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The kingdom and its subjects: charisms, language, economy, and the birth of a progressive politics in the vineyard

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THE KINGDOM AND ITS SUBJECTS: CHARISMS, LANGUAGE, ECONOMY, AND THE BIRTH OF A PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN THE VINEYARD

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Anthropology

by

Jon Bialecki

Committee in charge:

Professor Joel Robbins, chair
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2009
The dissertation of Jon Bialecki is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009
DEDICATION

For Judy, who can wrangle hummingbirds.
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Everything comes across a horizon of some sort, and for that we owe a debt to the peregrinators who brought us our material; once it has come into a space that we call our own, it is denatured and born anew by the recontextualization that the new locale allows, and so we owe a debt to those others who help us hold that space together.

I first became enthralled with anthropology as a UCSD undergraduate due to the lectures of Theodore Schwartz; it was due to him that I realized that the discipline was a space where nearly anything, no matter how seemingly ephemeral or marginal, could be thought through. I received my first set of tools for engaging in that work from Melford Spiro, and I still treasure – and use – those implements to this day. While at the University of San Diego Law School, it was Professor Roy Brooks who taught me not only that law – and hence society, social order, and the subject – was in the end a metaphysics, but that it was a metaphysics that had real world costs and effects; this is an insight that I carry with me to this day. Returning to UCSD as an anthropology graduate student, Don Tuzin ensured that Theodore Schwartz’s lesson would not be forgotten, and Michael Meeker gave me a language for the discussions that resulted. Joel Robbins, an indefatigable intellectual ally and friend, gave me the best gift that anyone could – that of open ended questions, and someone to debate them with. Suzanne Brenner has been a good guide in my exploration of two separate ethnographic arenas that are almost literally antipodally situated in relation to one another, while Steve Parish ensured that as an ethnographer and a theorist I was always honest. Thomas Csordas came late in my development at UCSD, but his presence had been
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had the opportunity to present my work to the UCSD Christianities Study Group and the
UCSD Anthropology Department Psychodynamic workshop, for which I am grateful.

The majority of this dissertation was written while I was serving as a Visiting
Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Reed College in Portland, Oregon. I would like
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who did the same for me are too numerous to name, I would like to single out Jiang
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made the time here at Reed better than worse. There are many things that are particular
about Reed College as an institution; one of which is that the instructor learns as much
from the students as the students learn from the instructor. I have been gifted with
numerous sharp students at Reed, some of which, by happenchance, had interests who
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Somewhere between the academy and the private realm is the intimate yet public space of ethnography, where the particular and the universal converge, and where a kind of irreproducible knowledge of named others is gathered so that it can be woven into pseudonymous patterns. A visitor to the churches, offices, and homes of others, and more than just that, but moreover a guest to their world, over the years that this ethnographic project took place, I have been the recipient of endless amounts of kindness, patience, and good humor by Christian believers; my debt to them, like my debt to my colleagues, is again hard to measure. Anthropological conventions, a desire to give them privacy, and an honest longing to protect them from whatever accidental hamfistedness my presentation of them may accidentally entail, they must go without being named, but that does not mean that my debt to them is any less.

The debts mentioned above are deep ones, but some degree of commensurability (in the form of general reciprocity) and scale for them is given by the institutional
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Parts of this dissertation has appeared before in other venues; specifically, sections of the introduction and of chapter four have appeared as “Between Stewardship and Sacrifice: Agency and Economy in a Southern California Charismatic Church,” in the 2008 Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.) 14(2): 372-390. The dissertation author was the sole investigator and author of this paper.

University Press. The dissertation author was the sole investigator and author of this paper.

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I thank the editors and owners of all these journals and their associated institutions and publishers for permission to represent the material here.
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Kingdom and its Subjects: Charisms, Language, Economy, and the Birth of a Progressive Politics in the Vineyard

by

Jon Bialecki

Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Joel Robbins, Chair

This dissertation, based on fieldwork performed in Southern California churches and small prayer meetings, uses ethnographic description of quotidian devotional, communicative, and economic practices, as well as a depiction of an emerging progressive politics, as an entry-point to the question of the formal constitution of the subject in the Vineyard, a Southern California originated but now world-wide Neo-Charismatic church-planting movement. Starting with the founding of the Vineyard in the early nineteen-eighties, this project traces out how the Vineyard attempted to meld together Evangelical and Pentecostal models of religious practice. These two forms of religiosity value separate and to a considerable degree incommensurable stances towards the questions of divine alterity – Pentecostal modes favor a participation at the
level of interiorized immanence with an otherwise transcendent God, while Evangelical-inflected practice consists of a fiduciary submission to a divinity who is conceived as being exterior to one’s self. This dissertation argues that in the Vineyard these two forms, rather than melding together in a form of intra-Christian syncretism, continue to exist side-by-side in what Slavoj Žižek would call a “parallax,” and that the resulting tension between these two forms not only explains the dynamics of much of the Vineyard’s current practices, but also serves to complicate the existing explanatory framing of language ideology, hermeneutics, theories of temporality, exchange theory, and political thought as currently presented in much of the contemporary anthropology of Christianity.
INTRODUCTION – STRUCTURE AND SETTING
JUDAS IN PITH HELMET

This monograph is about The Vineyard, a denomination that is not a denomination, a Pentecostal-style movement that describes itself as Evangelical, founded by already-believing Christians who felt that they had to convert yet again to another way of being Christian in the world. This is a social history of how their movement constructed differing normative yet co-present models of the self, and an ethnography of how the negotiation with alterity that stands as the explicit driving force in this process of constructing selves has simultaneously assisted the movement’s exponential growth, triggered crises, and been re-imagined as a generational change in leadership, all occurring while the social landscape in which the Vineyard is embedded has itself changed over time. The central argument of this work is that the Vineyard, taking advantage of a blending between Charismatic and Evangelical styles of Christianity made possible by a national rapprochement between Conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostals that occurred in the New Evangelical coalition-building of the nineteen-fifties and -sixties, thrived not because it, as a movement, succeeded in integrating the different forms of personal piety associated with these two traditions, but rather because these two styles continued to exist side-by-side in an uneasy juxtaposition. While I argue that to some degree the continued co-existence of these multiple and to somewhat contradictory models of personhood was the result of the particular history of the Vineyard as a movement, I will also suggest that this was possible because each of these differing models of personhood reflects alternate stances regarding the personhood, agency, and society that might have roots in wider phenomena – the way that
personhood itself is imagined in the United States – and that aspects of the Vineyard’s political practice has been directly affected by the democratizing ethos that can be intuited in the decentralization of authority that occurs in some of the Charismatic gifts.

And I would like to begin this discussion with a one-liner: “Well, if Jesus could have Judas follow him around for three years, we can certainly have you hang around with us.”

**The Vineyard: “Empowered Evangelicals”**

The person who made this joke was in his early thirties; his hair was short and spiky, thanks to the gel that he was then habitually using to form what was, at the time, a rather *au current* hair style, at least in Southern California. He had on a black tee shirt emblazoned with the “Museum of Tolerance” logo, loose khaki pants, and Doc Martin boots; the typical wear for someone hip enough to know what’s in, but too cool to be slavish about following it. He was a minister, and the statement was his way of letting me know that I could do fieldwork in his congregation.

He was not the first minister with whom I had spoken to by any means. My conversation with him was part of a larger project that eventually ran for over two and a half years; as part of my fieldwork I had taken on speaking many pastors as I could within my larger, Southern California field site of Rancho Palma Vista County.¹ The focus of my inquiry was on the growing population of middle class, theologically conservative Charismatic Christians. Since the nineteen-sixties, this special segment of the larger American Christian community has, by way of the sixties “Jesus People”

¹ Rancho Palma Vista, like Shores, is a pseudonym.
movement, been growing from its initial Pentecostal roots, with a (stereotypical) association with poverty, race, and its position on the social fringe (see Anderson 1979), to its current position as embedded firmly in middle class sensibilities and economic status (Miller 1997).

The question that originally animated my research, stripped of its theoretical dressing, was how do individuals who are a part of this community, holding what appears, at first blush, to be highly irrational, supernaturally charged beliefs, engage with the wider secular modernity that they are deeply embedded in? This was a people who freely acknowledged and used charisms (the ‘spiritual gifts’) that seemed to be particularly incommensurable with secular modernity – gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and visions, divine healing, battling demons, and, at the far end of the scale, even attempting to raise the dead (the latter being a practice that I never saw them engage in . . . but I had heard spoken about, often as something that occurs in foreign lands, such as Southeast Asia or Africa). In time, I would grow to see that my initial question itself was poorly formulated in its emphasis and in its particulars, but the central question, of the relation of modernity (or rather, more to be more exact, the modern conception of the self) to this very particular American Evangelical practice, would remain. In the end, I would discover in a dialectic between open and closed structures of selfhood – unconscious, inculcated templates that could be intuited in areas as diverse as their exchange practices, language ideology, ritual practices and political yearnings. While I would identify historical preconditions for this practice in the foundational moments of the denomination I studied, when Pentecostal practices were self-consciously grafted onto an Evangelical worldview, I would also come to believe
that this failure was rooted in something more than historical contingency, and that this ‘failure’ to adhere to one easy structural imperative regarding the proper structuration of the self – this odd shimmering between two fundamentally different religious imaginaries – pointed not so much to a contingent weakness, but to its strength. It is this irreducibility of religious practice to any single schematic outlining the relationship between the self and the divine alter, a seeming parallax construction (see Žižek 2006), that was the engine for so much of this movement. I would also discover that this uneasy structure had, along with allied socioeconomic factors and issues of generational change in a pseudo-denomination that was founded by baby boomers but was reaching out to a ‘post-modern generation,’ pushed elements of this Neo-Charismatic religious community into some surprising political directions, and that these political practices were fueled by this group’s own antinomies.

Before I could realize this, though, I would have to learn to truly engage with this population, spending time with them, day in and out, as they both prayed and partied (a phrase for all its alliteration is as clichéd as it was true), helping them out when they meticulously planned their church services and when they were spontaneously moved by the Holy Spirit. In spending well over a year with one congregation in particular, Shores Christian Fellowship, a congregation that was part of the Vineyard, a specific denomination – or, as they preferred to refer to it, a Church Planting Movement. Growing out of the suburbs of Southern California, the Vineyard refuses to acknowledge that it is a denomination (it defines itself instead as a ‘church-planting movement’). Since it was founded in the early 1980s, the Vineyard has grown exponentially, with over five hundred churches nationwide, and another four hundred
churches outside of the United States. The importance of the Vineyard, though, is as much in its influence as its size. Rooted in the ‘Jesus Movement’ of the 1960s, the original concept of the Vineyard was to combine Evangelical and Pentecostal religious practices in an attempt to revitalize both religious traditions; as such, Vineyard churches present themselves as ‘empowered Evangelicals’ (Nathan & Wilson 1995), and to this day usually refer to themselves as either Evangelicals or Charismatics, as opposed to other possible monikers, such as Pentecostals. The Vineyard developed this hybrid identity under the charismatic leadership of John Wimber, a church-planting specialist who, at differing moments in his career, was affiliated with both Fuller Theological Seminary (see Marsden 1987: 292-5) and the American pop-music group the Righteous Brothers. Under Wimber, the Vineyard emphasized the importance of using both popular cultural forms and miracle-based Charismatic practice as evangelical tools (Percy 1996), as well as favoring personal experience of the divine over theologically determined and overly intellectualized modes of religiosity. Indeed, the Vineyard’s prioritizing of experience over theology has led it to be almost blase about many theological issues.² I would hear pastors, speaking from the pulpit, call the tension between Arminianism and Predestination ‘uninteresting’, and witnessed a church member, speaking in front of other believers, refer to themselves, with a shrug, as ‘not very Trinitarian’ (Miller 1997: 127-8). This statement about Trinitarianism I took not to be a statement of heterodoxy (though it should be noted that there is a very strong

² While the Vineyard has a somewhat minimalist ‘statement of faith’ (available at http://www.vineyardusa.org/upload/Statement%20of%20Faith.pdf), I never heard of it being referred to by members, and only rarely in passing by pastors.
‘oneness’ tradition in Pentecostalism), but rather as pointing to a certain core *indifference* about the sort of theological niceties that was often responsible for church and denominational fissures in much of 19th and 20th Century American Protestantism.

Despite both the death in 1997 of John Wimber, and resulting subsequent changes in Vineyard leadership (Miller 2005), the original emphasis on the supernatural and the experiential continues in the Vineyard (see Luhrmann 2004a; 2005; 2006; 2007). This ongoing combination of strongly Charismatic religious practices, an informal culture, and use of popular music has influenced theologically conservative churches throughout America in the past twenty years, resulting in what has been referred to as the ‘Californianization’ of American Evangelicalism (Shibley 1996) or, even more extravagantly, as a ‘second reformation’ resulting in a new, experientially centered Protestantism (Miller 1997). Outside of the United States, the Vineyard is particularly well known for functioning as one of the ‘way-stations on [the] transnational rails’ that are responsible for the global propagation of neo-Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity (Martin 2002: 38).

The politics of the Vineyard are similar to, but not identical with, those of other theological conservative churches, at once broadly favoring political conservatives while still showing strong variation both between and within churches in the denomination; indeed, as we shall see later on, some comparatively ‘progressive’ churches can be found within the Vineyard as well (a fact that has become critical to my argument). Ideas regarding gender similarly vary within the Vineyard, but tend to be more egalitarian than those found in many other conservative Evangelical churches. In most churches I have observed, the ideal picture of gender relations stresses an
egalitarian, not hierarchical, understanding, and female leadership is common, though rarely in the role of head pastor. These relatively open stances on gender and politics may be a function of the fact that Vineyard members are often more educated than those members of other churches (Shibley 1996); at ‘Shores’ Vineyard, where most of this fieldwork was conducted, “the body” of the church consisted mostly of students and young professionals. Demographically, Vineyard members, at least at Shores, tend to run from college-aged till the mid-fifties, and were for the most part White, though with a fair representation of Asian-Americans and Latinos. While this assemblage is starting to face some challenges as elements of it start to age and contemplate what generational change may mean, the overall education, relative youth, energy, and intelligence of this movement has made it a powerful force for the popularization of a very unmodern-seeming set of everyday supernatural practices, such as speaking in tongues, supernatural healing, and prophecy.

**Jokes and the (religio-secular) Unconscious**

It was that energy, youth and intelligence that originally captured my imagination, and led me to suspect that this population would be a good site to try to work through how a broader Protestant and Post-Protestant American middle-class community understood their relationship towards the divine, towards one another, and towards the larger secular world. But before I could do that, I would have to ask, and when I asked, the

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3 In the Vineyard as a whole, there is slightly less diversity – the Vineyard is roughly 90% white (Miller 2005). There are also several Spanish language Vineyard (or ‘La Viña’) churches (Sánchez Walsh 2003: 154-91) that are outside of the scope of this study.
answer I received was a statement that put me in the shoes of the man who sold Jesus to his death. That answer, it should be stressed was a joke (or, more properly, considering it’s context-dependency, a witticism), and it was one that was (as often happens in conversation) rather funny in a way that escapes being easily conveyed. The tension inherent in this joke is obvious – the implied simile contained in the joke is a classic example of mapping onto the anthropologist the literal Judas spot. This gesture not only places the anthropologist as someone who cannot be trusted – indeed it equates the Anthropologist with a name synonymous with treachery itself – but it also sets the anthropologist as someone who is fated for a particularly bad end, not only in this life (Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:16-19), but (according to classical Christian imagery – think of Dante’s Cosmology in the Divine Comedy) in the other. It also nicely places the speaker not only on the side of the Holy, but squarely identified with Jesus himself, a particularly odd Gnostic twist that seems to be a recurrent theme in American Religion (Bloom 1992).

It is not surprising that the ethnographer should be compared to Judas Iscariot. As Freud notes, jokes are a means of presenting, often in condensed and surprising form, aggressive thoughts that would be too uncomfortable to express in undisguised form (Freud 1989). From the initial splintering of the American Evangelical community during the 19th century into two warring camps, one theologically progressive and open towards modernity, and another theologically conservative and suspicious, if not hostile, towards it (Marsden 1980), social science in general, and anthropology in particular, have taken that second camp to be the enemy, characterizing the more theologically conservative as being well beyond the pale, as at once an
exemplar of ultimate internal alterity while being considered at the same time, in a curios contradiction, undeserving of the ethnographic attention normally given to the “other” (Harding 1991, Robbins 2003). Given the anti-modern tendencies found in these theological conservatives, and the fact that anthropological ethnography (with its decentering, comparative project), is very much engaged in the reflexive process that can be seen as being at the heart of modernity (Marcus and Fischer 1986), it should be no surprise that when the ethnographer comes, pith helmet in hand, he is treated with suspicion. This, at least, is the easy reading.

But it would be the wrong reading – or at least, it would be wrong for us to stop there. Freud stated that the work of the joke lies not only in the expression of hostility, but also in the condensed representation of truth, and in the quick equating of the ethnographic project with treachery, a bit of truth has been uncovered. One of the ways in which anthropologists often think of ethnography is as a form of translation (see perhaps most classically Geertz 1973), such as what occurs with the spoken word or texts, and while there are ways in which ethnography and translation can be clearly distinguished as projects, this continues to be a popular idiom in anthropological “common sense” (a phrase used, of course, in the Gramscian sense of the term). While “faithful translations” are occasionally spoken of in the literary sense, it should be remembered that this is not the usual course of things, and, since we have already invoked Freud’s Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious, we should remember that one of the jokes he uses as evidence, “Traduttore – Traditore” (Freud 1989: 36), contains more than a passing element of truth; every translation is a betrayal, as is, in some vague sense, every ethnography. The joke itself was more than a passing friendly
jab at the ethnographer, it was a critical assessment, a critique, of the possibility of the underlying project itself, one predicated on a sort of “ready-to-hand” familiarity with the differentials of (purported) (intellectual) power and representation economies that, in a contemporary academic setting, arise from status disjunctures in the truth status given to differently grounded discourses.

But there is yet another reading of this joke that can be gleamed, one that doesn’t spring from the assumption of a gulf between the ethnographer and the informant, but from the presumption of a commonality. The philosopher of aesthetics, Ted Cohen (1999), has observed that jokes are predicated upon a certain simpatico between the individual telling the joke and her audience; where implicit shared understandings and affect function to mutually augment each other. Under this logic, what is relevant about the joke is not its violence, or the fact that it is a shared truth, but the fact that it is predicated upon a yearning for commonality: “When we laugh at the same thing, it is a very special occasion . . . [t]hat we do it together is the satisfaction of a deep human longing, the realization of a desperate hope. It is the hope that we are enough like one another to sense one another, to be able to live together.” (Cohen, 1999: 29 [emphasis in original]). When thought of in this light, what is striking is not how the aggression underneath the joke marks the ethnographer as other, but the level of trust in commonality that lies at the center of the jest, a trust that was at least in that moment well placed.

Here we get to the point behind this discussion, which was not to present some instantiation of an ethnographic trope conveying a supposed rapport that would bestow a certain authority on my hermeneutic practices (see Clifford 1988), but rather illustrate
how I shared a simultaneous similarity and difference with my informants in such a way that the question of “rapport” was short-circuited. This should be no surprise; in some ways the community that I was studying was one that, despite whatever creedal differences might lay between me and them, was one very close to home. They were well-educated people. The pastor, for instance, had a B.A. in English from a school well known for its theoretically sophisticated (and rather secular) literature department, and had completed his education by attending Fuller Theological Seminary, one of the highest regarded academic institutes for Evangelicals in America (Marsden 1987). He was not an exception. At Shores, I would meet not only pastors, but congregants who were engineers, physicists, research psychologists, physicians, human rights advocates, lawyers – and even graduate students in the social sciences. These were individuals well grounded in traversing the modern world, in articulating and defending their own interests. Ethnography with people whose lives were forged in the same educational institutions of modernity that I had my sensibilities imprinted upon would not be like the cutout cartoons sometimes made of classical anthropology, where it is portrayed as a politically suspect act of producing “representations” of others who have been rendered incapable of being politically “represented” by themselves (Spivak 1988). I would be writing about knowledgeable, professional cosmopolitans who in some cases appeared to be more at home with my native environment of bourgeois professionalism than I was. Given this proximity, this familiarity, I could hardly offer a proper “Malinowskian” ethnography at all, predicated on understanding generated by the alienating effects of an immense difference, or rather, this would not be merely a Malonowskian ethnography; it would be at the same time a document predicated on
what was distant to me as it was a native ethnography in the Boasian sense, a neo-
Boasian “history of the present.” (see Bunzl 2004).

Returning to the pastor’s statement, there is no sense in trying to deduce which of these three readings is the proper understanding of the jest; with something as ephemeral as a joke, where there is the possibility that it could be properly read through one, all three, or none of these hermeneutical encapsulations. These three possibilities – that the joke worked on the structure of a just barely below the surface hostility towards modernity, of a rueful seeing through the incommensurability of their worldview and the proposed ethnographic project, or of a shared skeptical sensibility jointly inculcated, perhaps through education – when they are all taken together, though, tell us something; put parallel with one another, they jointly communicate something that they, individually, do not. When all those strains are seen at once, we can see why Christianity is often seen as a disconcerting ethnographic subject; here, working in my natal culture, the too familiar and the too different that supposedly are a stumbling block to the ethnographic study of Christianity (Robbins 2003) at times ratcheted each other up to epistemological unbearable levels (see also Csordas 2004a:473).

We can also see in this brief sketch that in a single relationship, that between the ethnographer and pastor, several different modes of articulating self and other can be teased out. Each moment, in its source of authority, the world that it references, and most importantly, in the kind of relationship implicit in it – can be shown; this is particularly true when we are not speaking about a particular bon mot, but instead patterned, regular behavior. If this can be identified in the relational logic between two individuals, how much more complex must be the relationship between humans and
invisible – and to the eyes of a methodologically atheist social science – non-existent alter? Given their effective invisibility and silence, it would seem that theories and practices of interaction, linguistic or otherwise (Keane 1997a), with supernatural interlocutors could run towards the baroque. Of course, one could also say that this invisibility and silence could open up spaces for simplification – a dialogue in which one party sets up all the rules and determines all the content could be rather clean in nature. This is unlikely, though, if one makes two presumptions, as this work does; first, that while an understanding of what might be counted as ‘religion’ has been historically contingent (Asad 1993), that as an analytic framework the category of religion is at its most clear when it presumes some sort of engagement with, or concern about, actors that are more than merely human (Spiro 1987: 187-222), and second, that because of a certain self-alienation that is intrinsic to the human condition, there is something about religious thought and practice that always presents a possibility of surprise that results from a surplus left over from the processes of objectification that must be either domesticated or engaged with (Csordas 2004b). Engaging with this fundamental alterity, an alterity that can neither be within or without, since it is something created by the concretization of self and other as both experiential and theoretical categories, and yet not subsumable to this process, raises the specter that the bounded ‘western’ self may be placed into question (it is for this reason that the ‘western’ self can be interrogated by religious forms of alterity that we cannot say that non-western forms of self are particular to the ‘non’-west alone [Spiro 1993]), as if these sorts of grand statements about ‘the West and the rest’ are even recognizable as having any coherence in the first instance. Alternately, this form of alterity can be constrained, either through
marking it as a threatening other that could be engaged with and overcome, or (more
cogently for a discussion of religious practice, especially a monotheistic religious
practice) through attempting to placate it through subservience, to avoid a certain kind
of contact through submission to its mandates, and thereby keeping it at bay.

*Lévy-Bruhl in the pews, and the anthropology of Christianity*

It is in this framing of the question that I differ from the other anthropologist who has
taken on the Vineyard as an ethnographic object. While other anthropologists have, as
part of wider ranging projects, addressed the Vineyard as part of a broader survey of
American Christian hermeneutic practices (Biolo 2009), or observed churches that seem
to be influenced by or be similar to the Vineyard in their Charismatic concerns and an
incipient orientation towards social justice (Elisha 2004, 2008a, 2008b), only one other
ethnographer, Tanya Luhrmann, has made the Vineyard the center of a prolonged
participant-observer project. For Luhrmann, who has been studying other cognate
forms of American Evangelicalism for quite a while (see, e.g., Luhrmann 2004b), what
is striking about the Vineyard are the cognitive and embodied techniques that are used
to make that otherwise invisible interlocutor, God, a tangible and personable element in
their day-to-day lives (2007). As put by Luhrmann, it is through a series of interlocking
practices (through careful attention to the stream of their own interior mental life, and
through allowing themselves to be absorbed, dissociated almost, in their senses) that
members of the Vineyard learn to see elements of their own inner life as being the result
of an alien agency, a technique through which they make the God of the Bible speak to
them today as they feel He did of old. What Luhrmann is arguing, in the end, is that
through these exercises Vineyard members have trained themselves such that they have a fundamentally different cognitive mode of being in the world, one where the once conventionalized boundaries between self and not-self have been reconfigured such that these religious moderns are much more like the participatory mode of being that Lévy-Bruhl postulated as being one of the chief elements of ‘primitive’ thought – that is, in other words, to say that Vineyard members have a “participatory” way of thinking in the world.

Tanya Luhrmann’s ethnography is dead on in its description of Vineyard prayer and worship practices, and I say that with a certainty that only one who has shared (effectively) the same ethnographic object with someone else can say. While I cannot vouch for the psychological mechanisms that she identifies as being the engine of the Charismatic experiences that are so strongly associated with the Vineyard, neither can I

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4 There are some differences between Shores Vineyard and the Chicago Vineyard that stood at the center of her object; due to an influx of college students, Shores strikes me as being perhaps a ‘younger’ church – at any rate, issues of generational change seemed to be much more on the mind of Shores members and leadership than it appears to have been in Tanya Luhrmann’s Vineyard congregation. Also, while Shores was founded by a Lion of the Vineyard, a founding theologian for the movement who places the Vineyard’s Charismatic practices front and center, since that pastor has left Shores appears to have become less charismatically inclined that Professor Lurhmann’s church. For instance, I have heard newer members of Shores at time expressed doubt about the possibility of demonic activity (though to be sure, later on in fieldwork this church member would end up being one of the most charismatically gifted of members); at another moment, as discussed in chapter two, I have seen the pastor express a nervousness about tongues. Indeed, as addressed in the penultimate chapter of this monograph, I have even heard church members suggest that it is not Charismatic practices, but rather an incipient turn toward justice, that will in the long run be the true legacy of the Vineyard. I also have a sense that the Vineyard I studied, while not uniformly more middle class in membership (there were many students, and also many young professionals who were just beginning their careers, and therefore perhaps culturally, but not financially, middle class), had more well-to-do participants because of its being situated in one of the most pricey portions, real estate wise, of Southern California.
fault them, and they seem wholly consistent with the evidence, both hers and mine, even if Luhrmann’s model does not quite answer the critique that Vineyard members themselves proffer when they hear such a psychologized explanation. This full endorsement of Luhrmann’s ethnographic and theoretical work being said, though, there are several aspect of the Vineyard that seem to either go unaddressed by, or even run orthogonal to, Tanya Luhrmann’s explanatory narrative. Traditionally, Pentecostal churches, even in the earliest moments, only had partial participation in the Charismatic gifts, with a substantial portion of their members unable to engage in the kind of otherworldly processes (prophecy, speaking in tongues, etc.) on a regular basis, a number that seems to not be to too disproportionate with the percentage of Pentecostals in contemporary churches who seem to be incapable of engaging with the gifts as a regular modality of religious practice (see, e.g., Wacker 2002). During fieldwork, I found that the Vineyard was like this as well, and that while church folding-chairs and small-group sofas were full of people who were charismatically musical, there were also plenty of Vineyard believers who rarely, weakly, or very often never engaged in or experienced these charismatic religious modalities. If proper Vineyard religiosity consists of becoming a conversational partner with God, as Luhrmann avers, what are we to make of these other, ungifted individuals, and how are we to understand the draw that the Vineyard has on them? Luhrmann speaks of moments where prayer fails (2007:95); she does not address those instances where God is silent for a particular believer for more than ‘a season,’ but rather where he has been playing coy for as long as the game has been going on. Of course, these believers have narratives that they tell about their inability, predicating it either on weakness, or on a charismatically informed
reading of their self representations (one woman informed me that her “gift” was her capacity for being encouraging to others), but this is explication and not a subject position, and certainly not a fundamental orientation towards the divine. While part of this explanation may simply be that being in the Vineyard doesn’t structure these particular individuals’ personhood much, and that they are brought there by familial or other social ties such charismatically-inclined spouses or friends, they still must find some way to recognize themselves in Vineyard practices and discourses, which suggests that perhaps that the participatory, Lévy-Bruhl mode of being-in-the-world is not the only model of moral personhood that the Vineyard has to offer.

There are other aspects of the Vineyard that suggests that Luhrmann, however successful she has been in describing and analyzing vital aspects of the experience of Vineyard members, could have her account supplemented by a disjunctive logic of the self such as the one presented here. Luhrmann argues that when it comes to members of the Vineyard, their cognitive style and sense of self is dissimilar enough from conventional moderns that “[i]n some fundamental sense, they live in a different world.” (Luhrmann 2007: 99, emphasis in original). Given the ferocity with which I’ve seen people break into deafening tongues in a moment of revival, or the truly uncanny feeling that one gets when one is a witness to a deliverance from demons, I can see how that is true – the world that the Vineyard members inhabit is not the world of bounded selves that most moderns inhabit. But, as Luhrmann concedes, despite this profound cognitive difference, Vineyard members also “have no difficulty functioning with the logical, analytic, communicative skills needed for school and work.” (Luhrmann 2007:99-100). Luhrmann convincingly claims that this seeming contradiction is cured
by the fact that the sort of participatory religious thought that they engage in exists in a bounded domain, where the characteristic subject/object barrier breaching mode of mentation is limited to attributing thoughts plucked from their interior monologue to only one specific exterior entity: God. This practice is demarcated in such a way that attribution to God only occurs with a certain class of thoughts (those positive enough to be credited to a loving God), and this process of thought attribution is further limited inasmuch as it is a socially inculcated (learned) process.

This suggests, of course, that there are other, more familiar cognitive styles that are available to Vineyard members, and it would seem curious if there was not some degree of back-contamination from the “normal” world of bounded persons and external objects that colored their religious thought. What this means is that while we have to be mindful of how they forge a participatory mode of being with the divine, we also have to ask how what role other modes of cognition play in the religious ecology of Vineyard believers.

The value of this monograph is not solely in supplementing Luhrmann’s ethnographic record of The Vineyard, though; there is reason to focus on the possibilities of alternating framings of the self’s relation to alters in the world, that transcend friendly critique of just one author. Here I am thinking of one of the possible contributions that this thesis may make to the anthropology of Christianity as a sub-field. Because of the sub-field’s origins in ethnographic attempts to grapple with what ‘conversion’ means as a social fact when it was found in historically non-Christian locales, the anthropology of Christianity has tended to make its object comprehensible by contrasting it with the non-Christian milieu that the newly converted societies either
historically came out of in cases where the entire society converted (see, e.g., Robbins 2004), or, where only elements of a society converted, to compare the Christian elements with the larger non-Christian society that these new Christians found themselves imbricated in (see., e.g., Meyer 1999, Keller 2005, Keane 2007). This has resulted in a bifurcating analysis in which epistemologies, ontologies, ethics, language ideologies and logics of self are sundered between local, pre-Christian, and non-modern iterations, on one hand, and Global Christian modern ones on the other (see Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008). Even when dealing with the ethnography of Christianity in Christian counties, this tendency to rely on a contrasting analytic is apparent in two ways. The first is a tendency to locate Christianity as a fixed but growing transnational force that the local must orientate itself towards in particular configurations by individuals who identify not with regional ethnic or linguistic groups, but with that greater ascendant Christianity (see, e.g., Howell 2008). The second is in a tendency to see particular Christianities as dialectical response to extant critiques of the prior ways of being that have been offered by competing, hegemonic forms of Christianity; these new forms of Christianity that serve as an answer to this critique are usually thought of as being to a large degree a Christian re-articulation of ways of being that were unacceptable to the dominant Christian logic (see, e.g., Austin-Broos 1997). In short, all these are forms where the origins of Christianity, rather than its current space, or its short-term social future (as opposed to it’s eschatological one) are what are foregrounded. These are “before-and-after” stories, and Christianity stands in the place of the “after.” The inapplicability of this template, forged originally for recently non-Christian societies, or societies where the Christianization process has been incomplete,
for forms of Christianity situated in long-Christianized, or recently post-Christian, societies should be obvious, of course – a research paradigm predicated on the presence of an indigenous Christian teleology identified in ethnographic portraits of convert-cultures seems inapplicable in societies where, because of a long standing Christian presence, Christianity’s place in the imaginary is associated with what is normative, or with a degree of nostalgia, and therefore Christianity is read by many social actors as decidedly anti-modern.5

While it would be perverse to use a presently inapplicable tool simply because it has worked so well in the past, what I want to suggest here is that this contrastive analytic may have been effective for reasons that here-to-fore have not been fully understood. Splits in Christian subjectivity may not solely result from a gap between the competing Christian and non-Christian claims on proper action and understanding, but may also be aggravated by a split inherent in immanence and transcendence as possibilities inaugurated by a Christian metaphysics, and limitations inherent in obeying and listening both existing as different modalities.6 This is best explained by thinking through not only what is different between a Christian and a non-Christian milieu, but also what is continuous. In places where the quotidian and the material have been associated with a non-Christian order, it is only natural that immanence should be

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5 For a discussion of how similar Christian ideational structures can appear and function in significantly different ways, depending on the situation in which these beliefs are embedded, see Donham 1999, Friedman 2007: 427). It is in part for these very reasons that Chris Hann has been calling for a broader Anthropology of Christianity, where (in addition to paying more attention to alternate Christianities such as Eastern Orthodoxy), ethnographers would take on Western Christianity in traditionally Western milieus, an area that heretofore has been grossly ignored by anthropology (Hann 2007: 405).

6 For a parallel reading, which articulates a split within Evangelical ethics itself, see Elisha 2008.
thought of in non-Christian terms. In long-Christianized arenas, though, Christian forms of directly being in the world (as opposed to dealing directly with the divine, however constituted) needs to exist, even if it is at the limit case in the form of articulable and negatively valued, illegalities; and since that involves cultivating a studied distance from the divine, it is no accident that it should follow the alterity denying logic of the bounded and the submissive. Of course, this does not mean that convert-culture analytics can be unproblematically ported in to unpack non-convert culture cases. Further we should be mindful that there are versions of Christianity out there where the immanent-transcendent binary is inoperative (Cannell 2005, 2006). Finally, in a complex society with intense social differentiation associated with geographic difference and social stratification, and the possibility of multiple and antagonistic projects of self-production that can be indulged in, this spit between immanent and transcendent may ride on top of numerous other schisms in people’s sense of themselves and how they navigate the world, with the immanent/obedient and transcendent/participatory split being used to order the divergent and fluid late-capitalist field.

Some final words about methodology and representational choices, before we begin – for purposes of clarity if nothing else. This monograph, as was mentioned earlier in this introduction, is predicated on a methodological atheist sensibility, the logic of which is not to deny the existence of trans-human actors (or for that matter to affirm them), but instead to bracket that question to see to what degree social, cultural, and cognitive-psychological explanatory frameworks can elucidate the phenomenon under investigation. While methodological atheism is in accord with my own particular
intuition regarding the way that the universe functions, my choice to follow this default anthropological assumption (but see Howell 2007) is not controlled by this. The logic behind this choice is one of disciplinary rigor – anthropology should yield no ground to any other discipline, until it is manifestly clear that a purportedly anthropological object is not open to anthropological explication; furthermore, if one does grant that supernatural entities exist, then one should turn to, say, theology as a proper space to think them through. This being said, while nothing in this monograph runs against naturalistic explanations for charismatic behavior that would involve a pedagogy of the senses and the honing of human behavioral capacities, the project of this work is not to ‘explain’ the origins of charismatic religious practice either. Rather, it is to trace out the cultural and relational logic of personhood that one can see implicit in these practices, and to think through how they might shape numerous conceptions and practices in various domains of quotidian religious behavior for this population; as such, I would hope that this work may have as much potential use to those who refuse methodological atheism as a starting point for their intellectual projects as it does for those who accept the principle unquestionably.

The second issue is the decidedly abstract ways in which particular figures are portrayed in this monograph. While there are certain moments where individuals are presented in a way that accords with the realist or psychologist conventions that informs much of the current ethnographic literature, where there is a demand to display certain informants in ways that overcome a kind of abstract description and allow them to become unique, on the whole I have chosen to avoid that route. This is not because there is anything particularly wrong with such a technique, either as a rhetorical move
(in most of cultural anthropology), as a mode of depiction, or as an analytic (in person-centered ethnographies, where the tension between the individual’s relations with a world – a world including, often, the ethnographer – is highlighted). As a rhetoric, these moves immunize anthropology (to a degree) from accusations that it is an objectifying enterprise, as a mode of depiction, it captures some of what Malinowski (1984) called the “imponderables” of quotidian life, and as an analytic it helps us think through the relation between the affective and cognitive on one hand, and the social and cultural on the other.

Despite these clear advantages, I have opted not to take this path. The reason behind this is in part an effect of my object – if I am looking at formal and iterable modes of relating to the divine, to emphasize particular persons may highlight whatever role that these forms may play in a libidinal economy or a process of self-formation, but it is to erase the relation that these modes of relating may have as abstract but complementary possibilities generated by the field of practice. These other questions could be quite informative, and should be addressed, but before we can understand how these forms might concatenate with affect and cognition (see, e.g., Spiro 1987: 145-160), we should understand the forms themselves. These are also a function of the milieu in which my object is found, that of a West in which a certain kind of easy individualism is presumed; if anthropology is to function by estranging our object such that it is recognizable, denying the particularizing, individuating framing does that work. Finally, it is about a desire to be clear. These modes of relating to the divine are just that – modes. No more than a church ethnography is a total picture of the community that the church is located in, portrayal of modes of religiosity and relations
to (or under) the divine is not a total picture of the person – or at least not of persons who are not embedded in total religious institutions. To focus on (or fashion) individual figures would be to suggest that this one sliver of their lives has captured them in their entirety, and while this ethnography does not shy away from commenting on economic, political, and socio-cultural factors that might exceed a narrow reading of what comprises ‘religion,’ these people are too multifold, too rich and contrasting, to be reducible to what is presented here; therefore, I choose not to take steps that might lead to that illusion.

The third issue is the chasm between structure and what we might call practice (or, considering how much the religious ideation dealt with here is consciously held, we might equally choose to call praxis). In societies such as ours, where it is action and not a normative whole that is valued, it appears that we live in a realm of pure practice; practice, however, is relational, and the relations formed by practice are mutually informative and constructing. This is a logic, therefore, that Marshall Sahlins (1985) has called “performative structures,” where practice may seem at times to occlude structure, but where a structural logic can still be intuited. Because of the relationship between performance and structure in individuating socio-cultural topoi like our own, this ethnography may appear to drift in an almost dreamlike way between these two analytics, but that is simply a function not of any conceptual schism, but merely because the ethnographic material in moments points to the trajectories of actions, and in other moments to the asymptotes that these trajectories approach, but never quite achieve. This is not to say that the structures created here are not predicated on a decentering that allows for a certain amount of play (Derrida 1978), or that the elements that might
constitute a structure are not capable of being performed in contexts that would at once change the meaning accorded this new repetition, and challenge the easy reading given to previous presentations (Derrida 1988); in fact, the central thesis of the later section of this chapter is predicated on the portability of some of these religious practices to new imaginative arenas. But there has been for too long in anthropology a forgetting that the aporias created by iterability are complementary to structure – of the same status of structure, and predicated on the same mechanisms of signification that makes structure possible, to be sure – but these other uses does not erase from structures the fact that structure is always being performatively recreated.

**The structure of the monograph itself**

The organizational scheme of this monograph is three fold. First, it is an attempt to intervene in what I take to be still crystallizing theoretical problems in the Anthropology of Christianity: language ideology, hermeneutics, exchange/economic rationality, ritual, temporality, and politics. In each chapter (save the historical one, and the two summarizing chapters at the end), I select one of these problems and think it through a particular Vineyard practice. This monograph can also be viewed as a move from intimate arenas, where (again, after addressing the founding of the organization in the history chapter) we are dealing with believers as either isolated individuals, dyads, or small groups, and then moving on to larger practices where the church, the

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7 Small prayer groups are a main feature of much of contemporary social life, and often stand as a spot of intimacy and bonding for contemporary American Christians (Wuthnow 1994a, 1994b). As in other contemporary American movements (Wuthnow 1994a; 1994b), Vineyard small groups are weekly or bi-weekly affairs, usually held in a
denomination, or even the whole of the political may be the implicit or explicit horizon that makes legible the activity being discussed. Finally (and here we do not have to make an exception for the history chapter!), this serves as a sort of processual ethnographic history of the Vineyard, where after describing how the Vineyard comes into being, I first cover the ecstatic practices that helped give shape to the Vineyard, moving on towards the tithing and economic practices that follow after a church has acquired a certain solidity (and economic need), and then move to both more recently instituted styles of worship, and alternatives to a reflex-life automatic turn to the right in Christian politics, two changes that are relatively new to the Vineyard and to a large degree spearheaded by the new generation of congregants who are roughly age thirty and under that I have already alluded to. It is by no means a *proper* history of the Vineyard, of course, as this work is concerned with ethnographic-level phenomena, and the periodization that takes place here must be acknowledged as in the end merely a heuristic, since everything described here was in the broad sense temporally co-terminal, observed as it was during the same stretch of fieldwork (a two year period, from May of 2003 to May of 2005). Still, though, it is the hope that this mode of presentation will give some sense for how the Vineyard has been transforming during the early years of the twenty-first century after Christ.

This monograph begins with a chapter that traces out the history of the Vineyard through following the autobiographical representations made by its effective founder, believer’s home, which supplement larger weekly church services and are designed to provide opportunities for intimacy and bonding among believers. Membership in these small groups frequently indexes heightened levels of church participation and leadership.

8 Such a document already exist, regardless – see Jackson 2000.
John Wimber. In it, I show how his history as a church growth specialist, which gave him a position in a then growing network of Pentecostals and Evangelicals who were forging a coalition so that they could transform themselves in a movement to better transform the world, allowed him to create a productive, but ideologically unstable space in which to imagine and realize new forms of Christian religiosity. Combining this with interview material taken from pastors and other long term members of the Vineyard, I show the transformative power this new form of religious practice has on those who were exposed to it, though this transformative power often led to social conflict both within the Vineyard, and with other Christian denominations and para-church bodies; I also lay out the history of Shores Vineyard Christian Fellowship, a church that was grounded in these original Vineyard moments and that is to some degree a vision of where the Vineyard might go.

The next section traces out the conflicting models of personhood that all find a place in the spiritual ecology of the Vineyard. I begin the second chapter with an account of possession and gifts as they are practiced in the Vineyard. That chapter is centered around one moment – an evening of prophecy that turned into an impromptu deliverance from the demonic. In that section of the book, I address possession through the lens of language ideology, and show how the tensions in the Vineyard’s practices of speech and of charismatic gifts complicate narratives of Protestant Language Ideology that have received a certain level of consensus with recent Anthropological ethnographers of Christian communities.

I follow the discussion of language ideology and the Charismatic gifts to turn to another topic that has been the object of recent writing in ethnographies of Christian
populations, that of hermeneutic practices behind the interpretation of the Bible and other texts. Here, I argue that the co-existence of Charismatic and Evangelical models of authority has to a degree corrupted the distinction between text and speech, such that spoken charismatic communication is parsed and analyzed in a manner that is structurally similar to traditional Evangelical models for textual analysis, while Biblical texts themselves are treated in a way that is similar to how spoken word is pictured in anthropological accounts of Protestant Language Ideology. Finally, this section on personal interpretative and bodily practices moves back to the grounding of the social, with a discussion on how the various models of subjectivity outlined here shape the depiction of economic practice in the Vineyard imaginary. Making use of an economic anthropological heuristic, that of ‘spheres of exchange,’ I trace out different, but hierarchically striated, modes of economic activity found within the Vineyard pastoral leadership as well as in the laity.

