs differently due to events being more temporal in nature.

Ecumenism occurs as a result of a leadership valuing seeing Christians come together for a particular purpose. However, once the leadership's value on ecumenism has passed or the purpose of the ecumenism has passed then Christians again go their separate ways.

Something as large as a march or demonstration against a bill or idea that conflicts with a commonly held Christian theology takes a lot of time, energy and resources from individual Christians, meaning that in their lifetime there are only so many that they can support. Conferences (usually involving theologies connected to Christian living) can be held annually, but if there are only so many tracks then Christians can only gain so much from these events. Christian speakers and concerts can also be annual events, but there has to be a person or organization dedicated to the year after year coordination. Without this, then the event will be discontinued.

Case 4: Youth Programs

One of the topics that came up most frequently in my interviews was youth programs.

This is because youth programs are developed to teach theologies to children. Due to the nature of these programs having to be age specific, it was not uncommon for friends that I interviewed to experience several different programs throughout their childhood:

- AWANA is designed for elementary age kids and includes games, stories and reading components. I attended this program for a brief time.
- Instead of AWANA, one of the congregations I attended hosted CARAVAN, a boy-scout like youth program that my siblings attended.
- Beautiful Girlhood, a girl-centered coming of age program based off of a Christian book with the same name, is intended for middle school girls. Lauren, a college friend, was a part of this in middle school and remembers how it helped connect her with older women in the hosting congregation (which was not her home congregation).

- Throughout middle and high school I was a part of Free Methodist Bible Quizzing, a program where teams of teens from different congregations (of the same denomination) competed by answering questions about a particular book of the bible. I have kept a handful of my friendships from this program and enjoyed how it helped me to see that my denomination (and even Christianity) was bigger than my own congregation.
- Vacation Bible School (VBS) is a common multi-day summer event where congregations invite all kids from the community for a time of games, stories and crafts. The most successful VBS program that I was a part of had 55-70 kids attend per night (largely due to the fact that we chartered a bus to pick people up from apartments).

In the absence of a named program, a congregation probably has a generic “Youth Group” where curriculum is centered on the needs of whatever age is present, most often that of teens. Doug and Marie, a couple which led one of the youth groups that I was a part of in high school, became involved in youth programs when their kids were kids. If they noticed that a program wasn’t meeting the needs of a group (e.g. they noticed that at a certain point boys grew out of and no longer enjoyed AWANA), they even created a program or two to make up for these needs.

It should be noted that in most cases a congregation creates a program primarily for their youth and secondarily to reach the youth of those who are not a part of a congregation. As a result, they tend not to be ecumenical even though it isn’t uncommon for kids from other congregations to end up at them. Doug and Marie told me of some of their friends, also youth leaders, who value arranging events where several teen youth groups are present. The reasons mentioned to me was that larger groups (20 or more, as opposed to 6-10 which is about the size of groups that I was a part of) allow for larger activities⁷² and

⁷² Larger activities can allow for very creative events. Some events I participated in involved curling and find-and-see in a mall where adults from my home congregation dressed up (usually ridiculously) and hid in various stores. The most interesting mall activity I’ve heard of is the “trade-up” game that Marie and Doug told me about. Two teams were each given a paperclip and they had to trade-up with someone,

larger engagement between Christian teens. However, even though the theological principles taught at youth groups overlap, when these leaders are no longer active in youth groups then these ecumenical activities most likely do not continue unless new leaders with the same interest are found.

Case 5: A Unique Homeschooling Group

Cybil brought to my attention a fascinating case where a homeschooling group became the means of dialogue between Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism. Cybil and her brother were the first two Catholic students to join an evangelical protestant homeschooling group. Needless to say they felt like outsiders and bore the brunt of stereotypes. Many of the mothers of the group defined themselves as “recovering Catholics⁷³” and Cybil remembers that the first page of the Bob Jones Science Book listed the reasons why Catholics were not going to heaven. Further, transubstantiation⁷⁴ was confused with cannibalism and praying to the Saints⁷⁵ was seen as idol worship. Unsurprisingly one of Cybil’s first questions to her mother after joining the group was “Are we Catholic or Christian?” Her mother not only fielded this and many other questions, she was heavily involved in the group as the activity director (putting on plays,

meaning that they would trade their item for something of greater value (e.g. paperclip for a pencil, pencil for a notebook...etc.). At the end of the event one of the groups had a sofa chair.

⁷³ Meaning that they were raised Catholic but eventually ended up at a Protestant congregation and were “recovering” from their old beliefs.

⁷⁴ The primarily Catholic belief that the Host (bread) and Wine during the celebration of the Eucharist (“Lord’s Supper” in Protestantism) is the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ

⁷⁵ Catholics believe that Saints, Christians who lived a devoted and faithful lifestyle and performed at least three confirmed miracles, when they die go directly to heaven. Catholics will pray to saints to ask for them to intercede on their behalf before God.

dances, graduation, prom...etc.) and intervened if necessary. She had to explain to Cybil and her brother not to say that they read Harry Potter or dressed up on Halloween⁷⁶.

Even with such differences, Cybil views these experiences as overall positive. She saw how her friends relied heavily on using scripture due to the protestant emphasis on reading and studying the bible. On the other hand, Cybil was better able to use general ideas to illustrate her points. Regardless, she felt that everyone was able to articulate their beliefs well and didn't feel as if they had to compromise in order to have dialogue – which interestingly enough is considered the ideal for ecumenical dialogue.

Outside of the classroom, parents would invite everyone to activities at the various congregations, and over time that has included Cybil's congregation. Though parents attend different congregations as a result of this group, only two of the congregations seem to have grown closer⁷⁷ (the two congregations that have the most families attending this group). By the time of Cybil's graduation about fifty percent of the group's make-up was Catholic, which has obviously made an impact on discussion and understanding between the two.

This case study is very unique, and certainly not something I expected to come across. It combines what I mentioned about the need to educate youth (case three) with the role of a para-congregational organization (case two). Granted, there exist other homeschooling organizations; this one was created by a group of parents that wanted an alternative to

⁷⁶ Some Protestants (usually conservative) believe that anything relating to “witchcraft” or magic should be avoided, whereas others do not celebrate Halloween due to its origins in pagan religions. I would dismiss the witchcraft as silliness but I had a family member once buy me a “real” spell book. When I brought it home, another family member had nightmares and somehow came across the book and asked me to remove it from the house. Apparently they had had bad experiences with friends attempting witchcraft and the nightmares were memories of that.

⁷⁷ Not in a governmental way.

already existing programs. The leadership of this particular program, and especially Cybil's mom, is what created such an ecumenical space. A Catholic family coming into a primarily protestant evangelical organization creates one of two potential possibilities: ecumenical dialogue or ostracization. However, Cybil's mom being in a leadership position, and therefore showing her own interest in being a part of the teaching of a Christian education (the teaching of Christian theologies), meant that Catholics became accepted as misconceptions were clarified.

Case 6: College Christian Fellowship

Though there are several collegiate Christian fellowship organizations, I was primarily only involved in one, which I will call CCF. CCF's beliefs are concisely laid out in a particular document, however the key isn't so much what is written, but rather that the doctrine is kept as fundamental as possible so that Christians from almost any group can be accepted into the organization⁷⁸. That's not to say that CCF is completely closed to non-Christians. I can tell you from personal experience that we invite and accept non-Christians into our group. However the purpose of the organization, and the training given to the adult staff that partner with the student leaders, is dedicated simply to helping students "to take one more step toward Jesus wherever they are." This is a quote from Elizabeth, a CCF district manager who oversees the staff and fellowships of all colleges within her district.

CCF will work with congregations when planning campus events, and usually they only work with one at a time. However, CCF does bring both students and staff from a variety of denominational backgrounds together. At the staff level, denominational differences

⁷⁸CCF is actually designed to be ecumenical by the same mechanism that we saw in the last chapter. Theological principles are limited so that as many Christians as possible can be invited to participate in CCF activities.

are usually not discussed, but rather staff train and study together to learn how best to reach new students, Christian and non-Christian, for Jesus. The student level is much more interesting especially since my CCF probably has one of the most diverse groups. Come to think of it, similar to the staff, I can't tell you all the Christian denominations represented because we spend the majority of our time discussing Christian principles or verses that apply to anyone (including non-Christians). What was more interesting was who regularly attended that was not "Christian:" a Christian Scientist, Unificationist, a theist (or self-proclaimed heathen)⁷⁹. Though none of these has become "Christian," they were still impacted by the community which is why they still come. The heathen even joined the outreach team because he felt that others could benefit from being a part of the community whether or not they were Christian.