This discussion of economic activity serves as a bridge to the final section of this monograph, in which the models of differing kinds of personhood are revisited as different social stances towards alterity. Paralleling the multiple modes of personhood discussed in early chapters, I sketch out divergent approaches to this problem in the Vineyard, and suggest that each ‘solution’ has its own associated costs. In the first chapter of this new section, I address the Vineyard’s reaction to the threat of generational change and of a social post-modernity, arguing that a certain fear towards the possibility of radical otherness places limits on the ideological and ritual processes that some Vineyard members have constructed to contain the generational and epistemic discontinuity that is occurring within both the Vineyard, and in some
segments of American Evangelicalism more generally. In the following chapter, I suggest that newly emerging elements of the Vineyard (elements that are, however, informed by long-extant components of the Vineyard’s thoughts on proper social action) paradoxically limit their effectiveness as agents of social change by demanding alterity as the both the precondition for and grounds of political action. While neither approach – that of alterity’s rejection or embrace – is necessarily preferable to the other, I close this section with the observation that until the Vineyard refines its dialectic of openness/discontinuity and agentiveness/closure (a process which, was beginning to be engaged in when my fieldwork was over) the Vineyard’s self-image and social action may be plagued by these antinomies. In the penultimate chapter I synthesize the ethnographic material in this monograph, and argue that this play between open selves, discontinuity, surprise, and an agency centered around participation as one series, and closed bodies, the known, and an agency that is enacted through obedience and illocutionary act of subservient affiliation as a second series, may be not merely a historical artifact resulting from the Vineyard’s marriage of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, but is a function of some fundamental difficulties in imagining the American self that is not particular to the Vineyard, or to “new paradigm” churches, alone. This work closes, as many monographs do, with a summarizing moment in which the arguments made are recapitulated.

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CHAPTER ONE – FOUNDING
DO DUAL DENOMINATIONS EXIST?

It is 1984, in a church in Anaheim California, just minutes from both Disneyland and the Crystal Cathedral; despite the fact that it is a church, the nondescript simple modernism of the stage makes it appear for all the world like a hotel conference room.\(^9\) The front of the room is decorated in a smattering of ferns, possibly plastic, that add color to what otherwise would be a rather beige set; everything else on stage is either sepia toned or smothered in shadows. The only two distinct visual landmarks are a grand piano, tucked back in the stage-left corner, and a simple wood desk at from that appears to be as much a lectern for a professor as a pulpit for a pastor. The man who ambles up to the podium, it will turn out, is a little bit of both, and also a showman to boot; greeted by applause from the two thousand or so sized crowd before he even speaks, he has a casualness that seems smooth, though not studied. He’s wearing a blue untucked shirt, khakis, and sneakers; he has a full, though not wild, beard, which in conjunction with his calm demeanor gives him a rather paternal air (though more along the lines of a kind father than a stern patriarch). Given that he is appearing before an audience that is in wait, specifically, for him, it is striking to note that his first words are of his own anticipation – he’s been looking forward to this conference for a while, and though the idea for it first occurred a couple of years ago, it hadn’t been time yet.

\(^9\) There is a strong tendency for contemporary Evangelical and Charismatic churches to use the stark modernism of the conference as the organizing spatial trope of their churches (Loveland and Wheeler 2003: 154). This is in part a function of their utilitarian bent when it comes to church growth, as we will see later on in this chapter in a discussion of the architectural space of Shores Vineyard, but also, perhaps, this is part an unconscious nod to the importance that conferences themselves play in the propagation and vitality of this religious practice (Coleman 2000).
This conference, he states, was based on a course, ‘Mission Class 510;’ this course was originally offered at Fuller Theological Seminary, through the School of World Missions, and it was a course on miracles as an applied science.

It would be wrong to act as if one could boil off the entirety of the practices and history of the Vineyard and have remaining as some essential element just this one course or this one speaker; the Vineyard, as an organization, has a history that extends past that of John Wimber, the portly conference speaker (and effective founder of the Vineyard) just referenced; but that does not mean that the Vineyard and John Wimber are easy to separate in any narrative, as a quick review of the history of the Vineyard shows. Despite the inaugurating status commonly given to Wimber, the Vineyard was actually founded by a former Calvary Chapel ordained pastor, Kenn Gulliksen, as a Los Angeles home Bible-study group in nineteen-seventy-five; it quickly outgrew its initial surroundings, and proceeded to meet in places as diverse as the Beverly Hills Women’s club and a Santa Monica Lifeguard station. Gulliksen’s early Vineyard was notable for having success in attracting a great number of musicians, including perhaps most famously for a spell, Bob Dylan. John Wimber only joined the Vineyard after he split with another early Jesus-Movement church, Chuck Smith’s strongly pre-millennial dispensationalist Calvary Chapel (see Balmer and Todd 1994, Harding and Stewart 2003 for more on Calvary Chapel); the cause of the split, it may be unsurprising to learn for those familiar with the Vineyard, was John Wimber’s strong embrace of the Charismatic gifts, a phenomenon that Chuck Smith, as a former Four Square Full
Gospel preacher, found to be disruptive. In April nineteen eighty two, during a Calvary Chapel prayer retreat, Chuck Smith ‘encouraged’ John Wimber to leave Calvary Chapel and affiliate himself with Gulliksen’s Vineyard, which would itself become an independent movement. When Wimber did leave, thirty other Calvary Chapel churches opted to align themselves with the Vineyard as well (Jackson 2000:84-87). Shortly after Wimber joined, the Vineyard was formalized as VMI (or Vineyard Ministries International), an association of affiliated and technically independent churches, and Gulliksen stepped aside to allow Wimber to take a leadership position.

It is probably worth noting that when it is recounted either in denominational histories, or by those who lived through it, the original decision by individual Church leaders to either stay with Calvary Chapel or to leave and join the Vineyard seems to be one driven by differing positions regarding charismatic pneumonology, and occasionally by eschatological concerns, but much more quotidian elements also factored in. This was evidenced by one story I heard of a charismatically inclined Calvary Chapel church that almost refused to join up with the Vineyard because the chief pastor had just recently bought a set of satin bomber jackets with the church’s

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10 The Foursquare Gospel denomination was a meddling of Azusa-street style Pentecostalism and the Salvation Army, and was more or less brought into the world by the strong personality of Amie Semple McPherson. “Sister’ Aimee’s” own dramatics far out shadow anything discussed in this monograph – her extravagances included not only her worship style (large, complex stage shows, including musical numbers, were a commonplace in her Sunday worship at the Angelus Temple), but her personal life as well (she was famous for being her purported kidnapping, which may well have been a screen to cover an illicit rendezvous with her lover in Mexico). Given this, it is perhaps unsurprising that Chuck Smith preferred a more ‘dialed-down’ style of worship.

11 Calvary Chapel’s strongly Darby- and Scofield- influenced apocalyptic scenarios (see T. Weber 1979, Boyer 1992, Harding 2001), left little room for dissenters on issues of the end times, mostly due to Chuck Smiths hard stance which was unlike Wimber’s more open approach to these issues.
Calvary Chapel affiliation printed on them; another person who would later ascend to a position of pastorship at another church was simply told by his then pastor one day that they were now a “Vineyard” instead of a “Calvary Chapel,” a distinction that then had no meaning, or importance, to him at the time.

Under Wimber’s leadership, The Vineyard became a religious denomination that refused to label itself as a denomination, preferring instead to be thought of as a church planting “movement,” a word used to indicate the same kind of vibrancy and temporality that is associated with other types of semi-acephalous movements, such as political and aesthetics groundswells. This refusal of denominational status is in some ways a reflection of a long-standing trend in Evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity to see religion, and things associated with religion (such as denominations) as belonging to a fallen, this-worldly status, and also as part of a common longing to recapture the organizational ‘primitivism’ of the early church. Regardless, this refusal of denomination status is effectively something of a fiction – the Vineyard came very close to formally labeling itself as a denomination in the nineteen eighties (Jackson 2000), and it is often treated as a denomination by outside observes, as evidenced by the inclusion of three articles concerning the Vineyard (Jackson 2005, Miller 2005, Williams 2005) in Church, Identity, and Change (Roozen and Nieman 2005), an edited volume concerned with the fate of denominations in the twenty-first century.

In part because of this refusal of a fully governmental, communal, corporate identity apart from a historical allegiance to Wimber, in part because of John Wimber’s own charismatic nature, and in part because of the tumultuous history of the organization (some of which will be addressed in this chapter), Wimber is a sort of
fetish object through which the institution is often thought, and his legacy often tends to be read as a metonym for the Vineyard as a whole. As stated earlier, this is in a sense an error – especially since the Vineyard has matured and diversified since Wimber’s death. These warnings aside, though, what John Wimber is about to say next on that podium in some ways stands as a template for the history and the theology of the foundational moments of the Vineyard movement. What John Wimber is going to do is follow the very Protestant tradition of giving a biographically inflected conversion narrative. What will make this re-enactment of that convention unusual is the fact that it is not a single conversion narrative; rather it is one that is doubled, with the first conversion, purposefully presented in the most estranged, alien form possible, laying the groundwork for the second conversion narrative that follows hot on the first narrative’s heels. And, this chapter argues, the necessity of his having to tell two conversion narratives is a vital key to understanding not just the folk theology of the Vineyard, but also the dual modes of subjectivity that the movement engenders. And while this subjectivity is not specific to the Vineyard, the Vineyard’s specific history is such that the working portions of this mode of subjectivity are laid out particularly clearly in the Vineyard. To some degree this is a result of the tremendous influence that the Vineyard has had as an organization of the wider stream of Charismatically inflected Christianity, both in North America (Miller 1997, Shibley 1996) and in the world (Miller 2002:38). But to a large degree this is because in an age of megachurches, parachurch organizations, and heightened Christian media, the Vineyard exemplifies many of the larger trends that have marked Protestant and post-Protestant Christianity since the nineteen-sixties; specifically, the need to create a common matrix in which
both Evangelical and Charismatic religious strains can mutually recognize themselves as fellow-believers. To understand these forces, this chapter argues, we have to understand the way in which they not only cognitively map the secular, the Evangelical, and the Charismatic, but also understand how these worlds mutually implicate one another’s existence, and thus help facilitate a certain degree of what would be called ‘code switching’ in linguistic anthropology (McAlister 1998) between these three domains.

**The course: MC510**

Still low key, John Wimber begins his re-creation of his Fuller Theological Seminary class. Before we begin to present (and unpack) what he has to say, though, it is worth going through what may at first seem to be an obvious exercise and ask what it is about a course in miracles that makes it arresting enough to be recreated for the benefit of a two thousand strong non-student audience. What this exercise will also do for us is to highlight the pre-existing strains in American Protestant practice – strains that, this monograph argues, movements such as Third Wave charismatic Christianity,\(^\text{12}\) and later the Emergent Church movement,\(^\text{13}\) have attempted subsequently to sublimate.

\(^{12}\) Third Wave is used to identify a segment of Pentecostal-style American Christian practices that historically emerged after Pentecostalism (the ‘First Wave’) and after the Charismatic movements of the nineteen fifties and sixties (the ‘Second Wave’). In the first wave, individuals who understood themselves to have gifts such as glossollalia, healing, prophecy, or the ability to cast out demons left to join (or form) independent Pentecostal churches and denominations. During the ‘Second Wave,’ individuals often chose to retain their denominational loyalties, and instead worked and worshipped in conjunction with other like-minded members within their church, often as part of special interest groups or intentional communities (see, e.g., Csordas 2001). In counter-distinction to these movements, the ‘Third Wave’ was marked independent churches or
Two interrelated things, the content and the venue, made this course unusual when it was first offered. First, the content: this class was originally taught in the spring of 1982 with Peter Wagner, famous for inventing the term ‘third wave’ and who would later help to popularize South American models of territorial-based Spiritual Warfare worldwide, as the instructor of record; according to most popular press and personal accounts, though, most of the work of designing and teaching the class was done by John Wimber (who himself had the status of adjunct professor at Fuller). The official title of the course was called “The Miraculous and Church Growth,” though it was also know as “Signs and Wonders.”

Signs and wonders, at least in this context, stood as shorthand for powerful displays of Pentecostal-style activities such as healing, speaking in tongues, and casting out demons. The central argument of the course was that Evangelical ministry, that is converting non-believers and bringing them into the fold of the church, could be successfully supplemented by the use of miraculous new denominations (like the first wave), but had a series of beliefs about the role of the gifts that were more like those of the second wave. Specifically, the third wave attitude towards the charisma was characterized by a relative underemphasis on the salvific role and social prominence of speaking in tongues, a more democratic access to divine gifts, and a less sharp distinction between the “spirit-filled” and those who do not have access to the gifts (Wagner 2002). The Vineyard is considered to be a prototypical “Third Wave” church (Mellor 1997).

13 The emergent church is best described as a new trans-denominational Protestant movement characterized by its interest in experimental forms of worship and often self-avowedly “postmodern” biblical hermeneutics; see chapter four, infra, and Bielo in press.

14 At least this is the title as presented by Hummel (1993) and by Hubbard (1987). The only complete denominational history of the Vineyard, written by Jackson, was the title of the course as “Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth” (Jackson 2000:100); according to Hummel, this was the title of the lecture that John Wimber gave as part of John Waggoner’s pre-MC510 course, “Church Growth II” (Hummel 1993: 206). References to both names, as well as to a third name, ‘Signs and Wonders,’ proliferate on the internet; among my few informants who had first hand knowledge of this course, there was no agreed-upon name.
demonstrations; his warrant for this claim was that according to his reading of the Gospels, miraculous acts were always joined by a verbal declaration regarding the imminence or nature of the Kingdom of God (Wimber 1985; Hummel 1993:202-203).

This concept of the Kingdom, as we shall see, is in some ways as vital to the Vineyard’s early formation as the conception of “Power Evangelism,” though because it was to a degree the conceptual and abstract that was indexed by the miraculous, it did not receive the same degree of attention in the Christian press as Wimber’s pedagogy of the miraculous; this is also no doubt in part due to the fact that while “Power Evangelism” as a practice and as a term was unique to the Vineyard, the conception of the Kingdom had a longer and more varied history, starting in its most recent iteration with the professor and Fuller seminary theologian, George Eldon Ladd. As presented by Wimber, Ladd’s conception of the Kingdom was God’s reign on earth, in which there was a foretaste of the salvation that would come when Jesus’s apocalyptic and eschatological promise was fulfilled. Or rather, to be more exact, the Kingdom was the moments and spaces in which Jesus’s eschatological and salvific promise was already unfolded in the here and now; for Wimber, the temporality of the Kingdom was as important as what it heralded, and that temporality was a disjunctive, uneven one. As Wimber put it, what had occurred with the incarnation of Jesus was that “[t]he future age, the kingdom of God, invaded the present age, the realm of Satan” (1985: 24), and this invasion, while in some sense a fait accompli, since Jesus’ return and victory was beyond question, was in another sense still only partial and ongoing. This meant that the Kingdom was something that could be seen in flashes in the here and now, where the miraculous broke out, in the territories controlled by the enemy. Perhaps unsurprisingly,
given the fact that it was grounded at once in the concept of immanent reign, and at the same time in transcendence, Wimber’s vision of the Kingdom waivered between these instances of supernatural freedom that could not be tied to any particular human institution, and something that was at human beck and call. In some moments, Wimber was emphatic that the church was not the Kingdom, being at most a conduit to the Kingdom of God (Wimber 1985:24), while at other moments, Wimber suggested that the Kingdom were already in the possession of believers, if only they would have the power to use: “[w]e have been given the keys to the kingdom, the authority and power over the enemy, but if we do not exercise that power, it is of little use.” (Wimber 1985: 28).

While there was little engagement with Wimber’s use of Ladd by critics, Wimber’s claim regarding Power Evangelism was not uncontroversial, in part because it suggested that traditional forms of Evangelism were not worthy of the modifier “Power.” The degree to which the use of miraculous powers was designed to not merely supplement, but perhaps eclipse, more traditional means of Evangelism in Wimber’s mind is something that has been argued over. Later versions of Power Evangelism, the book that grew from the course, were rewritten as a response to charges that Wimber had described the more quotidian forms of evangelizing as ‘subservient’ to power evangelism. In the new version of the book these various Evangelizing techniques were presented in a style that accentuated their commonalities (Hummer 1993: 203; Jackson 2000:112), with Wimber observing that “preaching and demonstrating the gospel [through ‘Power Evangelism’] are not mutually exclusive activities, they work together, reinforcing each other” (Wimber 1985:46, 51, quoted in Hummer 1993: 203). In
Wimber’s defense, though, it should be noted that this claim of a complementary relation between evangelism and “Power Evangelism” was also emphasized in the version of the MC510 class that was recorded on video-tape. There is no way to adjudicate here between the competing claims that this was (on one hand) simply emphasizing aspects of the original message that had escaped the notice of critics, or (on the other hand) that this was a change in message resulting from contestation with the broader, offended evangelical community, and therefore a later amendment that suggests it was not part of the Vineyard’s original core message. In some ways, the very undecidability of the question of the relative rank of new charismatic vs. classical evangelical modes of religious recruitment in the Vineyard is more important for the argument that is presented here, in as much as it points to the validity of both modes of framing the problem in the eyes of both the Vineyard and its critics.

It was not merely the topic of ‘the miraculous’ that attracted attention to the course, however. The original format of the class was ten weekly three-hour evening lectures, which did not set it apart to greatly from other classes at Fuller, that then as well as now are often designed such that students can take courses while continuing full-time outside employment (with their employers as many times as not being churches or para-church organizations). The description of the course in Fuller’s catalogue was rather prosaic, as well – for the most part. The course catalogue stated that the course was mainly concerned with “understanding the effects of the supernatural signs and wonders on the growth of the church. It is approached from the Biblical, theological, historical, and contemporary perspectives. Special attention is given to the ministry of healing.”
The only sign that this class might be different from normal seminarian academic fare is the closing sentence in the course description: “Field experience is an important dimension of the course.” (SIGNS AND WONDERS 7). What was different was that the lecture component was followed by a one hour ‘clinic,’ where the students would attempt, in a trial and error format, to put into practice in the classroom the various charismatic gifts that had been lectured about earlier, often with John Wimber giving a moment by moment exegesis on the charismatic activity that was unfolding live before the audience, in a manner that seems to be not entirely unlike grand rounds at a psychiatric hospital. As it is recounted, healing was a rather common occurrence; Peter Waggoner himself claimed to have his high blood pressure supernaturally healed during one of these clinics (Hummel 1993; Jackson 1999: 117). Another example, taken from an interview with a MC510 enrollee that appeared in the Australian magazine Renewal Journal, gives a more detailed account

What happened in the third lecture he [John Wimber] gave - he would have a lecture then a workshop - he finished his lecture and asked people who had sicknesses of some kind to come forward. There were about ten of them. The first guy was a football player who was studying theology at Fuller. He came because his leg had until that week been in a cast and the cast had been removed after a month. It was his Achilles’ tendon that had been torn. So John propped him against the wall and asked him to demonstrate how much movement he had in both his feet. It was very limited in range as it would be after a tendon had been sown up.

Then John prayed for him and he started shaking. He finally went onto the floor. And I was worried because one leg was kicking wildly and I thought that was his injured leg. So I said to three guys, "Look stop him. Get hold of that leg and stop him from doing this." When they got hold of the leg they were all shaking too. I was mad at them and said, "Stop it! Do what you’re supposed to do and hold that leg." I was concerned about his leg but I was mistaken. It was the other leg that was injured and when
he got up he had a full range of movement. I got used to seeing things like that.

I asked John, "How do we get into this stuff? Do we get zapped by the Holy Ghost or what?"

John’s reply was "No, you just stick your neck out and start doing it." He says in retrospect that he saw great faith in me. See a real Christian has the Holy Spirit and has potentially all the gifts of the Spirit. That was suddenly revealed to me. I thought, "Well, I don’t like his answer but I’ll start." So we started praying for people’s headaches and sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn’t.\(^\text{15}\)

Understandably, a class predicated on the suspension of natural law had difficulty following the academic laws set down by Fuller’s administration – according to one informant, each evening before class (which was held in the basement of the covenant church located right next to the Fuller Campus) Peter Waggoner would ask students to leave if they were not either enrolled or formally auditing the class; this request was never honored, however, and the two hundred person sized class enrolment was only a fraction of the six to eight hundred people who were routinely present (also see Hummel 1993). Despite its formal status as a clinic, Wimber at times also seemed to present the class as something that stood outside not only the formal rules of the academy, but its scholastic imperative as well; one Vineyard pastor who attended the class recalls Wimber seeing him in the audience, with the future pastor-then student holding Greek flash-cards in his hand; during the raucous prayer session that shortly ensued Wimber shouted out to him (apparently in reference to his earlier attempt at multi-tasking), “This is a lot better than parsing Greek verbs, isn’t it?”

Consisting, then, of a challenge to basic Evangelical beliefs, presented in a mode that was a challenge to basic Evangelical praxis, and at the same time in rebellion against the very academic institution that made the course possible, MC 510 seemed more than compelling in itself. However, to stop here and ignore the role that the institution that housed it, Fuller Theological Seminary, contributed would be to cut our analysis short, and prevent us from fully grasping how completely John Wimber’s course challenged the pervading American Christian categories that had been in place since the middle of the twentieth century.

It may appear grand to say that a discussion of how John Wimber’s course related to Fuller Theological Seminar can serve as a privileged point of reference for thinking through a whole Century of religious practice; but Fuller Seminary is one of those rare pivotal institutions, such as Columbia University was for anthropology during the early 20th century, where the academic institution and the larger deadlocked social forces that made that academic situation possible dialectically transformed one another, at once serving as a space where larger social antinomies were written into the institution, and a point from which the institution could transform how those oppositional forces were manifested in the wider world.

Specifically, Fuller Theological Seminary as an institution was the result of a double split within American Protestant Culture: Fuller is only thinkable in terms of the split between a ‘liberal’ Mainline Protestantism and Fundamentalism that occurred in the opening decades of the twentieth century, and the secondary split within Fundamentalism itself, where a Neo-Evangelical sensibility led some Fundamentalists to retain the anti-modernism that was so much a part of their movement, but which also
led them to reject Fundamentalism’s inward turn away from the larger secular world. Rather, this new generation of Evangelicals saw their mission as engaging the larger society, often through intellectual activity. This in the end resulted in the inauguration of Evangelicalism as a separate, interstitial category between Mainline Protestantism and Fundamentalism (see, e.g., Stone 1997), and this separate meta-denominational category found the academic voice it was striving for at Fuller Seminary.

The excluded term in this triad (Mainline/Fundamentalist/Evangelical) was the other major fission that occurred in North American Protestantism in the opening moments of the twentieth Century – Pentecostalism. An offshoot of a radicalized form of Wesleyan Methodism, and depending on the scholars asked seen as originating either at the inauguration of the 20th century in Kansas or during the 1907 Azusa street revival, Pentecostalism grew to national and international prominence during the twentieth century (see generally Cox 2005, Synan 1997, Wacker 2002). However, despite its rapid growth, Pentecostalism was not a part of the debates that shaped Fuller theological seminar before the nineteen eighties. This was striking not merely because of Pentecostalism’s increasing numerical strength, but because its stance towards the supernatural was not unrelated to the debates regarding inerrancy that was so divisive for much of Fuller’s history. In response to Mainline Protestantism’s claims, Fundamentalists had, for most of the 20th century, been increasingly emphasizing the supernatural aspects of their faith, including (as part of the tenets that gave the group its name, the ‘Fundamentals’) “the virgin birth, the miracles of Christ, his bodily resurrection, and his second coming,” not to mention an apocalyptic theory, Dispensationalism, that stresses “divine interventions on human history” (Marsden
1987: 292). Indeed, Fundamentalism’s central claim of the inerrancy of scripture, while in part derived from a particular hermeneutic emphasis on plain readings (see Marsden 1980), could also be read as containing a supernatural element in that it necessitated a divine and perfect inspiration of the authors (Marsden 1987:292). This exclusion of Pentecostal practice from having a place at the Evangelical table seems all the more worthy of note when one considers that some Pentecostal denominations were even included in the National Association of Evangelicals (Stone 1997: 77), the coalition set up by former Fundamentalists to increase interdenominational fellowship and thereby, they hoped, also increase the likelihood of revival. While there are certainly differences in what is considered proper performative affect between these two religion orientations, with Evangelicalism associated with relative control and sobriety, and Pentecostalism allowing for a far more untempered emotional palette (see, e.g., Harding 2001: 247-269), given the institutional and theological commonalities, it would seem natural that Fundamentalism’s open minded, coalition-concerned inheritors, Evangelicals, could easily find a space for Pentecostal-style worship and healing at Fuller. As we shall see, though, this presumption would be incorrect.

The controversy

While the course was apparently considered to be a success, within the space of a year or two, a very damning bill of particulars began to be levied against it. As presented by Allan Hubbard (Professor of Old Testament and President of Fuller at the time of the controversy) in his forward to the published formal review that Fuller Seminar conducted of Wagoner’s and Wimber’s course after the troubles hit critical mass, MCC
510 was accused of generating a very vexing set of headaches for the school, and for the
dearer Evangelical community:

[Q]uestions which had been probably been latent from the beginning of
the course began to surface. Criticism arrived from pastors whose
student-interns had been indiscreet or rash in the application of what they
had heard (or thought they heard) in the course. Faculty members were
called to counsel students or members of their families when
disillusionment followed their failure to experience the power of healing
proclaimed in the classroom; a few persons were caught in a backlash of
naïve attempts to discern demons. John Wimber – founder of the
Vineyard movement and adjunct instructor along with C. Peter Wagner
and Charles Kraft, our professors responsible for the course – came to be
linked much more closely with Fuller in the minds of the public than his
busy schedule of pastoral and conference ministry warranted; his
audiences and readers were tempted to impute his opinions and
approaches to our faculty more readily that the facts would support.
Questions arose about the theological wisdom of conducting healing
services in an academic rather than churchly setting. Eagerness to
experience the works of the Spirit and to prepare our students to minister
in deed as well as word short-circuited the signals of caution that usually
prevail in a place like ours. In short, to borrow the language of another
discipline, our engineering outran our science. (Hubbard 1987: 7)

There were numerous reasons for this allergic reaction to the “Signs and Wonders”
course by several of the Fuller faculty members. In addition to the items forthrightly
listed above, a common compliant was that a high number of the auditors of the course
were not enrolled in the course, and that even among those who were enrolled, a great
deal of them were not seminary students, but were instead from Vineyard churches, and
that they had no intention of entering one of the degree granting programs at Fuller
(Jackson 2000:111). Whatever the truthfulness of the claim, this did hurt the course’s
academic standing in the eyes of some faculty members. Beyond mere academics,
though, there were some elements of the Fuller Faculty who saw the course as a sort of
existential threat to the seminary, and to Evangelicalism at large. To these faculty
members, there was a fear that the Evangelical movement, having worked itself free from the excesses of a Fundamentalist supernaturalism that had foreclosed so many possibilities of reaching out to a wider culture, was in danger of being swamped by a “heightened wave” of a Pentecostal supernaturalism embodied by this course; this fear, to the minds of these academics, overshadowed the possibilities of further alliances with Pentecostals and Charismatics that this course could have built (Marsden 1987: 294).

Due to these difficulties, a general moratorium, pending faculty review, was placed on the course in March of 1986, and later that year Fuller Seminary released its report. The document must have been written under both expedited and unnerving conditions. The report itself, a sixty-eight page document, was finished by the close of the year; numerous typos in the bound edition of the report, which Fuller Seminary self-published the next year, indicate the speed of the report’s production, as well as its reproduction as a published public document. As stated earlier, the course had received a high degree of public attention in the Evangelical print media, including the previously mentioned special issue of *Christian Life* magazine. As a result, this was not a minor academic review conducted away from the spotlight. As the report itself acknowledges, during the moratorium, “hundreds” of inquiries from across the country to Fuller, requesting to be given the reasons for the moratorium on the course, and asking as to the likelihood of it being scheduled again at some future time (Hubbard 1987: 8).

While the committee that authored the paper included the purported course founder, Peter Wagner, the report was not positive. First, the centrality of healing to a Christian ministry was challenged. While the report acknowledged the signal properties
of healing as an indication of the advent of the Kingdom, it stressed that in its view that healing was not the sole sign of Christ’s reign; indices of the Kingdom, according to the report, also included “freedom to the oppressed, food to the hungry, power to the weak, and judgment to the proud” (Smedes et. al. 1987:17). The second finding of the committee put not only healing into question, but also the use of the miraculous as a Church-Growth technique generally. Contrary to Wimber’s claim that “Signs and Wonders” stood as a general Evangelical technique, the report argued that “Signs and Wonders” had a very narrow meaning in the biblical context— that the phrase was “biblical language for the revelatory events of a salvation history that had its climax in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and advent of the Spirit, leading to the birth of the Christian Church” (Smedes et. al. 1987:18); there is therefore no contemporary mandate for healing, and given this particular reading, the report suggests, referring to answered prayers for healing in the current age as part of the “Kingdom” smacks of hubris, and further, goes against Jesus’ suggestion that there was something unfortunate about demanding signs of his divinity. More ominously, the report suggested that not all “Signs and Wonders” had their font in the divine, that the Bible was full of supernatural events conducted on the behalf of malevolent beings, and that the anti-Christ himself was prophesied as working “Signs and Wonders” when he eventually arrives (Smedes et. al. 1987:18-20).

16 There is a certain irony in this charge, given that the Vineyard has always has a concern with food drives and other forms of homeless outreach; this irony becomes even more arch when one considers how (as we shall see) just a generation after this critique of Vineyard spirituality was penned, segments of the Vineyard would start adopting a predominately left politics that centered itself on issues of Justice.
Equally telling is the report’s insistence that the Church and the Apostles are
different categories, each of which has to answer to different imperatives. Before the
crucifixion, Jesus gave a command to his apostles to cast out demons and heal in his
name; after the resurrection, Jesus instructs the church to “teach all nations and to
baptize in his name,” and “preach repentance,” but not heal (Smedes et. al. 1987:20).
Even here, though, the committee had to engage in some controlled readings to limit the
possibilities of the counter-citation of passages that seemed to point in different
directions. Specifically, Jesus’ final statement that believers “would do the works that
he did and even greater works” (John 12:12-14) is not seen as a commandment to
reproduce Jesus’ miracles – rather, after acknowledging any ability to definitively
interpret the statement, they see that commandment as fulfilled by “all the medical and
psychiatric hospitals, sanatoria, clinics, and other institutions that Christian believers
have been enabled by the Spirit to build and operate around the world” which “probably
have indeed brought about countless times as many healings as our Lord performed
during his brief sojourn with us on earth” (Smedes et. al. 1987: 21-22). While the
possibility of the contemporary miraculous is never denied by the committee, the
overall message put forward was that one is not to recreate Jesus’ ministry, but instead
to operate in a different (and most importantly, subservient) mode to Jesus’ authority,
carrying out his will in the material world – perhaps, though this is not stated, this
different mission acts as a marker of the ontological differences between a human
believer and the more than mere human object of belief.

One anxiety that runs through the report is that this rejection of the centrality of
the miraculous to the Christian message will be taken as a “capitulation to the naturalist
and technological paradigms of modern Western culture” and act in effect as a rejection of the divine. Following Wimber himself in couching this as a choice between “world views,” (which, they just as quickly add, is also a way of addressing one’s “God View”), the report’s authors argue for a third position, which they see as being more properly scriptural, one in which God is seen as permeating the cosmos, sustaining it and suffusing it with meaning, and is apparent as much in natural healings as supernatural ones; in this model, rather than looking for the divine in the disruptive, non-contiguous, and miraculous, we would look for him in the order of the mundane – though this is limited by the fact of the fall, which prevents his full goodness from being (currently) apparent in this world. The chief engine of this fallen disharmony is pointed to as human agency, albeit it one that is aggravated by ‘the ancient antagonist.’ Only by returning to the divine order, and by rejecting the enemy, can we work with God, according to the committee.

Given this thoroughly reformed view (and it is the Reformed church that the committee sees as being at Fuller’s theological core, even though it is home to Christian scholars from a wide variety of denominations), it is no surprise that in the closing moments of the committee report, it states that personal piety, and not public works, is the signs looked for in the “evangelical” tradition. “Nor have evangelical ministries encouraged the belief that miraculous healing is a special sign of genuine faith and effective prayer. Far more likely, the renewal of godliness in personal life and revival of righteousness in public life have been the signs looked for to attest the work of the Spirit in our ministries” (Smedes et. al. 1987: 53).
The report ends with a call for greater accountability in the success rate of healings, more care with discussions of exorcisms and deliverances, and a more careful articulation of, and distinguishing between, academic and pastoral authority. It also closes with the observation that as a multi-denominational institution, Fuller should be careful not to encourage classes that directly critique the theology and practices of its various constituent churches. Any of these technical issues of institutional authority alone would be enough to bring MC510 to a close; to that extent, one could wonder why the committee did not choose to base its decision on a narrow ruling alone, instead of courting trouble by including the larger discussion in which the grounds for the decision were presented in terms of a cosmological ordering and an ethical subjectivity, both of which were presented as being a part of an Evangelical ‘tradition.’ Such a more parsimonious finding would have also avoided the series of awkward contrasts with alternative ‘world-views’ that ran through the report; the invocation of a spiritually denuded and mechanistic model of reality, and of a Pentecostal-infused view of the word marked by a series of divine invasions, while serving as definitional alters against which the Evangelical worldview can be read, also destabilizes the report by pointing to other possibilities and logics that could create comprehensive readings that could more completely account for, or dismiss, the disruptive miracles that occurred in the course. The most likely explanation is that these three possible framings were so close a part of the consciousness of this population that they could not be escaped, and that a more narrow reading that did not at least motion towards these other ways of parsing the world would not be seen as an honest attempt to address the real problems posed by MC510.
The dilemma of Dual Conversion

If we take up the assumption of an unavoidability of both a secular (‘godless’) modernity, and of a Pentecostal language of other-worldly supernatural events occurring in this world, then we can retroactively see John Wimber’s project in bringing MC510 to Fuller as in some ways being an attempt to create a commensurable language – and hence the possibility of a shared space – between the various theological strains and subject positions that were understood, at least at Fuller seminary, as being incommensurable with an Evangelical framework. Evidence for this reading can be seen in how Wimber struggles to present his Charismatic activity as something that was part of a trajectory which, in the final analysis, was also an Evangelical one; as John Wimber explained in the special issue of Christian Life magazine that ultimately became Signs and Wonders Today, the expected growth in membership that ‘Power Evangelism’ would bring would serve to replace “the pre-war [world war two] generation” that was “beginning to pass from the Evangelical church scene without replacing itself.” (SIGNS AND WONDERS 19). As the very term power evangelism suggests – a suggestion strengthened later on by the choice of the term ‘Empowered Evangelicals’ as a frequently invoked self-descriptor for what Vineyard members were – MC510, and the Vineyard’s mode of “Signs and Wonders” preaching, was not meant to usher in a new wave of Pentecostalism. Indeed, in the MC510 syllabus (as reprinted in Signs and Wonders Today), the obvious Pentecostal antecedents for Wimber’s charismatic work were very much underemphasized. Wimber does not present himself as Pentecostalism’s inheritor at all, rather, he presents his works as being a continuation
of Wesley’s Methodism and the American revivals know collectively as the second
Great Awakening. This work sometimes comes across as a bit awkward – in his search
for forefathers that are approved by Evangelicals, he turns again and again for support
to noted cessationists (the name given to those who held that after the establishment of
the Church, the passing of the Apostles, and the ascension of Jesus, the age of miracles
was through). He does this by presenting Augustine, Aquinas, and Martin Luther as
predecessors who had ‘mellowed with age’ and accepted a contemporaneous
miraculous. On the other hand, Pentecostalism itself is only mentioned in passing in the
final two paragraphs of Wimbers’ account (SIGNS AND WONDERS 22-24). Despite
this attempt to lay claim to an imagined Evangelical miraculous patrimony, Wimber is
hamstrung by the fact that he cannot at the same time present what is occurring here as
an already existing form of Evangelical practice, for the simple reason that it obviously
is not an already existing form of Evangelical practice; this form of faith healing and
deliverances is something that was not extant in most of the Evangelical churches that
the evangelically derived Vineyard members would have experience with, and an
attempt to describe it as already existing in evangelical churches would simply render
null Wimber’s efforts to deliver it to them. This miraculous therefore must be depicted
as at once familiar and strange, recognizable and alien. What, then, is he to do to further
his project, and make this new way of understanding comprehensible?

What Wimber did was to present the adoption of a Charismatically-inflected
Christianity as at once a break from, and at the same time a continuation of, a previous
Evangelical mode of existence, by modeling the adoption of Charismatic Christianity on
the Evangelical model of conversion. Wimber further handled the seeming alien nature
of Charismatic beliefs and practices by highlighting the manner in which the baseline Evangelical beliefs and practices are themselves alien from a secular understanding, thus suggesting that just as an Evangelical worldview is different from and morally superior to, and hence preferable over, a secular world-view, Charismatic Christian practice stands in the same structural position vis-à-vis Evangelical Christianity that Evangelical Christianity stands in relation to the secular. Such a framing, however, does not over-write Evangelicalism, since in a way Evangelical understandings stand as the template that make the claim of Charismatic Christianity comprehensible in the first place; therefore a sort of rough, potential rapprochement between the two positions is made possible, a sort of dialectical sublation in which the underlying terms are not erased. As we shall see, though, there is something else that is brought into this two-tiered intellectual relation between Evangelicalism and Charismatic Christianity – much as the Charismatic turn is modeled on the prior Evangelical one, the foundational moment of conversion, Evangelicalism, has as its definitional alter (and therefore, in a sense, its foundational alter as well) a secular view of the world. By incorporating Evangelicalism, the Charismatic mode of being also incorporated the secular one as a possibility, as we shall see.

And when is all this rhetorical work, these attempts at reframing, done? Right at the very beginning – specifically, in the very first moments of the video version of MC510.

_A Gin-soaked Evangelist to Las Vegas_
Let us return to that conference. Speaking to the audience, Wimber explains the effective identity of this conference with MC510, and then, in a series of causal asides, proceeds to stress the disjunctive nature of what will be presented during this conference, while at the same time emphasizing its purpose not merely as a class on the technique of miracles, but also its role in generating personal transformation as well. In fact, it is personal transformation that is the first note hit, when he states that during previous iterations of this educational program “we’ve seen an incredible turnaround in the lives of students . . . and visitors who were able to get in during the early days of the course,” thereby leaving a space for those who my be desiring some kind of rebirth, but have been put off by the seminar origins of the course. This transformation, he tells us, will involve a certain sense of open discovery, and perhaps shock – “We’re here for the purpose of sharing with you the things that God has taught us, and we’ll put up some question marks as well as some exclamation points over the next few weeks.”

This transformation, though, strikes an odd balance between the new and the old. This is not something completely untoward – it is, as Wimber tells us during those opening moments “a new perspective on old information.” It is also of a technical nature – you are learning “new skills for your ministries” – and thus to a degree partitionable from other forms of knowledge, as domain-specific technical knowledge oftentimes is. On the other hand, it is also world (view) changing, and that shift in world view is such that for most Christians, their initial conversion has to be invoked to serve as a milestone to measure not just the nature of the conversion, but its degree as well – as Wimber states, “We anticipate, over this week, you will undergo a paradigm shift. You’re going to look at the things you’ve looked at ever since you’ve become a
Christian, and you’re going to look at it in a new context, a new way.” While Wimber
does acknowledge that the audience’s mere presence in a conference like this one
suggests that they are predisposed to accept his message, and even that some members
of the audience may already be engaged in practicing Charismatic-style prayer, he
stresses the likely untutored status of the audience in the Charismatic arts: “some of you
are already praying for the sick with some effectiveness, others of you have never – to
your knowledge – had the experience of praying for any individual that got well as a
direct result of your involvement in prayer for them.” This is a place, in other words,
that is more than open to Charismatic absolute beginners.

Given this promised shift from neophyte to novitiate, it is perhaps natural that
the very next beat Wimber hits is that of his own conversion. While testifying of course
is an over-determined Evangelical practice, serving at once as a mode of publicly
recapitulating one’s conversion (Stromberg 1993), and at the same time grounding
one’s authority in personal experience (Keane 2007), and it is common for testimony to
precede any substantive discussion, here the testimony is working as something more –
it is a unit in the course, equivalent to others sections of the ‘syllabus’ which address
whole discrete genres of Charismatic prayer, such as healing or deliverance; indeed, as
the course is structured in its video format, it takes up a whole tape, with the testimony
running an hour and a half. The testimony is even given a formal title as part of the
course curriculum: “Personal Pilgrimage.” The beginning is also a bit abrupt – after
stating the supposed grounding assumptions of the course, Wimber simply, and almost
unceremoniously, jumps in with “I’d like to share a bit about my personal background.”
As presented, his background is unremarkable. He grew up in Anaheim, not far from the future site of Disneyland (with characteristic play humility, he adds “I haven’t gone very far in life; I’m only eight blocks from where I began my career”). To the degree that there is anything of note in the opening moments of this biographical sketch, it is the unlikelihood of his later Christian turn, in that it seems to break from a certain generational trajectory – he describes himself as a “typical pagan” whose family had been without any “church affiliation” for “four generations.” Wimber says that while growing up, he never had contact with Christians for that matter, either – recounting being challenged on this point once, he throws out the *bon mot* that if he had any contact with a Christian in childhood, that (hypothetical) Christian “didn’t blow his cover in my presence.” The first Christians who do contact Wimber in this narrative come across as poor representatives of the type – driving across the desert on a personal pilgrimage to Las Vegas, where they hope to share the “good word” with then session-musician John Wimber, these newly converted Christian friends of John’s drink a fifth of gin they originally purchased as a gift for Wimber. Of course, Wimber would not know that these people are cast against type, untutored as he is in the faith. Wimber’s ignorance of Christianity is emphasized yet again when these gin-soaked Evangelists try to tell Wimber that they are born again, and that he should be, too (“Whaddya mean,” Wimers asks, “do you have to enter your mother’s womb again,” thereby re-enacting the dialog from John 3:1-21). The message being presented is literally incomprehensible to Wimber at this juncture.

At this point in the narrative, Wimber breaks the diegetic frame and flashes backwards a couple weeks in time, to recount his first “spiritual experience,” which
occurred in Vegas during a separation from his wife. Distraught and drinking heavily, he had been going out to the desert after his “prestigious” late shifts as a musician, in order to have what he (at the time) was characterizing as a “religious” experience: “I had been watching the sun come up . . . because someone told me it was a good way to groove on a religious experience. [After saying this, Wimber’s bulges his eyes in an imitation of someone “grooving out” – somehow conveying physically the possibly that the “groove” occurred with the assistance of illicit pharmaceuticals. This triggers laughter from the audience.] Nothing happened that day, nothing special, anyway. [More laughter from the audience.]” It was during one of these morning drives, that we have a curious moment that presages not only Wimber’s subsequent conversion, but his Charismatic future as well. As recounted by Wimber, out during one of those desert drives, he had a certain sort of epiphany:

I began weeping, a man isn’t suppose to cry. I think that it grows more dramatic in the telling, [laughter from the audience] you weren’t there, were you [more laughter] but I looked up, and I saw the stars and constellations for the first time in my life as something emanating from some-one, and I remember standing there awe-struck, and I said, ‘oh god, if you’re there help me,’ and I wept for a couple of moments, and then all of a sudden I felt this deep shame come over me, and I said ‘oh no, oh no, now you’ve really done it, now you’re talking to the dark, you’ve gone over the edge, the only thing left is to commit myself into the hospital,” and then I remembered that part about my mother and the underwear [laughter] and I thought I better go to the hotel and change before I go to the hospital. [More laughter] . . . Besides, I had some drugs I thought I’d better put away, in case I was in that hospital very long . . . and when I walked in the hotel lobby, the message clerk said hey, there’s a message here from your wife. I said, ‘from my wife? Can’t be from my wife, my wife won’t even talk to me any more.’ He said, yah, it is, call this number. So I went to the lobby phone and I dialed it, and sure enough my wife answered the phone, and I asked, whaddy want? And she said ‘I’ve been thinking it over, I’ve decided to give it one more try, come and get me.’ And when she said that, it was like a blow to my chest, I fell back against the wall, and I thought wow, I’m in
touch with the supernatural [makes an upraised punching motion with fist, laughter] cause I realized suddenly that I, uh, that there was a connection between that ‘oh god, if you are there, help me’ and my wife responding, and I asked her when did she decide this, and she said half an hour ago, and I thought ‘Ah! I Got her!’ [More laughter].

Afterwards, Wimber goes on to recount an immediately subsequent breakneck three-and-a-half hour drive back to Newport Beach, during which he presents his ‘second prayer’ –

I got in the car, and I’m driving along, and I’m excited, and I said my second prayer, my first prayer was oh god help me and my second prayer was ‘atta baby God!’ [Miming driving action as he talks] ‘You really got her that time’ [laughter] because I’d been trying to get my wife to straighten up for a year, and I couldn’t get her straightened out, and I started thinking I’m on a roll, and I started talking to him about everything, how about this, how about that, why don’t you do this, now that I’ve been plugged in, might as well start talking about it all.

This is a rather odd presentation – here, we have an intimation of Wimber’s later celebration of what he calls in other contexts, and without any of ironic distance exhibited in this dialogue, the supernatural. Unlike those other instances where the supernatural is invoked, Wimber is desperate to undermine whatever value this supernatural encounter has; first he goes out of his way to underscore these events as something that occurs well-before his conversion, a conversion that is presented as being at the least brought about in its first instances by a curious, and perhaps broken, set of Evangelists who bring gin as an entrée to Christian dialogue, only to consume it themselves. The strangeness of all this is underscored when Wimber recounts picking his wife up in Southern California later that morning after his otherworldly ‘encounter’ – Wimber presents his first words to her as (re-presented in a slightly spacey and
portentous baritone) “I’m in touch with the Supernatural,” which, as reanimated by Wimber during the lecture, only seems to enhance the vision of him as a comically out-of-touch affable lunatic.

This comedic note carries on as Wimber briefly sketches tableau after tableau of his attempts to produce an autodidact’s Christianity. At one moment John Wimber is told by his wife that God is a “Jew” – which Wimber, stressing the fact that he was then working after all in entertainment, has no problem with, even if God’s ethnicity comes as a surprise; at another moment we have an account of John Wimber, newly warmed to Christianity, searching for a Bible in Las Vegas casino stores, after being informed by some bartender that he has to purchase the “King James Virgin” or it wouldn’t be a Bible. During this section, which seems to be more organized as a stand-up sketch than a traditional testimonial, there are actually some pretty complicated rifts on the Bible itself. Wimber comments on the iconicity of the book – his initial quest is based on finding a proper looking book, black with gold letters, which at once is a play on a certain then-ebbing Christian visual culture, while at the same time is a way of emphasizing Wimber’s complete ignorance (the implicit idea seeming to run along the lines that since he had no idea what the contents of the Bible could be, the only way it could be distinguished is by its outward form). At another point, Wimber indirectly takes up the complicated history of the scriptures themselves when he yells in remembered (faux) rage that he was cheated because his New Testament was only “half” a Bible. Even after receiving a correct Bible, it is all but impenetrable to him (he asks his audience, rhetorically one presumes, given the stated topic matter “have you ever tried to read that book? It’s the weirdest book! I opened up to Ezekiel [immediate
*audience laughter*. That’s a *weird dude, that Ezekiel!*”). In the end, after their contact with the “gin soaked evangelist,” John and his wife end up relying on a series of children’s books of Bible narratives to give them the remedial understanding necessary to access the scriptures.

This turn towards viewing Christianity as a comically alien object, recalcitrant to secular understandings, expands almost exponentially when he and his family move back to Southern California and first visit a small church in Pasadena. As a prelude, Wimber asks the audience the rhetorical question, “Have you ever been to church – come on, own up;” he then describes being roused at seven on a Sunday morning so he could go to Yorba Linda, because as his wife explains to him “that’s where God was.” Arguing on the way up (which, as Wimber wryly states, he found out later was actually “the tradition – that you’re suppose to argue on the way up”), they come up to a “little old building.” The comportment of all the members is presented as being freakish and alien – Wimber saying that they all “talked real loud,” as he mimics their purported grating obsequiousness, shaking hands with an imaginary overflow of enthusiasm. “I had been in and out of bars for years,” Wimber wryly observes, “and no one had ever treated me this way.” Wimber goes on, inaccurately yet purposefully describing the church bulletin as a “menu,” recounting his unthinking cussing in the church, and his being led by the ushers (described as somber men “with flowers in their lapels”) to a spot in the front pews (his audience is particularly enthralled with laughter when he recounts that he was put up in front because “all the back seats were full”). Even the opening prayer at this church service is presented as a farce, with the stilted tones of the
pastor presenting the church’s invocatory prayer artfully mimicked by Wimber.\textsuperscript{17}

Indeed, few aspects of the church presentation escapes Wimber’s playful yet alienated framing – Wimber mistakenly thinks that the man reading the King James Bible out loud must have a lisp, but that is alright, because as he observes, there is no better place to hire the disabled than in Church.\textsuperscript{18} After a perfectly boring sermon, Wimber states that he can feel the momentum (“whenever a big show is about to end,” he says, “you can tell because of the way that the momentum picks up and rallies”), and finally the pastor asks that anyone who “was moved by what they heard” should “come up to the altar” . . . which Wimber can’t see, looking, as he reports, for the kind of altar that maidens were sacrificed on in movies. Wimber at this point, still stuck in the diachronic frame, scoffs that this is going to be a failure “because this is nineteen-sixty-three,”

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\item[\textsuperscript{17}] Asking a friend who accompanied him to Church why the pastor was talking that way, his friend replied “I don’t know – I think that they get it in seminary,” which is a potent jab, considering the fact that paralleling to a degree the arguments later put forward by the sociologists of religion Starke (1985) and Starke and Finke (1992), most of the baby-boomer generation of Vineyard and like churches tend to see seminaries as more instruments of routinization of charisma with a small-c than spaces where valuable knowledge is transmitted (also see Miller 1997). This is the one moment where rather than laughing, the audience’s reaction is like the sound made when two people are publicly trading insults.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] In point of fact, infirmities in voice – particularly musical voice – obsesses Wimber in this monologue; failures to hit notes are something he latches onto in his account of a solo sung before the church choir by a woman who introduces herself by saying that “God’s given me this voice and I’m gonna give it right back to him,” to which Wimber, now shifting his footing such that he is suddenly imitating God, replies with a shuddering, disgusted “Noo . . .!” While this parsimoniousness about sound and voice is certainly a function of his previous musical career, and a desire to highlight the “square” aspects of then existing Evangelical Christianity, this is perhaps a overdetermined interest on his part; considering the odd space that the musical voice holds, carrying both the sensible logos and the sensual pneuma (in the most literal sense of the world) (see Dolar 2006), it is perhaps no accident that the Charismatically inclined Wimber found infelicities in this registrar particularly disturbing, as they disturb both the intellectual and the embodies aspects of Christian practice.
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implying that no one would come to pray like that in this modern age; despite Wimber’s sureness, he notes with surprise that people do start trickling up from the pews, to which Wimber exclaims, as much in mock enthusiasm as mock surprise, that the pastor “Got one!” – echoing, perhaps, Wimber’s own reaction when he won his life back thanks to being “in touch with the supernatural.”

Wimber, walking out, emphatically tells his friend who accompanied him and his family that “that’s the weirdest thing I’ve ever seen, that’s the strangest bunch, that’s a weird group, those people are weird . . . look how they dress, look how they talk, I could never relate to them.” Of course, Wimber is retrospectively exaggerating – these people at the church actually “were lovely people,” and not only does he learn to relate to them, we later learn, but he becomes one of them; however he insists as he speaks that what he was reporting were “his [veridical] impressions on that first day.” Wimber goes on in this light, skewering a Bible study that he is invited to with the same acerbic wit that he skewered the main services; he does so even using the same rhetorical techniques – asking the audience of committed Christians, “have you ever been to Bible study? Well have you?” Bible study, again, is presented as alien, and played for laughs, right up until his conversion. Even that moment of transition and self-reformation is played for laughs. His conversion, in the narrative, is a shock. He presents himself as suddenly finding himself on his knees in the living room floor of a believer, where previously he had been sitting in a captain’s chair, holding onto the armrests with a vise-like grip. Recounting his kneeling, he says that, “I don’t know to save my life whether I got out of the chair, or was shoved [laughter]; I know theologically that that’s very important, but I’ve never been able to figure it out [laughter and applause].”
Wimber even mocks his own tears during the conversion process, blubbering in a
cartoonish way as he mouths the gibberish that comes out of the mouths of those too
emotionally topsy-turvy to speak. The tone only gets serious during this pivotal part of
the conversion narrative when Wimber recounts how, at that point, crying on the floor
and embarrassed that he was coming across as a fool, he remembered an earlier point in
his life where he went down to Pershing square in downtown Los Angeles to borrow
some money from a drug dealer friend of his; in that park, which he describes as a
disreputable, and perhaps unsafe, public space, he saw a man wearing a sandwich board
that said on the front “I am a fool for Christ,” and on the back said “who’s fool are
you?” As Wimber tells it, that earlier memory flashed into his mind during his
conversion, and as it flashed Wimber says to himself, “that’s it, that’s it, I’m gonna be
his fool. I resolved in my heart at that moment that I was gonna do the foolish thing in
the eyes of the world. I didn’t know that it was gonna be the foolish thing in the eyes of
the church too.” At this point, there is a loud ring of applause as Wimber lets his own
momentum pick up and rally: “But I determined that night that if Christ was worth
coming to at all, he was worth coming all the way with. [Numerous “Amens” from the
audience]. And so I got up from there, and been a fool ever since, wherever I could be,
in every way that I could. But my heart’s intent has always been to be his fool.”

It may be too much to shout out “he got one!” at this point, but this does seem
like a proper point for a conclusion – a natural point for a dénouement has been
reached, with Wimber having fallen to his knees and having a personal relationship with
a God who, scant weeks or months earlier (the implicit time line is rather sketchy here),
had no relation to at all. However, while this is a marked transition point of some
sort, and his conversion does indicate a substantial change in tone, this is nowhere near
the end of Wimber’s narrative. Following this false climax, Wimber stops treating
Christianity in general, and church practices in particular, as a comic alien other, and
falls into a more matter of fact pattern of speech, discussing how he built this church up,
brought “hundreds of people” to Christ, and became a pastor. This is the point where he
presents an encounter with an elderly church member that occurred in the wake of John
Wimber’s early ministry:

I remember one day a lovely lady, someone I had a lot of respect for, but
had grown up in that church, one day she stood at the backdoor of the
church, tears running down her face, her chin, her chin trembling, and
she was just violently angry with me, and she said “You’ve ruined my
Church!”

And I looked at her and I thought that’s the truth, we’ve really messed
your church up, and I stood there and I started crying with her, and I put
my arms around her and I said “I really love you” and I said “I feel your
pain” and I said “I understand your confusion, but,” I said, “what can I
do? You people took me in, you embraced me, and could I leave the rest
of them out there, dying and going to hell? I had to tell them about Jesus.
I had to tell them what you’ve given me.”

And she said “I know, I know, it’s just that change is so hard.” And we
wept together, and I’ve never forgotten that, I’ve never forgotten her
pain, because she was a lovely lady who loved the Lord, but all of these
strangers, all of this change, all these new people coming in, had
frustrated her, and served to ruin the church that she loved. It had
become a new church, a different church.

After this, Wimber goes on to recount the growth of his church, and the manner in
which, as he led it, he learned to adopt Charismatic religious practices, but rather than
going ahead with Wimber’s tale, it is worth pausing on the substance and affect that is
put forward in the scene. The emotion conveyed in Wimber’s voice as he covers this
part of his witnessing is actually quite moving, as it should be, since this middle space is
in fact the vital part of the whole narrative – it is this observation made by Wimber through the medium of this anonymous “lovely lady,” that change is “so hard,” along with Wimber’s immediately preceding comic characterization of the Evangelical church as irredeemably strange, which forms the space where the heart and lungs of Wilber’s rhetorical framing of the Vineyard in general is revealed. Specifically, this is the moment where he responds to the sort of Evangelical anxieties that would later result in the larger MC510 incident recounted earlier in this chapter, and where he attempts to mount a sort of precautionary defense for his Charismatic turn.

In short, Wimber was presenting a mode of religiosity that the audience would already be familiar with – and perhaps, have at least an ambivalent, if not wholly positive, reaction to\(^\text{19}\) – not as a homey form of spirituality, but instead as a weird, indeed, as an unidentifiable other, set of inscrutable practices that appear to be, literally, foolish. The work being done here is to suggest that much as the presumed base inheritance of Evangelical Christianity looks ridiculous from the vantage point of one who has not adopted it yet, other practices – particularly Charismatic religious practices – may also appear to be foolish from the point of view of those who have not yet been initiated, even though these practices, like evangelicalism, have a Christian origin. There is a recursive logic to this, that in a sense makes a Charismatic Christianity at

\(^{19}\) It is hard to say with certainty what the reaction of the audience would be to the forms of Protestantism that Wimber was mimicking on stage; on one hand, considering the fact that this is a denominational-like body that thrived off of transfer growth from evangelical-type churches, there is a definite sense that for many of them there would be a rejection of these practices; on the other hand, these practices would also represent the kind of natal Christianity that would have informed their earliest religious practices, and one could imagine that there would be a definite and undeniable nostalgia for this religious practice, even if it did not meet the sort of existential need for a greater commune with the divine that are discussed later on in this chapter.
once equal to, and yet a surpassing of, Evangelical modes of religiosity. It makes the
atheist to Evangelical turn equivalent to the Evangelical to Charismatic turn in that they
both are presented as a stepping into a terra incognita. Consider the parallels: in the
narrative Wimber lacks even the most remedial knowledge of what God is, not even
knowing what the Bible is, what prayer is, or even that God “is Jewish.” In the
conference, the individuals participants are about to engage in something that they have
“never knowingly” done before.

While these parallels on one hand makes Wimber’s prior Evangelical turn and
the audience’s contemporary Charismatic turn equivalent, in the same moment Wimber
coyly presents the narrative in such a way that while the Charismatic turn historically
follows the Evangelical turn, it is at the same time foundational to it. Wimber’s whole
turn to the faith was fueled not by the arrival of his friends, the gin-soaked Evangelists,
despite the fact that he starts out his narrative with them; rather what primed him to
have an interest in the church, and in the message of these Evangelists in the first place,
was his earlier experience of communing with a divine entity that was capable of
changing the heart of John Wimber’s wife, a conjunction of Godly contact and worldly
effect that that John Wimber describes as “being in touch with the supernatural.” The
audience, of course, expects a regular conversion narrative, which is why Wimber must
begin with human actors, but after he has succored them in with tales of an evangelical
encounter, he shifts the focus to a previous other-worldly. What is telling about this is
that this term “supernatural” is what, in a later lecture, Wimber will present as being
definitional about the Charismatic turn that he is trying to institute through methods
such as this very lecture series; as he argues, contemporary Evangelicalism is manqué
because it has effectively sold out to secularism by taking up a “modern” worldview that precludes the other-worldliness that Wimber is advocating a greater engagement with, and which he also calls (in that moment) “the supernatural.” In short, Wimber’s coming to Evangelicalism, which paved the way for his later turn towards a Charismatic practice of being in touch with the supernatural, is predicated by John Wimber having been, originally, in touch with the same “supernatural” that Charismatic practice is informed by.

The continuity here is enforced by a particular recurrent tick in Wimber’s presentation during this talk: specifically, John Wimber’s odd shouting out that various people, in various moments, have been “got.” Recall that a variant of this was shout out by a then unconverted Wimber when the Evangelical Yorba Linda pastor successfully had someone come up for the altar call (specifically, John shouts out “He got one”); in what seems to be a parallelism, something similar was also shouted out in the initial moments of the monologue when Wimber’s wife was moved by “the supernatural” to take Wimber back (“Got her!”). What is interesting is that in the second half of the lecture/testimonial, that ejaculation returns one more time. The remainder of the talk is relatively slow and serious, with Wimber narrating how he became interested in Charismatic healing through (or rather, despite of) his work as a Fuller-Seminary funded growth specialist. The climax of the second half of the talk is when, after repeatedly attempting, and failing, to physically heal the sick through prayer,\(^{20}\) he has his first breakthrough: he is called over to the house of a church member one morning.

\(^{20}\) In fact, his failure in this department is presented as so total and abject that he describes moments where he and his prayer team would catch the very illnesses they were trying to heal as they prayed for people with contagious diseases.
so that he can heal the church member’s flu-ridden wife, and after dejected and perfunctory prayers (John Wimber, at this point in the narrative, is use to, and indeed expects, failure), he is already explaining away the fact that prayer often times doesn’t work, only to be stunned to see the woman radically and immediately cured. After a brief rejoicing, he has a vision (his first, he tells us) on the drive home, where he saw God’s grace falling from the skies in the form of honey, with some people in the vision embracing it wholeheartedly, and others in the vision rejecting it as they are coated with the golden, viscous, and unwanted substance. What I wish to call attention to here is not the substantive nature of the vision itself, or the tongue-in-cheek pathos associated with Wimber’s long failure during his healing campaign previous to this successful turn, but rather the manner in which he celebrated the surprising healing of the flu-ridden housewife. Immediately after the healing, and after begging off and exiting the house in a degree of substantial shock, he walks out to the front lawn, shakes his fists up to heaven as if to share in the triumph, and bellows out “ALLRIGHT! WE GOT ONE!” In this moment of metaphoric capture, the initial encounter with the “supernatural” which started Wimber’s journey is quilted, as it were, with the Evangelical walk to the altar, and contemporary acts of healing, even as they are put forward as being different moments in a variegated Christianity career. Indeed, despite the similar exclamatory marking, these moments are presented as different enough that the transition from one to another, from an initial pagan-like grooving with God in the desert, to a kind of staid Evangelicalism, and from that kind of Evangelicalism to a Charismatic mastery of the spiritual gifts, had to be not only hard won, but proven through showing that the new state of affairs has the power to contain and transform isolatable and identifiable
individuals. These transformations have social costs by those who long for older forms in this narrative – Wimber’s conversion to Evangelicalism, remember, “ruined” the church for the “nice lady” who was a part of the congregation, and Wimber’s later turn to a more charismatic Christianity is marked in his narrative by those who reject it by leaving the church when Wimber first proposes experimenting with healing, and also by those in the vision who reject the honey falling from the skies.\textsuperscript{21} Despite this recalcitrance that is displayed towards each of these moments, though, the shout out that various people have been “got” serves to show the power of the new way of being, and to tie to other, now superseded and yet still enfolded Christian ways of being that lead up to it, in a way that is reminiscent of a Hegelian \textit{Aufhebung}, with the various turns in Wimber’s Christian career (secular, evangelical, and charismatic) being sublated without being struck out.

\textit{Post-founding – after Fuller, and after Wimber}

As we have seen, this attempt to position John Wimber’s course in miracles, and the Vineyard in general, as a break from, and yet still an encapsulation of a traditional Evangelicalism, failed at least as the short term goes; Fuller Seminary ended up not being able to countenance such Charismatic activity in its Evangelical space, and the course was shut down. Despite, or perhaps because of, the notoriety that resulted from this scandal, though, the Vineyard continued to grow, comprising today over five

\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, when it comes to the incident in the desert even Wimber’s wife is presented as to a degree questioning his sanity, and he imagines that there would enough social opposition from his ‘grooving’ in the desert that he imagines himself as a candidate for mental hospitalization (and a preparatory change of underwear).
hundred churches within North American, with about 100,000 individuals attending these churches nationally on a typical Sunday (Miller 2005:141,150). Just as important for this argument, though, the fundamental narrative that Wimber put forward, for religious practice where evangelicalism and charismaticism co-existed in an equal yet stratified relationship, continued as the Vineyard developed over the eighties and nineties and into the present moment, though the balance of power between the charismatic and evangelical elements somewhat changed during this time.

The change was as much a function of the failures of an uncontrolled charismatic impulse as it was the success of any evangelical tendency. The Vineyard’s post MCC 510 career was an incredibly turbulent one, shot through with numerous still-born revivals, turns towards (and reactions against) classical Pentecostal-style “Latter-Rain” prophets; all these forms of turbulence, it should be noted, were associated with the Vineyard’s Charismatic tendencies. During this period in the eighties and early nineties, the Vineyard, as an organization, would lurch from one position to another, endorsing some Charismatic aspects of a particular revival or prophetic movement, and thereby alienating more-Evangelical orientated participants, only to have to later renounce those Charismatic practices or organizations that they had affiliated with months earlier, and thereby losing Pentecostal-leaning believers. A particularly trying moment arrived with the 1994 “Toronto Blessing,” when the Vineyard as a whole first endorsed and then subsequently rejected a revival movement that grew out of a small Vineyard Church located by the Airport in Toronto Canada. At first very popular, with believers flying themselves in from across the continent, and even internationally, to visit the Toronto Vineyard as it ran nearly continuous revival meetings (see Paloma
2003), the particularities of this revival included many elements that were beyond the pale to the eyes of some of the Vineyard’s evangelical leaning camp. These evangelical orientated Vineyard members were particularly put off by a riotous, intoxicated “sacred laughter” that was one sign of the revival, and even more offended by the fact that for some revival participants, prophetic gifts came in the form of individuals making animal sounds, such as roaring like a lion, or braying. Following an incredible amount of negative attention, John Wimber asked this particular church to de-fellowship itself from the Vineyard, and the denomination as a whole started to systematically reject these practices.

The end of Vineyard involvement did not, by any means, mean the end of the Toronto Blessing – the church, now bearing the name “Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship” continues to this day, and has claimed not only continued revival, but even more miraculous signs (including God supposedly turning people’s teeth fillings and crowns into gold as a sign of his love for them). While the Toronto Blessing went on uninterrupted, the same could not be said of the most extreme Charismatic elements of the Vineyard; between the distancing of the Vineyard from Toronto, and John Wimbers’ own ill health (he was to die of cancer in 1997), there was a decisive shift in what some members have described to me as the Vineyard’s “culture wars.” In response to Toronto, the Vineyard began to forge the already mentioned conception of itself as being comprised of “Empowered Evangelicals,” which, though they denied it, highlighted a supposed Evangelical default position, though at the same moment (much like the phrase “power evangelism”) distinguishing themselves from other “unempowered” Evangelicals, even as they denied the implicit slur against there
brethren. There is a sense that one gets in the literature, and also from speaking to pastors who were around during this transition, that this heightening of the importance of the evangelical nature of this inheritance was an attempt to control the disruptions in authority that an unchecked prophetic could bring; this sense of a growing aspect of the Evangelical inheritance could also be a function of the fact that, as one pastor observed, “the churches that stood mainly on the Pentecostal side, the renewal churches, haven't done that well nationally.” This does not mean, however, that the Vineyard has lost touch altogether with the specific charismatic practices that brought it fame originally – or that allowed it to be associated with a “course on miracles.” While they may emphasize it to greater or lesser degrees, all the Vineyard pastors I spoke to were united in that they still felt that there was a place for what they called “the ministry of the Holy Spirit,” both in their congregations, and within the denomination.

*Shores Vineyard*

The Vineyard may seem to be in an intolerable position – their effective founder dead, their numbers winnowed by the crises of Charismatic authority that occurred in the eighties and nineties, and even their primary mission, that of spreading neo-Pentecostal forms of religious practice, now apparently no longer the center of their attention. Despite a relatively strong rate of growth (though I did hear the occasional murmur that the Vineyard’s growth rate was no longer as fast as it once was, and even that the Vineyard hadn’t “really grown” over the past ten years), the Vineyard was also faced by a generational challenge as well. The Vineyard was an organization that was to a large degree comprised of baby boomers, a population whose rapid graying bodes ill for their
ability to establish themselves as a long-term, multi-generational institution; the average age for a Vineyard pastor is forty-five, with only one in ten pastors being under thirty-five, and only one percent of pastors being under the age of thirty (Miller 2005:105). If one follows the assumption that membership mirrors leadership, then it seems safe to assume that overall the Vineyard’s lay body is graying, too (Miller 205:105). Given the generally poor retention rates that fundamentalists and other conservative Christians have, as far as keeping their children within the Church (see, e.g., Ammerman 1987), and the fact that the stylistic innovations once put forward by this generation may no longer appear fresh and exciting to newer generations of believers and possible converts (as we shall see in a future chapter), one may not only wonder as to the nature of the future of the Vineyard, but perhaps even question whether they have one at all.

It seems to me that if we are to understand what future the Vineyard is to have, or even if we are to understand the long term legacy of the Charismatic-influenced Evangelical Christianity that was such a part of the Fourth Great Awakening, the Christian revival that occurred from roughly the nineteen-sixties to the first half of the first decade of the twentieth century,\textsuperscript{22} then attention should be paid not to these graying churches – or at least not to these graying churches alone – but also to churches that have either undergone, or are undergoing, a generational change in leadership. It is there that we can see not only what part (if any) of their practices and imaginary are perduring and what parts are merely ephemeral, but also where we can see how that

\textsuperscript{22} For more on the great awakening and American “awakening” cycles, in which American conservative Protestantism experiences sharp numerical growth before a period of senescence, see generally McLoughlin 1978, Fogel 2000; it suffices to say that there is a certain systematicity to this phenomenon, and that while this revival cycle may not be over, it is most likely on a waning ebb.
which remains unfolds in different manners as it is presented in different contexts, and thus perhaps truly see what it is that was bequeathed to us by this population. It is for this reason that, after canvassing various Vineyards over three counties in Southern California, I chose to spend the lion’s share of my time in Shores Vineyard Christian Fellowship. Compared to other Vineyard churches, Shores was relatively young, with an average member-age of thirty; the pastor, who had just stepped into a leadership role over the past few years when the founding Pastor retired, was himself rather young in comparison to his other Vineyard pastor peers, being just barely in his mid-thirties himself (This generational shift makes Shores Vineyard double unusual, in as much as there is reason to believe that roughly about three-quarters of Vineyard churches are currently manned by their founding pastor.)

While Shores’ current status as a youthful, second generation pastoral-ship church may make it sound unusual, its history does not seem to make it that much of an outlier. Shores Vineyard was founded in the late-eighties by a well-educated former Presbyterian minister, who set the church up in one of the rich costal communities that dot the Southern California coast running from San Diego to Long Beach. Before his break with the local Presbyterian church, what he had heard about Wimber’s MC510 course at Fuller had drawn him to visit Wimber’s nearby Anaheim-located church. Recovering from a personal crisis, he found himself captivated by Wimber’s charismatic message, and by a personal relationship that grew between the two men. He

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23 This is based upon an assumption that the survey data presented in Miller 2005:150 is accurate; it does match my rough estimation of what I observed in the field, where almost all churches were still shepherded by those who had inaugurated them.

24 I should note that this material regarding the foundation of Shores is almost entirely second hand material; my attempts to meet the founder were unsuccessful.
soon started incorporating Vineyard-style Charismatic elements to the Sunday evening service (Wimber, the consummate tactician, had warned him that while he shouldn’t “mess” with Sunday morning, Sunday evening was fair game for Pentecostal-like experimentation); he also invited Wimber over to run small-scale conferences on material such as healing and prophecy. While this did help invigorate the church, this unusual-for-Presbyterians spiritual turn (along with what were apparently personal conflicts with a powerful church elder) led to the founder’s being removed from his pastoral position. After a long season of unemployment, his wife received a prophetic message that he was to found a Vineyard church of his own; the informal gathering which resulted, and which started out as being extremely small (thirty or so individuals, from what I can gather), met at a number of improvised locations, including in a small day-shelter right beside the water – a practice that also gave the church its name.

Over the years, Shores finally settled on a location, renting on Sunday mornings space in a special-education elementary charter school that was itself leased by the city. Despite the relatively reasonable rate charged, it was a beautiful location, situated on a hill not far from the ocean, and surrounded by some of the most expensive real-estate in the county (and, ironically enough, the new campus is located across the street from the very Presbyterian church that the founder had been expelled from nearly twenty years earlier). This use of a secular space to house an improvised church is not atypical – indeed, the almost guerrilla-like tendency to make use of what ever space (commercial, industrial, educational, or otherwise in origin and association), is one of the material
hallmarks of this breed of church. Here, the unerasable traces that point to the way that the space is utilized on days that don’t happen to be the Sabbath give the service a poignant edge; underneath the sea of blue folding chairs that are set out by church volunteers (and anthropologists) proscenium-style every Sunday morning, there are painted marks on the hardwood floor for when the space is used for indoor sporting events like basketball and four-square. Banners hang from the walls announcing the names of honor students, and a yellowing sign on the wall informs students on the rules for playing nicely with one another. This may be located one of the richer communities, but the homey aspects here make that wealth seem very distant.

During my time there, more and more people were coming to that homey space. At the moment when the new pastor took charge, so that the founding pastor could “retire” (which consisted of devoting himself to writing, creating content for an influential Vineyard website, overseeing a theological distance-education program, and devoting himself more fully to his already rigorous speaking tours), there were roughly one hundred and thirty regular attendees. Over a space of half a decade, the church grew to an average of two hundred and thirty attendees a day, with attendance occasionally as high two hundred and seventy people, and went from one Sunday morning service to

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25 This was so much the case that I can still recall the sense of something being almost unheimlich the two times I walked into Vineyard worship services that were located in traditional Church-and-steeple type buildings; the feelings associated with “holding church” within an actual church was, after so much time visiting various converted gymnasiums and industrial parks, to unusual for me to properly parse. Of course this sense of mild frisson lessened as soon as I realized in each case that this was again, someone else’s space that was being rented and redeployed – both Vineyards were renting space from aging congregations that, after Sunday morning proper was over, could rent the space out for Sunday afternoons and evenings.
two. The church also supported eight official “small groups,” and several that operated without official sanction, but that were not interdicted by the leadership in any way, either. While Shores is relatively diverse, and there are a core group of older members who have been with the church since its inaugural moments, a large portion of the new growth has been, again, from college students, recent college graduates, and young professionals in the initial moments of their careers. Part of Shore’s growth has been thanks to its ability to draw in individuals not only from the relatively wealthy area in which it is located, but also from the larger regional complex in which it is located.

This kind of numerical growth that Shores has experienced has been supplemented by numerical growth of a different kind – the church’s operating budget as of 2005 was roughly $400,000, putting it substantially ahead of the median Vineyard annual operating budget of $230,000 that most churches have to work with (Miller 2005:150). A substantial part of the funding goes to the fellowship’s ministry to the homeless in the surrounding beach communities, which has been a long-standing Shores practice; Shores has a program that, six days a week, serves lunch and offers prayer to the homeless at a relatively nearby public park, and for a number of years Shores also ran a halfway-house for the homeless who were attempting to work their way out of

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26 Since fieldwork has ended, a third evening service has been added.
27 In fact, during church activities I frequently found myself in the position of being the oldest person in the room,
28 Indeed, this ability may be essential to Shore’s growth – several members of Shores, including its pastor, could not afford to live in the region immediately surrounding the church, and were located in much more modest inland areas that were close enough to commute from for work or service, but not exactly nearby.
their financial, substance abuse, and legal difficulties.\textsuperscript{29} Shore’s growth has also allowed for new missionary initiatives in Northern Mexico and Southeast Asia. These short term missionary endeavors (see Priest 2006), primarily centered around groups of church volunteers heading out for limited periods of time (such as a few weekends a year in Mexico, or a couple weeks during the summer for Southeast Asia), were designed to be collaborative in nature, to be predicated on a high degree of interaction between short-term missions volunteers and the Christian populations that these trips were intended to support, and finally were also envisioned as being culturally sensitive, in as much as the stated goal was not a replication of a certain Western set of cultural forms, but rather an ‘indigenization’ of what was considered to be an already non-western in origins Christianity.\textsuperscript{30}

These institutional aspects of Shores Vineyard, of course, were vital, and they had their own structural effects that were intentional in nature; small groups were a way of identifying and encouraging nascent leaders and worship-music performers, and missionary activities and ministries to the homeless created spaces where willing

\textsuperscript{29} The halfway house had been closed down because the couple running it had become over-strained in their attempts to meet the demands of running it. Shore’s current pastor, who had co-run the Shores halfway home with his wife earlier in his career, wanted to reopen it, but felt that to do so immediately, before they could determine a mechanism to reduce the psychic cost that always fell on the home’s overseers, would be at best premature.

\textsuperscript{30} This follows from, as we shall see, the attempt by many Shores members to frame Christianity as a “non-Western religion” in that it supposedly challenged Western rationality.

Regarding the missions trips, I was unfortunately unable to see how this dynamic actually played out on the ground; my attempt to join a Shores-sponsored mission trip to Thailand was denied at the last minute after receiving initial approval when Thai church leaders apparently expressed hesitation about having a ‘non-Christian’ be part of the missionary effort.
individuals could test their potential willingness to take on even greater responsibility in furtherance of Shore’s core mission, the great commission of bringing the news of Christ to all nations. These practices that stemmed from this institutional arrangement, though, are to a degree the practices of many churches, and churches without the particular history of the Vineyard; informative in general about contemporary American religiosity, they perhaps do not tell us as much as we would like regarding the fate of Wimber’s attempt to graft an ecstatic Charismaticism on a controlled and controlling Evangelical church. Nor can we look to the institutional pronouncements coming from either the leadership of the Vineyard in general, or from those of the leadership in Shores – while they may both have their influence (though I suggest that the latter carries more weight than the former now that Vineyard-wide attempts at revival have passed on with John Wimber), it is in the everyday sets of relations, rather than in peak pedagogical moments, that we should look for a sense of what the Vineyard’s legacy will be. Have the charismatic practices been passed on to a new generation, and if so, do they either do greater structuring work in people’s practices – or perhaps are they structured in a way that is isomorphic to other aspects of their lives? It is with this question in mind that we will turn to the patterns seen in every day “Christian” speech practices, as will be explicated in the next chapter.
CHAPTER TWO – SPEAKING
NO CALLER I.D. FOR THE SOUL

In the rapidly emerging field of the Anthropology of Christianity (Bialecki, Haynes, Robbins 2008; Cannell 2005, 2006; Robbins 2003; Scott 2005), it is fair enough to say that issues regarding language, both spoken and written, have been the area where there has been the most productive work. The work done has been surprisingly extensive, covering not only historical material (Bauman 1990), but also addressing locales both outside (Keane 1998, 2002, 2007, Robbins 2001a) and within (Bielo 2009, Crapanzano 2000, Harding 1987, 2001, Malley 2004, Shoaps 2001, Stromberg 1993) the current ideological metropole for Protestant Christianity, the United States (see Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996); this concern for language has addressed a surprisingly wide swath of registers, addressing both the ephemeral voice (Engelke 2007) and the world-making possibilities of print (Keller 2005), and has taken on the vexed activity of translation (Rafael 1992, Meyer 1999). In truth, this is one instance within Christianity-centered ethnography in which one cannot claim that this ‘emergent’ status has resulted in a merely preliminary sketch, or a hazy program for further research. Rather, this ‘emerging’ discussion has resulted in what has effectively become a form of Khunian “normal science” within Christianity-centered ethnography (Joel Robbins, personal communication). In fact, its ubiquity, and its formulaic nature, might give us pause. While it is true that some account of the systemic regularities in the use and conception of language by Christians populations is probably necessitated by the fact that Christianity, particularly its Protestant instantiations, is notorious as a religion centered around speech (or, more to the point, as ‘the religion of talk’), this emphasis on
linguistic representation as a mode of inaugurating and fixing religious experience seems to be at the same time both overreaching, and perhaps a little completist.

This is the argument made in fact by Tanya Luhrmann (2004b), who, drawing upon fieldwork with several American Evangelical churches, has argued for the importance of both body- and sensory- subjectivity-forming practices that are only partially enmeshed in, and thus to a degree not entirely controlled by, language (a phenomenon that she gives the catch-all phrase of ‘metakinesis’). Given the experiential and supernatural orientation of the ‘New Paradigm’ Christians (see Miller 1997) she studies, which as we have seen include the Vineyard itself, this difference of tack could be thought to be the result of creedal differences between the object of Luhrmann’s study and that studied by other ethnographers; specifically it could imagined to be a function of differing attitudes regarding charisms, that is, the supernaturally understood activities associated with Pentecostal and Pentecostal-type practices, which, because of they way in which they offer democratic access to divine authority, often are divisive. At first blush, this seems unlikely, for while some of the authors who have explicitly or implicitly taken up the conception of language ideology as a central theoretical model were thinking through denominations historically hostile to Pentecostal/Charismatic activity (for instance, Crapanzano’s Southern California Fundamentalists), others drew from their ethnographic work with groups that are effectively (Robbins) or openly (Shoaps) Pentecostal in nature. It would initially appears that we have to take a different approach if we are to reconcile Lurhmann’s critique with these other models of Protestant subjectivity.
**Christian Language Ideologie(s)**

But again, we may be too quick here to err; while charismatic activity may not be the engine of difference here, considering how charismatic activity functions may give us insight into fissures in larger constellations of Christian language use. To explain why, we should look with a slightly finer lens to see what differences there may be in the details of Christian language ideology. If we think systematically about these various Christian language ideologies, we can see that while they share a family resemblance, at the same time they have moments when they differ from each other, and thus are separate in what appears to be not an entirely unmotivated manner.\(^{31}\)

Where these formulations of ethical language use differ, however, is in the way in which they imagine referential dimension of language functions. To take an example, Crapanzano’s *Serving the Word* (2000) presents a picture of Fundamentalist language where literalism serves as a drag that constrains allegorical readings, in which imaginative frontiers are occluded, where biblical material is read in a decontextualized, imperative mode, where the social is denied in a nominalist turn, and where the rhetorical, ironic nature of speech is instead obscured by seeing speech as primarily substantive and referential. Despite being couched in a moralistic, rather than a psychological, idiom, and also despite this Fundamentalist rejection of individualism as an ideology, Crapanzano presents his informants as radically individual actors, with

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\(^{31}\) There is one commonality, at least in the vast majority of studies of Christian language ideology. These systems are united by disvaluing the markers of, and sometimes the formal logic behind, the linguistic uses associated with either the non-Christian recent past, or the non-Christian others who share their social milieu. In short, Christian language ideology, at least as theorized to date, is always imagined as playing out against a wider non-Christian pagan or secular beyond, which is at once opposed and to some degree constitutive of the character of the language ideology.
spoken agency limited to two sources – the divine (often through the form of providential planning, or occasionally inspiration), or themselves (even if that agency reaches its apotheosis in its continuing self-erasure through faith in, and submission to, God).

Compare that with Harding’s (2001) description of Jerry Falwell’s rhetoric, which emphasizes the work done by the purposeful use of figurative and allegorical language, in which the ‘literal’ Biblical narrative is constantly being re-imagined as Falwell, and preachers like Falwell, deploy it in new contexts as moments of processual unfolding that orientates the subject not towards his or her self, but outwards and beyond the subject, towards the typological forms that are the true site of meaning. It is not impossible to reconcile these two narratives (careful observation of Biblical hermeneutics suggests that there is no end to the human capacity to reconcile narratives); Crapanzano’s interest is primarily in the hermeneutic practices of this population, particularly its academic and professional elites, while Harding discusses instead the work being done by a public figure to reorient and overcome Fundamentalist separatist impulses that had kept the religious movement from the political arena for much of the twentieth century. These details aside, though, there is something jarring in the sharply contrasting sense of the subjective worlds displayed in each author’s accounts of language – one, Harding’s, incredibly centrifugal in its expansiveness, while the other, Crapanzano’s, due to its limitation of, and at times foreclosure of, certain aspects of language, appears to be centripetal (and perhaps, as presented by that author, claustrophobic). And they are both describing populations that are at least overlapping, in as much as both serve up Falwell and the Thomas Road Baptist Church
as exemplars, even if each case at hand has an object that exceeds merely Falwell, or even American Baptists.

Loose and impressionistic as these terms are, the words *centrifugal* and *centripetal* used above do, I argue, sketch out two contrasting, yet prevalent themes in accounts of Christian Language Ideology. The use of centrifugal and centripetal as metaphors emphasize the underlying identity of these two different approaches to language ideology, in as much as they are both grounded in reflexive conceptions of what constitutes ethical and efficacious linguistic acts. These two terms also provide a way of speaking of the tendency to either highlight the outward origins of language, and of the exterior cardinal orientations that fix subjectivity, or to use this meta-linguistic reflection to lock down language’s polysemous nature, deny its physical substrate, highlight personal agency, and to repress the alterity present in any socially grounded communicative act.

An even more clear illustration can be found in contrasting two models of Christian language ideology that are drawn from separate populations – specifically, Keane’s model of the Protestant Semiotic Ideology that he extracts from his work with Calvanist Sumbanese, and Simon Coleman’s documentation of how language functions for the Sweden-based Word of Life Prosperity Gospel movement. Keane’s work has endeavored to trace out the relationship in Protestantism between proper speech, agency, and the person. While his work could be seen as part of a larger project to trace out the tensions inherent in the inevitability of the material substrate of communication (Keane 1997b, 2007), what concerns us here is his claim that there is a deep-running tendency in Christianity in general, and in Protestantism in particular, to valorize a state
of ‘sincerity,’ accentuating an isomorphism between external speech and the subjectivity of the speaking subject. For Keane, this sincerity is predicated upon an assumption of interiority, and because language is situated within this interiority, both language and thought are depicted as being “fully under the control of the speaking subject.” (Keane 2007:317). According to Keane, this encourages an ethic of linguistic ‘spontaneity’ (even if the rhetorical markers of this state of spontaneity are rehearsed and formulaic) and locates proper agency as arising from the individuated speaker, and not from larger external networks or material items (the latter in particular being dismissed as ‘fetishistic’). The final turn in most discussions of Protestant Language Ideology is the argument that the religious autonomous subject that is produced by this stance towards language is one that is closely related, either in genealogy or structure, to the confessional, agentive, self-fashioned subject of contemporary modern secular language ideologies, and therefore, Protestant language ideology points to some of the disavowed religious aspects of secular modernity’s logic regarding concepts such as originality and the self. In its concern for a bounded and fixed subject, Keane’s model appears to be more reminiscent of Crapanzano’s Baptists than of Harding’s Baptists – and hence, perhaps, could be catalogued as centripetal as well.

By way of comparison, in a reading of how Christian language functions, at least for a certain stream of faith-based prosperity gospel groups, Simon Coleman, in his work on the Charismatic World of Life movement, has recently traced out a different logic regarding language, where the borders of the self are much more porous, and where the concept of speech acts as being rooted in the specificities of the individuated person does not have the same importance. In this system, the believer’s
spiritual prowess is a function of her ability to internalize spiritual words, which have value because of their exterior source, while the subject’s own agency is carried forth beyond the limits of the person by a further circulation of both words and money that follows a person-extending (and credit-building) logic reminiscent of the Maussian Gift (Coleman 2004, Coleman 2006). According to Coleman, these words are prized not for their relationship to an interiorized self, but for the sense of materiality that Prosperity-Gospel adherents imbue them with – particularly when these words have an effect on their equally material bodies, shaking them in ecstatic paroxysms or delivering divine healing. In its emphasis on the exteriority of the language that comprises itself, and on circulation rather than fixed identification, it could be imagined as more akin to Harding than Crapanzano (see, e.g., Harding 1992) – and, thus, centrifugal.