Another example of how Christians from different backgrounds mix due to CCF comes from my interview with Destiny and Leslie. Destiny and Leslie were members of CCF at college B which was at an engineering college. After graduating they moved to my area and wanted to volunteer at my college's (college A) CCF. The natures of the schools were reflected in the members of the two CCF's. For example, Christians at college B tended to study sections of the bible to establish principles for how life should be lived. My CCF on the other hand often looks for themes and we tend to end each meeting with more questions than answers. In other words, the engineers look at the bible as a blueprint and the liberal arts students look at it as literature. Originally Leslie viewed us

⁷⁹ A fun side note – due to romantic interest in CCF members we have had other non-Christians attend for a week or two. I'd laugh this off, but another staff worker I know became a Christian due to joining a Christian group because a majority of them were women.

all as “loopy star-gazers”⁸⁰,” but he and Destiny now find that there is value in having both perspectives. They feel that if they were to create an event, the engineer Christians would be great at set up and the liberal-arts Christians would create all the discussion.

Finally, CCF hosts conferences throughout the year for all students involved in CCF. One in particular is a spring break inner-city service-learning experience. Over the course of a week, students gain a spiritual understanding of issues such as poverty, human trafficking and industry as well as a spiritual framework in which to engage these issues. On top of this, they travel to different parts of New York City to engage in various service activities such as volunteering to serve meals at a homeless shelter and distributing (food and clothing) resource cards. This experience in particular has shaped how I (as well as many others) approach social justice issues.

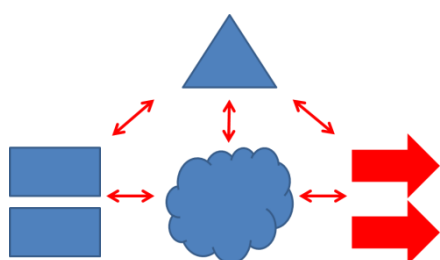
The key to understanding how CCF promotes ecumenism is that it does not identify as a congregation. It does not perform baptisms or celebrate the Eucharist as congregations do. Instead it focuses more on providing a space for personal spiritual growth and teaching the behaviors that come from this. This is why as an organization it brings Christian students together without worrying about bringing Christian congregations together.

Christian Living and Service as the basis for Life and Action Ecumenism

In the previous chapter I showed examples of how faith and order ecumenism works to achieve governmental unity as the primary form of ecumenism. On the other hand, in this chapter two themes are strongly present in the above six cases: Christian living and how this living inspires forms of service in the larger community. These two forms of

⁸⁰ Another great Leslie quote: “[your] CCF people are also the type that can sit around and spend a night talking about the concept of world piece”

ecumenism are not completely unrelated. Chances are that where a faith and order



ecumenical community exists a life and action

ecumenical community exists.

However, a life and action community does not

necessitate a faith and order community. Life and

action ecumenism is a much more approachable form of ecumenism for congregations

because there is bound to be a common theology that inspires a common action. This

action may not be long-term, but that should not be a testament as to its ecumenical

value. Creating spaces where Christians can engage together has the potential of inspiring

the ecumenical dialogue that is the basis of faith and order ecumenism. This certainly

holds true for Cybil, Elizabeth, Jaqueline and me. As a result of the ecumenical activities

that we have been a part of, ecumenism has become something that we value.

However, ecumenism should not be accepted at face value as something that is

fundamentally good. There are many congregations who are wary of ecumenism,

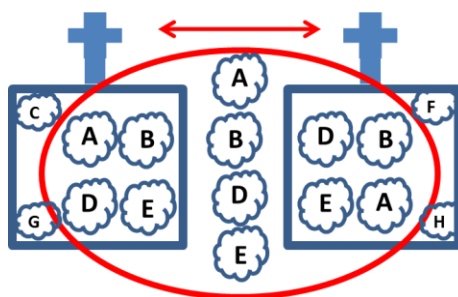
especially if it is related to the Ecumenical Movement. This critique is the subject of the

following chapter.

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“Biblical” Ecumenism



To introduce this section, I will quote a passage from D.A. Carson’s *The Farewell*

Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus:

“To some people, the term *ecumenism* has only good connotations. Utter the word, and they hear harps playing and angels singing; or if harps and angels are deemed to ethereal, at very least a certain fire lights up in their eye. To others the same word evokes only images of evil. Ecumenism is intrinsically a doctrine of compromise which emasculates the gospel and wickedly flirts with apostasy and assorted forms of unbelief. The first group tends to cite John 17 in its favor; the second group tends either to ignore John 17 or else to include within the unity only a very small group, while defining the unity in such innocuous terms (e.g., making it entirely a positional unity with no entailment for conduct) that it becomes difficult to see how such unity could ever serve as a witness of anything to the world...⁸¹”

This passage reminds us that Christianity does have divisions, and depending on one’s position within Christianity, these divisions are irreconcilable. Up to this point, ecumenism has been cast as a theology which attempts to overcome division and I have done this without questioning whether unjust sacrifices are being made toward this end. “Biblical” ecumenism, as it was described to me, claims that there are certain congregations that have lost sight of their purpose and therefore are no longer Christian. Because of this, biblically based congregations should not enter into ecumenical

⁸¹ (Carson 1980, 201-202)

relationship with these congregations. To understand the distinction between biblical congregations and others, I turn to my interview with Pastor Forte⁸².

Theological Roots

To help me understand the difference between biblically-based congregations and congregations that have lost their way (here forward referred to as “unchristian” congregations⁸³), Pastor Forte described theologies using the metaphor of a tree with roots, branches and leaves. Throughout the year trees lose many leaves and grow new ones; they are not vital to the life of the tree. If roots are destroyed on the other hand, then the whole tree suffers or maybe even dies. In the same way, congregations have root theologies, branch theologies and leaf theologies.

Root theologies are what make Christian’s Christian. Pastor Forte lists them as follows:

- “The authority of scripture. The bible is God’s word, and through it people learn that they are sinners and cut off from God unless they repent and confess Jesus as Lord. If not, they will go to hell. The entire bible from Genesis (the first book) to the maps (most bibles include maps at the conclusion of biblical text) is a message of salvation. It details why there is sin, what sin is, how people can be saved from sin, and what happens if they aren’t. The message of the bible is complete and above human reason or understanding.
- The deity of Christ, which ties in with Trinitarian belief. Jesus is the son of God, born of a virgin who was one with the father. Further, he was both fully God and fully man. As such, his teachings are more than divine inspiration, they are truth. This includes his teachings that he is the only way to gain salvation.
- Jesus’ deity is recognized by the supernatural miracles that he is recorded as having performed.

⁸² Pastor Forte is a very eloquent speaker so I quote his interview at length in this chapter.

⁸³ I want to be fair to Pastor Forte’s original words. He identifies as a conservative/evangelical (words he uses interchangeably) and grounds all of his beliefs in a particular understanding of the bible that will be explained in this section. Congregations that do not hold that view he identifies as liberal, and in the course of the interview he explained to me that liberal congregations are not Christian. Because the words conservative, evangelical and liberal have different connotations depending on their context (e.g. theological conservatism vs. praxis conservatism) I will generally replace conservative with “biblical” and liberal with “unchristian.” This accurately represents the divide that is central to Pastor Forte’s understanding of ecumenism.

- Substitutionary atonement. As fully God and fully man, Jesus faced the temptations of sin yet lived a sinless life. His crucifixion was foreknown by him and God and is the most significant act that he performed. Upon his death, he took on sin and went to Hell for three days.
- On the third day, he physically rose from the dead. This death and resurrection provided the only means by which humans can now come back into relation with God.”

The reason that Pastor Forte chose these five theologies is based off of an action taken by a denomination of “unchristian” congregations in the 1920’s. Pastors of this denomination took out a full page ad in every major newspaper that said the above are five things that you don’t have to believe in order to be a Christian pastor in good standing. To Pastor Forte, not believing in even one of the above theologies means that you may not be a Christian:

“A lot of times people will wiggle out of having any of conviction by saying I have my beliefs and you have your and that’s my interpretation. That’s baloney. Those five...doctrines⁸⁴ of scripture are not matters of interpretation, it’s clear as day. You either believe them or you don’t.”

I asked him what roots “unchristian” congregations have instead of the five listed above.

He mentioned the following:

- “The dependability of human reason - that we can gauge things to be true or false whether they seem reasonable to us. That we can function on reason, not religious truth
- Post-modern pluralism – every view is correct, not only does everyone have the right to believe what they want, but that every view is right.
- Inherent goodness of human nature – all humans are basically good and we can appeal to that basic goodness when looking at social issues and social justice and poverty relief. Biblical congregations do this too, but not because of humanity’s inherent good nature, but exactly the opposite, its inherent sinfulness.”

⁸⁴ In my interview, Pastor Forte used the word doctrine where I use theology and I believe the difference is this: I describe a congregation as having competing theologies, each of which is doctrinally based. Pastor Forte on the other hand would say that congregations either have a right theology or a wrong one. What I see as many theologies are lumped into one in his understanding.

I am not going to say that every congregation that does not have Pastor Forte's view on the bible is "unchristian". Neither he nor I can make that judgment as that is left to God alone (and this is something he mentioned to me in the interview). However, he and I do come from a background that views the bible as a complete work where each passage should be understood in the greater context of the salvation message. This salvation message comes with uncomfortable truths, but it is a disservice to others not to invite them to be Christian. Holding this belief creates a certain urgency and centrality of one's faith. It also comes with a worldview that is relatively black and white.

This explains the second set of roots listed above. Not seeing the bible in the light of this salvation message raises questions of whether Christians are reading the bible and choosing what they want to believe. For Pastor Forte, the bible has an unquestionable message that applies to many areas of life, and those not directly mentioned can be understood by logical extension of other passages. On the other hand, other Christian congregations will contextualize particular passages to say that biblical teachings were relevant in a particular time and context. If a congregation is contextualizing theologies related to the first set of roots listed above, then they are said to be placing human understanding over the divine truths revealed, and therefore their teachings are false. Post-modernism, understood to be a current trend in thinking that views truth as relative, and pluralism, understood to be movement that claims all religions are equally valid, are causing congregations to soften the salvation message and are yielding to popular culture. Any congregation that even allows for the possibility that people don't need Jesus to go to heaven, or that claims humans are fundamentally good, is "unchristian" according to this view.

Returning to Pastor Forte, any doubt on the first set of roots above would compromise a congregation. In fact, he views the Ecumenical Movement, National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches as irreconcilably compromised by these alternative perspectives. To him and others the Ecumenical Movement condones false understandings of the bible making it a fundamentally heretical movement. It asks congregations to find the least common denominator of theological overlap instead of holding to an unquestionable statement of faith and denying membership to congregations that are clearly “unchristian”. As a result, social issues are addressed without the inclusion of addressing the most important social issue: that there is no salvation apart from that of Jesus Christ. In Pastor Forte’s words not addressing this need simply “helps them to have a happier life on the way to hell.” Any biblical congregation that attempts to be in ecumenical relation with these congregations would be risking a slippery slope of compromise.

Theological Branches and Leafs

That being said, I certainly do not want to represent biblical congregations as homogeneous. The above section dealt primarily with root theologies. Branch and leaf theologies are related to these. I will begin with the latter and return to the former:

“Leaf doctrines are not that critical. You can lose a lot of leaves and the tree doesn’t suffer. Christians can be working closely together even within the same church and have different ideas. They can still work together if there is a common commitment to root doctrines. [The differences in belief] does not affect the authenticity of the Christian Church.”

The following examples were given by Pastor Forte as leaf theologies: “infant vs. believers baptism, baptism by immersion or by sprinkling, second coming of Christ,

church government, being inside or outside of a denomination and style of worship meaning do we have an organ or a band; do we sing contemporary music or hymns?”

The significance of what he defines to be a leaf theology is that these theological differences do not necessitate different denominations. Branch theologies on the other hand do:

“Calvinism and Arminianism are branch doctrines because they are highly influential. I could still cooperate together with someone from an Arminian background, we still consider each other brothers in Christ, but I could not be in the same denomination as them because we disagree on some fundamental things. We cooperate in areas where that [disagreement] does not keep us apart.”

So looking at the entire tree, roots must be held by all Christian congregations, else they are not Christian. As we work upward, there are legitimate branches (also called streams) of Christian thought which create different denominations. Further out there are leaf differences which are not as significant. Even if they result in denominational differences these differences are very small and chances are the leadership could easily engage with one another.

However, as is my usual comment to the reader, things are not always as cut and dry as they first seem. I asked Pastor Forte about what type of theology the ordination of women was:

“It’s not a root doctrine, it is a branch doctrine. It’s more important than a leaf. You can’t function with somebody who is doing something that is contrary to the bible’s teaching in that. We root our belief in ordination based on scripture. Paul wrote God-breathed scripture that a woman is not to be in authority over a man. A man is to be the husband of one wife who manages his household well. Relatedly is that the wife is to be in submission in a healthy way. The reason we believe that is because the bible teaches it.”

Pastor Forte's congregation does not ordain women, and grounds their belief in biblical teaching. Here, we see how a branch is closely related to a root and the line between the two is a little blurred. The ordination of women has the potential to conflict with the authority of scripture, which is one of the roots. The Apostle Paul's texts (along with others) are the ones that detail that women should not be ordained. By ordaining women, congregations...

"...reject the authority of scripture ... by saying Paul was wrong. That is dangerous because we are dealing with a root doctrine. If Paul is wrong, who else is wrong? How do we know he is wrong? [They say] we live in a more modern, sophisticated age. We know that Paul was culturally conditioned so we will excuse him. But we know better now, and this is where reason and rationality come... We see women who are better leaders than men, so we shouldn't be keeping them out b/c it's wrong. Our age has a better understanding of human nature than Paul did.

"I do not trust that our minds have a better understanding of truth than Paul. Christianity has always been counter-cultural and [the "unchristian" congregation] wants Christianity to fit in with culture. When the church starts changing its doctrines to fit what a non-Christian culture believes alarm bells should go off. We have more confidence in what non-Christian culture says than what God says."

Pastor Forte is not saying that congregations that ordain women are unchristian. When defining the root doctrines he chose the wording "authority of scripture" over "inerrancy of scripture" because he "might be able to work together with someone who doesn't believe that the bible is absolutely inerrant but really does believe that it is the word of God and takes it very seriously." The relation of ordination of women to whether or not a congregation is Christian then is a question of how seriously they take the bible and its message.

Faith and Order and Life and Action within Biblical Ecumenism

I have now established a context by which congregations are considered to be biblical or not. Between those that are biblical, similar types of ecumenism that I have mentioned in previous chapters are very much so present. I will begin with Pastor Forte's description of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE):

“People across the board are a part of NAE. NAE has a doctrinal statement about what we believe about the bible and what we agree on. The deity of Christ, the nature of the atonement...etc. You will find a lot of Christians who are not part of a denomination but who are on a mission's board or a publishing company will say that they adhere to the statement of the NAE. So there is a wide area of bible-believing evangelicals, institutions, organizations that believe that ecumenism is important, but not in the way of the NCC/WCC. NAE doesn't have local chapters, [rather] it is churches or denominations who are officially a part of NAE... The thing that most conservatives feel is most important is that it provides a national voice for conservatives to talk to congress about moral issues. Here is an organization that represents and gives voice to a public forum.