Of course, this opposition we have been crafting may be more entwined than it appears. When thinking through these two models, it is striking to note that the very spontaneity, originality, and inward source of language that Keane finds so vital in morally-valued Protestant speech appears to be the structural inversion of the exterior-originated, repetitious language thought to be spiritually and ethically efficacious by Coleman’s neo-Pentecostals. One could say that this is due to denominational and cultural specificities, exigencies arising from the social, cultural, and technological milieus in which these particular practices are found; however, it is important to note that both of these religious modalities imagine themselves to be, fundamentally, not particular but universal. Whatever merit this claim to universality may hold, these two modes of religious speech certainly can be said to be close to ubiquitous; traces of both religious language ideologies can be found in Christianities in widely diffuse locales,
both in the global south as well as the global north. We should also keep in mind the fact that there is a tendency for adherents of each of these language ideologies to take up the practices of the other – for Evangelical churches to become infused with prosperity-like Charismatic practices, or for Charismatic churches to have the “fires of revival” slake, becoming in linguistic practice inseparable from their Evangelical co-religionists. Finally, each author has moments in which he suggests that the language ideology that respectively identifies his Protestant or neo-Pentecostal subjects seems to have traces of a logic or of values that runs counter to their main animating impulse. Keane observes that the tendency to abandon a prior set of external linguistic forms in order to achieve a state of unmediated spontaneity always fails, instead bringing new external linguistic forms into being that have to be internalized by good Christian subjects in a manner reminiscent of Coleman’s prosperity believers. Similarly, while Coleman’s Faith-Gospel adherents emphasize the exteriority and physicality of language, this language is always in furtherance of an individuated self whose internal agency, in the final analysis, always seems to be the determining factor.

Given their competing claims to centrality in the global ecuméne, and the constant possibility of each ideology sliding into the other, these religious language ideologies could be said to be chained to each other as uncanny doubles – uncanny in the Freudian sense of that which seems to have been superseded, but yet insistently returns. This is especially true given the moral historical teleology that animates Keane’s depiction of language ideology, and the presumably eschatological teleology that one can sometimes intimate traces of in Coleman’s. If there is any value to this observation as a generality, we might expect to see signs of this uncanny doubling
inscribed in the practices of religious bodies that subscribe to these language ideologies, moments where the centripetal and centrifugal aspects of language and semiosis more broadly appear in parasitic relation – or even appear to transition into one another.

**Demons and Charisms in the Living Room**

I believe that such tensions are present in the Vineyard. For the remainder of this chapter, I’d like to briefly sketch out one particular instance of demonization and deliverance I observed during my fieldwork, and then work back to the relationship that demonization, possession, and the charisms have with the two models of what constitutes valued types of speech. My goal is to show how the act of being possessed, and being delivered from possession, apart from whatever other underlying political (Lewis 1966, 1971, Ong 1987, 1988), dissociative (Luhrman 2004b, 2005, 2006), depth-psychology (Obeyesekere 1981) or phenomenological (see Csordas 1994) mechanisms that may also be in play, can be understood as a mode of dealing with a crisis in the Protestant Language Ideology that is rooted in the attempt to use an iterable, exterior set of tokens to create moments of meaning that are purportedly particular, unique, internal, and personal to an autonomous bounded individual. To trace out the logic of this argument, this chapter will analyze instances of demonization, demonization-related discourse, and discourse and practices regarding some of the other supernatural gifts (or *charisms*) as they were practiced at Shores Vineyard. In the end, this chapter will claim that while Protestant Language Ideology in the sense used by Keane and others has a role in the Vineyard, it is practiced in such a way that it uses concepts of supernatural authorship of individual speech acts to acknowledge what
Bakhtin (2006) has called the dialogic nature of discourse; the ex-centric form of centrifugal language found in Coleman’s work. In short, I argue, it is not a matter of choosing the centrifugal or the centripetal aspects of language, but rather, seeing how they are both present and contain each other.

Despite its global scale and Pentecostal practices, in many ways the Vineyard remains true to the American Evangelical portion of its theological inheritance – particularly when it comes to language practices. Emphasizing the colloquial over the religiously charged, the Vineyard believers have an ethic of ‘toning down’ their spiritual speech, avoiding what they see as the ‘excesses’ associated with classical American Pentecostal speech. Vineyard pastors, by and far, prefer to ‘keep it real,’ playing down the baroque emotional and highlighting spontaneity and sincerity as linguistic virtues even as they engage in such non-Evangelical practices as dispensing prophecy and casting out the demonic.\(^{32}\)

With the passing of the Vineyard’s Charismatic (in both senses of the word) founder, John Wimber, however, there has been much change in the Vineyard’s denominational structure, and a sense that these earlier practices were no longer as central to the Vineyard’s mission as they once were (see Miller 2005). To a very real degree, as we shall see, in more and more Vineyard churches common sermons and discussions are more likely to be on such issues as social justice and proper economic

\(^{32}\) Again, evangelical is used here not to denote the larger Evangelical/Pentecostal political alliance that was formed by theologically conservative Christians to break with Fundamentalism and challenge mainline Protestantism’s supremacy after World War 2 (see Hart 2004, Marsden 1987, Stone 1997); rather, it is used to identify the practices associated with the classic American Evangelical denominations, which, at least before the Charismatic movement, strongly rejected Pentecostal-style religious activity.
practice than on Charismatic practice, suggesting that the Weberian process of routinization of Charisma may well be under way.

Therefore, my ears picked up considerably when we heard about the Prophet.

I first heard about the Prophet’s arrival in a home-based small group that I had been regularly attending as part of my fieldwork – small groups being church-affiliated gatherings that often stand as a spot of intimacy and bonding for contemporary American Christians (see Wuthnow 1994a, 1994b; Bielo 2004). The news about his impending visit was first broken to the small group well before he arrived, and there had been weeks of expectation before the Prophet came to town. But whatever the group had been expecting was certainly different from what ended up taking place. The Prophet wasn’t originally labeled as a prophet by the small group participants, nor was it particularly clear exactly how and when he achieved that status within the small group. He was originally described by the married co-leaders of the group as someone who was “gifted at hearing from god,” a Vineyard-renowned individual with particular gifts whom they had first encountered at a leadership retreat that had occurred earlier in the year. He was a high school educator of some sort, but he was willing to share his other, spiritual gifts on the side, driving up and down the state to present seminars on hearing from God. Impressed by his gifts, they had requested that he come to their small group, so that the fifteen to twenty people who had been cycling in and out of the once-a-week small group over the past year would have an opportunity to “hear from God” in a new way. The act of “hearing from God” had been a thematic touchstone of the small group for some time now – it had been one of the topics that the co-leaders, a late-twenties professional couple newly arrived from the East Coast, had been turning to
with great frequency during the informal sessions that mixed singing contemporary pop-rock tinged hymns, prayer circles, and informal discussions and testimony. Hosted by an engineer who supported the group by volunteering his large apartment that was just driving distance from a major university and technology center in Rancho Palma Vista, the makeup of the individual members of the group was much like its host and its co-leaders: mostly young Caucasian and second generation Asian-Americans\footnote{The only exception was a central-American emigrant and convert from Catholicism who came with his Caucasian wife.} in their twenties, rather well-educated (members include engineers, lawyers, doctors, clinical psychologists, graduate students, speech pathologists, staff members from secular, international NGOs, and two pastors with Master’s of Divinity who were engaged in campus ministry), often politically moderate or progressive, and, despite their Southern Californian residency, they were as much from the East Coast and Midwest as they were from the West. They were a sociable group, not quite gossipy, but quick to talk (and to the co-leaders’ occasional distress, quick to go off topic), and so, as the day approached, the informal scuttle often turned from, say, the latest hip-hop CD or movie, or the location of various sales, to the “special upcoming event.”

At some point, the word “prophet” became the way to identify this upcoming guest. During interviews, invariably held in one coffee shop or another, the small group members I met with would ask me about him; I had seen him teach a seminar during the previous spring, so during small group meetings I was often called upon by one of the leaders to give an account of his supernatural abilities, something that I did with a guilty
conscience, torn as I was between my anthropological skepticism on one hand, and my
desire to support the small group leaders on the other.

Finally, after weeks of expectation, seven o’clock in the evening of ‘the day’
came. Parking across the street from a well-lit mini-mall, walking through the heart of a
generically Southern California Spanish-style condominium complex, I went up the
stairs to see what would occur. The Prophet was sitting down, and seeing him was a bit
of a shock. When I had first seen him earlier giving the seminar in the auditorium of an
elementary school rented on weekends by a church, he was a flamboyant, spastic
presence, darting across the basketball court floor with the wireless microphone gripped
tightly in his hand as he interrupted himself with story after story. Here, he was a more
inert presence sitting glumly on a couch, a balding, goatee-wearing white man in his
late-forties with a Falstaff-like stomach. Slowly the members of the small group
entered, as did several guests, drawn by the unusual nature of the evening; over the
course of roughly an hour, twenty people showed up.

When all the chairs were filled in the living room, and people started to sit on
the floor, one of the co-leaders picked up the guitar, prayed “come holy spirit,” and
started playing plaintively, slowly, the songs that were familiar from Church services,
worship music CDs, and downloaded MP3s. The Prophet covered his face with his
hands as he started rocking back and forth, in time to the music, and in the background
the rustling whisper of the ‘polite,’ sub-vocal speaking in tongues found in so many
middle-class white Vineyard Church events could be heard.34 After a while the Prophet

34 For a discussion of the domestication of charismatic gifts by American bourgeois
joined in the speaking in tongues with his eyes closed, though at times he would open
them, stop speaking in tongues, and check his watch. As the singing went on, people
would drift from the lyrics, with women singing the counter harmonies, and one man
rushing in improvisatory prayers, in a rhythm almost akin to scat singing, in the gaps
between the lyrics.

After a good forty-five minutes or so of this, the Prophet started giving what he
styled a “fireside chat” (like, he said, the one given by Nixon on the projection screen at
the Richard Nixon library). All the taciturn worry had now been washed away, and he
was his prior self from the time before, the rightful center of attention. He started his
talk by speaking haltingly about the vitality of “the Kingdom” and about “Justice,”
though he slid off topic rather quickly, discussing instead how God’s power would “flip
your little theology around.” From this point forward, his talk was a mixed account of
various instances of supposed spiritual warfare with both Demons and with Jehovah’s
Witnesses, attacks on Christians for being “religious,” and heathens for, well, being
heathens, all of which was only so well received. He repeatedly made references to
broad categories such as “Westerners” and “Suburbanites” who don’t get the message,
with the comparison made to Africa, a place of “real belief” where, he frequently
mentioned, he had visited. “Why do we hear so many stories of people being raised
from the dead in Africa (after praying for them for four days)? Because they don’t know
any better, they haven’t been educated any better.” A faux pas in front of a liberal
audience, he quickly repackaged his statement as a claim that Africans, not being awash
in a consumer culture, are not schooled in the sort of empiricisms that serves to preclude
belief – something that afflicts Westerners in general, and him specifically (as he
confessed “I’m like that too; my brain is my worst enemy”). As was usual for that evening, he rescued himself by going off on a tangent, asking, “why are there so many civil wars in Africa? Because it’s a place of Spiritual Warfare.” It’s a land where Christians stand next to people who go to witch doctors. He ended with another sudden lurch in topic, saying that if you wish to reach the world through Evangelical outreach, “go to the University.” One of the campus ministers hissed a loud yes at that minute, but on the whole the audience was looking uncertain, restive (later on, his talk would be charitably remembered by some of those present as the weakest portion of the evening).

What he announced next was “ministry time,” starting it off with the statement that “first we talked about the Kingdom, and now we’re going to demonstrate it.” That, he clarified, does not mean that everything he says will be correct – the person who receives the prophecy is the measure of whether it is right, and the Prophet is as likely to be wrong as he is to be right. . . except, of course, when he is right; when one prophetic revelation comes in, like adjacent guitar strings, other revelations start to vibrate, and the more likely he will be to receive messages that are true. After another brief verbal waiver (the Prophet doesn’t predict death, marriages, and babies – not because he doesn't receive information on this front, but because the disruption that is caused by passing these revelations along), he asked the group a comment that seems as much of a casual aside as a dramatic presentation – “is anyone here named Sarah”?

There were ten seconds of anticipatory silence. No one in the room was named Sarah.

The Prophet smiled, and said he was relieved – he was worried that there would be someone named Sarah in the room, and that she would automatically assume that the
prophecy would be about her. No, this was a message about a promise, a promise that had been made and that someone has been waiting on, longing for, and is there anyone here sad because they have been waiting on a promise? Another ten second wait, but slowly a blond headed college age student, an active and very charismatically orientated member of the church, but only a guest here today, slowly raised his hand as he closed his eyes in angst. Starting to slowly sob to herself, another woman in the background, who had complained in the past about her stalled career and her constant single status, raised her hand as well. Unsteadily, the female co-leader said that she had a vision, of a geranium, or perhaps of a tropical flower, atop a snow capped mountain that looked like Mount Fuji, but there was no response – all eyes were on the Prophet then as he prayed over the college student, his voice a mix of sing-song tongues and a whispered speaking voice as the college student cried. He moved over to the woman, his hands on her head as he told her that, “you are loved by God, as a woman, you’re are valuable to his eyes as a woman.” Casting an eye over the rest of the audience, he issued them a directive – you know that the prophecy is for you if your first thought is that the prophecy is for you, and your immediate second thought is that it couldn’t be you. I looked around and noticed that this one evening, I was not the only ethnographer . . . three other people were taking notes.

He worked his way around the room, dispensing prophecy as he traveled. The Prophet told one man that he wasn’t meant to have a McJob, and then that he wanted to bless the man’s hands because they’ll “write songs to the lord.” The Prophet then turned to the man’s wife, asked if they were together, and after hearing the answer told her that “you aren’t just some accessory for your husband, I see you taking in and teaching
wayward and lost girls, that you have value apart from standing in your husbands shadow . . . that it’s okay not to dust immediately, to let the dishes go undone for twenty minutes . . .” As he walked away from her as she cried, he told her that God wanted her to be creative.

Eventually, he worked his way to a dark-skinned, dark-haired college-age man who was not a regular member of the group. The man, whom we’ll call Justin, sat there, worry and obvious consternation sketched on his acne-Scarred face, as the Prophet walked up and held his hands over Justin. The Prophet got his name and his occupation through a little banter – he was a student at the nearby University – and after that brief introduction, the Prophet told him that, “The Lord wants you to know that he is real, and that he’s not the author of your problems, I declare the cross that redeems, you have value to the father, the father knows everything that you’re thinking that he still loves you . . .” He threw out a phrase, that he used earlier in the evening – “You don’t need to call the psychic friends, you just need to call 1-800-Jesus.” The Prophet told Justin that he was “not wasting his time,” that he was “not stupid,” that he didn’t get to the University “on some quota.” Justin sat there, not particularly moved, but not any less visibly anxious for that matter, either. The Prophet asked him whether he did computer art, but no, Justin muttered that he works in biology, to which the Prophet answered that “the arts and the sciences are very close.” Another small, uncomfortable pause, and then the Prophet said to Justin, “those hurtful things in your family, God wants you to know that it’s not your fault.” As if he had been waiting for the moment, Justin started to cry. “The Lord knows your heart, the load of guilt we take it off now.” Justin continued to cry as the Prophet continued his work, saying that he “senses girl
problems,” but Justin was off in another world, at first slouching forward on his plastic dining table chair, and then slowly sliding off it. Walking away to pray over someone else, he called out to Justin over his shoulder, “That’s the healing of the Holy Spirit, enjoy it!”

Almost everyone’s attention continued to follow the Prophet as he went along his way, but to those that stayed with Justin, it soon became obvious that Justin was in no way enjoying his then-present healed state. Finally falling clear of the chair, Justin crashed to the floor, where he began coughing and moaning. A friend of his, the blond college-aged man who earlier had been prayed over because he had been waiting on a promise, in turn prayed over Justin. From the back of the room one of the college ministers joined him in prayer; that did nothing for Justin’s immediate condition, though. Interrupted from dispensing prophecy, the Prophet called out in a mildly annoyed tone of voice that all the blond student had to do was to “break the familiar spirit of death.” The blond haired student brought his face right up against Justin’s as he snapped his fingers repeatedly in front of Justin’s fluttering eyes, rapidly repeating a command for the spirit to leave “in Jesus’ name.” Justin’s moans became louder. Someone rushed over a metal bowl from the kitchen, and Justin started coughing into it with more force. Justin was by this point being cradled like a Pieta, and another campus minister, a charismatic Korean-American college pastor, came up to assist. Justin’s face was by then covered in phlegm and specks of blood, and he had split his lips in all the intensity. His eyes were glassy and red. A paper towel wiped his face clean, but it didn’t stem the mess. The newer college pastor, holding Justin’s hand with an obvious tenderness, asked in a calming voice what Justin wanted, and Justin said that he wanted
“to kill myself.” Nervous, I asked one of the co-leaders whether we should consider taking him to a hospital, but she didn’t reply (the next day she told me she would have taken him to the emergency room if she felt that he was in danger at any time, but since the attack “seemed pretty clearly spiritual in nature” she thought it was “important to try to get to the root of what had been happening for him personally”). People gathered around Justin, encouraging him to cough it out of himself, and some of the bystanders flinched from the moisture as Justin started to violently double over on the floor. The Prophet interrupted, saying as if in passing that the church had lost the symbolism of water, and then sprinkled a little over Justin’s head to no obvious effect before walking away. As if to continue the theme, someone took a plastic Aquafina water bottle and poured some water down Justin’s throat, but the water didn’t stay down. The more gentle-voiced minister squatted in front of Justin and, after a pause, continued to talk to him in the same soothing voice he employed earlier, telling him that Jesus died for him, and that it “isn’t a guilt thing,” but that Justin “has to make a decision to reject” his sins as well as whatever had hold over him. Justin bellowed a “No,” which, smiling, the gentle-voiced pastor took as a rejection of whatever had a hold on him up to now. Behind them, the female co-leader read, softly, from the Psalms. She passed a small plastic bottle of olive oil, and the gentle-voiced college-pastor anointed Justin’s forehead. By now, well over an hour had passed; Justin’s eyes were less red, and heavier, as if he was about to fall asleep. He mumbled that he couldn’t feel his legs, and the gentle-voiced pastor prayed for “wholeness and feeling” to return to the body – as he did so, he touched each limp leg, which suddenly twitched with the contact. Justin was led stumbling to a sofa, where the Prophet, busy the entire time, came up to him
and said in a forced, chipper manner that “it wasn’t the worst deliverance I’ve seen, though you did toss your cookies.” Dazed, Justin replied that it was carrots, not cookies that were tossed. As the evening wound down, people prayed in thanks over the Prophet, and just past two in the morning, everyone went home.

**Exterior and Interior Language**

There are numerous ways in which the previous ethnographic moment could be analyzed, identifying how embodied alterity was marked either in spoken code or in the ritual setting (Irvine 1982), or articulating the numerous shifting frames that were inhabited by the various actors that comprised the larger unfolding scene (Hanks 1996). Rather than pursue these threads, though, I would like to trace out the various conceptions of language present in each of these moments. I would like to argue that if we follow the transformations the subject undergoes throughout the process, we can see that each moment of demonization and deliverance contains traces of the two contrasting approaches towards language that we discussed earlier – that is, centripetal and centrifugal.

Take as an example the Prophet himself. To the extent that his statements have any authority at all, that authority is present to the degree that he himself is not the author of what’s uttered, but is merely conveying a message originated in another space (Urban 1989, Goffman 1981). We can see this in the language used to convey the origin of his prophetic statements. This is evident as well as in the way that he not only disowned any intentionality of the delivered messages, but also disowned any insight into what they referenced (think, for example, of his fear that the name Sarah was
intended to identify someone who bore that name). Further evidence could be seen in
the degree of disinterest, and heightened critical scrutiny, given to his pre-prophetic
‘fireside chat,’ (which was unquestionably attributed to him), in comparison to his
prophetic performance later in the evening.

A similar decentering can be identified in the use of tongues, and in the
understanding of tongues as a speech act; tongues is often a good metric for the level of
charismatic activity that is taking place, and was relatively pronounced on the night the
Prophet came to town. Webb Keane has suggested that tongues are best understood as
another product of what he considers to be the regnant Protestant Language Ideology;
for him, tongues are a communicative act where the drive for spontaneity and
independence from the outwardly determined social and material grounds of language
reaches its natural conclusion. Indeed, Keane sees this as a limit case, as an exemplar of
an entirely transcendent practice that, despite being driven by a purifying urge to root
out contingent and non-ideational contaminants, still falls prey to the material and social
conditions that enable semiosis. (Keane 2002:84). However, what is striking about
tongues both in practice and in conception within the Vineyard is not physicality and
alterity as limits, but instead as what is foregrounded. In the Vineyard church where I
spent the majority of my time, tongues are described as a love language between the
worshipper and god. Despite the fact that this seems to suggest a level of intimacy, and
to a degree privacy, that emphasizes a certain liberal conception of self that appears to
be in harmony with Keane’s conception of Protestant Language Ideology, the
particularities of how this love-language is thought to function works against this
conception. As is implicit in the word *charism*, one receives tongues from God, and any
sense of volition or control on the part of the subject places the validity of the act into question – I have heard informants wonder when presenting their biography whether in certain moments in their youth they were actually speaking in tongues, or if it was simply their own desire that had triggered in some unconscious manner a simulacra of tongues. Further, this love language is one that is not transparent to them – despite it being a sign of intimacy, the glossolalist is unaware of what the referents of his or her own speech are. This lack of transparency in, and access to, the meaning of one’s own exterior-derived “love language” is highlighted by the existence of a separate charismatic gift, that of interpretation of tongues; this gift is usually displayed in a large setting, such as a worship service, when, on the heels of a particularly loud or clear glossolaliaic event, someone gives a ‘translation’ of its message, which is usually worshipful or prophetic in nature – and hence articulated as a message from God to the body of worshippers as a whole (Csordas 1997). This last possibility should give pause, for it suggests that one can at one moment be speaking to God in a language not under one’s own control or comprehension, in a language received from God, and the contents of that speech act are a message that is translated as being from God to others, something that seems to weigh as much on the side of being decentered as it does on the side of immediacy, sincerity, and self-presence.36

35 Though I have had one practitioner explain to me that he was reasonably certain regarding what the proper referents were when he was speaking in tongues – but then his status and years of experience suggests that this is an outlier – and he did present it a fashion that suggested he knew that his statement was not in harmony with most established ideas on this point.
36 To be honest, while I had seen it at other Vineyards, at my time at this particular Vineyard church I never saw a moment of interpreted tongues (when such speech acts did appear, glossolalia usually to the form displayed in the possession narrative given
The materiality of tongues in a sense is also something that cannot be ignored, both in its sonic and embodied aspects. First, there is the register of voice, because it is here that the material nature of tongues comes to the fore; in a way, absent any clear lexical markers, and with any interpretation either at a temporal remove, or absent entirely, there is nothing but the ‘grain of the voice’ present (Barthes 1977) – it is all surplus, and extra-linguistic charge that is not isolatable to either the speaker, the hearer, or the medium that stands between them (Dolar 2006). Second, tongues are well-choreographed events; they are mapped on to sets of stock-poses (hands out or up in prayer, head tilted upward or down) in ways that draw attention to the body, especially since there is no other point of referent beyond the sonic force of glossolalia itself that the message can be linked to – without any immediate referent, due to the fact that this is a language beyond deciphering, one can only follow tongues not out to a set message, but back to the flesh.

above), but the core members of the church (that is, leadership and particularly committed members) whom I spoke to about this were familiar with interpretation as a practice (and one person who had never seen it asked for a full account, his imagination obviously caught).

The lack of public interpretation at this church is most likely a result of a general nervousness about tongues – church members did not openly pray in tongues during church services, and some people claimed that they had never heard tongues (despite the fact that I had seen them present at events where people had spoken in tongues). During one sea-side baptism at this church, the pastor felt it was vital to immediately give an explanation of tongues after some one spoke in it – saying that it was just another way of worshipping to the Lord. To the degree that tongues has to be given a gloss at an adult baptismal rite should suggest how much under wraps they were. The seeming unseemliness of tongues, at once a love language and yet something to be held at a distance suggests something about the kind of instability present in language ideology; specifically, it points to the presence, as argued here, of incommensurable and yet unmarked and co-present models of language.
To distill this discussion to a single point, despite the Vineyard’s preference for the laconic and colloquial in speech patterns – a preference that seemed to have deeply marked the speech of the Prophet, even when he was making supernaturally outré claims – it seems difficult to recognize in these charismatic phenomena the ideals of authority and origination that we have received from Keane, but these phenomena are much more amenable to being thought of as an exemplar of the fundamentally open and physically foregrounded self that Coleman describes.

At the same time, however, if we take the demonized state to indicate what is, literally, unclean as far as language and self goes – and there is no doubt that demonization is an inversion of the ethically proper mode of being (Csordas 1994) – we are presented with what appears to be the same constellation of forces present in the gift (exterior influence and corporeal physicality), only given an entirely negative valence. The Vineyard, following the larger contemporary American Charismatic demonology, sees the relationship between the demonizing entity and the sufferer not as an overwriting or replacement of the victims agency, but as a warping of it, a subtle shifting of the self’s desire by a non-self entity. This decentering is seen not only in the proximate supernatural cause, but also in the fact that the psychic and emotional wounds viewed as laying the groundwork for demonization often point to social and interpersonal factors, such as familial involvement with the occult, or abusive family relations. Demonization can even be the result of a violation of a person, with the arc of demonic affliction passing from violator to the violated. As stated by the Vineyard’s effective founder, John Wimber, “people who have been sinned against sexually usually have serious demonic problems. Seventy percent of all children of alcoholics become
alcoholics; I believe in many instances demonic influence contributes to their problem” (Wimber and Springer 1987:119). This link between trauma and demonization is so strong that, during the small group meeting that occurred immediately after the one the Prophet visited, one group member’s statement during discussion regarding the demonization transitioned, without any external markers of the shift, from being a meditation regarding the awesome nature of the supernatural manifestations that had been seen, to the new topic of human relationships; in particular, this person stated that she was really affected by the thought that human beings had ‘inflicted’ that kind of hurt on Justin, that Justin was tormented as a result of other’s ‘relational malfunction.’ It is equally telling that for her, the aftermath of viewing an instance of demonization was not a renewed vigilance towards the supernatural, but instead, a heightened concern of quotidian interactions: She then concluded with the observation that one of the biggest things that we can do as Christians is to concentrate on healing broken relationship. Like prophecy and tongues, then, demonization invokes the larger social network, rather than highlighting the individual agency (in this case, of the afflicted); and yet at the same time, it does so in a way that at once weakens, yet returns us to, issues of agency and responsibility.

Finally, the impromptu ritual of deliverance itself seems to foreground the decentered, the conventional, and the material. This can be seen in the multiple anointings Justin received during the deliverance, but also in the bowl (and the effluvia that it was intended to contain) that was brought out during the evening; in the Vineyard (as in many other Charismatic movements, as well as in non-Christian theories of possession [see, e.g., Boddy 1989]), there is a sense that the demonic presence has a
crypto-physical aspect, with coughing or vomiting often taken as a sign that the demon has either exited, or is working its way out. Even some of the language used to control the demon has a mechanistic quality – the staccato recitation of the order to depart “in Jesus’ name,” rapidly repeated and paired with the repetitive punctuation of snapped fingers, seems to stress the magical aspect of language in its reliance upon the power of the name; it also implied a conception of repeated invocations of that name bringing a power that seems divorced from any semantic meaning attached to it, to the degree that these later iterations did nothing further to clarify whatever underlying message that might be contained in the phrase – the concept of ‘in Jesus name’ was as clear the first time as it was in its final utterance, if not clearer.\footnote{Further evidence for the idea that at times there is a tendency to see power as being contained in the language itself, and not in its referents, or in the state of mind of the person speaking, can be seen in the fact that one Sunday morning, where there was a fear that there wouldn't be enough senior church members for the ‘ministry time’ that occurs at the end of the church service, I was informed that I was ‘released to pray,’ – and this, despite my decidedly non-Christian status. Therefore, it is not the subject, or his or her status, that makes prayers valid, but rather the language contained in the prayer itself.}

So far, this analysis could be taken as a claim that in this particular instance, Coleman’s reading is simply a better fit than Keane’s – in other words, another case of different village, different custom. But this would be to ignore the fact that the language used both in the background and the center of the possession account above is consonant with the language valued in Keane’s formulation. As stated before, the Vineyard does value informal patterns of speech, even when engaging in activities that are not of an everyday nature; to these Southern California natives, the speech patterns associated with traditional Pentecostalism suggests a theatricality, and ultimately a lack
of sincerity, that cannot be accepted. As one pastor from another Vineyard church asked me rhetorically during a conversation, do Pentecostal preachers speak like that when they are ordering food in a restaurant? Further, Vineyard language is free of the formality associated with other forms of ritualized High Church Protestantism – first names over last, and nicknames over titles was the order of the day. While this dislike of artifice and honorifics did not reach, say, the limit point found in later Quaker practice (Bauman 1990),\(^{38}\) in its disinclination to bend backwards to highlight social markers in language it suggests a self that exists apart from position and communal regard.

The situation is complicated further when we observe that, in the deliverance itself, the method that successfully propels the demonized individual from one state to another is an act of existential choice, expressed as a literal cry from the soul, that is, Justin’s somewhat inarticulate, but affect-laden, ‘decision,’ which seems to be a reiteration of the prototypical act of accepting Jesus as savior. This act, it seems, is easy to read as a ‘sincere’ act, made meaningful only because it was understood to be an exercise of his personal agency, all traits that appear reminiscent of Keane’s Protestant Language Ideology. To view this charismatic scene as simply one about language where author and animator are non-identical would be to miss these vital elements.

Further, we should note that in this instance, as it appears to be in other instances that I’ve observed and accounts that I’ve heard, it was the proximity of Charismatic activity (prophecy, healing, and tongues), of outward-originated

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\(^{38}\) Nor was it predicated on an identity between plain speech and divine speech, as it was with the historical (and contemporary) Quaker sects.
supernatural language and meaning that runs through the body, that triggered the negative form of permeable, ex-centric being. It was the claim (and, apparently, the exercise of) authoritative language regarding Justin from a source other than Justin, someone else being able to speak Justin’s truth to Justin, that is, that triggered the crisis that allowed both Justin and his fellow believers to see traces of other authorities in Justin’s own actions. Charismatic activity, by highlighting the way in which the human-divine dyad can be seen as one of exteriority rather than as interior adherence, raises the possibility of other forms of alterity within the self – an act that must be undone by regathering the self through an affirmative act of recommitment, highlighting agency by at once using it to refute Satan, and then by putting it in abeyance before God.

What I would like to suggest in closing here is that these differing ways of depicting languages source and power that we can see not only in demonization, but in these two language ideologies, are in fact structural variants, or rather, that each is the answer to a crisis in the other. As we saw in the discussion relating demonic crises to the proximity of the gifts, centrifugal ideologies, that is, Charismatic models of language that highlight exterior authority and origination for language and ideational material, be that source human or supernatural, suffer from what we may call a chain of evidence problem; having come from across distant ontological horizons, and oft from invisible beings (Keane 1997a), there can be no immediate surety about the proper provenance of the message. As one of my informants said, there is no caller ID for the soul, no way to determine at the very moment of reception whether vision or language originates from God, the Devil, or the flesh – hence, the importance of discernment as a Charismatic practice (cf. Luhrmann 2006). Therefore, it is no surprise that in moments
where the exteriority of language is highlighted by stressing its origin in alterity, such as we have with prophecy, anxieties about the origin of speech – and hence, in a way, of the subject’s proper capacity to act (Ahearn 2001) – should come to the fore. Likewise, those whose selves have already been reconstituted on the model of sincerity, interiority and agency are just as vulnerable to slipping into the sort of open ways of being that marked both the charisms and demonization; given what we already have observed that acts of what is understood as ‘sincere’ speech are predicated on socially typified, and thus to an extent ‘rehearsed and formulaic’ ways of speech, it is easy to see how these ritualized ways of constituting spontaneous selves could slip into a concern with possible non-self sources of language and authority. Deliverance, I suggest, functions as a way to separate and regulate these differing, co-present stances towards authority and agency in language.

This is not, of course, to suggest either that Keane in particular, or the idea of a semiotic ideology, is deficient, either. As stated above, Keane’s conception of purification necessitates ‘impure’ internal objects upon which this drive for semiotic perfection can work, and this drive will always be thwarted in the final analysis due to the necessity for both social recognition and a material substrate. This is simply to note that these impure elements may have their own uses in a religious and representational economy – and receive their own sanction as ethically proper communicative acts because of it. Nor is this use of a structural model of complementary ways of framing speech, and crisis as a performatve mode of shifting between them, to deny the historical contingency of these forms.
Finally, what does this mean for the question that haunts an Anthropology of Christianity that has accepted language ideology as “normal science?” Does this point to a ‘beyond’ of Christian language ideology? Perhaps, yes, but not entirely. If nothing else, it suggests that in a perverse way, in certain moments Christian language ideology is its own beyond – or that apparently different strains of Christian language ideologies not only can be seen as in some ways being structural variants of each other, but can be observed as being dialectically related in the manner in which they are acted out as well. Rather than only looking to a non- or pre-Christian exterior, then, to see what Christian Language Ideology is set against, one may wish to turn to the heterogeneous nature of Christian speech itself.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore, we should not be surprised when we see contradictory formulations of ethical language, or even of human agency in the abstract; in other words, Harding and Crapanzano may have been describing the same population after all. Furthermore, we should not be too surprised when we come across similar disjunctures in purportedly secular arenas that are none-the-less influenced by the Protestant tradition (see, e.g., Strauss 1990, 1992, 2007).

Of course, though, while there is a dialogic element of language, and while the line between speech and text may not be always easily delineated, as Derrida has suggested, the question remains whether there is something particular about speech, or whether the similar oppositions to those that we have identified in speech are isolatable in other forms of linguistic practice. In the next chapter, we will discuss the folk

\textsuperscript{39} Although not couched as a problem of Language Ideology, we can take as another example of this Austin-Broos’ (1997) work on Jamaican Pentecostalism, which identifies separate, and to a degree contradictory, gendered discourses within the same religious field.
hermeneutics that were found in Shores Vineyard, to see whether we can build upon the
centripetal and centrifugal aspects of spoken language identified in this chapter, all with
the ambition of seeing whether we can associate this with the Charismatic and
Evangelical combinatory disjuncture that the Vineyard, as an organization, was founded
upon.
CHAPTER THREE – READING
THE BONES RESTORED TO LIFE: DIALOGUE AND DISSEMINATION IN
THE VINEYARD’S DIALECTIC OF TEXT AND PRESENCE

In this chapter I wish to complement the previous chapter’s discussion of language ideology by focusing on the question of hermeneutics. Specifically, I want to turn our attention to the interaction between beliefs regarding the nature of the Bible itself, and beliefs regarding the nature of the charismatic gifts. My claim here will be that in the Vineyard milieu, the Bible and gifts do substantial work, both complementary and contrasting, and that this work addresses a core antinomy of Christian belief. I begin this discussion of how this one set of Southern Californian Christians use the Bible by referencing a discussion of another set of Christians, located in a vastly different place, who have no use for the Bible whatsoever.

Matthew Engelke, in his recent (and compelling) ethnography A Problem of Presence (2007), has argued that a central problematic in Christian thought (at least as that thought is apprehended through the medium of ethnographic engagement) is that of presence and absence. For Engelke, the classic issue of communication with absent and invisible divine others that is the crux of much of religious language (Keane 1997a) achieves a particular poignancy in Christianity, because this difficulty has been at once solved and exacerbated by the Christian historic narrative. In Christianity, the gulf between the human and the divine has already been bridged in the person of Jesus, understood (by most forms of Christianity) as a moment where the opposing categories of the human and the divine were condensed into a single being. This being — remarkable to the degree that he is thought of by Christians as both unique and crucial
in the cosmic drama — is absent, however, now that he has left, risen, and (somewhat irritingly) left again.

For Engelke, this leaves Christians in a dilemma — how do they continue contact with the divine, especially since the possibility of an extremely intimate form of connection has been so tantalizingly raised? How do they make presence felt in the absence of the physical presence of the incarnation?\textsuperscript{40} To answer this Engelke draws on recent work on the ideology of representation as it pertains to Christianity — particularly Webb Keane’s (1998, 2002, 2007) work that expands the concept of language ideology to uncover the (often implicit) local understandings of all forms of semiotic activity. Engelke uses Keane’s work to suggest that at least in the case of Zimbabwe’s Masowe Friday Apostolic Church, their local solution to this long-running theological crisis was to think through issues of the divine in the play of materiality and immateriality that constitutes signification. Here, the immaterial is understood as an index for otherworldly presence, while materiality is complementarily seen as indicating forms of communication distant in both time and physical proximity, and hence lacking the immediacy that constitutes direct contact. This opposition is such that for the Friday Apostolics, in the field of religion transient speech is the preferred form of communication, while writing, shackled to the materiality of the implements that produce it and the material it is inscribed upon, is rejected. Because of this same materiality, the Bible itself is included in this rejection. So much better is the

\textsuperscript{40} For a similar version of this claim, though one that does not see this problematic as being as essential to an understanding of Christian practice, see Cannell (2006).
contemporary Holy Spirit, delivered from the mouth of possessed prophets, than old words about what happened in Palestine a long time ago.

While there are still some hitches and aporias in Masowe practice (for instance, most Masowe healing is done by way of supernaturally charged, but otherwise rather quotidian material items, such as pebbles and honey), this appears to be a rather stable binary and hierarchical opposition. Presence and absence, immaterial and material, are set against each other, rather than thought through at once. If we wager that Engelke is on in his supposing that this is a vital opposition for this population — and his ethnography is rather persuasive in suggesting that he is right — we may wish to observe that this stark divide, although it is the Masowe way, is not the only way that these opposing terms can be set into relation. While there are pleasures in presence, there are dangers as well. Recall Uzzah the priest (2 Samuel 6:6–7), who was struck dead when he made physical contact with the Ark of the Covenant as he touched it to prevent it from falling. Pure presence has its own risks. What happens, then, to the play of presence and absence in the more commonly occurring situation where they are in a sense both prized, where rather than opting for the presence of charisma or the distant mediation of the Bible, Christian communities opt for both, forcing them into a dialectical relation?

This chapter argues that at least in one instance — the Vineyard church movement in Southern California — this move splits the local hermeneutic model used to understand the Bible. Playing on the tensions present in the “textual ideology” (Bielo 2009) that informs how Anglophone North American Protestants read the Bible — using charisma to supplement the Bible, and in turn deploying the Bible to supplement
charisma — opens a gap between the imperative that the Bible is the same today as when it was first recorded, and that not only is the Bible is relevant today but also relevant in new ways each time that it is revisited (ibid.). This gap results in the simultaneous presence of two mutually exclusive, but oddly complementary, folk theories of communication. These folk theories, it will be shown, bear an eerie resemblance to long-running opposing themes regarding the nature of communication itself — that of communication as broadcast, and as a form of intimacy — that have been outlined by John Durham Peters. Using Peters (1999), this chapter will argue that the “problem of presence,” as well as the problems of absence, materiality and immateriality, have an entirely different solution in at least one corner of the North American charismatic movement. To make this argument, I will focus on describing the simultaneously vague yet crucial role the Bible has in the imagination of Vineyard believers. The chapter will then present its central theme, using an account of biblical material given a very personalized reading to flesh out the relationship between charismatic presence and biblical hermeneutics. I conclude with a brief discussion of how the Bible is at times used as a check on charismatic expression, rather than as something supplemented by charisma. While this chapter will address multiple aspects of Bible use in small groups, sermons, and even in folk apologetics, it will turn on an account of “prophetic scripture” that suggests that even when the Bible is read sola scriptura, it is never read alone; it is either complemented by otherworldly presences — or it is combating them.

Bible
What is it that Vineyard believers think about the Bible? Like many denominations, the Vineyard church contains a statement of faith, albeit a somewhat thin one when compared to the catechisms and doctrinal statements of other churches. One of the elements of this statement is a brief description of how the Association of Vineyard Churches, as a collectivity, supposedly conceives of the Bible:

The Sufficiency of Scripture

WE BELIEVE that the Holy Spirit inspired the human authors of Holy Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:20–21; 1 Corinthians 2:12–13; John 14:26) so that the Bible is without error (Psalm 19:7–9; Psalm 119:30; Psalm 119:43; Psalm 119:89; Matthew 5:17–18; John 3:34; John 10:35; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; Revelation 22:6) in the original manuscripts. We receive the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments (Luke 24:44; 2 Peter 3:15–16; Revelation 22:18–19) as our final, absolute authority, the only infallible rule of faith (Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35) and practice (Matthew 7:21; Matthew 7:24; Luke 1:38; James 1:22–25).41

This document conveys some information — the very presence of twenty-two citations to the Bible itself as a form of persuasive evidence argues for a certain grounding in biblical authority within the Vineyard.42 The degree to which this passage can serve as a

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41 Downloaded from www.vineyardusa.org/upload/Statement%20of%20Faith.pdf; footnotes to proof text in original quote incorporated into main body of block quote by author. The Vineyard also makes available a much less commonly read “Theological and Philosophical Statements” (available at www.vineyardusa.org/upload/theological%20booklet%20rev%202004.pdf), that parallels the statement of faith document closely, differing chiefly in specifying the Bible as “the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments,” that is, the standard Protestant Bible.

42 Or at least, the degree to which the Vineyard feels that proof text is an effective rhetorical technique when the Vineyard is confronting a skeptical theologically conservative audience. It should be noted that the Vineyard’s statement of faith dates back to what might be thought of as difficult circumstances, and in part appears to have been drafted to defend the movement against hostile critics. The statement was formally adopted in 1994, at the high point of a series of attacks on the Vineyard by evangelicals and fundamentalists who were aghast at the Vineyard’s association with “the Toronto
guide for how on-the-ground practice functions is scant, however, in part because the vital categories in this definition — “inspired,” “without error,” “original manuscripts” — come across as shibboleths of religious allegiance, or perhaps theological cum nosological categories, when they are presented stripped of any particularistic social grounding. This is even more so when dealing with a group whose development has been as contested, and as transformative, as that of the Vineyard. As we have seen, the history of the Vineyard, albeit brief, is complex and multifaceted (Jackson 2000, 2005). What is most important to understand about that history for the purposes of this discussion, though, is that while the Vineyard emphasized in its rhetoric the use of charismatic gifts to convert the “unchurched” (Wimber 1985; cf. Percy 1996), most of the Vineyard’s members came from other Christian communities (Perrin 1989). This was not a new phenomenon for theologically conservative churches; in fact, the “circulation of the Saints” in evangelical, fundamental, and Pentecostal churches has been a fact documented by sociologists of American religion for quite a while now (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973). What makes it of note here is that because the Vineyard, due to its “best of both worlds” claim to combine divergent religious streams, was growing by bringing in members from both the evangelical and Pentecostal/charismatic camps. This meant that rather disparate religious streams were laid alongside each other in practice. This combinatory logic of the Vineyard, along with the fact that it favors an experiential, rather than a theologically driven, form of religious practice, means that

Blessing” (Jackson 2000). The statement stands to this day, though, and it should be noted that hostility to the Vineyard from theological ultraconservatives has diminished since the passing of the Vineyard’s effective founder, John Wimber.
beliefs regarding what manner of book the Bible is, and practices regarding how best to engage with it, vary considerably from church to church and from person to person. This was no less true in Shores Vineyard.