“Many local areas have a local council of churches that includes clergy of various associations that all believe the statements of the NAE. Even an evangelical catholic could subscribe to them. When you get together that wide of a variety, there is still going to be disagreement on some things, but there is still enough in common that is critical to essence of the gospel so that we can function together. For example Protestants and Catholics will protest together in front of Planned Parenthood over a shared opposition of abortion and the shared sanctity of life. We can't function together in preaching because they preach a gospel that is faith and works, the things you have to do to be saved that minimizes the saving effectiveness of Jesus' death on the cross.”

In my section on faith and order ecumenism I highlighted the governmental unity that faith and order ecumenism works to create. However, this overlooks another relation that faith and order has with life and action in the narrative above. Councils of faith and order are places where congregations may issue joint declarations on particular issues. For example, Revend Pallish (the head of Cityville Ministries mentioned in the previous chapter) gave me the example of a faith and order council that made a declaration that

Sundays should be kept as a day of rest. A life and action result was that parents lobbied to ban athletics on Sundays. This same relationship is present above where the NAE acts as a theological mouthpiece of those who are involved with the NAE, whether as an individual, congregation or para-congregational organization. Sanctity of life as a theology leads to a declaration that abortion is immoral through the faith and order ecumenism which results in protests as a form of life and action ecumenism. Pastor Forte gives some other examples of life and action ecumenism:

“Each denomination has its own foreign mission board, but there are many who are independent. Wycliff Bible Translators, African Ilin Mission, Evangelical Alliance Mission, New Tribes Mission (and many more) who have career missionaries who are members of different denominations that cooperate for foreign evangelism. Ministers in the PCA are full time missionaries for Wycliff and they are free to teach and preach the distinctive doctrines that we hold to in the PCA while they do their translating or church planting work. And they cooperate with Christians from other denominations who hold other leaf doctrines. You might have two guys working on a bible translation in Ecuador and one of them may be Calvinist Reformed Theology and the other is Arminian.

The Alpha Pregnancy Center is a Christian ministry that supports young pregnant women and encourages them not to have an abortion but to have the child and raise it or have the child and put it up for adoption. Wonderful ministries in parts of towns where women will find themselves in that position, and the Episcopal church is located near a low-income area.” (Can I make these fit better)

The governmental unity goal of faith and order ecumenism doesn't really exist in this context largely due to audience. The Ecumenical Movement is working to reconcile differences between Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions, which is a very wide range of congregations. One reason for this is that there is much more convergence in the areas of Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry in the congregations that Pastor Forte relates with than between the spectrum of congregations of the Ecumenical Movement. Another

reason is that Pastor Forte's congregation and the congregations they are in relation with celebrate the Reformation's role in returning to biblical truths⁸⁵.

"Every October we get together and have a Reformation Festival on the Sunday Night before October 31st, Reformation Sunday when Martin Luther published his 95 thesis in 1917. [My congregation] hosts it because of the bigger facilities and there are members from about a dozen churches from eight different denominations. We celebrate what we have in common. Pro-life, sanctity of marriage, where we can cooperate on something where we don't have to compromise our distinct views on those root doctrines, nor do we have to compromise our leaf doctrines because that's not what we are focusing on."

This celebration of a return to biblical truths is actually the origin of many of the denominations that Pastor Forte's denomination is in relation to:

"The Orthodox Presbyterian church is very similar to us. It came back into existence in the 1930's in the same way that our denomination came into being in the 1970's, by leaving liberalism. We are so similar that the OP and PCA churches were once considering merging in the 1980's. PCA voted for it, OP almost did, but even though they aren't [a part of PCA] they are very similar and operate a joint publishing house for Christian education materials.

"Another similar denomination is the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod with roots that went back to the 1700's, and they voted in 1985 to join the PCA, became PCA. They had their own college and seminary which became PCA. Another would be the EPC, Evangelical Presbyterian Church. This denomination is made up of many conservatives who left mainline denominations, but felt PCA was too narrow on some things. They wanted to have women elders and wanted to be more open to the exercise of charismatic gifts (speaking in tongues), which we aren't. We are so similar and could comfortably exchange pulpits."

Further, the PCA and OP are part of an organization known as NAPARC, the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council. NAPRC includes, "...denominations [that are] very similar to PCA. [There is] cooperation in publishing, mission work, endorsing military chaplains, [and we] worship jointly on special occasions." This

⁸⁵ The Reformation was when the Protestant tradition broke off from the Catholic tradition.

doesn't mean however that Pastor Forte only interacts with Christians who are from congregations and denominations that are a part of NAPRC:

“I have been part of an ecumenical pastor's fellowship every Wednesday which includes [clergy from], two independent churches of the 4 C's tradition (Conference of Conservative Christian Fellowships), Reformed Baptist, United Methodist, Episcopalian – many different denominations, but all of us believe the root doctrines. [We all have] enough in common that we enjoy each other's fellowship and have a bible study.”

This bible study is what Pastor Forte mentioned later in the interview when I asked what is gained by ecumenism:

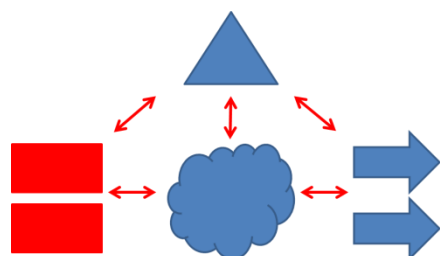
“Jesus smiles, it's what he prayed in John 17. If there is a mutual building up of one another and an attempt to learn from one another. That's a good bit of what we do on our pastor's fellowship on Wednesday mornings. We'll talk about things we disagree about, but not in an argumentative way of each trying to change the other. Of understanding why he believes the crazy doctrines that he believes. But it is mostly for the joy, we often don't get to the study but talk about things like what I preached about Sunday. I'll ask for input, what should be included?”

United Methodists are very well known as being connected to the Ecumenical Movement, and if I'm not mistaken, their denomination came about through faith and order efforts. I was surprised then to hear that a United Methodist pastor attended this fellowship and was curious if he received any backlash:

“He and the Episcopal rep are recognized as conservatives. Episcopal rep's bishop has a tolerant spirit (not pluralistic) and allows him to hold his views even though they are inconsistent with the denomination. It depends on the local bishop/ruling body whether conservatives are allowed to remain and preach their conservative views. Some areas of the Episcopal Church, the rep wouldn't be allowed. Men will leave the Episcopal Church because of this. United Methodist Rep is a bible believing man and he was comfortable with us, but many of the United Methodists were not comfortable with him. UM ministers are moved around every four years automatically, and they will never place him in charge of a large

congregation where he could be influential. He will be confined to small country churches where they will be ok having what they regard as an old fashioned fundamentalist.”

Biblical Ecumenism vs “Unchristian” Ecumenism



The end of the above paragraph makes for an ideal transition because it represents a very interesting

dynamic between biblical congregations and

“unchristian” congregations. As we have seen biblical

congregations are wary to relate to congregations whose actions and beliefs aren’t

“biblically” based and go as far as to call them unchristian. As a result, biblical

congregations will not relate to “unchristian” congregations, though they will accept

Christians of those congregations that hold “biblical” beliefs. Congregations of the

Ecumenical Movement on the other hand see “biblical” congregations as narrow-minded

Christians who “have a corner on the truth” and aren’t willing to engage with other

Christians who have just as valid beliefs. Congregations of the Ecumenical Movement

shake their head and hope that their “brothers in Christ” will someday see the light.

Some of my informants are Christians who don’t believe that Jesus’ death on the cross is

the most important biblical truth, who don’t believe in the trinity, and who believe that

humans are corrupted but not fundamentally evil. Because of my background, my

immediate (mental) response is similar to what I’ve described in this section: “Are you

holding that belief because it is easier than the exclusivity of the salvation message, or is

there another valid way to interpret and understand the bible?” However, from

conversations with these Christians I know that they are not whimsical in their faith. One

of my informants told me that one of the best things that she ever did, coming from the

background that doesn't view Jesus' resurrection as the most important event, was to have a bible study with other pastors who came from the same background as Pastor Forte. She found that there were misconceptions on both sides; she saw her counterparts as close-minded and they saw her as not taking the bible seriously enough.

Putting these viewpoints in relation with one another is the topic of my final chapter.

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Conclusion: Discussing Ecumenism more Broadly

Hey Pete.... I found out that my grandfather is in his last days. You know that I don't really believe in God or anything, but I was wondering if you could uh, say a prayer or something for him.

Christianity: A Matter of Life and Death

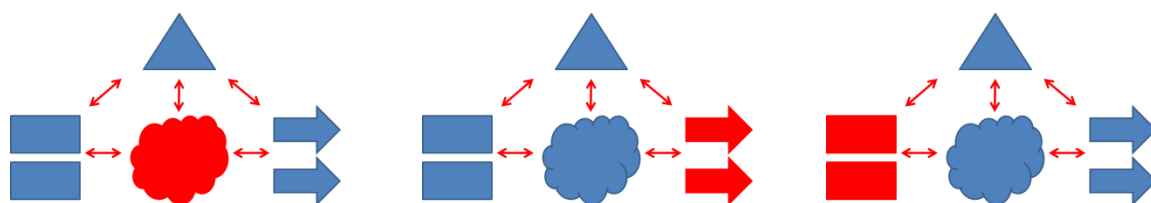
Throughout this work I have detailed three ways in which Christian congregations work toward creating unity based off of Jesus' prayer "that they may be one." These three, in the order that I introduced them, are faith and order ecumenism, life and action ecumenism and "biblical" ecumenism. I have included their representative pictures below in the same order:

The question now turns to why, if many congregations have theological points of convergence (e.g. as represented by the BEM document), these different types of ecumenism exist. The answer is because Christianity is a matter of life and death.

As a Residential Adviser in college I received training relating to privilege and identity. Essentially, this training taught me that every person has a series of identities and that these identities vary in importance to that person. Some identities are so central that without them a person would feel lost. After discussing the shortcomings of the Barna survey that I briefly mentioned in a footnote in the first chapter, Thalita told me about a question she used to ask her undergraduate students to try to get them to think about what belief of theirs was most central and which were periphery: "What is your most core belief, that if you found out was false, would make it very difficult to get out of bed in the morning.?" For many, this is that there is a God and he sent his only son Jesus to die on the cross for their sins and that they have new life because of this. For me, it is that I can put my faith and hope in a fundamentally just and loving God who will not lead me

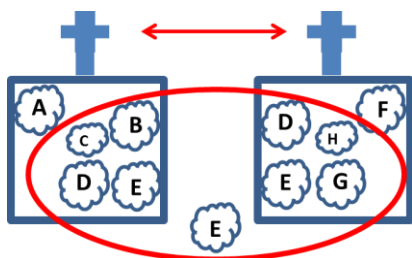
astray, who wants to have a relationship with me, and who teaches me how to be a better person. For Thalita it is first and foremost that her life has a purpose, followed by what gives her life purpose: that there is a God and that Jesus calls her to serve others...etc. If a person believes that their Christian faith is central to their identity, then Christianity gives meaning and purpose to life and assurance in the face of death.

As I mentioned briefly in the second chapter, Christian congregations are described as bodies in the bible. In the same way that people individually ground their worldview in Christianity, congregations ground their collective worldview in particular theologies. These theologies give rise to understandings of “us” vs “them” usually in form of followers of God vs “the world.” Some congregations are only interested in their members, and whether they have cordial or hostile relationships with other congregations, they don’t value ecumenism and that theology won’t shape their engagement with those outside of their doors. If ecumenism is included as one of these theologies, then congregants will share beliefs on how to positively relate to other Christians depending on the posture of the congregation.



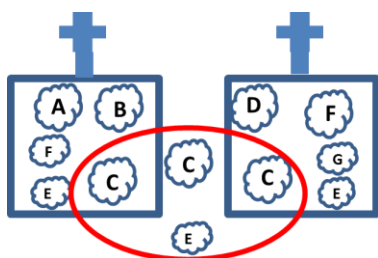
I have shown in these chapters three different postures based on the faith framework introduced in the second chapter. The first, faith and order ecumenism, is a worldview that begins by examining theological points of convergence for the purpose of creating governmental unity. The second, life and action ecumenism, finds the points of theological unity and uses those to create spaces where Christians can work together. The

third, “biblical” ecumenism, ensures a great level of theological convergence is present before ecumenical activity occurs.



Implicit in each of these postures are the same convictions about Christianity’s relationship to life and death. Christians in faith and order ecumenism, especially in the longer term conversations, hope for a

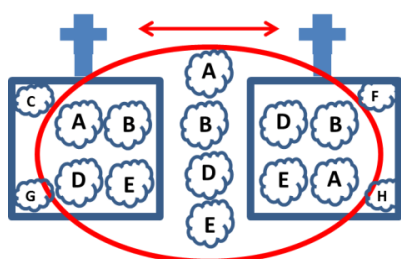
time when congregational and denominational structures will allow for the joint celebration of practices that are so central to Christian living. To these Christians, the Trinitarian relationship between Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit is the basis of Jesus’ call for complete unity, and until baptisms are universally accepted, until Christians can celebrate the Eucharist (Lord’s Supper) in any congregation, and until ministers in one denomination are allowed to preside in others, unity will remain largely unfulfilled. The image next to this paragraph represents the way in which the theology of ecumenism works to draw institutions together (represented by the arrow) by bringing different theologies into dialogue and limiting the emphasis on difference (“E” stands for ecumenism, all other letters are arbitrary).



Life and action ecumenism recognizes that Christian living calls people to a lifestyle of service to others. It is no surprise that Christians have been responsible for the establishment of education centers, hospitals, food

pantries and homeless shelters throughout the world. Jesus is recognized for being a compassionate teacher who tirelessly reached out to the poor and condemned wealthy hypocrites. He broke social norms, was revered by the people and feared by many other

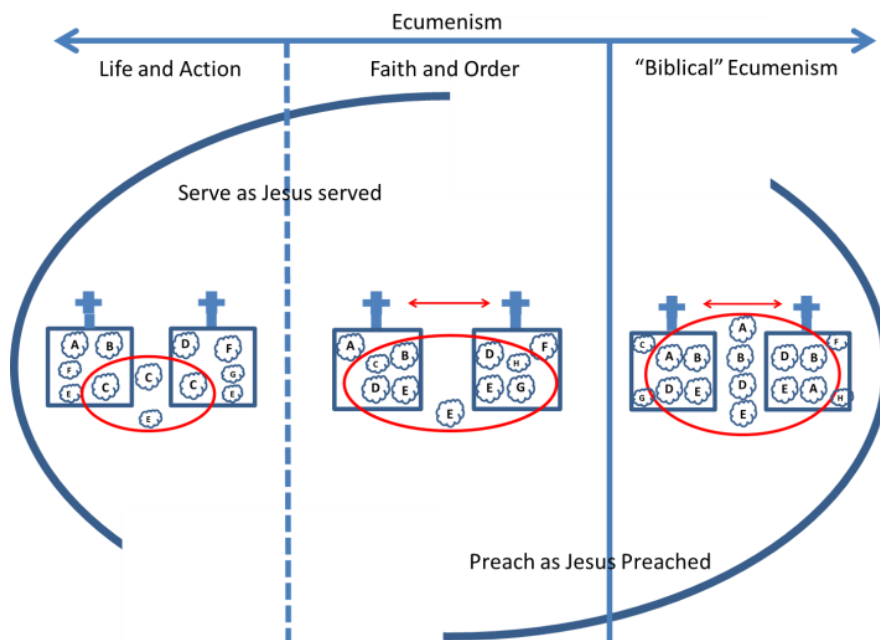
religious leaders. Christians engaging in life and action look to this image of Jesus to shape their interaction with others; serving others is a religious act of service to God. This is represented in the image by theology “C” being the compulsion to unity, though a (smaller) theology of ecumenism is present in each congregation.



“Biblical” ecumenism looks to Jesus as savior and gatekeeper to everlasting life. In this view, not telling others how they can receive everlasting life is a disservice because they will go to hell if they do not

accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is recognized that other’s material needs should be met, but that it is most important to meet their spiritual needs. Congregations that do not recognize have lost their way and are living false teachings and therefore are not Christian. The reality of death creates urgency in life. The image represents this as all major theologies between the congregations are shared to create the institutional unity represented by the arrow.