As at many churches, there are only certain places where the collective meaning of the Bible is forged; like other Protestant traditions, there are two arenas in which the Bible is publicly interrogated. The first is in the intimate space of small-group meetings. The second is in the traditional sermon, a form that retains some currency in the Vineyard, even if worship at the beginning of a service (in the form of collective singing of popular music derived Christian rock) and the exercise of charismatic gifts at the end have to some degree challenged the sermon as the central focus (cf. Albrecht 1999:162–163). Drawing from how the Bible is used in these two arenas, we can see that, as it is for many other Christians, in the Vineyard the Bible is to a large degree an ambivalent item — instructing, but not necessarily binding; true, but not necessarily veridical.

When asked, Vineyard believers tend to answer that the Bible is “authoritative” — a phrase that distances them from their primary imagined interlocutors, fundamentalists (Crapanzano 2000; Harding 2000), who are imagined to hold to a more constraining (and most likely phantasmic) interpretive imperative of complete literalism, where “every jot and title” is taken to be the truth. Literalists (who, when spoken about at Shores by the younger lay members, are often collapsed into fundamentalists — and occasionally dismissed through use of the secular sneer “fundies”) are usually described as, in the words of one member of Shores, “dogmatic.” This disinclination for literalism is partly a result of the anxieties associated with the
Vineyard seeing itself through the eyes of secular others (cf. Bashkow 2004, 2006). As likely as fundamentalists are to be portrayed as dogmatic, they are portrayed as seeming dogmatic to others — a negative status in the “eyes of the world” that would stand in the way of the Vineyard project of carrying out the Great Commission of bringing the gospel to all nations. It is as much the damage done in reputation as in practice that makes an ideologically literalist hermeneutic stance unpalatable. As the pastor of Shores Vineyard said during a conversation on this subject, “The very, very, ultra-literalist position, I think, has all kinds of damage if we take that on as our identity or make that a badge or a symbol or a sorter — ‘to follow Jesus you have to wear this shirt.’ At that point we’re really putting up a barrier that is not only wrong, but unnecessary, and has terrible practical results.”

It is unclear, I would argue, exactly what is entailed by a scheme in which the Bible is read as being authoritative, but not necessarily to be read as literal (or at least not to be read in such a way as one’s reading of the Bible is read by others as a literal reading). Such a scheme, though, is definitely open, covering at once Vineyard members who see the opening sections of Genesis as indicating a “young earth,” and Vineyard believers who read it in the form of a legal charter, similar to the later covenants. What is important to understand, though, is that for both variants of

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43 Parenthetically, this tactic of distancing the movement from fundamentalism, while at the same time seeing the secular/mainline position as unacceptable in that it must be at once engaged with yet redeemed, points to a strong continuity between the Vineyard and the post-World War II evangelical position (Stone 1997).

44 Though it should be noted that in the time I was doing my fieldwork, individuals adhering to a young earth position were more or less a silent contingent in the church; this was apparently less so in the early nineties, according to one oral history. This is all the more striking because Southern California is a particularly strong hub of creationist
believers, every section of the Bible somehow reflects a divine intent, even when it cannot be literally true because it runs against social expectations or because it points to a conflict or dilemma that is difficult to map exactly onto the contemporary social milieu. This principle of relevance (Biolo 2009) means that, as was decided in one small group I attended, Romans 14 cannot simply be the issue of avoidance or embracement of dietary taboos read against the background of sacrificial meat to idols, but instead becomes (ironically enough) a biblically approved backhanded condemnation of “fundamentalists” for having to cleave tightly to their literalist reading of the Bible because of their “weak” faith.

This imperative of relevance and intent, even when deployed against literalist readings, creates ironically more concern regarding the exact nature of language. Because, in the mind of these Vineyard believers, the proper reading here cannot be easily seen as a mere Augustinian correlation of referent with object (Wittgenstein 1986), but instead must be the deduction of a logical structure that was intended to be deployed in differing levels of abstraction, one cannot be blasé about pegging meaning at a particular level of what could be called “textual resolution.” Rather they would show a willingness to attempt to “triage” the process of translating by setting competing translations against each other, hoping the differentials in each particular translation could be set side by side to create a parallax that would allow the original document to come into view. In another instance, in the same small group about a year later, there was a shift in Bible study toward using multiple translations of the same passage, placed

either in sequence or interlineally (Malley 2004: 37–39, 55–56). In discussion, one
member started differentiating the various translations according to level of resolution,
presenting the NASB as the “word-for-world” translation, and the NIV as the “thought
for thought” translation (the sequence was continued as another member shouted out in
what is probably an uncatchable moment of Bible shop-talk humor that the dynamic
translation also included on the handout, The Message, is a “book-for-book”
translation).\textsuperscript{45} Given the idea that there are different levels of translation, however, and
the importance of intent, this seems to be a limit on Benjamin’s thesis that the Bible
marks a limit of “unconditional translatability” because “language and revelation are
without any tension” (Benjamin 1969a). Because it is a pure intent that is being worked
through, capable of being represented at different states of resolution at different
moments, it ironically resembles the more traditional definition of texts that Benjamin
puts forward — only in this case, the “afterlife” of the text is predetermined by a still-
guiding hand.

The issue of intent, and of a supernatural guiding hand, raises the difficult issue
of authorship. Authorship is something that is presumed, but never fixed. In discussions
of the Gospels in small group, whoever was running the small group would occasionally
vaguely refer to what “the author” says, usually as part of a discussion-starting
interrogative, but only rarely would the participants take the step of identifying who that
particular author was. This of course was not a uniform practice; the various epistles,
tied as they were openly to specific, identified authors, provided less of a problem, and

\textsuperscript{45} NASB is the acronym for the New American Standard Bible, while NIV is the
acronym for the New International Version.
were attributed to their supposed authors more readily, and the Psalms were frequently — but far from uniformly — referenced by people as being authored by David. Again, these moments of vagueness with authorship should not be taken so much as an acceptance of the liberal position regarding authorship of the Bible, as exemplified in the documentary hypothesis that came out of nineteenth-century German scholarship, but again as the reluctance to fully embrace the fundamentalist position. This ambivalence is perhaps best captured in an incident during a sermon in which the pastor, referencing Genesis in passing, visibly choked when he stated that “Moses” was the author. Asked about this slight verbal hiccup later, he stated that since Jesus, and the entire unbroken tradition following Jesus (unbroken that is, until recently) held that Moses was the author of Genesis, that it was “monumentally arrogant” to reassign authorship — but he also quickly added that to project a modern definition of authorship, complete with copyright law, back into the past attributions of authorship to Moses was arrogant as well. In this situation, again, author means authority. The hesitation was that stating Moses as author could be read as an endorsement of the claim that Moses “sat down one day and wrote the Torah.” This unintended broaching of the authorship of the Bible was an opportunity to, in his words, “choke on the bones and miss the fish” — so it was best to let the situation slide, even though it meant for a moment an uncomfortable alignment with a “fundamentalist” position.

This looseness about the fine details of authorship and proper hermeneutics, contrasted with an opposition to forms of religious practice seen as outdated, such as

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46 This was even the case where epistle authorship was questioned – for instance, I never heard a distinction made between the ‘authentic’ Pauline and the pseudo Pauline epistles in all my time there.
mainline Christianity and fundamentalism, has been commented on before. Miller (1997) sees this as one of the defining traits of what he has entitled “New Paradigm” Protestantism, which in his scheme includes the Vineyard. This claim should not be thus understood as either being novel or distinctive. Nor should this underlying undecidability about exactly what kind of object the Bible is, how it was fashioned, and how it should be accessed, suggest that working with the Bible is an impossibility — shrugging off these foundational issues in no way has limited their ability to hold Bible studies that are immediately recognizable to Christians from other cognate forms of the religion. What I will argue is that this sense of the Bible being central, while at the same time having the reason for its centrality, and the way in which it is central, be unclear, is associated (though not necessarily causative in a sequential or temporal manner) with its structural complement — immediate presence, in the form of charismatic activity.

Dialogue

What is more important to note about the Bible, in other words, is that it is never read alone — or rather, it is never read alone by people who are already believers. To clarify what I mean here, I would like to recount a discussion with a friend and informant who at the time of this exchange had just come back from a local Vineyard-sponsored short-term missionary trip to Southeast Asia. The discussion was held in that stronghold of domestic ethnography, the coffee shop — this one was French-themed, striking for how it set itself apart from the other stores in the strip-mall that sat at the center of a complex of condominiums that hadn’t been there even a half decade earlier. My informant was a little frazzled. He was set to resume working at his postdoctoral clinical position in a
laboratory rather soon, even though he felt as if he had just barely arrived from his short
term mission trip. While in Southeast Asia, he had spent some time doing mission work
with a population of Christian Karen who were caught in a no-man’s-land between the
Burmese and Thai border. He was eager to speak about what he and the rest of the
mission team had seen — about the sociopolitical position of the people, the Karen’s
openly hostile relations with the Burmese military, about the peculiar personal
dynamics that arise whenever one travels internationally with a large group like a short-
term missions team, and even about the rather heavy bout of traveling illness he started
to exhibit on the long return voyage from Chang Mai to Southern California. But, there
was one more thing he was especially eager to pass on: he had received what was for
him a new gift, “prophetic scripture.”

In this instance, prophetic scripture meant something other than the usual
meaning given to that term. In most evangelical uses of the word, the phrase “prophetic
scripture” is understood to reference either historical events understood as occurring
either after the date they were supposedly written (such as the suffering servant passage
in Isaiah 53, which is read as predicting elements of Jesus’ person and ministry), or
narratives of eschatological events, the completion of which are imagined to occur in
the future (such as elements of both the Book of Daniel and the Revelation of St. John).
Rather he was using it to describe receiving, during prayer, a “sense” (the word he used
repeatedly for this kind of discernment) for a passage of scripture that was appropriate
to the situation. As an example, he stated that before he and the rest of the team had
visited the Karen, he had been drawn to Psalm 91, which he described as
communicating “a sense of God’s protection and provision through times of war.”
When the team arrived, he was surprised to discover that the Karen claimed to have experiences that, as he described it, mapped almost perfectly (“verse by verse”) onto the Psalm, and had incorporated it into what he described as their “deliverance story” from the Burmese army.

This sense of prophetic scripture, however, was not necessarily oriented around momentous events, either intended for others or for one’s self, that were immediately fulfilled. Although he had received biblical passages regarding the Karen, and biblical passages that referenced issues that members of his missions team suffered from (he declined to state what the passages, or the issues, were, on the grounds that it would breach their confidentiality) there was one instance of prophetic scripture whose referent was unclear until the very end of the mission’s trip. The first bit of scripture that was received during prayer was Ezekiel 37 — the famous “dry bones” verse, where the first-person narrator of the text has a vision where, following a command from God to prophesize over a field of desiccated skeletal remains, God first clothes the remains in flesh and then reanimates them. He only realized its meaning after he had returned from his mission trip. On the way back he fell rather sick, necessitating medical attention both in transit and upon returning to the United States. One of the problems that was immediately identified during treatment was dehydration. As the fluid flowed in through the IV, “It literally felt like life was being put back into my veins so I kept thinking about this passage, because it pretty much captured what I was feeling so I felt that God gave me a sense that it would happen, that the end of it was the bones get restored back to life.” This divine warning was more than a medical prognostication, because it also spoke to his larger circumstances; specifically a sort of ennui that he had
been feeling ever since he had moved to the suburbs of Southern California, a location that he had previously felt was monotonous and overly conservative. “It was significant to me because outside of the trip, I had been dealing with a loss of hope which I don’t really know why, it was just something that I was dealing with, mostly because moving here is just not really realizing where I fit into . . . so the sense it was encouraging to go through the experience, to come out the other side I saw it as an affirmation of a hope that I had, basically that God is a good God who’s doing things you know . . . so that’s kind of the personal level.” In short, there was an isomorphism between three elements — the particular scripture under question, the medical circumstances that followed on the heels of a somewhat unusual short-missions trip, and a larger period of general unease that had followed a change of circumstance.

It should be noted that this phenomenon is not necessarily particular to my informant, or to charismatic Christianity. Nancy Ammerman (1987: 54) reports that fundamentalists occasionally use biblical passages to guide their decisions in idiosyncratic ways, such as the man who took the inclusion of “roebuck” in a list in Deuteronomy 14 of animals that were clean for consumption to indicate that he should buy a tent from the Sears Roebuck company. Brian Malley (2004: 101–102) has documented a style of personalized reading of random Bible quotes, which his evangelical Baptists informants called “Bible dipping.” Simon Coleman (2006) has also observed similar instances of biblical language being wrested from its context, to be personalized and redeployed in new ways. The common practice of radical

47 Throughout this chapter, ellipses mark pauses in the original recorded conversation. Ellipses in brackets mark deletion of extraneous or redundant material from the original interview.
recontextualization of scripture is one of the elements that makes the folk hermeneutics associated with the Bible in Western Christianity a particular kind of anthropological object. In this particular milieu, it is difficult to imagine other texts, such as *Beowulf* or *The Iliad*, being redeployed to produce such an individualized (and individuating) reading. The difference between these books and the Bible is that of the local understandings of ultimate authorship of these two classes of works; one is produced by a merely human agency, and another is produced by God, as mediated through a human agent. That difference allows for a much more expansive interpretive horizon — while it is doubtful that my informant believed that Ezekiel, the purported author, had the particular set of events pertaining to my informant in mind when the prophet was recording this vision, it is because of the Bible’s status as an inspired text that recovery from diseases and ennui in Southern California could be seen as one of the “intents” animating this text. Of course, this gap between scribe and inspirer is simply a textual variant of the gap between author and animator in spoken language pointed out by Erving Goffman (1981). What is important, though, is that this ability to read specific personal intent into text by having it under the authority of an effective author who is still present also changes the way that text functions. According to conventional argument, text is a form of communication which, because of its ability to propagate well beyond the context of its original production, has made it (in the West at least) a locus for anxiety regarding a loss of meaning (Derrida 1998a). Here, though, the text’s association with an author that not only has the ability to shape text but also an unlimited ability to shape context as well shifts the structure of the underlying interpretive ideology that animates reading practice.
One way to parse this different approach to text is to rely on the typology in John Durham Peters’s history of the idea of communication, *Speaking into the Air* (1999). Peters’s book is a broad-ranging and nuanced intellectual history, covering well over twenty-five hundred years of technical and ethical conceptions of how exchange is mediated through a variety of forms. Although there is a careful approach to the details and particularities of what he covers, he does see that conceptions of the field that would be (often retroactively) understood as communication are shot through with two overarching trends — an idea of communication as either “dialogue” (which Peters occasionally also refers to as “telepathic”), which is how he parses the idea of communication as an intimate, immediate experience that breaks the walls of solipsism; or “dissemination,” which constitutes a broad, even, and nonparticularized message that is broadcast in the most literal sense of the term, distributed with a studied indifference to the particularities of the receiver.

What is interesting about this rubric in light of the vignette discussed above is that it gives us an analytic frame to think through what is different about this particular mode of interacting with biblical material. It appears here that the ability to supplement previously existing texts with an understanding of present-time, personalized divine intent shifts the fundamental understanding of the type of communication that is underway here from the wild, scattershot dissemination associated with most texts to the alternate “telepathic” order. Of course, there are certain ironies in this application of Peters. For one, in his typology Peters sees Socrates, not Jesus, as the greatest exemplar of the telepathic model of communication that Peters classifies as “dialogue.” Jesus is instead placed at the antipode of dialogue as “the most enduring voice for
dissemination” (1999: 35). Jesus is seen as dissemination’s champion for two reasons. The first is due to the promiscuous nature of communication through parable, which is the hallmark mode of teaching used by Jesus in the synoptic Gospels. In parables, it is the receiver who must do the work of decoding the message, which suggests that communication functions not as a mutual rapprochement, but instead as a processes of translating a message from an indifferent broadcaster to an anonymous audience that may (or may not) have the cultural and cognitive tools available to properly unpack the transmission. The second reason Peters sees Jesus and the synoptic Gospels as being on the side of dissemination is the content of the parables themselves. In these parables, such as the parable of the sower and the parable of the laborers, the same message (seeds in the former, a day’s wages in the latter) was disseminated without any care to the particularities of the receivers (again, various types of ground in the first, various time spent engaged in manual labor in the second). According to Peters, not only is Jesus’ form of communication indifferent to who its receivers are but also his message is that the same reward will be given, regardless of the particularities or suitability of that audience.

A more telling irony, though, arises from the fundamental disjunct between how this “prophetic” communication is evaluated by those who receive it and the form that it takes. In its purest form, dialogic/telepathic communication is marked by irrepeatability and sense of presence. In this particular instance, the irrepeatabilty of the encounter is grounded in the way that the scriptural passage is written into the unique events of both short-term history (the happenstance of disease and its treatment) and a larger biographical arc (a lingering sense of dislocation resulting from the move). As we have
seen with Engelke, though, presence itself is something more difficult to manufacture when dealing with material items, such as text, that are closely associated with their supporting material substrate. What we can ask is this: how is a sense of presence written into text, a medium that is predicated on distance and deferral?

In this case, this is dealt with through authority — though not in the sense of institutional power (Asad 1993), but as an immaterial supplement to the materiality of the text, a supplement that shows that one is in line with intent. To illustrate what I mean, let me return to the interview with my friend that started this discussion. About half an hour later I asked him how he had been affected by his recent experiences. He replied, “The other thing that I’ve been impressed with] is the authority of the Word of God to really speak into people’s lives. It goes into this whole sense, this prophetic scripture thing, that the words in the Bible have a real effect on someone if spoken in the right way or in the right time.” When asked if particular parts of the Bible were more efficacious — a question that pointed to whether it was the content of the text that mattered, or something more — he replied, “I actually think some parts could be more efficacious than others at certain times but I’ve been struck, as of late, by how every part, even the ‘begats,’ really speak to someone if spoken at the right time.” ⁴⁸

Indeed, meaning or content is to a degree a barrier to authority as it is used in this manner. The power is not in what human meaning that someone might extract from the biblical text, but instead in the contact itself, unmediated by interpretation.

⁴⁸ The word “begats” was originally something I introduced in the conversation earlier as a light-hearted reference to the genealogical sections of the Bible; I never heard this regularly used by Vineyard members, and so it should not be counted as a common word in their biblical vocabulary.
I had this mindset that I had to interpret the Bible so someone could understand it and that’s always a good thing. I’m not getting down on that, but sometime I would think that to such an extent that I take away from the actual message of the Bible, of the actual essence of what is spoken about in the Bible, I would start getting into things where for lack of a better explanation I would add items to the actual Bible. [. . . ] The word of God alone has power, has authority, is efficacious. It was a healthy reminder that I don’t always have to explain, I don’t always have to try to figure out what is the best way to try to explain something to someone, that the actual word of God can actually speak to someone.

This passage may suggest that the authority lies in an uninterpreted truth, passively received, but this is incorrect, because it is not truth itself that is being conveyed. Indeed, there is a question as to whether the passages are literally “true” in the way that we would normally associate with a reading that sees itself engaged in an unproblematic, nonfigurative reading (cf. Crapanzano 2000).

I’m kinda realizing that the word has authority, has power. I don’t think in my mind as of now that doesn’t necessarily mean that everything is necessarily true in the most literal sense. So I guess what I’m saying is that I’m starting to realize that that actual literal content has power and as of now as of yet I’m sure of the literal truth — truth is a bad word. [. . . ] I don’t have a pat answer other than to say that, uh, that as of now I’m struck by both the truth and the power and there’s a lot that I don’t know if its literally truth.

Asked for an example, he went on to indicate the Pauline injunction against women teaching to men, which he felt was culture bound and not in keeping with the abilities or spiritual gifts of women.49

49 Again, recall that compared to other similar charismatic groups that grew out of the 1960s Jesus movement, the Vineyard is relatively open to female teachers and ministers. Currently, women can be ordained as ministers, and operate the local church or national-leadership level, though dissenting churches are not required to ordain women if they deem it to be unbiblical.
If authority is not something inherent in the understanding brought to scripture, and not predicated on the veridical nature of the accounts or instruction communicated by scripture itself, then where does this authority lie, and how is it deduced? What is telling is that it is not figured from the text itself, but is emergent to the situation, or rather, something emergent in the deployment of the text. Asked what authority was, he first likened it to a physical sensation. After a moment of thought, though, he expanded: “I don’t know how to explain it other than to say that I kinda of sense it, feel it. [. . . ] Authority feels powerful, I feel charged. I guess, yes, yes there’s definitely a physical sensation I think it’s a spiritual thing too. [. . . ] I felt like I was a part of something that was bigger than myself so in that sense I guess you could relate it to when you do community service and things like that but it goes beyond that there’s a twinge of power.”

Authority, then, is a surplus, a surplus that is read as a power. This language of power is also the language of the miraculous charismatic activity, such as speaking in tongues, deliverance from the demons, and healing (Percy 1996). It should not be surprising that the language used to index the feeling of authority is almost identical to the language used when pointing to the power of the Holy Spirit, which is the engine of charismatic spiritual practices. Nor should we be surprised that the examples that he gave that were emblematic of this sense of authority in practice were either moments that were the exercise of charismatic gifts or were analogues for the charismatic gifts; the two instances of a sense of biblical authority he gave were, first, the sensation he had when laying on hands while praying for the spiritual healing of a women beset by memories of sexual abuse (Csordas 1994); and second, the feeling he had when
teaching the gospel to the Karen, despite a seemingly insurmountable language barrier. This later process could be seen as being an analogue to the early Pentecostal understanding of speaking in tongues as xenoglossy (Wacker 2002: 44–51); this ability to achieve what he gauged as a successful overcoming of linguistic and cultural hurdles was certainly understood as miraculous on his part.

Another important aspect of this feeling of authority/power in these two emblematic instances that he recounts is that it occurs not in solitary moments of engaging with the Bible, but rather in improvised collective ritual activity, arguably a hallmark of Pentecostal and charismatic practice (Robbins n.d.). This of course is not the whole of this authority — it is vital to note that the instance of authoritative scripture that gave rise to this discussion was a very idiosyncratic and personal reading of a Bible passage, and was not set against the context of, nor did it arise during the practice of, communal ritual activity.

But what is important is that it suggests that power/authority is associated with presence. This also correlates with the observation that the feeling of this authority has not only a physical and emotional component but also one of connecting to a great project grounded in alterity, or as my informant put it, of being connected to “a part of something that was bigger than myself.” While this smacks of the language of transcendence, what it also does is point to being imbricated in another being’s ongoing project, and because it is “sensed,” that is, intuited or felt rather than induced or decoded from text, it is the functional way that presence is invoked even where physical presence is lacking. This practice is well in accordance with wider Vineyard spiritual practices that are orientated toward a wider process of identifying signs of “God’s
presence” (Luhrmann 2004a, 2005, 2006). It is this capacity, expressed through these categories, that allows the text to shift from dissemination to dialogue.

It should be noted that this link between divine presence, improvised ritual, and a biblical hermeneutics of presence is not limited to the individual, small groups, or ad hoc charismatic practitioners. In fact, nearly identical logic can be found animating a vital place in (and arguably the pivot of) the main Vineyard ritual of the Sunday service. As previously mentioned, though it has been somewhat challenged for supremacy as far as time allocated goes, the sermon has a respectable place in Vineyard services; and as is customary in many Christian rites, sermons inevitably revolve around an explication of biblical verse, and again, not unusually, these sections of the Bible are read aloud by the speaking pastor, even when the congregation has access to the particular verses in the form of their own Bibles, church circulars printed in support of that sermon, or power-point demonstrations. And it is notable that the first time during a sermon that part of the Bible is read out loud, that reading is almost always close to, and often immediately proceeded by, an invocatory prayer.

The work done by this genre of prayer is multifold and rich. Certainly it does a lot of rhetorical heavy lifting when deployed by skilled pastors in telegraphing how the reading should be interpreted; also, since it often occurs at or shortly after the inception of the sermon as a whole, it does a certain amount of work marking an important transition from worship to discursive leaning in the Pentecostal/charismatic liturgy (Albrecht 1999: 160–163). That kind of work is not what I wish to focus on here, though. Rather, I want to point out how the internal grammar of these prayers replicates the logic of supplemental reading of the Bible. It is telling that these invocatory prayers
invariably ask for two linked events. The first event requested is proper collective interpretation of the scriptures, often couched as proper reception of the message by the congregants, or as proper explication by the minister. The second event that is requested is some manner of divine attendance in the event, often palpably couched in the language of physical proximity. As an example, here is one almost architectonic invocatory prayer given at the beginning of a Vineyard service.

Father, again we invite your presence, again we say, Lord, come, and anything that I might say is that from you, that you would bring it close to the heart, make it change us, God, and anything I say that is not from you, Lord, that you would not allow them to remember at all, so that it would just be about you today and what you desire, and Lord I know that your spirit is the convictor of truth; Spirit do your job, do your thing, we pray this in Jesus name. Amen.

This logic of linking divine presence to successful interpretive practice again brings together the elements put forward in this discussion of “prophetic scripture” in an overt way. There is no necessary reason to string these together under a logic that is concerned exclusively with an instrumentalist logic — one could imagine that the element which is supposedly at play in the present moment, that of proper explication, could be effectuated without divine presence. Alternately, it could be imagined that the act of divine action controlling these instances of interpretation constitutes presence enough, and there would be no need to make what could be read as a superfluous request. This linkage, then, points to a tension — they are neither identical items, nor entirely separate, but at least in this moment of public exposition of biblical material function in a complementary manner; perhaps it is this ability of supplementing the text with presence that gives the biblical explication from the front of the church the sense
of contemporary currency that is a noted trait of Pentecostal sermons (Albrecht 1999: 164).

A few observations should be made, before we move on. First, of course, we should note that this sense of presence is not something that can be found in the Bible, or even in religious texts, alone — other readers in other milieus have also intuited the presence of a text’s author while engaging with that author’s oeuvre.50 However, because this may be thought of as a property potentially found in certain conceptions of reading (or perhaps “literature”), this does not mean that the religious nature is therefore unessential — which brings us to our second point. The logic that informs this individual and communal reading practice can not only be used to color the particular reading of the Bible that is undertaken but it can also be used to disallow other, alternate, readings that might challenge certain founding assumptions in this spiritual tradition. If one assumes that a proper reading of the Bible is characterized by a sense of intention and directedness on the part of the purported ultimate author, with that intention and directedness characterized as “presence” or “authority,” then it follows that readings not informed by engaging in this dyadic relationship are faulty, subject to the vagaries that come with interpretation unsecured by this supplement. This is borne out in a tendency by some of my informants to dismiss out of hand any discussion of, or challenge to, biblical material made by non-Christians, citing the reasoning that since non-Christians don’t have a relationship with God, they are incapable of reading the Bible in a way that leads to understanding. Of course, not all Vineyard believers wish to

50 An excellent example of this is Adam Reed’s (2002) depiction of how members of the Henry Williamson Society cultivate, through their reading and imaginative practices, a sense of connection with Williamson that far exceeds his physical presence.
foreclose engagement with secular critics. I have found that second-generation believers, that is, children of parents who were in some way involved in Pentecostal, charismatic, or renewal forms of Christianity, are particularly willing to expose themselves to non-Christian arguments regarding the content or form of contemporary Christianity. Also, it should be observed that more than one convert to Christianity who now attends a Vineyard church cites preconversion engagement with the Bible as an important (though not necessarily central) part of the conversion process. These caveats aside, it is telling that at least for a certain set of believers, not only is such a relationship with a divine alter in some form beneficial for hermeneutic activity, it is also the logical necessity for the successful completion of the activity.

**Dissemination**

We have seen how it is possible to take text and craft it into the functional equivalent of speech as far as the structure of the exchange between the ultimate author and the reader, making present and intimate an encounter normally characterized by very great temporal and spatial gulfs, and thus more reminiscent of Peters’s model of “dialogue” than “dissemination.” This should not be taken to mean that this mode of reading the Bible is exclusively privileged, however. I would like to conclude by briefly sketching out moments in which text is not supplemented by presence, but rather counterpoised by it; by showing how the biblical text’s quality of distance is also mobilized at times in the Vineyard to keep the feeling of presence itself in check.

As we noted earlier, the Vineyard is a strongly charismatic church, where members often routinely receive divine direction in the form of intuitions, surprising
thoughts, dreams, or visions. These moments of revelation are often accompanied by the convincing sense of God’s presence (Luhmann 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006). This means, in effect, that the priesthood of all believers has been radically democratized by giving everyone equal access to radical opening with the divine. Equal access, however, is not the same thing as universal success, either in achieving an opening (like many other charismatics, and Pentecostals, many Vineyard believers do not experience these gifts on a regular basis, or even at all) or in promulgating received messages to a wider audience. One reason for this gap between access and success in communicating supernatural information is the belief that, as we discussed last chapter, there is “no caller ID for the soul,” and that not only is there the possibility that visions, seemingly divine thoughts, and the lot may have an origin from some source other than God (such as Satan, or physiological and psychic processes gone awry), but that these messages do not necessarily bear the stamp of their true origin. Hence, there is a need to be able to determine the proper provenance of these messages, a process that is commonly called “discernment” in the charismatic and Pentecostal world.

Discernment is a polysemous term used, as the name implies, for any kind of proper identification or intuition that is either turned to the supernatural (for instance, those that have the power of discerning demons), or empowered by the supernatural (one time I had someone explain to me that he had the gift of discernment, by which he meant a preternatural ability to know when someone was lying to him). Most of the time, though, “discernment” is used in the sense of identifying the actual origin of supernatural visions, thoughts, and the like.

Opinions regarding what constitutes proper discernment vary within the
Vineyard. For some Vineyard believers, particularly ones who had direct experience of the more enthusiastic early days of the movement, discernment is a practice that is so much a form of embodied practice, of a sense grounded in routine sensibilities rather than in discursive knowledge, that it operates entirely in a “ready-to-hand” manner alienated from language, and constitutes nothing other than an immediate acceptance or rejection of the meaning in the message. This aspect of the process, seemingly instinctual, is usually defended by a reference to the phrase “my sheep know my voice” (John 10:27); one believer, asked to explain, simply said that proper discernment was “like cooking eggs — you know just how you like them.” If a vision or message is intended for another person, then the intended recipient’s own sense of how apt that message is for his or her own life is often seen as an important part of the discernment processes. This is also realized in the negative, however — a strong, knee-jerk rejection of a message sometimes framed as a prideful rejection of a “hard message” coming from the Spirit. It is interesting to note that this interpretation is often pushed by that very small subset of people who have taken their “gift for hearing from the Lord” and used it as a platform to engage in more than one congregation, often presenting themselves as specialists. Within a church most people, including the pastor, generally stress the individual’s own discretion to see in what way, if at all, a message is applicable to them.

It was more common, though, to stress the importance of less immanent means than individual judgment for determining whether something was of divine origins. Here, tests such as confirmatory visions from others were valued, as was synchronistic coincidence, such as a vision being reminiscent of a seemingly unrelated opportunity or
offer that unexpectedly comes up. Occasionally “trial and error” or “the fruits” of a vision is used as a means of judging, following the logic that if there is a negative outcome resulting from implementing a vision, then it probably was not of divine origin, since it is unlikely that God would steer one toward failure or spiritual death.\(^{51}\)

Since these visions can address anything from quotidian activities to important life decisions, such as career choices or determining marriage partners, however, this method of discernment is more often discussed than implemented as a primary mode of parsing visions.

Just as important, though, are checks based on the content. Messages of whatever form are often judged as to whether they are “positive” in nature. This question is often a trumping factor — positive messages, being in harmony with a loving God, are assumed to be true. To some degree this test is articulated in such a way that the actual divine origin of the message is incidental. Positive messages are viewed as likely candidates for acceptance, because they are classified as being things that God “would have” said, even if God is not the actual source; because the positive message is in agreement about what is known about Him, it can be treated “like” something God might have articulated anyway, and taken to heart regardless.

The one universally accepted benchmark of a prophecy, vision, or message, though — and it is here that we return to this chapter’s theme — is that it must be

\(^{51}\) In light of the argument that will be made later in this chapter, one should remember that even the act of “judging by the fruits” is often presented as being a biblically sanctioned test (with proof cites to Matthew 7:15, 1 Corinthians 14, and Acts 5:33), even if it is not a test grounded by comparing the contents of spiritual experiences to specific Bible passages.
“biblical.” It must, in other words, comport with scripture. In daily practice in most churches, this horizon is one that is never reached; I never once had an informant present a verbal warrant for why any particular experience he or she had was biblical, nor did anyone publicly engage in self-critique, stating that an experience he or she had narrated earlier was beyond the biblical pale. The reason for this could be that visions that are seen as being susceptible to “nonbiblical” readings are generally not shared with others, and hence exposed to potential critique from that standpoint.

There is reason, though, to believe that visions that could be read as being “nonbiblical” do occur. One attendee of a Vineyard church confided in me that she had prayed for a prophetic word regarding some metaphysical speculation she had picked up from a New Age book regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. Her views would not be viewed as in accord with the conventional reading of the biblical narrative — she was basically questioning Jesus’ divine status as the exclusive incarnation of God, which would have opened up the possibility of others also taking up that special mantle. Naturally, she did not feel free to look to others in the church for confirmation of her ideas — but she did feel free to look to the Holy Spirit for backing of her theories.

For the most part, however, accusations of “nonbiblical gifts” are usually used in theological/political struggles between or within factions during times of major upheaval, either when there is a social distance between the interlocutors or when an issue had become polarizing within the community. An example of this later phenomenon would be the accusations made during the 1990s by internal and external critics of the Vineyard that a set of prominent nonstandard charismatic behaviors then popular in the movement was “unbiblical” in nature. The charisms in question were
“holy laughing” and the making of animal sounds and postures (usually, but not always, 
that of a lion) that were associated from a renewal taking place in the Toronto Airport 
Vineyard. The renewal’s critics argued that there was no biblical precedent for these 
demonstrations, and thus suggested a physiological, if not a demonic, origin (see 
Hanegraaff 2001; Jackson 2000: 282–338; Paloma 2003). Just as important is the fact 
that Vineyard documents from the time that defended this charismatic practice 
acknowledged the Bible as setting the horizon against which everything had to be 
considered, arguing what while these practices were perhaps extra-biblical, in that they 
were not necessarily positively sanctioned by any biblical verse with an historical 
exemplar, they were not counter-biblical in any way, and certainly in line with the 
biblical limitations set on the charismatic gifts (see Hilborn 2001: 339–346).

What does this discussion have to do with the argument made in the earlier 
portion of the chapter? As we had noted, in instances of charismatically infused biblical 
reading discussed in the previous section, presence is used to supplement the Bible and 
give it the sense of a personal, dialogic mode of communication with God. However, 
when dealing with instances of charismatic “presence” where that presence is not 
explicitly used to make biblical text dialogic (and hence give its message greater 
strength, even though that message may be made wholly anew by recontextualization), 
but rather used to convey a separate message, the Bible becomes important as a check 
on charismatic authority not simply because it is a personalized, dialogic form of 
communication, but rather because it functions in these instances as communication as 
dissemination. As can be seen in our discussion of discernment of charismatic 
information, all other forms of discernment suffer from one of two flaws. Some forms
of checking discernment, such as whether a message is “recognizable” as divine, is “positive” in nature, or results in “success,” is primarily predicated on subjective judgments. The other forms of discernment (such as ratification by another individual’s vision, or, ratification by the recipient in cases of visions or words meant for another party) are capable of being ratified too easily by a limited number of people — often times, only two people. Either mode of discernment places the power of prophecy in too limited a set of hands, and gives no means for divisive prophecy to be impeached. This potentially takes charismatic Christianity’s greatest strength, the democratic access to the divine, and allows it to become a critical weakness. Given the already schismatic nature of American Protestantism, particularly in its spirit-filled varieties, anything that opens up authority to purely subjective judgment allows for too much centrifugal force as differing factions could forge incompatible — or even antagonistic — divine messages. The only basis for nonpersonalized judgment that is common to the whole community, and thus the only vantage of collective judgment capable of keeping this radical redistribution of authority that comes with charismatic authority in check, is that of the Bible. But what makes the Bible useful in this circumstance, what makes it communal instead of subjective or limited to an inspired pair, is the fact that the Bible in this instance is always relevant not because it speaks to each person as an individual, but because it speaks to each person as part of an anonymous collective who all have equal access to the document. In short, in these instances it is the Bible’s indifference to individual concerns, rather than the way that it speaks to individuals uniquely, that makes it capable of precluding these sorts of divisive disputes.

This then is the other part of the dialectic of presence and absence, that of
authority and its absence. That, of course, is not to conflate authority and absence — as we have seen here, even within the same movement. Authority and presence can be arrayed in different manners, even when considering the same set of objects, the charismatic gifts and the Bible. This phenomenon is most likely not limited to the Vineyard, or even charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity — even fundamentalist-inclined Christians, as we have seen, are capable of engaging in idiosyncratic readings of the Bible that follow the dialogic model, and they are also capable of receiving inspiration or prophecy, though perhaps with less frequency, and in less striking ways, than their charismatic and Pentecostal kin.52 Indeed, as Malley (2004: 108–111) has observed, evangelical Bible readers also have the ability to shift between historical and devotional contexts as they work through the book — suggesting that even when not explicitly supplemented by a charismatic pneumology, the Bible as text is at once a record for all time and an intervention into the present moment. It may be that even in these groups, defined so long by a literalist reading and a rejection of the metaphysics of presence, that text, voice, authority, and presence shimmer like the impossible — and hence, powerful — objects that they are in the Vineyard.

Large portions of chapter three will appear in the forthcoming chapter “The Bones Restored to Life: Dialogue and Dissemination in the Vineyard’s Dialectic of Text

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52 One can think of God’s inspiring Jerry Falwell in Harding (2000), or the processes of “hanging out a fleece” (from Judges 6:36–40; e.g., Marsden 1987) that is, attempting to intuit God’s will by asking him to “speak” through various natural phenomenon and chance events.
and Presence” in *The Social Life of Scriptures: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Biblicism* (edited by James Bielo and Brian Malley), New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. The dissertation author was the sole investigator and author of this paper.
CHAPTER FOUR – GIVING
BETWEEN STEWARDSHIP AND SACRIFICE

In this chapter, I address the question of Christian economic practice. I do so by giving an ethnographic description of, and theoretical frame for, a simultaneous concern with and revulsion to money, consumerism, and materialism as it is played out in the Vineyard; I argue that the economic thought of these ‘religious moderns’ can surprisingly be accounted for by an economic classificatory scheme that has formal elements common to other anthropological accounts of economic activity, known collectively as ‘spheres of exchange’ theory. By using this theory to broaden an understanding of ‘exchange’ beyond explicitly economic transactions towards an appreciation of the salvation economy found in this particular form of Christianity, my chapter allows for a clear characterization of the nature and location of conflicts in the imaginations of believers. When submitted to such an analysis, the apparently conflicted valuation of material wealth is shown instead to be an instance where three core values of American Charismatic thought – control, spontaneity, and intimacy (Csordas 1994) – are dialectically played out as Vineyard believers imagine the sources of (and limits to) their agency, while they simultaneously work through what properly is their duty as God’s creatures, and what is their will as God’s beloved.

Material abundance and spiritual crisis in the Vineyard

The importance of money was one of the first things that I noticed when, as part of my research, I began regularly attending a small prayer groups. Just a few weeks into the first meeting I attended, and after the usual intense half hour of communally sung
acoustic guitar accompanied worship songs, and an ice breaker to introduce the two or three new people who had dropped in on the fourteen person group, the woman who was running the group that evening asked if there was anything that was “weighing on [anyone’s] hearts” that could be prayed over so they could “be present” during the rest of the prayer-meeting. A little hesitantly, a women in her late twenties volunteered that she was stressed, to the point of being physically ill, about a multi-million dollar budget that she was putting together for her new job at a (non-religious) charitable institution; she had never worked with sums of money this large before, and it was turning her stomach against itself. Another woman who happened to be the group’s youngest member stated that the day had been a “tear filled day” for her – the statement came across as all the more unsettling because of the brave smile she was wearing as she said it. She had just received the bill for a very recent root canal treatment, which at over a thousand dollars she could not afford, and the same day was told that what she thought was simply a pulled muscle in her back was actually what she described as a “broken vertebrae” (a doctor in the group, asking some clarifying questions, saw that what she actually meant was that one of the protrusions that grew out of the vertebrae was fractured). For someone like her, freshly out of college and without health insurance, this was an economically crushing combination; what made the situation even more bleak was the fact that she was afraid that this would mean she would miss a series of important auditions that were vital if she was to have any chance of advancing in her career as a professional dancer.

The soft drink and snack covered table in the center of the circle of chairs was lifted up and carried to the side; the two women kneeled down where the table was and
one by one they were prayed over. Hands, either resting on the women being prayed over, or held out in their direction with the palms facing them, ringed them all around; a moment or two of silence would be punctuated by spontaneous prayers, first centering around one of the women, then the other. Praying over the woman with the budget woes, someone prayed that this should be the moment that she proves herself, that she takes this challenge as an opportunity to show the talents that God gave her: this statement was punctuated by a barely audible “yes, yes!” For the woman with the dental bill and the back trouble, though, it seemed to me that the prayers had a different, slightly more resigned cast, as if there was an edge of doubt about what could be done for her. They prayed for her to heal quickly, to “enjoy the rest” created by this gap, for her last performance before this news to “not fade from the mind” of her business connections in the dance world, and even a command that “in the name of Jesus” that “the back pain be gone.” No prayer, however, about her debt.

A few days later, an email was sent out to everyone in the group – that is, everyone excluding the economically and physically wounded dancer. The text of the email, sent out by the young doctor who was just beginning her pediatric practice, went as followed:

Hi fellow small group people […]

I don't usually do this very often, actually... i don't think i've ever done anything like this before...but anyway... Last tuesday at small group when we were all praying for each other, I really felt that God put a burden on my heart to help out [the dancer] with her root canal situation.... And when i talked with [my husband] after we left, it was kind of weird cuz God put a similar burden on his heart (though slightly different)... so we decided that God was probably asking us to help her out... I was reminded of the early church as an example in Acts 2:42-47.
It really impresses upon me how the early members of the church shared everything with each other and helped those who were in need.... So anyway, [my husband] and I decided that we would contribute some money to a little fund to help [the dancer] with her current financial need.... So if any of you guys feel any desire or burden to contribute anything as well, please let one of us know [...] and it could be anything... $1, $10 or whatever... (we'll be there on tuesday night karaoke...we'll try to remember to bring a little card to sign if you want to write any words of encouragement.... just pull one of us aside from all the chaos of singing!) And if you don't, please don't feel obligated.... just ignore this email... that's why i'm just emailing you guys instead of asking or calling...

anyway, i hope you are all having a good week!

The call was answered, and during that group night out, among the fourteen or so group members the entire amount was raised. The envelope was slipped to her without any ceremony, though certainly not without comment the next week, when the small group opened with the dancer’s ebullient testimony. She reported how she had been giddy all week – and how those around her (particularly unbelievers) had been taken back, not only by her joy, but by her good fortune as well; not only had she received the amount of money necessary to straighten out her dental debt, but she had also received a coveted dancing position despite her injury, and she had been given a long term house-sitting gig in a multi-million dollar house right beside the beach in one of the most exclusive communities in the region. “What,” she squawked, her tone mimicking an unbelievers lack of belief, “The Lord gave you all that?” Even two years later, long after the dancer left the small group, what occurred would still be remembered by many of the group members, but not as an instance of anyone’s
particular generosity; rather, it was recalled as a “move of God.” (See Coleman 2000:193).