The following is an attempt to put all of these together in one image:



The Effects of a Pluralistic and Secular Society on Ecumenism

Christianity however does not exist in a void, but naturally responds to social trends.

After all, the Ecumenical Movement began at a missionary conference. It was a time when Christianity was being spread to all parts of the world and the founding Christians of the Ecumenical Movement believed that this should be done in efforts of cooperation instead of competition. In this sense, the second part of Jesus' prayer took on a particular meaning: "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." "The world" in this sense was these new areas where Christianity was being spread, or if it had already existed for some time, where it was developing structures and coming into relationship with other congregations on an international level. Congregations of the "west" were becoming sister or parent congregations of those in foreign countries⁸⁶.

⁸⁶ (Mackay 1964)

It is obvious to say that the religious climate of the United States has become both secular and more diverse than 100 years ago. This undoubtedly has impacted the Christian climate of the country, and therefore the ecumenism. The largest impact is again related to evangelization. The rise of other faith traditions (including humanism) means that there are new understandings of life and death that more accessible to people⁸⁷. This plays a role in the declining attendance to historical Christian denominations. Declining attendance means declining resources, and this causes the institutional congregation to rethink the priority of different programs. As a result, congregations may become more interested in trying to increase their attendance and this can create hostility between congregations over fears of stealing each other's congregants.

Further, I've noticed a general discontentment with historic denominations. During high school classes I remember learning primarily about the conflicts that were present in or caused by Christianity: the crusades, the inquisition, the protestant reformation, schisms, creationism, missionaries...ect. Christianity wasn't presented in a positive light by any means. I believe that this is one factor contributes to the rise of non-denominational congregations; they are defining themselves against what they see historic conflict that is present in denominations. As a result, there is less willingness to partner with other congregations.

Technology has also allowed for an interesting new development, the concept of a single "church" with multiple locations. To use my terminology, a congregation comprised of sub-congregations. Each of these congregations has a pastor that oversees all parts of the

⁸⁷ Diana Eck's *Pluralization Project* is an example of a study that traces the growth of these new communities.

service except the sermon⁸⁸, which is broadcast live from the primary sub-congregation where the head pastor is speaking. Instead of having congregations with different pastors who each have different preaching styles or emphases, one pastor gives the message in multiple locations. Not having much experience with these congregations, I can't comment on the extent of ecumenism. There is a potential for it to be less (each sub-congregation is almost a carbon copy of the other) or more (the pastoral staff works to bring the same message to widely different populations in different areas).

Regardless, the lack of resources, decreasing denominationalism and changing religious climate does affect the different types of ecumenism I described throughout this paper. Overall, it has slowed ecumenism for the reasons previously described; less funds, structures and priority means that ecumenism does not gain the attention it used to. However, this does not sum up all consequences, and in fact some are positive.

Congregations by their nature develop concepts of “us” vs. “them.” I mentioned Cleveland's *Disunity in Christ*⁸⁹ in my literature review section, and I will return to her briefly. One of the arguments that she makes is that “us” vs. “them” categories are mechanisms that provide humans with a physiological benefits in the form of energy saving devices. In short, we use less cognitive energy when we around those who are similar to us than those who are different than us. Further, the more homogenous of a group that we are a part of, the more we seek those similarities in others and the more we respond to (and define ourselves against) differences. If this holds true in Christianity, as

⁸⁸ In many protestant congregations, the sermon is the central part of the service, which is why it takes up forty or so minutes. For Catholics, the sermon (homily) takes up just as much time as the celebration of the Lord's supper (Eucharist).

⁸⁹ (Cleveland 2013)

she argues, then it helps to explain some of the traits we see in ecumenism. What I mean by this is how do Christian congregations respond to a more religiously diverse climate?

Obviously the answer cannot be that they don't respond. Congregants are beginning to live with people who have different worldviews, and the institutional congregation has to find a way to incorporate these worldviews into their own. I have noticed two different ways in which this occurs.

The first is very similar to what I described in the last chapter. Here, a congregation strongly reinforces its beliefs in the face of "the other". "Biblical" congregations find their "roots" in "historic" Christianity, meaning that they claim to be teaching what has been taught since the days of Jesus Christ. These groups are often labelled as "conservative," where what is being conserved is the teaching of the salvation message in an environment that makes the exclusivity more real and therefore more uncomfortable. The reason why these groups will also take the title "evangelical" is to demonstrate that in this environment they are not afraid to be true to their faith in the face of this discomfort.

The second way is that congregations will develop gray areas of overlap between systems of belief. For example, I was talking with a Catholic minister about differing views on sin and humanity. The congregations I have been a part of argue that any and all good in the world ultimately comes from God. The terms for this good is "common grace," or the good things that happen to both Christians and non-Christians, and "saving grace," the good that comes from believing in the salvation message. On the other hand is a view that there is good, no matter how small, that is within each of us, and that following God

brings out this good in us. A related train of thought is the concept that people may be following God without realizing it. In other words, there may be practicing Jews, humanists, Buddhists...etc. who are following the Christian God without realizing it. However, and this is where the gray area comes in, if members these groups hear the salvation message and are invited to become Christian, and they reject it, there is a question as to whether or not they will go to heaven.

Ecumenism in some senses benefits more easily in these conditions. In the former, where congregations work to identify their roots, it makes it easier for congregations to work together due to having the same roots. As soon as there is this recognition, ecumenism flourishes. These groups celebrate their similarities both in life and action (e.g. the Reformation celebration) and faith and order (pastors exchanging pulpits) while maintaining their congregational differences.

In the latter, definitions of “us” vs. “them” broaden due to interacting with other faith traditions. If a congregation is coming to understand their relationship with other faith traditions such that they are seeking to find areas of overlap (without losing their Christian identity), then the differences between them and other congregations naturally becomes smaller. Instead of discussion being about the proper way to baptize, there is a celebration that all congregations baptize with a similar understanding of its significance. Due to this, governmental ecumenism that was formerly impossible becomes possible, albeit it is still an incredibly slow process.

One other point to make relates to life and action ecumenism. Other religious groups are usually just as interested in addressing the same social issues as Christian congregations.

This raises the question for ecumenical organizations as to whether there is value in remaining ecumenical or whether organizations should become interfaith. Becoming interfaith potentially allows for the organization to draw on more resources and provides a place for interfaith dialogue; however remaining ecumenical allows the organization to celebrate being Christian. Both types of organizations are valuable, though they have different purposes. I'm not sure how the possibility of becoming interfaith has impacted life and action ecumenical groups on a broader scale.

The Effects of Race and Sexuality on Ecumenism

Race and sexuality are also factors that play into ecumenism. Throughout this paper I have often referenced LGBTQ communities because it is a very relevant topic in Christianity today. Many “conservative” and “evangelical” congregations fundamentally believe human sexuality has an appropriate context (e.g. the sanctity of marriage) whereas “progressive⁹⁰” congregations believe that there are larger or more contexts in which human sexuality is both natural and sanctified. This is a very hot topic between congregations and it is divisive. For example, one Christian denomination that is part of the Ecumenical Movement has ordained a gay bishop, and other denominations have cut ties or distanced themselves from that denomination. It has raised larger questions and controversies in the communities of the Ecumenical Movement, thus slowing ecumenical dialogue.

Reverend Pallish pointed out to me how this divide does occur across some national lines. The United Methodist denomination has essentially a divide between white congregations in the United States that are more progressive and black congregations in

⁹⁰ These groups self-identify as progressive.

Africa that are more conservative/evangelical. The denomination is having difficulty managing the divergence between the two groups internationally, and there is speculation that it will split. One of the things that I have noticed is that Black Protestant⁹¹ congregations do tend to be more conservative and tend to be located in the south. Because all of my research took place in New York State I didn't observe this trend directly, so I don't have any larger conclusions as to its specific effects on ecumenism.

Where now?