The issues brought up that initial evening, of charity, economic adversity, and of career, point to the centrality of money in the minds of Vineyard believers. During fieldwork, I often witnessed discussions, sermons, and prayer that were centered on the issue of money. During small group meetings, prayer requests often turned to the minutiae of careers or finances. People would request group prayer for trouble with co-workers or employers, for job-related fatigue, stress, ennui, possible promotions, and for divine assistance with a sudden expense or divine instruction regarding a financial opportunity. It would be hard to understate the degree to which this range of topics dominates prayer time – easily rivaling, if not surpassing, prayers regarding health or family and personal relationships. Most remarkably, there were instances where some of the less well-off small group members, praying for supernatural relief from financial hardship, received assistance instead from their co-religionists. What was most striking about these instances was that when these wealth transfers occurred, they were described by the recipients as having originated not from the fellow group members who had pooled the money, but rather as having come from God (see Coleman 2000: 193).

At the same time as the small group highlighted financial concerns, messages from the pulpit, prayer leaders, and a wealth of para-church organizations railed against a larger ‘materialist’ way of life that was fixated on what they viewed as a spiritually deadening and ultimately fruitless attempt to centre one’s life and identity on increasing financial success; this imperative came from churches that almost inevitably contained
coffee carts and book tables overflowing with Christian self-help books, Christian music, tee-shirts, stickers, and car plaques. All of this, of course, was constantly supplemented by appeals for financial assistance of one sort or another – for missions and missionaries, homeless outreach and victims of disaster, smuggled Bibles, oppressed foreign Christians, and the like. Indeed, there were times when the problem of wealth seemed to be the central consuming question for the pastors and laity with whom I spoke. They had formulated reasons for such a concern. Numerous times it was pointed out to me that this was an issue that came from the Bible itself; I lost count of how often I was told that ‘eleven of the thirty-nine parables [in the New Testament] are about money’, that ‘one out of every seven verses in Luke is about money’, that the Bible states that ‘where your treasure is, there is your heart’, or that Paul’s epistles often centre on issues of money and charity. More local concerns were also offered – I was just as often told that the United States was the ‘wealthiest society in history’, or that their Southern Californian community’s reputation, accurate or otherwise, as one of the most affluent communities in America made this financial focus a necessity.

However, a great deal of the attention to the topic appeared to spring not from the situation in which the church was embedded, or from the tradition from which it came, but from a deadlock rooted in where the church was heading; specifically, there was a concern among pastors that to continue as a movement, the Vineyard must simultaneously pay careful attention to money and the contemporary commercial values that represent wealth, while at the same time refusing to become enmeshed in its logic. There was thus a sense that both the church and its members were stuck in an untenable position, suspended between two imperatives that could not be reconciled. For example,
Shores’ image was carefully projected in a way that bore the indelible imprint of the logic of the commodity. This commoditization consisted of more than the logo (a purposely simple, internet-friendly insignia created in consultation with a graphic designer); this entirely improvised church, created anew in a rented space every time that it convened, was color-coordinated, the primary motif being an aquatic blue to represent its proximity to the beach. Color co-ordination went from the obvious (church bulletins and fliers, web-site design and banners) to what might have escaped notice, such as the color of the cushions on the chairs in the grade-school gymnasium where they met every Sunday morning. When asked, the pastor stated that he was comfortable with the idea of ‘branding’ of the church, something engaged in to ensure a ‘quality experience’. The purpose of all this, of course, was to make the church an immediately identifiable and attractive place. Branding was also an attempt at standardization, so that believers could bring in their non-Christian friends with some expectation as to what they would see when they came. This language of branding, however, affected more than just the surface deportment of the church. It also cast its shadow over areas where one might assume that the logic of commodity would not reach – values were branded as well, chief of which was the ‘brand’ value of community, which the church felt was its particular mission. Understandably, when this issue came up in conversation with the pastor, it led to a difficult discussion; he would worry about the possibility of Christianity becoming undone by its financial and commercial aspects, saying that the commercialization was “the Achilles’ heel of the church in America,” which was “just a thin margin away from being Microsoft with a Christian logo.” This, he darkly thought out loud, could be the undoing of the church. While not everyone expressed it in those
stark tones, the pastor was not alone in being suspicious of an interest in the economic. It is telling that, almost uniformly among the pastors I spoke to, there was a disavowal, and sometimes outright ridicule, of the form of prosperity gospel/Word of Faith style of Christianity that has been growing both in America and beyond over the last thirty or so years (Coleman 2000; 2004; Gifford 2004; Wiegele 2005). It is important to note that the only time that I observed a Vineyard pastor resort to mimetic caricature was when discussing the prosperity gospel movement; the invocation of a fake Southern baritone in parody of these preachers suggests that issues of class (Anderson 1979) and region (Shibley 1996) may in part animate the rejection of this practice. Such suspicion was widely shared by the laity as well; while one could occasionally find a stray copy of the Prayer of Jabez floating around, the prayers regarding money and work heard during small group meetings were never the extravagant requests for unbelievable wealth and conspicuous commodities that seem to be representative of the prosperity gospel. Striking as this is, it is only a difference of magnitude, not of nature, as prayers for career guidance, jobs, and promotions were engaged in all the time – just not for overly extravagant results.

Concerned with money and a material culture, even thinking through supposedly anti-material values through the lens of a (non-philosophical) materialism, the Vineyard seems to be caught in contradiction, if not hypocrisy. This contradiction is not necessarily new – as Eskridge and Noll (2000: 1-2) have observed, American Protestantism has, at least since the early twentieth century, been characterized by a variety of different approaches to economic activity, from careful management to a wholly trusting reliance on the divine, but it could be suggested that in the Vineyard,
drawing at once from multiple Evangelical and Pentecostal roots, this contradiction is more manifest, and far from any resolution. This is only a contradiction, however, if one assumes that what is being prayed over, and what is being inveighed against, is the same sort of transaction. What happens if we assume that all economic activity is not the same, and explore the possibility of understanding this as a set of divisible activities – as an instance of nested or hierarchical spheres of exchange? That is the question that this chapter takes up next.

*Laying the groundwork for ‘primitive’ exchange in the suburbs*

Recent attention to the economic practices of North American Christians gives us a purchase on which to base an analysis of Vineyard believers’ economic imagination; works on Christian material culture and Christian commodities as means through which American Christians could positively articulate their faith (Hendershot 2004; McDannell 1995) allow us to intuit how this-worldly economic activity might be framed as contributing to other-worldliness as well. Further, Simon Coleman, in his recent work on the Swedish Charismatic ‘Word of Life’ prosperity gospel movement (2004; 2006), has read the act of circulating both words and money through the paradigm set up in Marcel Mauss’s The gift (1990 [1925]), a move which brings to the fore the way in which giving is a form of expanding and circulating not just the giver’s agency, but in another sense the giver’s actual self. The moral imperative implicit in charitable acting has also been emphasized in the work of Omri Elisha (2004, 2008a), who has documented how some petit-bourgeois Evangelicals in the American South have attempted to work through the antinomies created by their class position and their
religious tradition by emphasizing the role of community service to the poor and disadvantaged in their religious practice. Perhaps the most promising contribution to this discussion has been Susan Harding’s description of contributions to Christian political leaders and televangelists as a way in which believers could participate sacrificially by donating wealth and personal control to God by funding projects that were symbolic (or, more technically, ‘typological’) re-enactments of the cosmological events that stand as the cornerstone of the Christian metaphysical historical narrative (Harding 1992; also see Harding 2000: 105-25). Harding observes that acts of generous donations ‘break [Baptists] out of cycles’ of disciplines and discipline-installing texts that “peak their consciousness about the finite flow of money coming into and out of their hands” (Harding 1992: 53). In this moment, Harding allows us to see that the Christian fiscal imagination consists of cross-cutting currents that might explain the ambivalence regarding finances noted earlier. However, because Harding’s project is consciously orientated towards analysing the rhetoric of Falwell and other church elites (see Robbins 2006: 286), and not towards an analysis of quotidian Christian life, we are unable to see how this dynamic plays out in practice.

What is lacking in the existing literature is a system, some way of thinking through this multiplicity of transactional terms, of sacrifice, morality, personhood, that

53 It is for similar reasons that other analyses of elite Christian speech, such as Kintz’s (1997) analysis of the links between theologically conservative Christian conceptions of proper kinship and sexuality, on one hand, and neo-liberal economic projects, on the other, are of limited use here; also, because not all Vineyards are uniformly politically conservative (Bialecki 2006), Kintz’s observations are not necessarily applicable. This chapter was written before James Bielo’s (2007) contribution to this discussion, so I was not able to incorporate his observations, or respond to his claims regarding this piece.
allows all the contours of the field to come into a graspable relation at the same moment. Finding unity in a literal wealth of differing transactions, ranging from normal purchases to career decisions, purchasing Christian tchotchkes to voluntarily alienating wealth without tangible return, may seem difficult; however, a common thread can be imagined if that commonality is predicated upon the acknowledgement of difference, rather than its disavowal. Such is the logic of classical anthropological exchange theory.

Exchange theory is not a common way of conceiving economic transactions in the anthropology of modernity, even though its predication on separate transactional realms suits us well here. A short meditation on exchange theory will show us why. One of the cornerstones of classical anthropological theories of exchange has been that of differing spheres of equivalencies. Differing accounts may organize exchange into different registers, such as Lévi-Strauss’s tri-partite exchange of words, goods, and people (1963 [1958]: 296-97); or exchange may be organized into interlocking but hierarchically ascending spheres of exchange, such as Bohannan’s description of the Tiv economy (1955); interlocking but differing modes of exchange can be correlated with geographical and social distance (Sahlins 1972: 185-275; cf. Munn 1986), or, in partially monetized societies, they may be organized by the temporal horizon operative in these exchanges, with differences between short-term exchange (often geared towards maximization of resources) and long-term exchange (organized around the replacement and continuation of the community) (Parry & Bloch 1989a; Robbins & Akin 1999). While there is certainly no consensus on what the effect of currencies and monetization generally is on these systems – whether money, by its structural logic, is corrosive of these exchange systems (Bohannan 1955; 1959), or whether money is
subsumed into the organizing logic of exchange found in these societies (Parry & Bloch 1989b) – there is a consensus that in the long term, the prognosis for the continuation of separate spheres of exchange is poor, especially where these societies take up Christianity as a social institution (Sahlins 1992), as in the situation we are taking up in this chapter.

None the less, if we step back and consider the underlying logic of exchange theory, it appears to be better suited for our purposes of exploring North American-inspired Charismatic economic activity than we would be led to believe by these predictions of a triumphant modernity heralding flat planes of pure equivalency. Throughout the numerous articulations of exchange theory put forward to match various ethnographic particularities and theoretical predilections, two points seem to run through the vast share of them. First, each exchange sphere has its own organizing logic that does not just control how one exchanges, but also regulates what goods can be exchanged as well as proper exchange partners (Robbins & Akin 1999). Second, each sphere or register is linked but separate, meaning that while exchange is usually of a type within that sphere (goods for goods in one sphere, marriage partners for marriage partners in another), there are instances where relations or goods will spill over from one sphere to another – a ‘conversion’ (Bohannan 1955) – allowing a transvaluation not just of goods, but of relationships and moral evaluation as well. Needless to say, the phrase ‘transvaluations of relationship and moral evaluation’ could also be used as a description of how many North American Charismatic Evangelicals would understand their calling. This is particularly true of the Vineyard.
**Secular consumption and Christian stewardship**

But what, specifically, could these spheres be? Where does Harding’s dynamic of restraint and sacrifice play out? It seems that for Southern California Neo-Charismatics, one sphere consists of the quotidian realm of monetized wage and commodity exchange. While close, this should not be taken to be the same as the apparently parallel secular economic transactions that non-believers engage in. Vineyard believers have their own understanding of what could be described as entirely secular economic practice, an arena in which, though most recognize their own complicity, not all take pride.

According to the implicit critique, the chief difference between daily economic practice as it exists in the wider society and as it exists in Christian practice is the fact that secular practice is marked by an absence. These Christians accept the common view of humans as beings who engage in economic activity as a result of need, or at least as prompted by desire. What strikes them as problematic about this circuit is that, since it excludes God, it can only speak to fallen desire, and therefore it can never be satisfactory; hence when they speak during small group discussions or sermons about the non-redemptive purchase of items ‘in the abstract’ (as opposed to recounting particular purchases that they or others have actually made), they tend at once to give examples of purchasing commodities linked either to pleasure or to status (such as high-end computers or luxury cars), while at the same time suggesting that access to these  

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54 Perhaps the willingness with which they accede to this truism is a result of the way that this narrative is a de-theologized variant of another story familiar to them, that of the Fall (see Sahlins 1996).
items inevitably fails to deliver on this implied promise, and that this disappointment often serves as the impetus for a cycle of later, larger purchases. It is no accident that this understanding of non-Christian commodity purchase as an endless series of compulsive purchases centred on transient pleasure and empty, self-aggrandizing markers of social status mirrors the cautionary myth of female shopping as excess that Daniel Miller analyses in his *A theory of shopping* (1998); Charismatic imaginings of unbridled secular consumption, like secular imaginings of unbridled female consumption, serve as ethical commentary delineating the limits of actual practice quite as much as they describe an activity that anyone actually engages in.

If these Christians conceive of their economic activity as different from their secular brethren, it seems fair enough to ask in what positive way they conceive of the difference. What is distinct about these believers’ model of proper economic practice, as opposed to their understanding of the secular model of exchange, is that their own practice is structured in such a way as to erase the importance of the subject as an agentive force, while at the same time stressing the accountability of that subject. What is meant by this? One of the most common tropes that Christians supply in conversations about money is that it is ‘not their own’ – that they are stewards of God’s property.

The construction is a familiar one: since they are created beings, and since the attributes that garnered their salary in the workforce – their skills, talents, and abilities – ultimately arise from their creator, their money is properly God’s, and therefore their only real relationship to the wages is that of a steward. Alternatively, the logic of sacrifice rather than creation is used: since Jesus, through his death on the cross, has
‘purchased’ our lives, everything that is ours properly belongs to him. Though this logic applies across the board (I remember one overweight Christian, gesturing towards his stomach and lamenting that as far as his body goes, he had not been a very good steward), it is primarily heard in discussions regarding money. Another distinctive aspect of this system is that one’s stewardship is never exhausted or completed: this side of death or the apocalypse, there is no way that the stewardship relationship can end or the body of the trust be returned to its proper owner. One can never give one’s money directly to God; one can only at best pass it on to other humans. On the receiving end of that same donation, there is no transitive reciprocity. As observed earlier, you may give money to someone else, but they receive it from God.

The bind in this system should be obvious – one is fully accountable for one’s stewardship, but at the same time one’s agency is undercut. Since you are a creation, there is no credit for proper oversight, but there is certainly blame if one is flawed in one’s execution. That this is about accountability and self-restraint is evident from the language used, especially when it comes to tithing. When asked about their donation habits, informants describe tithing as a ‘rule’ that serves to remind them that their money is not their own. This is more than mere ideology tied to promoting tithing as a practice. Instead financial obligation, and attention to that obligation, are viewed as spiritual disciplines that form character. What is striking is how this system casts an organizing shadow over all financial activity – and the degree to which this shadow is a rationalizing one. If none of your money is yours, then every purchase is done on the ‘divine dime’ and should be carefully considered. Praying over financial transactions is naturally par for the course under such a regime; home purchases and mortgages, being
the most sizeable of investments, are often the ones that get the most attention, but the
impulse can trickle downwards to smaller purchases, with the limit case being an
informant who was caught on a cell phone, locked in prayer over what milk to purchase
while standing in front of the dairy section in a supermarket. Many of my informants
have rather intricate budgets, tight economic schedules to ensure that waste does not
occur; furthermore, many expressed a horror regarding debt, particularly consumer
debt. They view paying interest on money that they have a stewardship relation over as
simply throwing resources away. This is a virtue that is endorsed from the front of the
church: a typical sermon regarding money often times will exhort the faithful to careful
budgeting, one time even encouraging the use of financial software programs. At an
extreme, this attitude finds its way into practices such as Christian Credit or Financial
Counselling, where one’s entire budget is reviewed by a professional for its
appropriateness, for how it operates according to ‘biblical principles’ (cf. Eskridge
2000). In a similar way, concerns with career success also become spiritual issues, as
job performance becomes a sign of how one effectively mobilizes the intangible capital
entrusted to you by God.

These practices may sound like a contemporary re-booting of Weber’s this-
worldly asceticism (1930 [1904]), and in many ways this is not too far from the mark.
The differences, though, are as instructive as the similarities. Putting aside that this
conception is only part of the fiscal imperative that these Evangelicals are operating
under, they also differ in the theological underpinnings of such asceticism, as well as on
the translation of this imperative into practice in important areas. The most striking
difference is that the question of salvation is, for the Vineyard, not an issue in any
serious contention. Unlike the fretful Calvanists described in Weber’s seminal work, who were always attempting to deduce from their behaviour and fortune whether they were numbered among the elect, there is no mystery among these believers. Reflecting the general optimism that marks most contemporary American Evangelicals, they are without doubt numbered among the saved. The voluntary act of accepting Jesus has secured eternity, and when they speak of the future reunion in heaven with friends and family now living and dead, conditional clauses are never invoked.

Given that salvation is already an accomplished fact, it should be no surprise that discipline is not as exacting as it was for the Protestants described by Weber, who were playing for greater stakes. However, like Weber’s ascetics, stewardship is also an ideal type, and the degree to which these imperatives are actually fully put into practice varies from individual to individual; or, to observe another aspect of this dynamic, this variance is viewed in terms of individual against individual – because this rubric is used as much to quietly evaluate the financial choices of other believers as it is to plan one’s own. While accusations or judgments about specific others are rarely made openly, one can sense how such sentiments shape the social field as one listens to the nervousness of one believer trying to rationalize the purchase of a new entertainment system to his or her friends, or listen to a woman quietly admitting to ‘struggling’ with judging other Christians based upon the high-end cars that they have purchased. As such moments of sly contestation might suggest, these Vineyard Neo-Charismatics appear to be as prone to brief financial enthusiasms, rash purchases, and illegal transactions as any other metropolitan in the United States; during one men’s prayer session, the topic of illegal downloads of praise music came up, and the sheepish admission that almost everyone in
the room had downloaded praise music without paying for it (of course, as an evangelizing device, I was assured) was followed by the even more sheepish acknowledgement that somehow those recordings almost never get passed on to unbelievers, and are instead listened to for a mixture of devotion and recreation. Even the most careful of stewards, it seems, can find themselves sinking downwards into pure consumption.

*Sacrifice*

Stewardship, however, is not the only model of exchange used; there is another brisk trade in which Vineyard members are engaged. It starts, like the top level of many systems of sphere of exchange, with a mutual trade in persons. As a response to what is understood as ‘God’s gift of his son’, believers accept Jesus into their heart, or, more tellingly ‘give themselves to God’, which is just the first of a near-endless series of gifts that can be offered up. What is offered up in these latter transactions is a series of goods, material and non-material, that can be viewed as being marked entirely for total expenditure, if not destruction. For a more concrete instantiation of this process, this chapter will turn its attention to worship. What I am going to argue is that worship is a form of sacrifice, in some ways the paradigmatic example of sacrifice for this population, and that an analysis of worship will help to understand sacrifice itself as it is understood by this population. Worship is privileged as an analytic object here because it stands as one of the most common, most valued, and most communally cognized ritual moments in which the act of sacrifice occurs. To make this argument, however, I have to lay some groundwork first.
As already mentioned, the Vineyard prides itself on its worship, where, for half an hour to an hour and a half, people will sing directly to God in an ecstatic manner. In the Vineyard’s own eyes, one of its claims to distinction is the centrality that it places on worship as a religious activity; worship, in this case, means extended sets of pop-music-infused, chorus-heavy songs. The presentation and goals of Vineyard musical worship are very similar to those found not just in the larger Pentecostal tradition (Maltz 1985; Shoaps 2002: 39–40), but in other Charismatic religious services as well (Luhrmann 2004b: 523) – though, as some Vineyard pastors argue, these latter groups have followed the Vineyard’s lead in re-energizing worship practices through the adoption of contemporary musical forms as a mode of religious expression. In church, PowerPoint displays of the lyrics encourage attendees to join in song, and in Bible-study-style ‘small groups’, the limited repertoire of songs guarantees the familiarity necessary to sing along in PowerPoint’s absence. The vast majority of these songs, rather than simply enumerating Jesus’ or God’s virtues while using the third person, are songs that are imagined as being actually addressed to Jesus, or God. The lyrics of these songs, centered thematically on love, longing, and failure, are affect-laden – as is their performance, not merely by the band-members playing at the front of the church, but also by those in the congregation. In church, almost everyone stands while singing; raising hands and closing eyes is almost a default position, and it is not unusual to see people’s faces clenched in emotion, or to have someone kneel against their chair or lay prostrate on the ground while the band is playing.

The value of worship is multifold: it is expected to entertain, to allow for artistic expression (Wuthnow 2003), and to create a space for sleep-addled parishioners to park,
caffeinate, and socialize before the opening portion of the message. Primarily, though, there is an expectation that the worship band will set the emotional tone for the service. To this end, there is a careful logic to how songs are chosen, and in what order they are sung. Not only are factors such as song key taken into account (identical key allows for seamless transition, conserving the emotional momentum from the previous song, while moving to the relative minor key in relation to the previous song is another tool used to ensure a feeling of continuity), but even BPM (beats per minute) are kept track of in order to create an affective sweep as the fast songs are followed by slower, more introspective tunes. According to some, the net effect of these careful techniques is to create a powerful space for altered forms of consciousness (Luhrmann 2004b; D.E. Miller 1997: 80-9; Paloma 2003); it is true that the extended worship times can come across as powerful, a sort of pop-rock elegiac to the divine.

What makes this act of worship compelling for those who engage in it is that worship is conceived as a form of speaking with God. As I was told, communal worship is powerful because one is seeing others in an emotional engagement with God (no matter what the emotional tenor of that interaction action is), which in turn serves as a spur for one’s own outreach. Indeed, sincerity, spontaneity, and deep affect are arguably the guiding principles when viewing worship as a communicative act (Shoaps 2002: 57-62). For many, however, this is more than speech – it is an offering, a gift. Exactly what is being offered, or what that offering amounts to, informants are not uniform on, but the lyrics of the songs themselves point unequivocally to the fact that worshipping is not merely the proffering of communication in the same manner as it would be if I were, say, to sing to another person. For many, because of the level of emotion created and
the depths of attention demanded, worship is sacrificial. If you ask what is sacrificed, you get a variety of answers: worries, concerns, fears, desires, and even dignity, all of which are items that, despite their negative valence, people consider themselves overly attached to. These are the things that they claim not just to lose through worship, but also to give up to God.

An example of the sacrificial logic of worship can be seen in the lyrics of one particularly popular song sung at many Vineyard churches: Matt Redman and Martin Smith’s ‘The heart of worship’. Matt Redman is a prolific Christian recording artist who has been associated with the Vineyard’s musical label; he is popular not simply within the Vineyard, but in the larger Charismatic and Revival community as well (see Paloma 2003: 43). This catchy song, while being the best of the bunch, is not untypical, either in its music or in its lyrical content. There is no need for the lyrics to be displayed on a PowerPoint projector when the song is played; they are easily recalled by even the most occasional church member. Like many Vineyard songs, it is sweetly mournful, a mix of major and minor chords in soothing progression, lyrically uncomplicated to facilitate easy looping during performance so that the length of the song can be extended for as much as an additional fifteen minutes. The lyrics themselves are laden with a sacrificial motif. What is in play here is in the words of the song itself, “more than a song” (Redman & Smith 1999). Instead, the essence of the individual is at stake, as is suggested by the song’s frequent referrals to a supposed interiority of the subject in such phrases as “you look much deeper within” and “you’re looking into my heart” (Redman & Smith 1999). The totality of what is being offered up is vast – one’s entirety, one’s “every single breath.” And while the gift is nominally centred on God (who, as the song
reminds us, “It’s all about”), the person, or at least the person’s syncrymphical representation (or “heart” – see Biel 2004), naturally comes into focus as the complementary part of the dyad. And, as part of the dyad, the individual stands as subject and agent, and not as object; as a Vineyard handout regarding worship states, God “receives our sincere offerings of worship that are a choice of our wills.”

At the Vineyard, this idea of worship as ‘sacrifice’ occupies a spot on the Christian conceptual terrain next to a series of other related ideas, all of which can be glossed under the wider category of ‘giving up to God’, often through the medium of prayer. In these other offerings, as with worship, what is often tearfully ‘given up to God’ are negative items – habits, relationships, and statuses (often sinful in nature) that, despite their negative moral charge, the person will at least claim a powerful emotional bond to and pleasure from (cf. Firth 1963: 13). Questionable romantic relationships,

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55 It is this sacrificial aspect of worship that is lost on those, such as Alan Wolfe, who criticize this Vineyard-style of contemporary Christian music. Working from an observation made by Lutheran Theologian Marva Dawn, who states that worship is properly about “offerings or sacrifice,” both Dawn and Wolfe suggest that the contemporary culture of narcissism “[m]akes us want to feel good about ourselves” and so “we make ourselves, and not God, the centerpiece of our Worship” – hence contemporary worship is about something other than sacrifice (Dawn 1995, cited in Wolfe 2003:23). As evidence that this is the case, Wolfe sites Dawn’s observation about the frequency with which the first person singular appears in contemporary worship songs. What this claim overlooks is that in any sacrifice, for the bridge of communication between the mundane and divine to be established, all the components of the sacrifice, (performer, beneficiary, site, and medium [or sacrificial offering]), must be articulated and identifiable (Hubert and Mauss 1964[1898]). While it is striking (and perhaps, to a degree, admittedly narcissistic) that it is the singular person rather that the community that is the worshipping party, in this act of sacrifice, where the worshipper fulfills three of the four categories (including, in some ways, having the worshipper’s own subjectivity serve as the site of the sacrifice as well), the believer as an entity must naturally come to the fore, if for no other reason than to fill out all of the sacrificial categories. If anything, the focus on the individual enhances the idea of the sacrificial act as being one undertaken freely by a fully responsible agent.
Internet porn predilections, even ‘attention-grabbing’ suicidal thoughts are offered up in this manner. While these may seem like things that one wishes to be free of, what is often stressed is the amount of emotional investment in these activities and the degree to which they define one’s life; thus giving them up is, in an odd way, a relinquishment of something with a counter-intuitive worth. Like worship, these forms of release highlight free will. Unlike the actuarial sphere of economic exchange, there is no confusion about agency and origination here: the traits and relationships sacrificed are the giver’s own, in both causation and ownership. Nor is there the encouragement towards conscious moderation that one finds with economic activity: extravagance and a lack of hesitation are the ideals here. When one surrenders to God, the goal is to surrender completely. Finally, unlike the economic exchange, there can only be one partner for this transaction – rather than interacting with those who stand as God’s proxies in economic exchanges, here you cannot give up your pride or illicit relationship by offering it up to your neighbour.

This is sacrifice in the most literal sense of the word. What is given up is (ideally) destroyed; troublesome relationships and unfortunate traits do not become aspects of God because of this transfer, but instead cease to appear in the world whatsoever. We see here an inversion of expenditures in the realm of stewardship, where God’s property is continually sent out to others, but God never loses title; here, endless material is sent to him, but it never becomes his own (cf. Robbins 2004: 233-4). Given the totality of the procedure – and the theatricality sometimes associated with public pronouncements regarding this act – this can come across at times as a sort of spiritual potlatch without (at least overtly) the underlying aggression. And, like a potlatch, there is an expectation
among believers that one person’s public sacrifice in the church or prayer group will
elicit even greater sacrifice in others.

One thing that can make these transactions appear to be particularly potlatch-like
is the fact that they are not entirely limited to immaterial property. Often, the keys to
wealth and success themselves are what is offered up. Educational opportunities, jobs,
and even whole careers are offered up in this manner if they do not sit right at some
level, or if they are ‘desired’ to such a degree that they becomes a distraction from
keeping one’s heart centred on Jesus. One does not even need to have the position to
give it up – not only a job that one has, but potential jobs, and even positions that one
has unsuccessfully applied for, can be retroactively offered, so that the act of accepting
an already unavoidable financial reverse or lost opportunity can be classified as an act of
sacrifice. One example of such a sacrifice was a young lawyer who applied for a
prestigious internship at a public interest law organization. Because the interview went
well in her mind, and she was assured by the career services office at her law school that
she was perhaps the most qualified candidate for the post, she began to plan her future
with the certainty of the job as a cornerstone. However, as she waited, doubt began to
gnaw on her, and days after receiving the dreaded thin envelope associated with failure
she offered the job up in prayer. While this retroactive ‘giving up’ is primarily a release
of concern and anxiety to God, there is a sense that it is also a release of a sense of
entitlement, and, hence, of a genuine interest in what is released. Evidence of this can
be seen in the fact that after individuals offer something up, they often expect
something ‘just as nice’ to replace it; in the case above, the lawyer took the failure to
receive the internship as a sign that another equally prestigious one would be sent her
way soon.

In many ways, sacrifice, centered as it is on a complete and voluntary alienation directly to God of personally owned, intangible property, seems like a form of exchange that could have no relationship with its opposite, stewardship, which is characterized by an underplaying of agency and a heightened sense of accountability as the believer manages God’s property (property which, as we have seen, includes the believer’s very person). However, as already mentioned, with most ‘spheres of exchange’ systems, there is a possibility of conversions, exchanges that cross or blend spheres. Here, it is the sense of sacrifice as extravagance that is tapped into when the distinction between stewardship and sacrifice is blurred and money is requested, especially in unexpected, informal, or non-periodic ways; in short, when there is an upward conversion where money in which one has a stewardship interest becomes instead a sacrifice that one releases to God. It is no wonder that at Shores, the transition from celebration to donation in the admittedly loose liturgy was marked by the invariant phrase, ‘Let us continue worship by taking up an offering’. This sense of a sacrificial gift was even more pronounced in moments where the giving was intended to be spontaneous or as part of a unique request. Unlike tithing and other disciplined spending, which is seen as being hard-wired into a properly Christian financial discipline, believers are constantly appealed to for various undisciplined ‘love offerings’ – donations for missions, campus ministries, Bible camps for underprivileged youth, and, as discussed earlier, even the unexpected personal expenses of fellow believers. It is this sense of Christian charity, often overlooked in the literature, that marks the ambivalent tipping-point where the conservative economic practice of stewardship meets the Christian impulse to take up
financial sacrifice, often in the form of ‘servant evangelism’ (Elisha 2004), a term
frequently used by the Vineyard for its charitable projects. For this class of giving, the
usual question is whether one ‘feels led’ by God to donate or ‘has a burden placed on
one’s heart’ – usually, there is something about either one’s social bonds with the
person making the request, or about the nature of the request itself, that sticks with
one’s imagination, returning again and again to mind and prayer until the obligation
must be acknowledged. Here, it is not responsibility that is key, but a complete lack of
hesitation, and a full surrender to an impulse to act extravagantly; and unlike tithing,
where individuals hold back if they have doubts about how the money will be spent,
here, concerns about the money’s use are rarely expressed – it is the act of giving that is
important.

If these two realms, stewardship and sacrifice, are different spheres of exchange,
with their own logic, then they are interlocking spheres. This point is evidenced by the
way that a concern can cross from one sphere to another, and back again, as it develops.
In prayer requests made in small groups, you can watch the transformation. People will
pray for success in their current troubled workplace, only to have their prayers suddenly
become requests for the will to walk away from a job that they would love to stay at,
were it not for the calling on their hearts to leave it; the condominium purchase changes
its place in the spiritual actuarial table as its possibility becomes more remote and the
promise of it has to be surrendered to God. This crossing over from stewardship to
sacrifice and back allows one to in effect ‘launder’ the moral charge associated with
being an economic agent in the world; almost any degree of economic concern or
recklessness can be articulated as a proper response to circumstances at hand, and
radically shifting tactics is nothing more than responding to the spirit. Both the most obsessive style of financial supervision and the most impulsive of gestures are seen as being appropriate. Given that there appears to be little limitation on what can cross over between these two techniques, spheres of exchange is perhaps an unfortunately stable term to address what is going on here – what is elided by the phrase ‘spheres’, with its unintentional echo of platonic heavenly permanence, is the way in which these are also separate moments in a subjective process that is always ongoing, according to individual predilections and narrative need, with the subject shifting freely between being a religious accountant and being a spiritual philanthropist.⁵⁶

**Conclusion**

In summary, we have sketched out an organizing logic for exchange in these Southern California Vineyard churches, as expressed through the lens of anthropological ‘spheres of exchange’ theory. Following Robbins and Akin in defining spheres as hierarchically linked categories of modes of exchange, proper exchange goods, and proper exchange partners, we outlined three spheres: the lowest sphere of ‘non-Christian’, secular exchange, in which one trades consumer goods with anonymous others in a desire-driven market; a sphere of stewardship, in which one trades material items that are ultimately under divine ownership as a morally controlled practice; and a sacrificial sphere, patterned on the soteriological logic of Christianity, in which immaterial elements (such as worship, aspects of the subject, and status relations, including

⁵⁶ This observation should be taken as a description of subjective experience, and not as a comment on the substantivists/formalist debate (see Graeber 2001: 9-12).
revenue-generating ones such as specific jobs or whole careers) are offered as sacrifices to the divine. We have also seen how material can cross spheres in conversions, either downwards (as in worship songs illegally downloaded for mere personal pleasure) or upwards (cash donations that become ‘sacrificial’ offerings).

Now that this picture has been at least outlined, there are four final observations that should be made: two are points regarding the incompleteness of this system, while the third raises the issue of the specificity of the system, and the degree to which the explanatory model presented here may be capable of travelling. The final point raises the question of what implications this model might have for the political thought of these believers.

First, it would be a mistake to see this system as solely an outside ideological imposition by the pastors. Given the alacrity with which Evangelicals and Charismatics change churches if they are displeased (Bibby & Brinkerhoff 1973), for the most part pastors do better to conform to existing opinion than to shape it; further, the fact that this system is for the most part unconscious suggests it is not the result of purposeful education. Second, it is important to note that the implied outside of this two-sphere system of exchange, which, as we recall, is the secular mode where commerce is entirely individualistic and God is not a partner to the exchange, is also represented within this system. Remember that in their imagining of secular economic practice, the omnipresent pressure to purchase, and the irresistible nature of transactions that are assumed to occur in this realm (which is portrayed as an endless, near-compulsive expenditure on luxury items of questionable value that inevitably fail to satisfy), make it appear to believers that expenditures outside of this system are no more a site for any
agency than the actuarial mode of stewardship exchange located within the system is a site of agency.\textsuperscript{57} However, this perceived lack of freedom means that secular economic practices are almost ideally situated to appear in the one realm where there is a perception of agency – that of sacrifice. In fact, to the degree that repudiated behaviors have a financial component, in that they often relate to commodities (alcohol, pornography, or markers of worldly status), this outside is the home of the behavioral compulsions that are so often the centre of sacrificial giving of elements of the self. What is worth thinking about, given the connection of the first sphere and its outside, is the degree to which they may slide into each other, in the same way that the charismatically faithful Christian can slowly become the focus of demonic attack. Money is fungible, and the enemy is tricky; what appears to be an expenditure faithful with God’s leadings can, in the anonymity of the market, slowly be subverted, and become a purchase meant entirely for the autonomous self – which, since that expenditure will be tinged by the vice of selfishness, is a purchase for the devil.

Third, there is the issue of how this explanatory model stands in relation to other models of Christian exchange. We have already discussed how the stewardship model is reminiscent of Weberian models of Protestant financial restraint, and how Southern California Vineyard pastors have mirrored the laity’s lack of interest in the prosperity gospel movement by specifically rejecting it. This rejection, however, does not necessarily mean that prosperity gospel theology is not suitable to a ‘sphere of exchange’ analysis. I would make the observation that the demarcation between

\textsuperscript{57} This is a view of economic agency that stands in sharp contrast to the usual phenomenological reading of the marketplace (see Simmel 1950).
material and immaterial exchange also follows the divide between inert matter and the 
spiritualized agent that is common to Protestant and post-Protestant forms of 
Christianity (Engelke 2007; Keane 1998; 2002; 2007). Money, which stands astride 
both the material and the immaterial owing to its symbolic and fungible nature as a 
signifier of pure abstract value as well as a material object (Keane 2007: 274), is the 
only material element that routinely ascends from the realm of stewardship to that of 
sacrifice.

If money’s role as a mediator between material control and sacrificial exuberance 
is predicated on the subject/object, immaterial/material split that Keane speculates is 
rooted in Protestantism, then it follows that in situations where an opposition between 
the immaterial and the material has either been rejected (Coleman 2006) or never taken 
root (Gifford 2004; Wiegele 2005), a functioning barrier between sacrifice and 
stewardship disappears. In these circumstances, it appears that the higher form of 
sacrificial exchange in which transactions are directly engaged with the divine, no 
matter who one’s temporary material exchange partners may happen to be at any 
particular moment, can expand downwards to subsume transactions that would in other 
cases fall within stewardship. Further, with the material/immaterial barrier removed, it 
is more likely that the divine grace offered in return for sacrifice can be read as 
appearing in material, and particularly pecuniary, forms, and become not so much the 
exception as the rule. These suspicions align nicely with the observation that where the 
prosperity gospel is a dominant normative model, the kind of rationalizing, disciplinary, 
and economistic logic associated in this model with stewardship is often undervalued 
(see, e.g., Gifford 2004: 150-6). Likewise, in areas where the gap between the material
and the spiritual is considered to be less porous, or where the divine itself is thought to be so far distant that contact is either difficult, presumptuous, or conducted only through designated mediators, it seems more likely that all financial activity will fall within the scope of stewardship; indeed to the degree that formation of the self might be modeled on an Aristotelian concept of self-transformation rather than on offering up to the divine aspects of a ‘partible’ personhood, then the entirety of the self might become yet another object to be reflexively controlled through the same practices that constitute stewardship (cf. Asad 1993).

Finally, returning to the case of the Vineyard, while we have demarcated a typology of transactions, what we have not created here is a systematic or complete economy, not even a ‘general economy’ in the sense used by Bataille (1991 [1949]). What we have brought forward, though, is, at least in a vestigial (or perhaps anticipatory) form, a moral economy, in the sense used first by Thompson (1971): a system of beliefs about the proper procedural and substantive mode of carrying on economic activity, as set against the liberal imagination of the market as a realm where the anonymous forces of deregulated exchange and self-interest will naturally work out to the benefit of all (given enough time). Even here, though, there are some important differences. Most moral economy models are informed by an indigenous assumption of a scarcity model (Austen 1993: 92-5), and the population imagined to be harmed by scarcity is usually the same population that promotes that moral economy in the first place. In comparison, here, centred on an assumption of an all-providing God, economic injury to the self is not the chief concern, at least not explicitly. Instead, the concern of believers is for others – an imagined class usually described as ‘the needy’ or ‘poor’.
According to this moral economy, it is the poor, and not believers, who should be in large part the beneficiaries of sacrificial giving when it occurs in a monetary form. Given the precarious and contradictory position of the population of young professionals at Shores, fortunate and successful in their educational achievements and social status, on the one hand hard pressed by low starting salaries, transitory positions, and educational debt, while on the other hand they may feel more kinship with (and be desperate to create an ideological distance from) those ‘poor’ ‘others’ than may initially be apparent. Still, these forms of exchange do stand as the ground for judging the activity of others, even if there does seem to be something idiosyncratic about these judgments owing to the underlying structure of the sort of exchanges considered ideal. It is because of this multiple-sphere conception that individuals nearly identically placed in the larger scheme of production can be given entirely different moral valences: for instance, a believer at one moment may praise a Christian ‘dot-com’ multi-millionaire because of his charitable activities, while seeing other almost identically situated non-Christian corporate actors as villains. The degree to which this functions as a conscious critique of capitalism, which may initially appear to be something unlikely to arise from the Evangelical camp, is something that has yet to be revealed, but it is possible, given the growing concern for poverty, the environment, and issues concerning diversity and justice in at least some Evangelical circles, that the origin and contents of the next wave of political and economic critique may come as a surprise as much to the left as to the right.

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CHAPTER FIVE – EXPERIMENTING
RISK AS RITUAL, THE JOSHUA GENERATION BITES THE HAND THAT LEADS THEM, OR A POST-MODERN APOCALYPSE

One morning, during what was up to then a regular Sunday morning church service, something suddenly swerved in a direction that I doubt any in the room had foreseen. In the middle of one of the praise song that are routinely used to warm up the worshippers, the music suddenly became atonal, and what was a bouncy four-four time became a rhythm-less drone; this shift was disquieting. The congregation became hushed, and the guitarist walked up the microphone and, in a slightly haunted tone of voice that conveyed as much fear as it did resignation, started speaking to the audience. He had been reading a book, he said, that was about “the last days.” It presented a “logical” argument that the world was going to end soon – something that also made sense from a “Christian Perspective.” He listed a brief run of possibilities, including environmental collapse and “WMDs,” which he mentioned parenthetically was “something that we’ve been thinking about for the last three years.” It was at this point that his comments took a quick series of turns, from the reflexive to the theological, “I guess that’s why I’ve been melancholy lately, but I have no reason to be melancholy . . . worship like it’s the last day, but prepare for the future.” As he was saying these words, simultaneous quick hand movements he was making gave away the real reason for this odd departure – all the while he had been speaking, he had been re-stringing his guitar, something that I hadn’t noticed, taken as I was by the dark cast of this impromptu speech.
This moment was a surprising marriage of ultimate fate and contingent chance; all the more surprising because the Vineyard is not a denomination as concerned with apocalyptic narratives, and especially with pre-millennial dispensationalism, as many other similar denominations are. This was brought home to me during one small group session, in which a respected founder of the group pulled me aside with a little concern, to let me know that the red-letter Scofield Bible that I had brought to the meeting was, in his words, “dangerous.”\textsuperscript{58} This may be, to a degree, a regional issue – in Southern California, the Vineyard has had to compete head-to-head with Calvary Chapel, which has been exquisite in the development of its dispensationalist sensibilities (see, e.g, Harding and Stewart 2003). In what might be seen as complementary schismogenesis (Bateson 2000), in Southern California at least, the Vineyard seems to have distanced itself from dispensationalism as a reaction to Calvary’s apocalyptic turn. I have been told by a Vineyard pastor that this is not necessary representative of the stance of the Vineyard in the rest of the United States, where many Vineyards, free of competition from Calvary Chapels, have held onto their original dispensational inheritance; this seems to be in accord with what I have gathered from conversations I have had with Vineyard members from other parts of the country. Be that as it may, it seems irrefutable that in Southern California, the Vineyard has placed this particular future into a past that it has outgrown.

\textsuperscript{58} The Scofield Bible is a traditional Bible text, usually a King James or a New King James version, that has been supplemented by annotations that explain who the various verses fit into the apocalyptic scheme created by dispensational millennialist thought. See Boyer 1992, Harding 1994, 2001, Weber 1973.
Because it has outgrown a concern for the apocalyptic does not mean that it has outgrown a concern for the future, however. This chapter sketches out one possible future that the Vineyard sees, and how that future has affected the Vineyard’s practices around contingency and hazard in ritual; for this reason, we turn to how the Vineyard speaks about, and at times courts, risk.

_A church that takes (some) risks_

In its broadest terms, risk is inherent to any projection of meaning in the world— the very act of “people putting the categories of their culture into play by acting . . . subject[s] those categories to risk in the event that the fit between category and reality is not a neat one” (Robbins 2005, 7; see more generally Sahlin 1985). People’s vision of the world, and hence of their place in it over time, is perpetually at risk. When risk is imagined as a corollary to ritual, however, it is not the broader existential issues that usually come to mind. Instead, risk as an index of a zero sum game of success or failure is usually what is thought of. In its crudest form, the anthropological model of risk and ritual would first identify one of the chief purposes of a class of ritual as the prevention of that which falls outside of one’s immediate control; the classic example of this would be Malinowski’s (1954) magicians, struggling to command with words and rites what they could not command with their labor and practical knowledge. Under this system, risk could also appear in the form not of a danger averted, but as a failure of the mechanisms intended to control for that danger. This failing could result from the fact that the necessary prerequisites for the “felicity conditions” of the ritual weren’t met (see Austin 1975; Rappaport 1979, 1999) – or failure could have its root in the collapse
of the ritual process itself, due to error in the execution of the ritual itself (here, one can think of the literature on performance and ritual).

All of these imagined possibilities are predicated on a certain dully obvious (and hence contestable) assumption – that failure is something to be avoided, and that risk is an unfortunate necessity hazarded en route to a desired end-state. The question that is avoided by this formulation is what are the limit cases of this scenario, specifically in what situations is risk perceived to be its own reward, and when is failure seen to be as vital for the continuation of the community as is success. In short, I want to investigate a case where, if my reading is correct, risk itself is the focus, and the reward, of the ritual, and that this risk is summoned up in a way to obscure other risks, risks that, by the logic of its definition of self and of history, this group cannot avoid.

If we were to look for an organization or community that exhibited this seeming perverse desire for risk and failure, I would submit to you that the Vineyard would be an excellent exemplar; from its first moments, it has presented itself as an organization that is more than willing to experiment. Consider, for instance, Wimber’s moxy in offering a class on the miraculous, or his willingness in his conversion narrative to have his church be “about” healing, even before he had successfully prayed for healing yet; as another example, recall how the Vineyard’s reappropriation of secular rock as “worship music.” Innovation, at least in Anglophone Protestant Culture, necessitates situating one’s self as being ideologically “on the edge,” which in this case meant hazarding questions about whether this new style of church was little more than secular culture with a Christian veneer (an argument that the Vineyard eventually won, as more “contemporary” worship styles spread like wildfire throughout the larger evangelical
culture and many Vineyard songs became new standards) and whether their more extreme forms of spiritual practices were sound (here, the Vineyard was less successful, as it gained the opprobrium of many Evangelicals, and eventually schismed, as the Toronto Blessing presented odd behavior such as making animal sounds as a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit). This culture of risk was so strong that at least one pastor, a long-in-the-tooth Vineyard veteran who often wore the unofficial uniform of shorts and a Hawaiian shirt, defined it as the essence of the Vineyard – “we’re a church that takes chances.” In fact, this identity was something that was earnestly sought; among the prayers uttered from the front of Shores was the invocation, “Let us be a Church that takes Risks” – something usually uttered whenever any new project, from a short-term missions trip to doubling the number of Sunday services, was taken on.

Even though these excesses were of a spiritual nature – or at least of an ecstatic one – the Vineyard has entered the twenty-first century in a common American position of recovering from the excesses of the nineteen-nineties. That has not meant, though, that the Vineyard has abandoned its nature as a “risk-taking” organization. Over the last decade or so, Vineyard churches (like many other Evangelical and Charismatic churches) have been experimenting, sometimes radically, with “how they hold church,” specifically, with the structure and content of worship services. Often as a complementary service at night, but occasionally during the day, Vineyard churches will have services that fall under a wide variety of names; the assortment of names either identifies this mode of worship in the generic (such as ‘Emergent’ services, a name popular in the wider Evangelical community for similar services (See McLaren 2001, 2004)) or names specific, repeated events that (theoretically) occur in specific
congregations (these services bear particular, in all sense of the word, names like ‘Circle’ or “Sounds’n’Grounds Lounge”).

What marks these services as different is the inherently unstable nature of them – although they easily become rather familiar quickly, there is little repetition in either the form, content, or scheduling of these services (though there is a strong preference for weekend nights, with the occasional Friday also making the grade). These services are usually, for lack of a better word, pretty shoddy affairs when compared to what normally occurs in these congregations; the usual Sunday morning services at these churches are spit and polish productions, marked by wireless microphones, PowerPoint presentations of song lyrics and the sermon’s main points, and copies of the proceeding available on CD within minutes of the end of the meeting. Professionalism is the order of the day on Sunday morning.

By comparison, the services that concern us here are chaotic affairs with endless technical faults such as failing or unpowered microphones and seas of feedback, and unlike the 9am, 11am punctuality of Sunday morning performances, these evening affairs run a schedule reminiscent of third world train systems, sometimes starting hours late, and sometimes staring so early that they are apparently halfway through when the nominal starting time occurs (though I could never get anyone to actually confirm this, it has always been my impression that organizers took a certain glee in this chaos, their happiness with the proceedings seemingly to be an inverted function of how close they were running to whatever nominal schedule they had). If time is an ailing, if not broken, axis for this organization, space is as well – unlike the regimented rows and columns of fold-out chairs that mark Sunday mornings, the seating arrangements are
usually sloppy half circles of the same folding chairs, broken up by a random assortment of “novelty seats” such as beanbags and sofas, lugged at great inconvenience to be used in these services once or twice, only to slip away again from whence they came. All this often occurs under the cover of a near perfect darkness, where often the only illumination are vast banks of tea lights that seem more reminiscent of a Catholic church’s vestibule that anything having to do with Evangelicalism.

In a similar way, the content of these performances follow a pattern of an open predictability. Unlike most traditional services, which are focused on a single set of musical performers and an individual speaker, these services are a polyvocal mish-mash of Gospel readings in foreign languages, poetry-slam style religious works, Christian hip-hop interpretive dance, and grunge renditions of traditional Christian ballads such as “amazing grace.” Presenters come in from the audience and then slip back into it, sometimes in accord with a pre-existing schedule arranged by the equivalent of a master of ceremonies, sometimes stepping to the microphone as guided by their own whims, or that of the holy spirit. Sometimes whoever is performing will beg the audience to come up and participate, with the hope being that the dividing line between audience and performers will disintegrate entirely, and everyone will become part of an inchoate, expressive mob. The only rule about who can participate is an implied one; although people of all ages can, and do, attend, there is a marked preference for young adults, organizationally and performatively, in these meetings, and the one time I witnessed a much older, graying individual step up to the mike, there was an immediate sense of very mild annoyance and disinterest in the audience, as if the testimony being offered could not possibly, for unstated axiomatic reasons, have any relevance.
This may sound like the Evangelical Charismatic answer to a talent show, and in some ways it is, but there is one difference – there is the expectation that, as in the end of conventional services or the revivalistic “conferences” that occur, the Holy Spirit will move, and when this does occur, it can occur in a particularly strong manner. Freed of the shackles of the three-Services-every-Sunday timetable, and not dependant on being relevant to any particular theme, as in religious inspired conferences and workshops, during long musical interludes the normal Charismatic gesture of laying on hands at the request of a friend or family member can build in energy and seriousness, as more people gather around someone who appears to be emotionally distraught, or has some issue known in the wider community. Given the open-ended nature of these events, these spontaneous prayer circles can build for as long as the energy and momentum are present, running late into the night if the desire is there. However, there is no guarantee at all that something like this will occur, and there is a sense that these events are as likely to end in tedium and mild embarrassment for the performers as it is likely to end in a sense of God being “really present.”

Given our interests here, what seems most striking about these proceedings is the fact that they seem to be primed to fail. Compare it to the usual Sunday services, in which upon entering the building you’ll be greeted by someone who is part of a “welcome” team, who will hand you a pre-printed bulletin for you to peruse while the highly practiced band plays onstage, in front is PowerPoint screen bearing the song’s lyrics. As we have seen, everything from font use (San serif, at the Church where I did the lion’s share of my fieldwork) to overall color scheme (a soothing blue, for everything from t-shirts to fliers and the folding chairs that everyone sat in) was
carefully controlled for, out of a concern, I was told by the pastor, for “quality experience” and to maintain identity – or, as he acknowledged when asked, for purposes of branding. None of this meticulousness was present in these more informal, “Let’s put on a show” type meetings. Perhaps it is for this reason that these proceedings weren’t very popular, with attendance being at best only about a third of a normal Sunday service – and there are generally two of those Morning Services on any particular Sunday. Most of the Church members who did attend admitted that this was low on their triage list, something that organizers alluded to more than once during Sunday morning announcements when they stated that “the enemy” has a way of throwing things in the way of people when it came time for these evening worship sessions.

**The post-modern dispensation**

Why are these services engaged in? What purpose do they serve? To some degree, these proceedings can be thought of as a “farm league” where upcoming talent can be identified and nurtured, a process that is particularly important to a church where individuals often start attending Seminary once they have already achieved a leadership role within their congregation – that is, if they attend Seminary at all. However, this reason alone isn’t sufficient; there are other venues, such as home groups, where talent can be fostered, and regardless the need to raise new leadership does nothing to explain the particular *form* of the ritual here. To make sense of this, we must turn our attention to the one descriptor notably absent in our previous discussion – the postmodern.

When I say postmodern here, I do not refer to it as some new turn of history, an emerging aesthetic, a phenomena of semiotics, or a form of cultural critique, but instead
I am speaking of it in the emic sense, as a folk typology and theory found, among other places, in Evangelical Christianity. To those who care to recall the academic discussion of postmodernity that occurred in our field not that long ago, there should be little surprise that in the Vineyard, the notion is an unclear one, with little consensus about who or what is postmodern. In what may be a typical postmodern gesture, I’d like to identify two, or, depending on your subject position, three different broad stances regarding postmodernity that can be found among people in the Vineyard. The first is the idea of postmodernity as a threat, and at the same time as an opportunity; typical of this vision might be a statement taken from the talk given during one of the larger (and more standard) late night revival style evenings fostered county-wide by all the Vineyard churches in my fieldsite, where the headlining speaker, having worked himself up from his rather calm starting demeanor to the frenzied tones that are perhaps more usually associated with Evangelicals, predicted a coming generation with “a worldview different from anything the Western World has seen to date.” This upcoming generation was one that strikes “fear in the heart of the church” because this generation is not impressed by the phrase “The Bible Says,” running instead under the complementary relativistic logic of “what’s true for you is what’s true for you, and what’s true for me is true for me.” This view of the postmodern as an erosion of all standards of truth and meaning have both negative and positive dimensions; while this idea of the postmodern unsettles many (I have actually been told by one person that the threat of a “postmodern world” was in part the impetus behind her conversion to Evangelical Christianity), it is also seen as an opportunity of unprecedented dimensions, because this would mean, in the words of our revival meeting preacher, a literal
restoration of the church to its initial environment: as he said, “I am overjoyed at the
cynicism [of this generation], because it's the closest thing to the Roman worldview
seen in the last two thousand years.” Under such circumstances, it is only natural that a
church practicing the full range of charisms that marked the early church would
encounter an equal level of success. It is perhaps this mix of opportunity for a greater
future and the renewal of a solid grounding in a past charismatic tradition that caused
that particular meeting with the postmodern fearing speaker to be the most
charismatically uproarious event that I ever attended in my fieldwork; at the close of the
homily, the assembled audience (which was drawn from all the Vineyard churches in
the region) rushed the stage of the rented church hall in a manner that seemed to best
express what I had read and heard about the classic Vineyard of the nineteen nineties.
Between speaking in tongues, praying at full volume, and outright bellowing, the
volume was deafening, and experienced members who were not caught up in the
excitement still rushed to the borders of the throng, in order to help give prayer, and at
least in one instance catch someone who had been slain in the spirit and was in danger
of just collapsing straightaway into the floor.59

You see this kind of language regarding the ‘postmodern’ in the Vineyard
constantly; when the former institutional head of the Vineyard, Todd Hunter, left the
position of National Director of the Board of the Association of Vineyard Churches, he
cited as his reason a desire to turn his attention to the project of being “a church

59 Tangentially, this was also an experience in how contagious these forms of affect and
compartment can be – standing right at the edge of crowd, twice I was asked by
bystanders whether I “wanted prayer,” which suggested that perhaps I myself looked
like I was slipping into the state of agitated confusion that seemed to mark the most
strongly affected.
planting missionary to postmodern generations;\textsuperscript{60} This has become an institutional, and not just a personal, concern: Vineyard pastoral conferences almost inevitably feature talks and panels about communicating to these upcoming postmoderns, in a postmodern manner.

In contrast to this idea of postmodernism as an external threat or opportunity is the concept of the postmodern not as an environment or an alter, but as self-identity; indeed, at the very conference/revival meeting that hosted the talk referenced before, one the people who was managing the audience through a careful mix of crowd control and prayer had, just earlier that day, calmly explained to me that the Vineyard itself was a postmodern movement; borrowing, perhaps, from a book by the sociologist Donald Miller (1997), he had explained to me how their abandoning the materialism and institutional reliance that he, at least, saw as the sign of the modern, combined with their easy acceptance of the supernatural, meant that they were not moderns. He was not alone in this belief – the founder of the Vineyard, John Wimber, himself had written about how the Church had been hemmed in by secularism, self-reliance (a particular name for individual autonomy), materialism, and rationalism (Wimber 1985); the Vineyard was meant to leave that whole (modernist) thicket behind to practice the authentic, “non-Western” Christianity that the apostles had been initially called out to live.

For this strain of Christianity, then, the postmodern is an impossible object, at once denotating the Vineyard itself, their descendants, and alien others, and connoting

\textsuperscript{60} Vineyard USA Press Release “Todd Hunter resigns as N. D. and Board President,” May 9, 2000.
both triumph and despair. While this trying lack of clarity may sound familiar to those who recall the academic discussions of the postmodern, it is worth identifying the particular constraints brought upon the deployment of this concept that occur because of the religious background in which this discussion is imbedded. American Evangelical Protestantism, the Vineyard included, fancies itself (by way of Jonathan Edwards) the direct descendant of the reformation; and to the extent that their genealogical claim is true, some of the hallmarks of that initial movement, such as the emphasis on the sense of an individuated biography (Soeffner 1997), and an intensely materialistic and rationalized sense of engagement with the outside world (Weber 1975) can still be seen gleaned today. It is these traits, combined with the elements within Protestant language ideology that we have discussed earlier that endeavors to conceive of language as at once fixed in meaning (Crpanzano 2000) and (at least ideally) identical to the internal state of the speaker (Keane 1998, 2002), that makes the postmodern unimaginable, regardless of whether it is regarded as describing an ascetic, a critique, or a state of being. It is difficult to imagine that flat, depthless breaking with any wider hermeneutic network that Jameson (1984) sees as being at the core of the postmodern aesthetic as being compatible with the Evangelical focus on identity and a wider significance; the sorteriological story at the heart of popular Protestantism does not seem to be all that compatible with the death of master narratives, for that matter, either (see Lyotard 1984).

Keeping this in mind, and returning to the question of these “Emergent” or “Postmodern” ceremonies, we can see that the postmodernism that animates them is, at best, a faux postmodern. Although the body of every ‘performance’ can vary incredibly,
they all must be given a semantic and biographical content – introductory patter almost always discusses what the artist is trying to “say” during this song, and often touches where the individual “was” in their life at the time that they wrote it. This sense of an important, deeper meaning is especially present during sections when the Bible is read, particularly when it is read in “Foreign Languages.” When the Bible is read in these languages, it is followed by a reading in English, which is presented as showing what the Bible passage “means”; translation is taken as unproblematic, and at no time is the question of any of the particularities of translation – of idiom, of indeterminacy, of context – ever addressed in any way that suggests that it doesn’t graph on perfectly to the English meaning; in a sense these “post-modern” moments of presentation are more modern in sensibilities than the quotidian interpretations that occur in the unmarked spaces of the small groups, where (as we have seen previously) the resistances to unproblematized folk theories of meaning that are inherent to translation were acknowledged.

Perhaps the least “post-modern” aspect of the whole performance, however, is the logic of personal expression that lies behind these performances. The appeals made both to promote attendance at these events, and during these events to promote participation, all are organized around tropes of expression of some kernel of a true self (such as calls for “Your Personal Way of Service” or an opportunity to “Share your passion for Worship”) or of further development of the self (where these procedures, with their unconventional nature, are described as “A chance to lose your insecurities as Christians” or “a chance to really stretch oneself”). It is this sense of the service serving the reaffirmation and promulgation of a permanent, continuing self; that seems to be the
biggest break with the avowed “postmodern” nature of these evenings; indeed, centered as they are on themes of expression and self-expression and self-development, these moments seem almost as modernist as a Le Corbusier building.

It would be crass, though, to state that the problem is that Evangelicals “just don’t get it.” For all the talk of a “scandal of the Evangelical mind” (Noll 1995), there is no reason to simply write this off as a mistaken dumbshow, an aping of a philosophical system that is beyond them. Following that line would not result in any meaningful analysis – and furthermore, it is in many instances factually incorrect. There are elements of unease in the consciousness of at least some Vineyard members regarding the way that the postmodern is treated – as one member said to me, they’ve taken “a critique” and “replaced it with candles.” What is more interesting is the question of why they would engage with a mode of thought (imagined as critique or aesthetic) that is in some serious ways such an anathema to them that they cannot even give it full reign in a situation where it is suppose to reign.

To answer that question, we have to return to areas touched on earlier – the history of the Vineyard, the way that they speak of the Postmodern, and the very concept or risk that we began with. As mentioned earlier, the Vineyard imagines itself as a revival Church, both in its individual history as an offshoot of the nineteen-sixties Jesus People movement, and in its current affiliation with the larger wave of Theological Conservative Christianity that appears to be taking place both in America and beyond. The logic of revival as understood by them is simple, and not different from the larger meaning of the word – it is a rebirth, something which, by necessity, is predicated by a death; in their case, the prior death was a spiritual one that occurred in
the conventional Protestant Churches. Due to limitations of space, I am unable to express the logic of the exact feelings that Vineyard members, particularly leadership, have towards Mainline American Protestantism; a short sketch of it would be a nearly Oedipal mix of rage and disgust at something that many of them see themselves as decedents of, mixed with a little bit of *et in arcadia ergo*, that gnawing sense that just as their grandparents’ faith once diminished to the point of “spiritual death,” their faith, and that of their children, might someday, as well. They fear the gentrification of denominations over generations that was originally outlined by Niebuhr (1957), and they have become versed on the popular sociology concerning this hypothesis.

It is therefore telling that, as we observed earlier, one of the prime ways that the Vineyard imagined the Postmodern was as a generation. While this may be a function of the weight that concept of “generation” carries in Evangelical circles, it also can be thought of, in part, as their imagining of the future; as both foreign and unknown, a place where, if history follows its usual course, their belief will fade away until there is some “new move” of the Holy Spirit. The idea of postmodernism, as at once a sort of primal heathenism as a result of unchecked relativism, and unmeasurable opportunity due to the decline of secular modernism (a promise implicit in postmodernism’s very name), stands for a perfect condensation of all their hopes and anxieties regarding this cyclic future. We should see these “postmodern” practices not as a true postmodernism (whatever that would mean) but a religious modernism’s phantasy (in the psychoanalytic sense) of the future, a scenario that at once represents and obscures lacunae that stand at the heart of their self-narrative, an imaginary screen intended to
give substance to a gap in what is conceived or allowed, a gap that is at once desired and feared (See Žižek 1989).

Looked at this way, we can see that these “postmodern” services are a way of working through the idea of futurity and change on one hand, by acknowledging the possibility of there being other ways of being Evangelical, while at the same time foreclosing evangelical alterity in two different fashions. First, it forecloses it by portraying the future as pure unpredictability (in as much as anything can happen, and in any order – Jewish Passover prayers followed by Hip Hop, the Gospel in sign language preceded by an improvisatory comedy skit). This emphasis on the unforeseeable idea of the future negates the idea that change would be in any way predictable, and thus manageable in the manner that, say, Beck (1992) or Giddens (1991) describe risk. The only thing knowable about the future is that it, in essence, won’t be like the present, and all narrative categories and taxonomic distinctions will not allow you to know what comes next, or in what combination. At the same time, this future is one that is ultimately understandable; even though it is alien, and unpredictable, it is still capable of being assimilated as it occurs, under the traditional classificatory schemas that serve as the bedrock of the Evangelical social imaginary – of autonomous individuals expressing core aspects of their unique personalities, as formed by their biographic history, in their communication with a singular supernatural presence.

And this, then, is in a sense ironic. As mentioned earlier, one of the things that distinguishes the Vineyard from its closest genealogical relative, Calvary Chapel, is that the Vineyard has walked away from Pre-Millennial Dispensationalism. The Vineyard is
not alone – many Evangelical organizations (for instance, Fuller University, the self-styled intellectual hub of Evangelicalism (Marsden 1987)) now treat Dispensationalism as being effectively beyond the pale,\(^{61}\) and no longer endorse it as an eschatological vision; it is often in these circles that the idea of “Emergent” worship is popular. Yet, in their incorporation of the idea of postmodernism, and their exploratory practice of postmodern ritual, they have inadvertently followed dispensationalism’s logic. Like dispensationalism, they have taken the future and carved it into separate ages, although they have taken the names for their eras from critical theory instead of the Scofield Study System Bible. Their relation to this future age even follows some of the tensions of always almost being on the cusp that identifies the “everyday millennialism” (Robbins 2001b) that their dispensationalists brothers have to live with. Like American Dispensationalists split by the concept of modernity, the Vineyard is at once tracing their own identity as “postmoderns,” while attempting to brace for postmodernity’s alien impact; by doing so they have imagined the future as a place where they at once don't have to imagine in because it is at once unimaginable, and yet already known. In short, they have imagined the future in a way that obscures what they already know at some level – that whatever the future holds, for a movement that sees itself as revivalistic, and therefore revolutionary, it most certainly is not perpetual revolution.

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\(^{61}\) This rejection of Dispensationalism was imagined by my informants to be something that was breaking out all over - I was even told at one point that Dallas Theological Seminary, renowned nationwide as one of the strongholds of dispensationist thinking, was now distancing itself from that position; whatever the truth of this information (it was given to me in an oddly gossipy sort of way, so I am a little skeptical), just the fact that such an event could be imagined is a piece of evidence in and of itself.
This is not the only attempt that has been made to come to a rapprochement with the future, however. As has been broadly hinted at throughout this monograph, politics among a newer generation of believers had been undergoing a shift, and in ways that resembles, but by no means mirror, the dialectics that we have seen put forward in this section. This politics is doubly about the future – first of all, it is futurial in being enacted against and informed by an eschatological horizon, and second, in being, like post-modernism, a way of thinking through the question of continuity over a time-scape that to them seems to be forged of nothing but generational schisms.
CHAPTER SIX – IMAGINING
POLITICAL PAUL

Recently, time has become a subject of concern for some anthropologists. The focus of this concern with time — or, more properly, with temporality, the phenomenological and cultural sense of and models for time’s immediate passing — is a perceived ominous foreclosing of the future; as Jane I. Gayer observes in her revelatory article, “Prophecy and the Near Future: Thoughts on Microeconomic, Evangelical, and Punctuated Time,” there has been “a strange evacuation of the temporal frame of the ‘near future’” (2007:409); what falls out with the foreclosure of the near future, according to her argument, is the imaginary chronological space that gave room for “the process of implicating oneself in the ongoing life of the social and material world that used to be encompassed under an expansively inclusive concept of ‘reasoning’” (Gayer 2007:149). Gayer’s evidence for this phenomenon is drawn from two distinct domains — that of macroeconomic theory and that of contemporary evangelical Christian culture in the United States. The foreclosure of a middle future in Christianity, although not articulated in those specific terms, has been intimated before (Crapanzano 2000; Harding 1994, 2001; Robbins 2001b); what is groundbreaking about Gayer’s piece is the recognition that this foreclosure is part of a larger pattern, one that implicates not just Christian practice but secular reasoning as well, including anthropological thought.

Although Gayer’s diagnosis is rather convincing (e.g., one can think of other instances of stillborn futures that she does not address, such as cyberpunk and other new genres of science fiction that see the future merely as a more intense variant of the social failings and technological overreaching of the present), what is striking in her
analysis is that she puts forward no causal agent that has led to the current impasse (Robbins 2007a). Despite the linkages to evangelicalism, she certainly does not see the engine of this phenomenon as being religious itself — Guyer draws on other parallel Judeo-Christian traditions and nonevangelical forms of Christianity to suggest that nothing about this particular inflection of Christianized time is inevitable. Although this turn away from a middle future may not have been predestined in Guyer’s mind, it does seem relevant to observe that Christianity, at least in its evangelical and Pentecostal variants, “provides for the possibility, indeed the salvational necessity of, the creation of ruptures between the past, the present, and the future” (Robbins 2007b:11; also see Robbins 2004). Fractured by a set of narrative events such as creation, the incarnation, and the apocalypse, Christian time (one could argue) has always had the potential for parts to break off into eternity.

Interestingly, at the same moment that some see a shattering of temporality as shutting off the future, another theoretical project that foregrounds time has attempted to give it back. Anthropologists are starting to orient themselves to hope as a site of redemption; both Hirokazu Miyazaki (2000, 2003, 2004, 2006) and Vincent Crapanzano (2003, 2005) have made a close study of hope as a temporal orientation that looks expectantly to the future as much as analytically to the past. Despite this shared interest, the approaches of these two authors to this topic differ considerably. For

62 The philosopher Jonathan Lear (2006) has also recently turned to the ethnographic record as a space to think through hope in the face of radical cultural change; the arena that he chooses to ground his analysis in, that of the radical transformation of Crow Indian life that occurred during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is one in which, once again, for the implicated individuals, the future as it was known disappeared. Lear’s concern with the proper ethical standard to adopt in moments of radical acculturation, however, falls outside of the purview of this chapter.
Crpanzano (see 2003:9, 10, 16, 18), hope is, at best, ambivalent in its moral charge and cognitive clarity, always indicating an ineffable something more than whatever concrete item stands as its putative object, and leading as often to passivity or resignation as to agentive deeds as well as standing in the way of a certain kind of realism.

In contrast, Miyazaki has made hope the most central issue to both the analytics and the politics of his anthropological project. For Miyazaki, attending to the way that the anthropologist’s informants understand themselves by reference to their longed-for futurity is more than merely a more careful calibration of the ethnographic endeavor (a variant of James Siegel’s [1986:9] imperative that the anthropologist is interested in what his informants are interested in). Rather, Miyazaki (influenced, as I discuss below, by Ernst Bloch), claims that hope is an anthropological method as much as an ethnographic problematic (see Miyazaki 2004, 2006:148), allowing for a fundamental reorientation of knowledge, as it enables one to think through problems prospectively rather than retrospectively. Although Miyazaki (2004:162–165) sees this corrective as beneficial at many levels, perhaps the largest gain that he envisions for a methodology of hope is an opportunity for anthropology’s role as a form of social critique to be revitalized. Guided by a methodology of hope, Miyazaki suggests that anthropology (along with allied disciplines) can overcome the current Guyer-diagnosed inability to imagine futurity, at least in the case of postcapitalist forms of political economy, and that it can go on to “redefine radically and imaginatively the constitution of a critique” in a way that points to “an exit from critique as we know it” (2006:165).

Given that an evidentiary touchstone in Guyer’s argument is the centrality of apocalyptic prophecy for evangelical Christianity, it would be ironic if Miyazaki’s
“methodology of hope” pointed the way out of this lack of an imaginable midterm future, especially when one remembers that hope is often considered a Christian virtue (Crpanzano 2003:5; Miyazaki 2000, 2003), particularly a Pauline one. At a much less abstract level, this turn to an at least Christian-inflected understanding of hope, and to a recapturing of what seems to be a foreclosed future, is mirrored in the United States by the attempted alignment of progressive politics with a Christian (indeed, an evangelical) Left to reclaim political and social positioning that has been lost to conservative forces during the past 25 years; a certain stream of center-left Democrats is now carefully sharpening a rhetoric of the divine that parallels the religious language of the Christian Right while avoiding falling into a divisive politics of morality often associated with that language.

This leads me to the central question of this chapter: What are the pitfalls, imaginary or otherwise, that might be associated with this almost homeopathic attempt to recapture a future vacated by evangelical prophecy through the adoption of a Christian virtue of hope and with undermining a Christian attack on progressive politics by invoking the Christian Left? Is there an approach that enables one to think through the kind of radical change that a method of hope calls for, that can grasp the stolid temporal logic that Geyer suggests characterizes the modern day, and that can help in negotiating the Christian logic that seems to, at least in passing, color both of these analyses? In this chapter, I argue that Alain Badiou’s theory of proper political subjectivity as a state of fealty to a rent in the statist categories of inclusion and exclusion, modeled (in part) on the activities of Paul of Tarsus as a religious-cum-political militant, has a use in explaining Geyer’s observation regarding the link
between late-capitalist time and Christian practice; in understanding the strengths (and weaknesses) of a certain stream of politically progressive, theologically conservative Christian practice in the United States; and, finally, in pointing out the risks that may arise in a social science critique informed by a methodology of hope. Badiou, in his close attention to the temporal orientation of the politically active subject, and in his interest in the horizons of change made possible by events that are irreducible to explanation under the current order of things, provides the purchase necessary to think through these divergent concepts at the same moment. Just as Badiou can be used to illuminate the ethnographic facts of progressive Christianity, the ethnographic data also shine a light back on Badiou, and that light should reveal that Badiou’s thought, although certainly utopic, is not a panacea. In short, my core claim is that Badiou’s theory of the militant subject can be used to unpack the temporal structure implicit in the views of some members of an emerging charismatic Christian political Left but that such a theoretical gloss also makes apparent the potential limits of imaginable political action, not only for these socially concerned Christians but for Badiou and Miyazaki as well — and that, in these limits, one can find an effective Guyer-like evacuation of the near future in an inability to think through short-term political projects. To understand the limits of Badiou’s and Miyazaki’s utopic projects, I turn to another imagined utopia — that of Southern California’s suburbs.

**Brokenness and civil rights**

I start with a cliché — a pastor crying from the pulpit. During my two and a half years with the Vineyard, I often saw tears, offered up in home groups during prayer, in the
course of healings, during cries for divine guidance, or in the expulsion of demons. The tears that I refer to here, though, were of a peculiar sort that I only saw once. They were shed by the pastor of the Shores Vineyard Christian Fellowship, a man well liked, although occasionally accused of being too “intellectual” by (some of) his congregation, at the end of a sermon he delivered on religion and politics. The sermon’s argument was that politics and religion were indissociable — a faith that does not change how one acts, not just as a person but also as a citizen, was not faith at all. In its final moments, his sermon shifted from the general necessity of using Jesus’s radical, otherworldly, and moral message as an organizing imperative to the question of how Bible-believing Christians might carry this imperative out in the political realm. Arriving at the issue of gay marriage, he invoked an evangelical truism: “I think marriage is between a man and a woman because the Bible says it is.” But his next turn was one that perhaps might have been unforeseen by those familiar with the rhetoric of theologically conservative Southern California Christians (cf. Crapanzano 2000). With pain audible in the timbre of his voice and tears starting to stream down his cheek, he stated,

I thought a long hard time on this issue of equal protection under the law. Should I as a pastor, should we all … as believers, make an argument that there isn’t protection … I really believe gay civil rights are important — it’s hard to say from up here. I feel I have to say that there are other Bible-believing people who believe it … I think civil unions, something that gives you equal protection [pause] Genesis one constrains my definition of marriage, but the reason that I think that civil rights are important for gay people is that I believe that it is important for me. My life is sexually broken, it is broken in all kinds of ways, it’s getting wholer and wholer praise the Lord — ought one kind of people be denied civil rights because of what’s in their hearts, because of their brand of brokenness? That cannot be the way forward.
This was a dizzying inversion of the normal theologically conservative parsing of this subject. The pastor took homosexuality’s status within proper evangelical sexuality as, at best, another type of sin, and he relabeled it “brokenness,” the evangelical term for the sinful weakness that leads a person to God; this move gave homosexuality an affective charge that transformed it into an identity rooted in the most sacred space in charismatic folk biology — the heart — and put forward a basis of rights derived not from righteousness but, instead, from one’s fallen nature.

This call was for more than the mere extension of rights to others to protect one’s own — for the pastor advocated not merely an extension of legal liberties but a sustained commitment to what he called “the gay community”:

I believe that if we’re to advocate, we’ve got a lot to say, I believe that we’ve got to love the gay community I believe … if we don’t speak the language, don’t know the customs, don’t want to hear the brokenness, don’t want to hear the stories, we don’t have a right to say anything about it, if we want to have credibility, we’ve got to have some buy in — I’m still growing, this is a tough question.  

His subsequent statements gained a certain momentum, calling for aid for the poor, both private and governmental; for an end to abortion, not through legal means but through the creation of support structures for pregnant mothers such that neither woman nor child would go uncared for; and, finally, for an end to “killing children” in the war in Iraq. At the end of the sermon, rather than invite people to the front of the church for prayer or healing, as he usually did, he had people break up into small groups to pray

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63 It is important to observe, for the purposes of my argument here, that this call was not followed up by any new ministry or by any other greater, systematic engagement with the gay community.
for the leadership of the nation. Afterward, the congregation was startled but electrified; some people milled excitedly in the parking lot outside the grade-school auditorium that the church rented on Sundays while others stayed inside, going to the front of the auditorium to pray some more. Although no one had expected this moment, I did not hear a single word of protest or complaint, either then or afterward.

What makes the pastor’s plea seem even more unlikely is the pedigree of both his particular church, and the denomination of which it is part. While the Vineyard is undeniably attached to the name John Wimber, that is not the only famous name that it has a connection to. The Vineyard is also the denomination of Bill McCartney, the ex-coach of the University of Colorado football team and founder of the Promise Keepers — a Christian men’s movement that, although interdenominational and independent, has very close ties with the Vineyard. Although the connections between the Promise Keepers and the Vineyard were never formal in nature, the overlapping allegiance of McCartney is a sign of the political conservatism that originally marked the Vineyard. It is true that the Vineyard’s early focus on Pentecostal-style “spiritual gifts” to a degree partially eclipsed its politics, and some older pastors remember the Vineyard’s founder as a man who prized personal conversion over ideologically centered social contestation, but it is fair to say that, in its original moments, the Vineyard’s political center of gravity was located firmly to the right.

This earlier orientation might suggest to some that the Shores Vineyard church had gone off the political reservation; recall, however, that this in the past church was certainly no outlier — its history goes back to the early days of the Vineyard, and the founding pastor (who handpicked and mentored the current pastor) was and is one of
the most influential speakers in the movement today.\textsuperscript{64} Clearly, this church does not currently consider itself to be an exception within the larger denomination. When I asked the current pastor whether his church was an aberration, he invoked one of the classical evangelical population-sorting techniques that we have already seen deployed, that of generation, in giving me his answer, saying that concern with justice was not something particular to his fellowship alone but pointed toward a wider trend: “God is putting a heart for justice in this generation — he is calling across the board for a hunger for justice, attention to the themes of justice, meaning social justice. This takes a different perspective than family values, there is a burning thing in [this generation] that prevents them from signing on blithely with what the GOP says.”

One should be careful about taking this statement as a representation of where the entirety of the Shores’ fellowship stands politically. However much energy this church derives from “this generation” of youth, it derives a share of its income from donations given by an older generation of congregants who joined the Vineyard in its formative era in the 1980s and 1990s and whose politics more closely reflect the conservatism associated with Southern California church movements in those days (see McGirr 2001). One should also be wary of seeing this more “liberal” turn as the only future direction possible for the Vineyard as a movement. In the wake of the death of Wimber, of numerous changes to the overarching structure that followed (Miller 2005),

\textsuperscript{64} The founding pastor of Shores Vineyard, despite his theologically conservative pedigree, had a habit of taking surprisingly “liberal” positions at times, having endorsed allowing women to teach in church, a position that, despite the Vineyard’s stance of arguing for an equalitarian, rather than a “complementarian,” relation between the sexes (my avoidance of the word genders here is deliberate), tends to very seldom be emphasized.
and of the ebbing of the fires of revival that initially formed the Vineyard, the various Vineyard churches have gone in many different directions (Martyn Percy, personal communication, February 3, 2007), ranging from a revival of high-church liturgical practices to the postmodern practices associated with the “emergent church” movement. The concern with justice is only one possible path for Vineyard churches, although if one takes the contemporary interest in combating slavery and genocide and in issues of “creation care” (i.e., environmentalism) in the wider U.S. evangelical movement as representative of emerging interests, it is an increasingly popular one.

The Vineyard and the Pauline event

This turn to the left by these theological conservatives raises numerous questions. What I ask here is how to understand the internal logic, and the limits of the logic, of this new progressive politics, which marks a break with the politically conservative thought with which charismatic and evangelical Christians have been associated since the late 1970s. How is this thought structured, and what effects does this structure have on the possibility for political practice? I examine these questions by turning to a school of social thought coming out of what my informants would call a “post-Christian” continent. As part of a wider phenomenon that has been called the “religious turn in philosophy” (de Vries 1999), there has been a flurry of interest in the Apostle Paul by European critical theorists as they look for a way to reimagine revolutionary breaks in the aftermath of Marxism’s fade from the scene; as part of this move, authors such as Giorgio Agamben (2005), Badiou (2003), and Slavoj Žižek (1999, 2003) have held Paul
up as an exemplar of the militant figure, a model for revolutionary praxis.\(^{65}\) This new Continental Paul may be timely for reasons beyond the vagaries of poststructuralist fashion, however.

At the same time as the Pauline rediscovery in Europe, analysts of U.S. politics and history such as David L. Chappell (2004) and Charles Marsh (2005) have begun to document the role that religion played in the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s and have argued that the success these left-leaning movements enjoyed was the result of their careful deployment of the tradition of prophetic thought to new ends. This interest in prophetic disjunction and rupture aligns with recent conjecture in the now emerging subfield of the anthropology of Christianity, in which Christianity has been hypothesized as a religion of discontinuities. Under this reading, many local forms of Christianity work through their tensions with a non-Christian past and a post-Christian globalism by centering their narratives, again, on radical temporal breaks and ontological ruptures such as conversion, the incarnation, the crucifixion, and the apocalypse (Robbins 2001b, 2007b), formulations that appear to mirror both the Continental neo-Pauline philosophies of subjective transformation and the U.S. accounts of the prophetic as the cornerstone in the impetus to reform. For the purposes of this discussion, I treat Badiou as a paradigmatic representative of this line of thought,\(^{66}\) as someone centrally concerned with questions that are the most “Pauline.”

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\(^{65}\) This turn toward Paul is not without precursors. As Joseph Taubes (2004) recalls, Walter Benjamin’s own messianic Marxism, a touchstone for much of leftist critical thought, was itself grounded in Pauline notions.

\(^{66}\) It is Badiou’s recent work on the subject that Agamben, and particularly Žižek, are writing in response to—although Agamben’s work also displays a deep influence by the works of Taubes (2004). The works of these other authors do not align completely with
This may come as a surprise; as a former Maoist, an atheist, and a lifelong self-described militant who has continued to keep May 1968 as his political guiding star, Badiou may seem to be an odd champion of Pauline thought (although Badiou’s description of May 1968 as a “Road-to-Damascus” experience [Hallward 2003:33] suggests that perhaps even this initial characterization is too harsh). A student of Louis Althusser in the 1960s, he is best known today as an opponent of what he characterizes as the hermeneutic and anti-Cartesian forms of philosophy and social theory that are regnant in contemporary French thinking. His work, which has been translated into English only in the last decade, can be described as applying the systemic formalism of Jacques Lacan to the question of what the necessary requirements are for a political praxis that is not dependent on political parties or vanguards. And it is this interest in new forms of revolutionary praxis, informed by 1968—like moments of unforeseen and decentralized political foment, that lies behind Badiou’s interest in the Pauline corpus.

For Badiou, what is important about Paul is his status as an exemplar of the agentic subject who is informed by his relationship to a particular event. An event, a
central category in Badiou’s thought, is any occurrence unimaginable under whatever central controlling scheme is then in existence (and, for Badiou, there is usually only one central classificatory scheme, almost always statist in its nature — although that scheme may encompass several differing although structurally complementary discourses). What the event produces, in its unpredictable arrival and its unreadable nature, is a resistance to being identified in the existing regime of power-saturated classification. This momentary unreadability has the potential to throw that classificatory system into question. For Badiou, such a failure in the classificatory system allows for the possibility of new systems of classification to be brought into being, systems that, because they are not beholden to existing powers, can be driven by a universal, hence, emancipatory logic and that allow subaltern elements, present but not politically marked in the old system, to be given their just space in a newly forged scheme of representation; under this emergent universalism, there would be, say, “neither Jew nor Greek, free nor slave” (Gal. 3:28). For Badiou, the engine of this new

67 Although not particular to Badiou alone; for a recent parallel construction of the “event” as a category in political-cum-religious analysis that does not explicitly rely on Badiou, see Caputo 2006, 2008.
68 Badiou also makes room for events grounded in other arenas, such as art, science, and love; these fall outside of the present discussion.
69 Badiou, for reasons grounded in his particular ontology, chooses to articulate these classifications in terms of set theory; his gambit is that because of the inherently polysemous nature of reality, the constitutive entities that comprise reality are capable of an effectively infinite set of groupings, and, thus, what is most vital to attend to in analysis is the logic of inclusion, exclusion, and limit setting that set theory provides.
70 More specifically, the event allows for a rearticulating of the members of the set that constitute the situation, such that all members of a set become visible, not merely those that are given a second-order importance through their representation within a second-order structuring designed to suture together the initial structures that give the set its minimal coherence—a second-order structuring that Badiou (2005a) associates with inclusion within the state.
system is not the event itself. Because of its inability to be mapped in the previous system, the event is, in a way, undecidable. Instead, the center of the process is the subject of the event, a militant figure who not only wills his or her self to a new self-understanding in light of the event but who also takes the emancipatory potential of the event and gives it a processual reality as a new mode of understanding, a process that Badiou (2005a), a formalist to the core, calls a “truth procedure.”

Badiou’s theory is, of course, potentially subject to anthropological critique. Its claims to universality (even as a formal and not a substantive model), its decisionist nature, and the way that it privileges classificatory systems of power over other possible engines of subject formation and social-structure regulation are all aspects that can raise the hackles of anthropologists (but see Humphrey 2008). One could also claim that his concepts are in a sense nothing new for anthropology but merely a formal reimagining of what anthropologists have known for a long time as revitalization theory (see Harkin 2004; Wallace 1956) or as theories of structural reconfiguration following an encounter with the unassimilable.\footnote{Indeed, as Donald L. Donham has shown convincingly in his book \textit{Marxist Modern} (1999), anthropology, at least as a historically informed project, has the conceptual tools necessary to think through the sometimes surprising (and, perhaps for that reason, often ephemeral) confluences between competing modernist and antimodernist religious and political temporal imaginaries in the wake of pronounced ruptures such as revolution.} Finally, one would be remiss if one did not take time to observe that Badiou’s implicit concept of a subject vested with a Cartesian-derived interiority is at best ahistorical and most likely a misreading of the conceptions of the person that animated Paul’s writing (Stowers in press). For the purposes of this chapter, though, I put these issues aside. What I focus on, instead, is the question of whether this model for engaged, revolutionary universalism can further understanding of a particular
subset of contemporary U.S. charismatics — whether this way of thinking through political subjectivity, forged in the ruins of “actually existing socialism,” can help elucidate an instance of “actually existing Christianity.” This, of course, was never the intent of the theory. As stated above, Badiou is a strident atheist, who presumes that universals must be forged, rather than found, as Vineyard believers would argue. But that does not stop me from asking these questions: To what degree does this disjunction, the adherence to the purported event of the resurrection as a political imperative, open up a space for action in the thinking of the theologically conservative but politically progressive Left? And, if there is such a space, does this disjunction do the political work that it is supposed to, or is there something about this Pauline break that is self-defeating in the way Guyer identifies in other cases?