Christianity is always responding to societal changes and it is hard to predict how society will change, much less how Christianity will change with it. I believe that the Christian climate, especially in upstate New York, is in a time of transition due to decreasing attendance. Less resources creates emergency and fear of the loss of historic congregations (congregations that have been around for years), both of which detract from ecumenism. Congregations are adapting to these circumstances, and some are doing it successfully. Others are closing, and though it is sad, sometimes it is a good thing.

I have been a part of two congregations where the membership decreased to fifteen or under. In one case, denominational leaders stepped in to determine the future of the congregation (which is in process right now). In the other, the congregation makes up for deficits by pulling from a sizable savings account. Going to either congregation was very sad because of how empty it was, and I don't think a congregation can function⁹² at such a small size (especially in relation to building costs). They usually tend to be homogenous and older, making it difficult to create the change needed to bring in new

⁹¹ "Black Protestant" is one of the protestant categories that I found on a site called www.thearda.org which studies what types of congregations are where in the United States.

⁹² By function I mean both create a space where people can meet and talk with God and address the needs of the congregation. When a congregation gets small enough, eventually all their tithes are doing is paying the pastor's salary and maintaining the building as all other programs are on a shoestring budget.

members. Also, sometimes the population around a congregation changes, and the congregation isn't willing or able to understand what is needed to reach these new populations. The most common dynamic where I have seen this happen is a largely white inner-city congregation that is now in a largely non-white poor community. However, suggesting to these congregations that they close down butts against congregational identity as many of the remaining people have been attending this congregation for a significant portion of their lives. Further, they are stuck in a catch 22. If they leave everyone that they have come to know really well (because there are so few people in the congregation) to find a healthier congregation, they are decreasing the health of the former and leaving their friends. This creates a very guilty feeling on behalf of the person leaving. For this reason, some congregations that should have closed years ago are still around.

Regardless, congregations are adapting, and in some cases they feel that this adaptation necessitates independence from former structures. Because I believe that God does work through the majority of Christian congregations and denominations, I do believe that even with the rise of non-denominational congregations ecumenism will develop in through other structures. Perhaps my favorite quote from my research is by Reverend Pallish: "You can't rush these things, you know?" One of its uses was in reference to the Catholic denomination recognizing some of Martin Luther's points of dissidence as valid as well as a joint Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. "It took them five hundred years, but you can't rush these things, you know?"

Like I said, I believe that Christianity is in a time of transition. "Biblical" congregations that consistently return to Christian roots I believe have an easier time of moving through

this transition by the nature of maintaining a strong exclusivity. Some historic congregations are less willing to do this, and have to adopt⁹³ theological understandings to engage with trends in the world. These take a significant amount of time, especially if there are divisions within congregations and denominations regarding the hot-button issues of today. But I do believe that these understandings are being adopted, it's just a slow process.

Regarding non-denomination congregations, I don't believe that they have the same longevity due to being independent from other congregations. I did read one book about the social accomplishments of one particular non-denominational congregation, and what surprised me is how changes in leadership resulted in the attendance of the congregation to fluctuate widely⁹⁴. This happens in denominational congregations, but denominational structures would provide a support system that a non-denominational congregation wouldn't have. I'm curious as to what structures they do have for longevity, or whether they are more organic and come and go over time.

So in summary, I believe that ecumenism will always exist going forward, and that there are ebbs and flows in its fervor. The ebbs are during times of transition when congregations are shaping their identity to respond to public trends. Flows occur during times when identity is more established and structures are developed to cut across identity differences. When will we see these structures emerge and in what form will they

⁹³ I believe that these theological understandings already exist, it just takes a while for them to become mainstream within a congregation or denomination. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, the Catholic denomination believes that it takes about 100 years for changes to be completely absorbed, and the changes from Vatican II are only at fifty years.

⁹⁴ I believe that attendance to this congregation was at or over 1000, so the fluctuation was hundreds of members. At a smaller scale this would be a congregation of 100 losing or gaining 30 to 50 people.

be? That is the topic of more research. How quickly will they happen? At some point.

You can't rush these things, you know?

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Appendix A

My informants (each listed with a pseudonym) are listed in order of interview including length of interview and a brief background on my relationship with them.

Lauren – (45min) – I met Lauren through College Christian Fellowship (CCF) when she was a first year and I held a leadership position in the club. I didn't know her name for several months and referred to her as "friend" (in my defense, she always came with another person and I didn't want to call her the wrong name), something that both of them remind me of constantly. As circumstance would have it, I eventually trained her to take on the leadership position I was serving. I interviewed her about her Church experiences with a focus on what Churches she thought would work with others, how and why?

Lewis – (35min) – Lewis and I have been friends since freshmen year, bonding over late night runs, video game adventures and intelligent conversation. Regarding the latter, Lewis is one of the most thoughtful and logical people I have ever met, having the ability of boiling down economic or mathematical theories (his majors) into understandable concepts. A memorable example of how his logic-oriented brain wowed a room was when he suggested we take the contrapositive of a biblical verse during a CCF meeting. Simply put the contrapositive of the statement turned out to be much stronger than its original and our STEM friends were geeking out while the liberal arts friends were trying to understand what in the world just happened. He grew up Christian Scientist, and I interviewed him about the differences between Christianity and Christian Science.

Cybil – (60min) – I was a Resident Advisor in college and Cybil was one of my residents. When she came to a CCF meeting and mentioned her Catholic background, I was interested in hearing more about her experiences and whether she had heard of ecumenism. Her interview introduced a very unique circumstance that brought Christians from different backgrounds together that I never would have thought of.

Jaqueline – (80min) – I met Jaqueline at an inner-city service-learning trip hosted by CCF. The group that went down bonded quite strongly, and at other CCF conferences we would recognize each other and catch up on where life had brought us. I thought to bring my recorder to one of these conferences and I ended up interviewing Jaqueline about her church experiences. Over the course of her life she became involved in at least six different congregations plus Catholic school and I was curious as to which congregations she thought would work with others, why and how.

Doug and Marie – (70min) – Marie and Doug are a married couple who are primarily involved in the youth programs at the different congregations that they have been a part of. I got to know them through Bible Quizzing and a youth group and have stayed close with them after we ended up attending different congregations. I interviewed them as

members of the laity to hear about the ways that they have seen congregations work together, why and how. They referred me to Fred (mentioned below) and another individual that I didn't get the chance to interview.

Rudy – (44min + 56min) – Rudy is the adult leader of my CCF. We grew close as we worked together on CCF leadership and talked about life on late night walks. Other CCF leaders and I agree that talking with Rudy is a very self-reflective exercise (It was often remarked “He stares into your soul!”) due to his thoughtful nature and desire for mutual deeper understanding. He is an ordained minister and I interviewed him to see if he had heard of the Ecumenical Movement, if so in what capacity, and whether there is value in congregations working together. If so, why and how?

William Martin – (Corresponded via e-mail) – William Martin is the leader of the CCF inner-city service-learning program where I met Jaqueline. Though he is only mentioned briefly in this paper, he is one of the best-spoken Christians that I have ever met. He invites Christians to view issues such as poverty, injustice, human trafficking and modern day slavery in a spiritual context that has influenced many CCF students and staff. I was interested in hearing the ways that he works with such a variety of students and staff.

Pastor Jeff – (75min) – I have known Pastor Jeff since I was a kid and he is well known for his “punny” sense of humor; he can make one out of everything and anything. I was interested in hearing his background as a pastor (he began down south as a Southern Baptist Preacher and eventually migrated north and changed denominations) and wanted to know his familiarity with the Ecumenical Movement, and in what capacity he had worked with other congregations.

Torin (73min) – Torin is an ordained minister who works in one of the offices on my campus. I believe that we met in some capacity through CCF though we got to know each other better over the years through a variety of means. I would drop by her office to talk about life, took a class that she was one of the moderators for, and helped with some interfaith work on campus. I came to find out that Torin's denomination is very involved in ecumenically-related activities, which made her interview very valuable for this paper. She also connected me with Thalita (mentioned below).

Elizabeth (82min) – Elizabeth is a regional coordinator for CCF, and I reached out to her to inquire as to whether CCF provides any training for its staff in how to relate to students from a variety of Christian backgrounds. What ended up becoming a large part of the interview is Elizabeth's experiences with several different denominations over the years as a result of growing up in the Townville ecumenical community and attending different congregations throughout her life. She connected me with one of the leaders of this community, who is also her father in law, Pastor Roger.

Thalita (75min) – I met Thalita through Torin. Thalita is a sociologist that helped design a study to determine the (for lack of a better word) health of a congregation. I originally was curious as to whether ecumenism was one of her indicators, but we covered a range of topics. Some of these included conversation about being born into certain Christian denominations (meaning that some denominations are very strong in some areas and chances are if you are born there you will be a Christian of that denomination), the controversy surrounding what measurements to use to determine if someone is Christian and the centrality of certain beliefs.

Destiny and Leslie (65min) – Destiny and Leslie were both a part of CCF during college and after graduating became volunteers at my CCF. Both of them brought different skillsets that the leaders of CCF have benefitted from and appreciated. I was interested in hearing whether either of them had heard about ecumenism and what experiences they had had with congregations working together. Perhaps the most interesting point during their interview was their experiences with different types of Christians due to having gone to an engineering college and volunteering at a liberal arts college.

Fred (46min) – I was put in touch with Fred through Doug and Marie. I interviewed Fred to learn more about the congregation he attends that meets in a building owned by another congregation. The two congregations share the space and further, the pastor of Fred's denomination is also the pastor of the other denomination. Fred's congregation is non-denominational and the other congregation is denominational, which is what makes the situation so interesting.

Pastor Rick (90min) – Pastor Rick has known me since I was a kid and has had a strong spiritual influence in my life. For a longer description of Pastor Rick, please see the second chapter.

Veronica and Arnold (70min) – Veronica and I have known each other since elementary school and Arnold is her boyfriend. When she became a baptized Jehovah's Witness, some of our old friend group did not respond well they learned that Witnesses are only supposed to have friends who are Witnesses. I interviewed her because I was curious to know more about what Witnesses believed and how they viewed Christianity.

Vince (49min) – Vince is one of the sweetest guys you will ever meet. We met in college, and during my thesis I found out that he and two of my other friends are Unitarian Universalists or UU's for short. I interviewed him to learn more about UU beliefs and we went to a UU service together.

Ronda (57min) – Rhonda and I have been friends since freshmen year of college. Talking about faith is something that had come up frequently in the past as we ran errands downtown, which is unsurprising considering my interest in ecumenism and hers in

multi- and interfaith initiatives. She is a Unificationist, and I interviewed her to learn more about Unificationist beliefs and how they viewed Christianity.

Pastor Roger (20min) – Pastor Roger is Elizabeth’s father-in-law which is how I got in touch with him. He is one of the pastors of the Townville ecumenical community that has been in existence for over thirty years, and I interviewed him to learn more about this community.

Pastor Forte (85min) – Pastor Forte is an elegant speaker and passionate preacher at the congregation I attended during my time at college. His denomination is similar in many respects to one of the other congregations that I was a part of growing up and I have come to appreciate the ways in which he teaches biblical understandings. When I asked him if he knew about the Ecumenical Movement, he responded that he did and sent me some resources that criticized the movement. Over lunch we chatted about the failings of the movement and the appropriate context for ecumenism. This interview is where I heard and adopted the term “biblical” ecumenism.

Reverend Pallish (62min) – Revend Pallish is the executive director of Cityville Ministries, which identifies as an ecumenical organization. I was curious about his thoughts on the current ecumenical climate, and we chatted about the Ecumenical Movement, divisions in Christianity, non-denominational congregations and I picked his brain about where he thought things would go next. This interview is where I heard and adopted the terms “life and action” ecumenism and “faith and order” ecumenism.

Appendix B

The New Israel

The image of followers of Christ as the “New Israel” is key to understanding how early Christians defined themselves against the dominant religion: the Judaism of Jesus’ time when the world was ruled by the Roman Empire⁹⁵. The religious leaders (Pharisees) of this time were part of an exclusive hierarchical system that mistreated and took advantage of the poor by creating legalistic laws that the Pharisees developed as additions to laws that had been handed down by their early religious leaders⁹⁶. In claiming to be the “New Israel” Christians were rejecting the rule-based system of faith and were returning to the principles and laws that they believed God wanted them to follow, based on the teachings of Jesus Christ and his followers. In this sense, unity has almost a nationalistic sense, with the teachings of Jesus Christ as the law, the engagement of the practices of his teachings with the world as the culture, and the leadership of the nation being the living Trinity that interacts with its people in the individual and the institutional⁹⁷.

The Flock of God

The image of a Shepherd and flock is very prevalent both in the bible and in Christianity, probably because the ancestors of the Jewish people either were or had some sort of relationship with shepherds. If one knows anything about the relationship between sheep and shepherds, they would realize that this image is a powerful one. At night, shepherds moved their sheep into protected areas and slept at the entrance to these areas so that they could defend their sheep from predators (John 10:1-6). God is described as a shepherd who knew his sheep so well that he would leave the entire flock to find even one that was missing (Matthew 18:10-14). Sheep are loyal followers of their shepherd and know their shepherd’s voice (Luke 10:1-6)⁹⁸. In this sense then, unity centers on Christians common obedience to a God that laid down his life to take care of all those who follow him. Jesus,

⁹⁵ I add this sentence in because I want to stress to the reader that religions have to be understood in their historical context. Religions, like people, like empires, change over time. Christians need to remember that the Judaism of today is not the Judaism of Jesus’ time. The secular world needs to remember that the Christianity of the Crusades and Inquisition is neither the Christianity of Jesus’ time (or centuries after that) nor the Christianity of today (or centuries previous).

⁹⁶ An example I have heard of this is that on the “Sabbath” (a day of rest commanded by law) religious leaders had rules on what actions a person could perform. Jesus challenged these rules (see Matthew 12:1-14)

⁹⁷ Though I chose this image because it is in Mackay’s book, I provide my own interpretation of its significance. I feel that my version better explains its cultural significance and adds to Mackay’s description. I also do this for “The Flock of God” and the “Body.” The “Building” is where my interpretation is close to the one he provides on pages 84-91.

⁹⁸ I heard a story once that a group invaded some area and gathered all the sheep into one area. An old widow asked the soldiers of the invaders if she could have her sheep back since they were her only source of sustenance. The invaders told her that if she could find her sheep out of the crowd, then she could have them. She called out and immediately all of her sheep began to move toward her whereas the others ignored her.

when using these metaphors, does not use the plural “flocks” (implying there will be different types of followers) but rather uses the singular “flock.” The interpretation of this for the Ecumenical Movement is that all followers, regardless of tradition, are actually part of one “flock” or one universal Christian church.

The Building

To describe the next image, I again want to return to a biblical text:

“¹⁹Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²²And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This imagery helps to explain the definition of “church” that I have replaced with “congregation.” Above, all Christians are described as stones that comprise a building, specifically a temple. Jesus is described as the “cornerstone,” the most important stone in the foundation, which is also comprised of those who were his immediate and early disciples. All other Christians comprise the rest of the structure to create a place where God lives. Because of this, Christians do not actually need a physical location (a parish) in which to worship because all that they need (namely, “God...by his Spirit”) is not confined to a physical location. To relate this to ecumenics then, it follows from this metaphor that all Christians are connected in a spiritual sense into *one* temple (not many temples). If they are already related spiritually, how can this relationship be realized physically?

The Body

Again, I will begin with a biblical text:

¹²Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by ^[c]one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body...¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?...¹⁸But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (1 Corinthians 12:12-15, 17A, 18-20)

Very similar to the imagery of the temple is the imagery of the body. Elsewhere, it is said that Jesus is the head of the body (Colossians 1:18), meaning that all other Christians comprise its members. Now, the use of this metaphor by the Apostle Paul is in regards to handling the diversity of gifts (specific talents that God gave to different people to help grow the universal Church such as preaching or teaching) in a congregation. However, the important theme is that all are united under Jesus Christ, which can be brought to the modern day Ecumenical Movement. Is Jesus the head of several bodies (congregations/denominations) or is he still the head of one? Assuming it is one, has he given each congregation something that they can bring to the others for the benefit of the universal church?