**Already—not yet**

One might think that a church such as the one I discuss here would be an ideal space in which Pauline political subjects might be constituted and harbored, a place in which Badiou’s hoped-for militancy might be fostered. After all, Shores Vineyard Christian Fellowship is a place where it is not unusual to hear people invoke the minor prophets during small group discussions as they call for radical justice, particularly justice for the poor, the homeless, refugees, and victims of the contemporary slave trade. This interest

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72 Badiou rejects religion as a process that subordinates the creation of universal truths to a preexisting, unfashioned, substantive (rather than formal) truth (Hallward 2003:18). However, although the event is fictive in that it is “mythological,” Badiou grants that it is therefore “theoretical,” meaning at once that it follows the logical strictures of actual events and that those Christians who thematize this break in their thought can be considered “philosophers” of the event (Badiou 2003:108).
in justice, combined with their self-understanding as having been called to transform a world that they are in, but not of, is certainly reminiscent of a kind of militant politics. In other words, in their concern for those who are part of, yet excluded from, the current neoliberal order, they appear to mirror the inclusive and universalist logic of Badiou’s militant subject, agitating for those excluded by, yet present within, the current mode of political representation. And yet, something to their logic regarding what constitutes justice prevents a form of political activism from taking root within their church.

There are several reasons for this. One has less to do with the cultural logic of Christian political thought than with the social structure inherent in the contemporary “circulation of the saints” (Bibby and Brinkerhoff 1973) — the tendency of believers to have only a passing affiliation with any particular church for more than a handful of years — and the larger politically conservative Christian milieu in which politically progressive, conservatively theological churches are embedded. As Reginald W. Bibby and Merlin B. Brinkerhoff originally noted, there is something transitory about church membership; this is especially so in a denomination like the Vineyard, in which the great majority of new members come not from conversions, but, instead, as transfers from other Christian denominations (Perrin 1989). The students and young professionals who constitute a large share of Shores’ membership continually cycle in and out of this church as they chase their careers. This continual coming and going marks an effective limit on any sort of possible ideological unity, as the incoming population’s heterogeneous political imaginings dilute whatever consensus may form within this congregation. This heterogeneity can be controlled for. Despite the pastor’s stated desire that the church serve as a place where parishioners can disagree, he is
always engaged in attempts to, to some degree, control the dialogue, for instance, by slyly removing copies of the local right-leaning Christian weekly newspapers that occasionally find their way to the church’s literature table. However, such instances are only transient moments in shaping the debate; despite the pastor’s vigilance, stacks of the weekly keep reappearing.

Putting aside such structural issues, however, I argue that believers’ political imaginary is predicated on an enduring problematic that hampers effective action. Specifically, I claim that, because they conceive of proper — and, hence, just — political action as being a break with what is in this world, the only way proper political action can be figured is as what is impossible in this world. Let me provide an example. In the spring after my major fieldwork was completed, I met with Shores’ pastor over lunch so that we could catch up. During the meal, he recounted a recent occasion when some longer-term church members left in response to a prayer he uttered at the end of a service; the prayer had started as a request to remove racial divisions within the church and expanded outward in its scope until it ended in a call to literally tear down the fence that separates California from Mexico. The pastor, who in earlier years had been quite concerned with allowing space for differences of opinion within his congregation, seemed untroubled by the departing members. His attitude shifted significantly, though, when I asked him if the sentiments he had voiced meant that he would be participating in what was expected to be a rather large (and well-publicized) march for immigrant rights that was to coincide with the Great American Boycott of May 1, 2006.73 He

73 The Great American Boycott was one day of combined street demonstration, strike, and purchasing boycott that was intended to underscore the role of workers without
deferred, saying that, although as a Christian he stood with those who are strangers in a strange land (echoing the words of the biblical exile narrative),\textsuperscript{74} he was not comfortable participating; he was uncertain what the politics of the situation were, although he was conversant with the issue. Other people from the church would be there, he was certain, particularly the “younger” members (a forecast that turned out not to be as true as he imagined; only a few people from that church participated, according to others I talked to). But because he was uncertain of the provenance of coalition members and what their desired goals were, he would not be marching with them.\textsuperscript{75}

This inability to participate, to engage in the political, despite strong ethical convictions, had precedents in other moments. Earlier, after a hazardous mission trip to

papers in the U.S. economy. Called by a group known as the March 25 Coalition, a group of Latino advocates, labor organizers, and progressive Catholic activists, the combined march–boycott was framed as a response to legislation before the U.S. House of Representatives, H.R. 4437 (the Border Protection, Anti-Terrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005), which would have substantially increased the penalties for undocumented aliens within U.S. territory. Ultimately, the bill was not ratified.

\textsuperscript{74} This was not a mere seasonal statement. Later in the year, he would narrate from the pulpit, again in a sermon fraught with emotion, the challenges faced by undocumented workers as they traveled north and crossed the border, suggesting in his story that the choice to come north to ensure the finances necessary to prevent starvation was at once a form of “family values” and a sign of the heroic nature of these economic migrants.

\textsuperscript{75} There is, according to Rich Nathan, a published Vineyard author and member of the board of directors of the Vineyard’s governing body, the Association of Vineyard Churches, a Vineyard tradition of pastors abstaining from political speech from the pulpit. Nathan himself, though, has played at the edges of this prohibition, offering purportedly neutral, but heavily biased analyses of issues such as domestic partnership benefits and then informing congregants how citizen-believers can “make themselves heard” (it is worth noting, though, that over the past five years, Nathan’s implicit directives have been drifting from a center-right to a center-left position, and that lately he has emphasized an incommensurability between Christian belief and single-party politics). In my research, I have never heard any other Vineyard pastor endorse this “tradition,” and I have also heard specific political statements made from the pulpits of many right-leaning Vineyard churches, particularly ones in support of the Second Iraq War in the days leading to and immediately following its onset.
a Burmese Christian Karen refugee camp located in a no-mans-land on the Burmese–Thai border (there were credible reports of shelling in the vicinity by the Burmese military during the visit to the site), the mission group came back with “a heart for the Karen people” and an appreciation for their suffering; but when I asked the pastor if he would consider working with Burmese democracy activists, he demurred, although he admitted that it was probably the only way that the Christian Karen could end their refugee status and be set free from the camps in which they had been sequestered for years.

The point, and let me stress this, is not that the church, as a political unit, does not take its self-appointed anthropologist’s advice regarding political strategy. Rather, specific calls for justice are not associated with any programmatic course of action. This disconnect is systemic in nature, touching even believers’ conception of their core mission of spreading the faith and caring for the poor. One of their repeated mantras was that Shores should be a church that “plants churches” and that these churches should have “a heart for the poor.” As one church member critically observed, though, these were “tiered responses,” with the emphasis on church planting, and the link between the imperative to plant churches and the imperative to assist the poor was never formally articulated in a way that suggested some sort of causality. The way to assist the poor was to build more churches that had a heart for them — even if the way in which these new churches assisted the poor was not through engaging in social engineering but, rather, through planting more “concerned” churches.

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76 Among the members of the missionary team with whom I spoke, there was an almost universal refusal to use the designation *Myanmar.*
It would be easy to read this pattern of concern with “oppressed” groups, on the one hand, and unwillingness to take on any productive political alliance to assist them, on the other hand, as either laziness or perhaps a love (and members of the Shores fellowship do resort often to the language of love) not for the peoples who suffer but for suffering itself. I propose a different interpretation, however. I argue that this pattern is rooted in the way that church members’ politics is informed by their eschatology, or, to put it in Badiou’s terms, by the temporality of the event that informs them as subjects.

The event here, of course, is the same event that Badiou saw as the defining break, inarticulable in the Hellenic and Hebrew discourses of the Roman state, that transformed Saint Paul — the “Christ event.” However, perhaps because they do not have access to an immediate “pre-Christian” shared past found in “convert cultures” (Robbins 2007b), a past that can be invoked to mark a break in continuity (see Keane 2007; Meyer 1999; Robbins 2004), for the Vineyard the event is depicted as at once completed and not yet begun. Drawing on the theology of George Eldon Ladd (see, e.g., Ladd 1996), the Vineyard presents the event, “the Kingdom of God,” as suspended in its existence, as “already” and “not yet” at the same time.77 Although Jesus’s death on the cross — and the advent of the Holy Spirit — has opened up an interstitial moment in which divine justice is imaginable and supernatural healing is possible, justice and healing are conceived of not as consistent with the present order but as moments out of

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77 For an articulation of this view by the Vineyard’s founder, see Wimber 1985:21–29.
time, part of an alien future whose only relationship with the present is that of pure incommensurability. ⁷⁸

This stance is also reflected in the Vineyard’s rather open doctrine regarding “the last days.” Unlike many other Pentecostal and fundamentalist denominations, in which a regimented imagination of the Christian apocalypse called “predispositional millennialism” has been a strong focus (see Crapanzano 2000; Harding 1994, 2001; Harding and Stewart 2003; also see Robbins 2001b, 2004), the Vineyard has been rather noncommittal about embracing any standard other than a general, but very certain, not figurative, affirmation of Jesus’s return. Although this openness has not precluded the experience of preapocalyptic fervor during past revival-like moments or participation in the Vineyard by individuals very committed to a premillennial dispensationalist theology, on the whole detailed scenarios do not have the same commanding role in the collective imagination that they have in other, comparable groups; rather than look for an eschatological tomorrow, in the Vineyard attention is turned to incommensurable inbreakings of the future in the present.

An echo of this sense of disjunction, of the incommensurability of the divine order with the present world, can be found in the way the Vineyard imagines contact with the divine. Although the Vineyard imagines a host of charismatic processes through which God can make his will evident, one method, in particular, is commonly

⁷⁸ This “already–not yet” characterization does other work for the Vineyard as well. It is occasionally invoked to smooth over disagreements in the already hypocognized field of theology: An instance of this can be found in the closing of a letter from Vineyard leadership announcing the somewhat controversial decision that female pastors could hold positions of interchurch oversight in the denomination. In that letter, the Vineyard’s national director, Berten Waggoner, acknowledged the tensions with camps opposing this decision by referencing it as part of living with the “already–not yet.”
referenced by believers. As they explain it, what constitutes “talking to God” is a careful act of self-monitoring, attempting to find strands in one’s own subjectivity that point to an unstated exterior origin. What points to exteriority is the divergence of a believer’s thoughts, in their content and their strength, so far from his or her usual quotidian mode of thought that supernatural authorship is the only possible explanation (Luhrmann 2006:5, 10). A thought is from God when it is not something that one would ever conceive of; in other words, what points to divine provenance of a thought is its literal unthinkable for the believer (Csordas 1994:82–83, 94–95; 2001: 227). God is that which cannot be foreseen, that which defies expectations; for that reason, one sometimes hears God described as “messy.” This messiness is the sign of objects and notions appearing under the imperative of a different order; and this order, because of its links to the Kingdom and the larger charismatic salvation narrative, is as much temporal as it is ethical or ontological in the nature of its alterity.

What does this imagination of God as that which is unimaginable mean when it is infused with a social practice that sees perfection as necessarily an act of inbreaking? I would argue that this translates to the realm of social action as a picture of a world that is always waiting for redemption but that will not find that redemption in any form reminiscent of any prior institution. This tendency displays itself in many venues. In believers’ imagining of their relationship with existing religious institutions, it shows in a skepticism toward the very idea of denominations (“denomination” is a concept that the Vineyard rejects, seeing itself, instead, as a “movement”). It is also seen in the preference of many believers to identify themselves not as “religious” but, instead, as “spiritual” and even in the occasional surprising rejection of self-identification as a
“Christian” and the preference, instead, for the label “follower of Christ” because the latter suggests a personal bond to the Christ event itself, rather than a creedal adherence to something that can be found in the interim between the event’s announcement and its full realization. And it is for this reason, I suggest, that when it comes to their imagining steps toward what they would consider justice for the poor, for the visitor in the foreign land, for those whom they view as persecuted, what believers call for is always a “radical” justice that must mark its alterity, its link to the divine, by rejecting quotidian forms of practice that could be given a space in existing social arrangements.

Divine justice is recognizable as divine justice not simply because of the purity of what it calls for but because achieving its aims through the strictures of this world is unimaginable. In short, the very improbability of what believers call for, and their inability to work toward that goal, is the very mark of that goal’s redemptive propriety. Therefore, theirs is always a demand for a course of action for which there can be no discernible course of action — a cry to tear down the border fence as opposed to supporting an immigrant boycott, making a symbolic statement by a hazardous visit to the Christian Karen rather than making political alliances with those working to better their conditions, and calling for gay civil rights from the pulpit not despite the unthinkable of such a course but because of it.

This is not to say that the difficulty lies in believers being suspended between ideas of a present order and dreams of another one. For Badiou, at least, a form of split subjectivity is inevitable in any ethical subject that is interpellated by an event, in that the subject is torn between the mode of classifying the world that already exists and the aspirational one built as he or she converts the universal promise of the event into a new
way of being in the world (Badiou 2003:63–64). The problem, at least in the case at hand, is that the definition of the world that is left behind is, in practice, wholly negative, in that anything that is of value in the past properly belongs to the category of the future and is merely manifested in an untimely way; hence, the past — and the present — are discounted whenever one thinks of redemptive change. And this, in a sense, is the peril of being Pauline — that the desires to break with the existing system will be too radical; that the attempt to reimagine the world will presume the inability of that vision to become a reality as a prerequisite to its being deemed just in the first place; that, for a vision to actually be conceivable, there must be no way to forge a program that will result in effective action to realize it. Hence, the move from this-worldly radicalism to otherworldliness is a short one, as the messianic, redemptive aspects of the vision gain predominance over any intermediary steps.

Of course, many successful social movements have had the path toward their goals occluded by a utopian haze of pure difference — Marx’s social critique was always stronger than his vision of how free men would reach the state of “fishing in the morning, philosophizing in the afternoon.” One could also argue that the dynamic just discussed, although perhaps describing the Vineyard’s orientation toward the event, does not necessarily describe Badiou’s. Time associated with the event, because it has the form of a logical proposition (even though it is a sort of logic that could not be figured in advance), should be differentiated from chronological time, which is merely the accumulative dross of history (Hallward 2003:157). One has a sense, then, that the temporality of the event may not be as vital to Badiou, as long as the event still challenges the existing verities of the time in which the subject is embedded.
This analysis, however, is made questionable by critiques of Badiou’s own work as a political activist that are similar to the one I offer in this analysis of the Vineyard. Although not questioning the necessity for radical change, or the vitality of intense commitment to that change, Badiou himself has suggested that it is impossible to present an overarching strategy for political action in the current neoliberal order (or, as he puts it, “in this time controlled by the enemy”); instead, all that can be done is to insist on articulating the universal axioms that animate progressive action (Badiou 2008:37).

A similar phenomenon can be found in l’Organisation Politique, a political-action group dedicated to “politics without a party” that Badiou cofounded during the mid-1980s with Sylvanian Lazarus and Natacha Michel and that is concerned primarily with the rights of illegal immigrants, with housing, and with working conditions (Hallward 2003:29–30, 43). Badiou’s political work through l’Organisation Politique, though, has been faulted by Peter Hallward, perhaps Badiou’s premier English-language champion, for its refusal to engage with existing political structures (such as trade unions), for its substitution of ethical imperatives for concrete analysis, and for its failure to put forward realistic, actionable suggestions for ameliorative and transformative institutions. As Hallward himself puts it,

Badiou’s determination to pursue an essentially isolated if not intermittent politics — a politics that now bears more than a passing resemblance to the later Sartre’s politics of isolated subjective praxis performed by a “group in fusion,” at an absolute distance from the deadening objectivity of the practice-inert — may mean that his commitment has little chance of forcing … internal transformation. [2003:284]
Or, as he more bluntly puts it, when comparing l’Organisation Politique to traditional labor unions, “The main difference between OP and union, in short now seems to be that between organized mass mobilization on the one hand and the isolated affirmation of principle on the other” (Hallward 2003:283).

This suggests that the block to effective political action lies in both Badiou’s and the Shores’ desire for a pure alterity, rather than in a particularly Christian religious temporality — although Christian ideas of transcendence do seem to lead toward this alterity in the first instance. This is not to suggest that the Christian Left will be unable to mobilize itself politically; other left-leaning Christians, particularly evangelicals such as Tony Compolo and Jim Wallis, have found ways to be politically active. There is no reason to believe that pragmatism is solely the possession of the U.S. religious Right, and that an emergent charismatic Left will not be able to follow its conservative, dispensational co-believers in imagining an effective politics that is in line with its eschatology. Indeed, in its reliance on an economizing, managerial, and capitalistic

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79 Indeed, according to Grant Wacker (2002), one of the hallmarks of the practice of early Pentecostals, who were the antecedents of these charismatic Christians, was its careful balance of the pragmatic and the transcendent, so a highlighting of a certain kind of political pragmatism would not necessitate a complete break with the charismatic religious form.

80 As evidence for this claim, I would submit that a series of conferences on social justice that occurred in the spring of 2007 at the Anaheim Vineyard, the original Vineyard Church (and one of the largest), as well as the rather influential Columbus, Ohio, Vineyard’s sponsoring of a “Justice Revival” event in April of 2008 (which included a visit by left-leaning evangelical and founder of Sojourners magazine Jim Wallis), suggest that this kind of thinking though is starting to occur on a larger scale (although the latter event did include some careful distancing from an unequivocal embrace of Wallis by the Columbus Vineyard). That these were both presented as conferences is important, given the role that conferences play both in propagating new techniques and concepts in charismatic Christianity and in creating a global charismatic Christian identity (Coleman 2000).
logic, as we have seen the Vineyard at some moments appears to be too pragmatic in its own eyes. Further, I do not mean to suggest that the Vineyard is incapable of effective action via what its members consider to be ameliorative or evangelical acts, such as providing food and other assistance to the homeless and other populations seen as being “in need” or self-consciously reaching out to transcend the racial segregation that marks most U.S. Christian denominations; both the Shores Vineyard congregation, and the Vineyard, in general, have a strong tradition of productive engagement with both of these projects (Sánchez-Walsh 2003; also see Elisha 2004). Neither do I suggest that, in purposefully organizing their lives in ways that are orthogonal to a larger secular state, they are not already engaging in a form of politics, even if that is not their avowed intent. Finally, my discussion here should not be taken to mean that all their political imaginings are necessarily doomed to failure — as Žižek (1999:134) notes in his reflections on Badiou-like political action, sometimes political “miracles” do occur. To the extent that their practice is oriented to a vision of justice anchored in a redeemed but unreadable future rather than in a fallen but legible present, however, one should not be too surprised that these theologically conservative, political progressives will experience difficulty in bridging that very disjuncture that gives their aspirations eschatological force and metaphysical validity.

*Anthropology and intimacy: Resulting reflections on critical anthropology and “the social” in the United States*

This orientation toward an ontologically alien futurity has two other important implications, one of which concerns the experience of, and action in, the social world of
U.S. charismatic Christians and the other the theoretical world of U.S. anthropology. I start with the former. Having outlined this structure of aspirational alterity, I make an observation that, at first, may seem like a counterargument to the dynamic laid out in the previous section. The Shores Vineyard Fellowship, in addition to emphasizing “justice” as one of its core concerns, has also at times stressed other values, namely, those of community and relationship. Like those in many other churches in North America, the believers discussed here imagine their church as a communally fashioned space in which otherwise atomized individuals can gather into a collectivity; what sets this collectivity apart from other nonkinship-based institutions is that the emotional ties between the group’s constituent members transcend the sort of shallow friendships they associate with other aspects of their lives. Church members often speak about their relationships with one another using the same terms they invoke when discussing the family, that suburban North American imaginary zenith of intimacy and caring, and as in idealizations of the family, a frequent motif in informal discussions and sermons alike is an account of the mutual support of church members for one another during times of emotional, fiscal, or spiritual crisis.

This concern for what these believers read as an affective and moral imperative toward a nonsexualized intimacy may appear to be orthogonal to the eschatologically imbued justice discussed above, because the concepts of “community” and “relationship” they use in this context are predicated on a model of human interaction that seems eminently recognizable to U.S. sensibilities; following this line of thought, one might be tempted to identify a different folk-model than the one previously presented in this chapter, in which the eschatologically imbued is that which is alien to
the current order and appears in an untimely way only because of divine grace. There is reason to believe that such a reading would be wrong, however, and that the concepts of “justice,” “otherworldliness,” and “relationship” are actually related. In discussing the futurial eschatological space opened up in the contemporary world that believers refer to as “the Kingdom,” there is a tendency to see an orientation toward valorizing human relationships as part and parcel of supernatural grace; this tendency is strong enough that the act of “building relationships,” as building informal, emotion-laden social affiliations is sometimes described, is taken retrospectively as a sign that “God was present” in a particular encounter — and occasionally these relations are referred to as actually constituting God’s presence. Thus, the affective social links between human beings, the essential element out of which society is composed, is understood by these Christians to be of a different order entirely than that of the current moral and ontological order and yet, at the same moment, to be an instance of divine inbreaking; this formula is something that would seem to place in doubt the transcendence-oriented scheme outlined above.

This tendency is harmonizable with Badiou’s reading of Paul. In Badiou’s eyes, it is Paul’s commitment to the event, which entails overcoming the Deuteronomical law and rejecting the preexisting “representation” that established the previous order of things, that necessitates “love” as a virtue. Love serves as an open-ended means of self-regulation that is only understandable in light of the Christ event and, thus, it serves to guide adherents to the new message in a way that guarantees fidelity to the event itself (Badiou 2005a:86–92). However, there is another way to read this style of picturing relationship as an index of the divine, one that works off of the general valorization of
relationship in evangelical and charismatic Christianity in the United States. In an article on Southern California–origin, charismatic-tinged evangelical movements, Tanya M. Luhrmann argues that the turn toward prioritizing not just a personal relationship with God but also one that seems to be subjectively verified by the senses is the result of what she calls the “attenuation of the U.S. relationship” (2004:527).81 Awash in the media sensorium created by the very modern technology that helps distance them from others, these contemporary U.S. believers are using an ease with trancelike phenomena supported by our strange new absorbing media and using it to build an intensely intimate relationship with God to protect them against the isolation of modern social life. After all, the most striking consequence of these new religious practices is the closely held sense of a personal relationship with God, and this God is always there, always listening, always responsive, and always with you … the experience of faith for these Christians is a process through which the loneliest of conscious creatures comes to experience themselves as in a world awash with love. [Luhrmann 2004b:527]

Even if one brackets Luhrmann’s claim linking current media formations and the genesis of contemporary charismatic phenomena as tangential to this argument,82 there is still something very striking in the claim. If Luhrmann is correct in her thesis that

81 The movements discussed by Luhrmann have close historical kinship with the Vineyard. Luhrmann’s account is drawn from her work on what is essentially a Calvary Chapel church; the founder of the Vineyard, Wimber, served for a time as a Calvary Chapel pastor until he and numerous other Calvary Chapel churches split to found the Vineyard as a separate institution.

82 I am unable to say, one way or another, to what degree contemporary forms of media serve as a training ground for what Luhrmann reads as dissociative states (one could say I am agnostic on this question), although I can attest to the fact that charismatics often invoke cinematic language in attempting to communicate the experience and content of these prophetic encounters to others, an observation that would seem to resonate with Luhrmann’s claim.
there is a link between social isolation and hunger for a personal relation with the
divine, this may very well be the key to understanding how the phrase “the Kingdom”
can encompass both an unanticipatable eschatological utopia and the social bonds that
comprise life in the here and now. Living in Southern California, a region where the
architecture, the scales of distance involved in daily commuting, and the centrality of
the commodity form all conspire together to maximize the anonymizing aspects of
(sub)urban life already inherent in the metropolis (see Simmel 1950), some evangelicals
may have intuited that, at some level, social bonds not dominated by a commercial logic
have no place in the current order of things and, hence, can be imagined as belonging to
a divine register that holds the fantastic, the unimaginable, and the shocking. Even if
this yearning for ideal community and relationship is predicated on a certain long-
standing fantasy of unmediated, gemeinschaft-derived intimacy and transparency that is
impossible to achieve (Stasch 2009), the fact that social relationships in contemporary
society can be thought through as so alien that in some ways they do not count as ties
proper to this world should give one pause. At the very least, this act of viewing certain
social arrangements as originating in a different ontological order could explain the
broader tendency of North American Christians to place certain sets of personal
relations beyond the realm of conventional politics and to imagine individual moments
of connectivity, however fleeting or deflected, as the chief engine of personal and
political transformation.

What does this mean, though, for anthropology and its own project(s) of
transformation? Here, I am thinking particularly of Miyazaki’s “method of hope,”
which I turned to in the opening paragraphs of this chapter in an attempt to overcome
the lacuna in temporality that Guyer originally pointed to, and that in turn leads to a
thinking through of the political practice of left-leaning charismatics. Anthropology’s
attractions as a discipline are numerous, from epistemophilia to a promised encounter
with romantic alterity, but it is fair to say that one of its draws these days is the
possibility it offers of intervening on behalf of populations threatened or oppressed by
unchecked neoliberalism, ecological collapse, governmental violence, or oppressive
gender relations — and sometimes by all these forces working in combination. As I
noted early in this chapter, it is here that Miyazaki’s anthropology of hope speaks
loudest. Miyazaki’s own hope is that an anthropology of hope will itself cure the self-
doubt of a theoretical critique that has “lost its relevance and its critical edge”

This is a hope that I do not which to squelch; it would be, at best, churlish to
discount Miyazaki’s progressive orientation, and it may be that an anthropology of hope
could accomplice this, bringing into being some actionable turn that could function as a
concrete program for political and social practice. However, I feel my observations in
this chapter necessitate a cautionary note as to the likelihood of this occurring in the
near term. My skepticism is predicated once again on the correlation between the sense
of time implicit in the Vineyard’s discourse and the formulations found in theory. As
the observant reader may already have noted, the already—not yet that the Vineyard has
inherited from Ladd bears a striking resemblance to the “not yet consciousness” of
Ernst Bloch (1995, 2000) that was foundational for Miyazaki’s own anthropological
conception (see Miyazaki 2004:3–4, 11–19) — both reaching back, of course, to the
temporal disjuncture in Paul’s own writings on the resurrection. That both of these are
terms that toll current projects as they await new forms to appear is indicated in their shared verbal formulation. Given this odd correlation, it is unsurprising that Miyazaki’s Bloch-infused anthropology of hope shares some of the same traits as the views of some progressive-minded evangelical Christians, both in its temporal orientation and in the way that it images agency.

The anthropology of hope frames its object as ultimately about future possibility rather than retrospective causation, with this reframing occurring in an attempt to produce a utopic analysis that has no end point internal to it; further, this move is designed to take up the position that thorny questions of agency would normally occupy and explicitly replace them with a view of foregrounded temporality, instead (cf. Miyazaki 2004:18). The Vineyard’s “already” element, which is not openly paralleled in Bloch’s verbal formula, can be seen in the way that Miyazaki, following Bloch, and Benjamin (1969b) as well, understands previous unfulfilled hope as being redeemed in the hope of the present moment, thus giving the anticipated turn a foothold in the past as well as in its fulfillment of the future. In short, the orientation to the future is the necessary action, and any programmatic project imagined as being carried out in that temporal field is not hope but merely retrospective analysis played out in another arena. It is perhaps for that reason that, when Miyazaki counsels hope to critical theorists, he is able to convincingly argue for stronger, imaginative, future-facing, and, most importantly, new social critiques that make a sharp break with traditions put forward by academics grounded in the old social and intellectual forms. But, much like Badiou, he offers no such programmatic critique himself.
And in the end, this is the same program laid out by the progressive charismatics I observed and that is found in the praxis of Badiou’s politics. Like Miyazaki, some within the Vineyard dream of new modes of political action, but by framing those new modes as fundamentally discontinuous with what has come before, they are producing conceptual barriers that make the imagining of actionable forms of new politics exceedingly difficult. It is perhaps for this reason that Crapanzano observes that hope is “implicit in accounts of revolution and utopia” but that there is “a passivism, a resignation, inherent in the notion of hope itself” (2003:5). Perhaps this shared impasse between anthropological and organic intellectuals here provides another way of reading Miyazaki’s use of Crapanzano’s observation that both ethnographer and subject are caught by hope (Crapanzano 2003:25; Miyazaki 2004:148–149); it may also raise the question of whether we collectively should endeavor to escape.

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CHAPTER SEVEN – STRUCTURE
DO DUAL DENOMINATIONS, A REPRISE

One afternoon, after fieldwork had formally ended, I had a lunch with the pastor of Shores. Over fish tacos, and with an entrancing view of a strip mall parking lot, he discussed the sort of minutiae that marks the internal life of any organization, including the difficulty involved with the possibility of exploring whether to purchase a free standing building to house the church after leasing space in a school auditorium for so many years. After a longer post-field conversation than usual (pastors are busy, and even the most giving can only set aside so much time for one who is not really integrated into the flock), he mentioned at the end that he thought that in a few years it would be social justice that the Vineyard would be known for, and not for the charismatic activity that marked its early days. While there was something about his tone that suggested that a ‘few’ years might take a while to come to pass, there was also a kind of confident optimism in his statement as well, given how defining John Wimber’s Power Evangelism had been during the eighties and nineties.

What went unarticulated in his prediction was the question of how social justice could stand as an organizing motif for a quasi-denominational entity like the Vineyard. There certainly were earlier denominations that have shifted their central focus from charismatic frenzy to progressive political action; one can think, for instance, of the Quakers, a group that had included at one time John Wimber as a member. However, in the case of the Quakers, the shift also necessitated a transformation in leadership style and language ideology (Bauman 1990). Furthermore, any transformation of religious identity would presumably have to occur in the narrow theological space and market
niche that the Vineyard now occupies, between Fundamentalism and traditional Pentecostalism, on one hand, and mainline Christianity on the other. The Vineyard would have to yet again avoid the theological hard right’s separatism and dogmatism, while avoiding drifting into a theologically liberal space where God serves as more of a metaphor than an interlocutor.

This final chapter will continue the past chapter’s work in thinking through what a new political orientation might mean for those members of the Vineyard who have taken it up; here, the focus is not only on their theological imaginary, but also on how it is affecting what they imagine to be their positioning vis-à-vis other Christian and non-Christian collectivities. This conversation, however will necessitate thinking about the Vineyard’s practices in their entirety, something that heretofore we have not done, and thinking in such a way will end up tracing out in these various seemingly divergent skeins of hermeneutics, exchange, and politics, an organizing logic that we can trace back to the Vineyard’s foundations – and possibly even further. I start this discussion by showing how this new form of political religiosity situates itself in the interstitial space opened up by the split between the secular world and the American Religious Right. After tracing out how the then current political practice of the left-leaning Vineyard members created what might be described as an ethics of self-erasure, something not unlinked to the discussion in the previous chapter, I show how, alarming as this might sound for the Vineyard’s future, this is only one aspect of the Vineyards’ self-representation and self-presentation. Relying on Žižek’s reading of the antinomies of the real, as well as on Lévi-Strauss’ discussion of different modes of politically charged representations of complex structures, I then argue that this set of believers is
forming anew a polystructural mode of being in the world, one just as subject to productive internal immanent/transcendent divides as their previous Evangelical/Charismatic concerns, but with different – and as of the time where the main body of my fieldwork ended (2005), still undeveloped – particularities, particularities that may help us imagine how this pastor’s offhand remark could be still be a kind of prophetic act, and which might illustrate how the Vineyards’ attitude towards political action might shift, and also explain how otherworldly charisma might naturally lead into this-worldly action.

**Secularism and Protestant Language Ideology, again**

A recent contribution to the anthropological study of religion, something so strikingly obvious that it seems odd that it has not been seen as a truism before, is that the secular and the religious are co-constitutive categories that contain heterogeneous materials, and, given the essentially contingent nature of the boundary that constitutes these categories, must always be re-established and policed, with the opposing categories of “religion” and “the secular” having more in common than one might imagine from their supposed deadlocked relationship (See, e.g., Asad 2003). When it comes to policing the barrier between secular and sacred, state actors, of course, are the most natural ‘policing’ agents – but what I wish to suggest in this section is that in a space where liberal verities have been long-internalized, there are other mechanisms that help to reconstitute the religio-secular borderland in the wake of perhaps somewhat ungentle attempts via politics to renegotiate them. What I would like to put forward here is that in an already constituted liberal playing-field, the category of religion, when whatever
local religious actors exceed that category as then constituted, leaves these self-identified religious actors open to critique not by opponents who’s suasive power is predicated on secular authority, but instead by individuals acting on what is in essence supernaturally predicated normative frames; further, I want to suggest that while the disruption caused by the breaching of already negotiated boundaries may cause interesting constellations in the interim that are animated by a quite different logic, the breaching of liberal categories inherent in this attack may ultimately be vulnerable to normalizing processes, and in the final moment these disruptions may act to reestablish certain liberal boundaries.

The first intimations of this came to me when I was asking a young professional about her spiritual life, and (as I listen back to the tapes) obviously expecting nothing that would disturb my equanimity as I worked through the standard question schedule, inquiring as to when she first spoke in tongues, had her first prophetic vision, and so forth; and while it was this permeable sense of personhood and orientation towards an at once transcendent yet imminent divine that had first drawn me towards the Vineyard, the miraculous had by that time become to seem commonplace to me. Despite her obvious willingness to continue the interview, I begged off because of the ‘late’ hour. As I turned off the recorder and gathered my things, she mentioned causally that she was surprised that I didn’t ask her about her political views. What she said next was something that I was not ready for – in fact, it was my first conscious indication that there was something politically at odds about the Vineyard, though in retrospect other indicators, such as the already mentioned distancing from the conservative fantasia of pre-millennial dispensational thought, had been staring me in the face the entire time.
She stated that her political views don’t line up with those of the religious right, and, because of that she said that “I don't like to call myself Christian.” If she were to present herself as a Christian, she explained, people would make certain incorrect assumptions about whom she was. A little stymied and agape – we had, after all, just been talking about activities that seemed to very easily fall within a folk-classification of “Christian” – I asked her how she likes to refer to herself, and she said, with a very upbeat smile and a shrug, “I just like to call myself a follower of Jesus.”

This was one of the first comments that turned my attention to the political change that elements in this congregation were experiencing; a political change in the imaginary structure of which I laid out in the last chapter. But while this rejection of an agenda associated with the Religious right was surprising enough in and of itself, what also caught my ears was the fact that this was articulated in a way that was undoing Christianity itself as a kind of stable self-object; to the degree that Christianity was available as a referent in this comment, it was something that could not be identified with. My ear sharpened, after this I started to hear again and again attempts at a destabilization of a secure Christian identity by those whom I had previously imagined called themselves Christians. Following an idea with roots in both Protestant theology and in West Coast culture, believers would present themselves as ‘spiritual’ as opposed to ‘religious.’ This sometimes took the form not of a disavowal of Christianity, but of a reframing of the very object itself – Christianity, one youth pastor opined during a Bible study, was a ‘non-western’ religion (which leaves open the question of what religion would be a ‘western’ religion), predicated on the individual and life transforming pedagogical bond with one’s rabbi, Jesus; it certainly is not about institutions or beliefs,
per se.\textsuperscript{83} At other times, Christianity would be described in a language that followed an unfolding, processual logic, as something that is constantly coming into being rather than as an achieved identity, and something that did not have clearly defined boundaries, as something that at once had aspirations to knit together all the disparate elements that constitutes the world without overriding them. Most shocking, given the Evangelical theology of these Pentecostal-style believers, I had even heard suggested the idea that a specific act of being born again in Jesus’ name was not necessary – borrowing a parable from the final ‘Tales of Narnia’ volume, on separate occasions two believers independently explained to me that adherents of explicitly non-Christian faiths, in as much as they were following and dedicated to the good exemplified in Christ as they participated in non-Christian spiritual practices, were effectively following Jesus, and may well be numbered among the elect when that final reckoning occurs. Given the power of the formulation ‘in Jesus name’ in Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in general, and particularly in this population, this rendering superfluous of the operational power behind the words ‘Christian’ and ‘Jesus’ as necessary to grace shockingly suggested the erasure of Christianity as an identifiable field.

Offered up by believers in intimate spaces such as prayer groups and in private conversations, this was of course not an institutional discourse – or rather, when similar concerns were expressed in a space more marked as public than personal, they had to be constituted differently, in part due to the fact that, as we saw in the previous chapter,

\textsuperscript{83} For more on Vineyard presentations of Christianity as a ‘non-western’ religion in the Vineyard, see Bialecki \textit{under review} [Quiet Deliverances].
they have to communicate to more conservative as well as more progressive believers. In sermons in Shores, “Christian” was not an absent lexical item, but it was, however, invoked primarily to mark a larger set of individuals that exceeded the current church, or as a term that might be used by outsiders to individually pigeonhole believers. When speaking of action, either at the level of the specific community being addressed, or what believers as a collectivity should be aspiring to, the term more likely to be invoked to constitute the identity of those being addressed by the pastor was, again, “followers of Christ.”

This reluctance to use a certain name could be over-read of course – Protestantism like many other forms of Christianity, has historically had a strong tendency to favor the transcendent over the immanent, at least in Europe and North America (But, again, see Cannell 2005, 2006). Further, following a claims made by the theologian Karl Barth (and also, Kierkegaard), it has long been a tenet of many Evangelicals that Christianity is not a religion (Barth 1975); the logic behind this claim is of course that religion is man-made, while true Christianity is a revelation and a relationship. This maneuver is an attempt to take non-Evangelical practices that might be characterized as ‘religion’ and resituate them as in essence an almost secular project, in that it is a human(ist?) agency that is foregrounded in the account of these religious competitors. In short, this could be read as yet another instance of the work of purification that Keane (2007) identified as being at the heart of Protestant Language ideology, where language users, in an attempt to carry out a normative linguistic bias towards formulations that can be recognized as transcendent, immaterial, and agentive, disavow the insincere and ‘worldly’ aspects of speech (see, infra, chapter two, three).
The phenomenon at hand though – the walking away from Christianity as a moniker – seems distinguishable from this long-standing Evangelical practice, in that the circle of what is to be foresworn now seems at vital moments to include the term “Christianity” itself, rather than merely the category of religion. If this was purification, it is purification at the point where the asymptotic limit is reached, and the idea of organized religious orthopraxis delineated by an identifiable body begins to disappear.

While there is always the problem of generalizing from a concrete particular to abstract totalities – one of the dangers inherent in ethnography – evidence suggests that this is not particular to the people I spent time with. Rather, this is obviously a systemic phenomenon that is occurring within a certain segment of young American Protestant Christianity – a primarily (but not exclusively) white, a mostly (but not completely) well-educated, urban, and culturally middle-class population. As James Bielo (forthcoming) has noted, new forms of Protestant (or perhaps more accurately, post-Protestant) “emergent Church” practices are in the process of casting off a wide set of the verities of Conservative Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christianity that has had so much political and social influence recently in the United States. Borrowing from Philip Harrold, Bielo has labeled this process ‘deconversion’ – a systematic refusal of the markers associated with the kind of Conservative Evangelical Christianity that has been ascendant over the last three decades. Of course, some of what is occurring is predictable in any new Protestant quasi-sectarian occurrence – for instance, it probably will not surprise anyone familiar with the history of Protestantism to learn that the ‘Emergent Church’ has a noted tendency to see itself as an exercise in recreating the primitive Church, though it often does so by suturing together the original patristic
practices with a contemporary postmodern sensibility by classifying itself as ‘ancient-future.’ Other transformations that might stand out even further from a Protestant ‘baseline’ have included a rejection of a systemic theology for a narrative-based understanding of theology, and, most importantly for this discussion, “Emerging Christians seem intent on not being mistaken as the latest incarnation of Pat Roberston, Jerry Falwell, or James Dobson.” (Bielo, forthcoming draft, 28). In short, this is not just a decomposition of Christianity as a category, but also a conscious rejection of the default form of Christianity as having normative force.

There certainly is an element of this generic Protestant tendency towards a kind of self-erasure here, both in the Emergent rejection of old forms, and in the struggle of some Shores members to find a new articulation for their religious identity – but to identify the engine of this turn as entirely a function of a long extant logical tendency in Protestant language ideology is to ignore the fact that it functions as a very particularistic political intervention as well. It seems important that this distancing oneself from ‘Christianity’ is in actuality a distancing from a particular historically-situated instantiation of Christianity, and one that has a particular political valence. When they speak of not wanting to ‘do church’ in the way that they have previously, and we have seen that they do speak that way, what they mean is that they do not want to engage in doing mega-church forms of devotion; when they say that they are engaged in what they articulate as the “Politics of Christ” instead of “Christian Politics,” it is clear that by “Christian Politics” they are referencing the Christian Right. In short, it is their progressive concerns, their desire for prophetic justice and a certain kind of Pauline radicalism, that has to be figured in. I would put forward that among the people
I spent the most time with in Southern California, it is the political aspect of ‘deconversion’ that is the most salient. In other words, while a Keane-like purification may be occurring, it is politics that is driving things as well, and that their political imaginings, sketched out in the previous chapter, are starting to affect not only their imagined future, but the way they imagine themselves in the present as well.

Given that it is categories of identity that are being placed into question, it should be little surprise that the critique that is offered against the Christian Right is that it is an identitarian movement. In sum, the critique that was offered up was that those who can be numbered within and without the “Christian Right” are easily identifiable through their invocation of a set of shibboleths; for instance, in post-field conversations with some informants, the immediate acceptance of Sarah Palin as a “Christian Politician” due to a few external markers (all this, despite what was interpreted by many of my informants as her refusal to speak publicly in detail about her faith) was put forward several times this particular election cycle by my informants as evidence for a kind of automaticity in Christian Right cognition, and therefore, it was implied, a human and institutional logic. Under this logic, “we” know who is among the Christian Right not because of their relationship with God, but because of the way that they signal their eminently predictable platform positions. In this predictability, it appears, operates the logic of the known, and hence the material and unredeemed. What this comes down to is that the ‘spiritual’ argument originally presented by Conservative Evangelicals to situate their practice against other religions as unique has now, like an autoimmune disorder, turned upon the very institution that originally put it forward (Derrida 1998b); or in words, the previous attempt by certain Evangelical Christian actors to effectively
hold the field of religion exclusively as their own by slyly insinuating that other “faiths”
share more with the secular than the sacred has turned out to not be a move exclusive to
them alone. Given that it is political concerns that stands as central to the attempts to
resituate the religious/spiritual playing field, it seems that it was the Christian Right’s
attempt to renegotiate the secular-religious divide that left it vulnerable to the argument
that the Christian Right was a religious, as opposed to a spiritual, movement. In what
appears to be a metonymic crawl, the secular that the Christian Right directly contested
with through an organizational politics has now colored how the Christian Right itself
appears in the eyes of at least this group of neo-charismatic believers – and this has not
been a turn to the Christian Right’s advantage.  

Where does this situate those who have used this tactic in their rejection of a
Christian right? In the previous chapter, I have argued that the formal logic behind the
conception of justice (and hence, politics) here is one with structural homologies to the
eschatological conceptions, and also to the implicit models for what exactly is occurring
to the subject during supernatural moments such as Words of Knowledge (prophecy)
and glossolalia; that is, a breaking into the imminent order of an alien yet desired
futurity that is consonant with little else in this world other than previous moments of
divine interruption. Centered around the unexpected and novel, this is a politics of the
exception – a much different exception than normally referenced (Agamben 1998) –

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84 While to take it up fully right here would lead us off track, it should be noted that this
politics of rejection is also a politics that is to a degree a politics of, again, a temporal
schism, this time not played out against the future, but here the past – while there are
consociates others that are associated with the rejected political position, there is also a
sense that this is a rejection of a baby-boomer kind of Christianity, as we shall see later
on in this chapter.
and a politics that takes its cue not only from the logic of the charismatic gifts as an ontological rupture of immanence and a temporal schism (in as much as it is a foretaste of a divine justice associated with a future perfected world), but also from Jesus’ response to Pilate – “my Kingdom is not of this world.”

We should be careful before we classify this logic, even if it is working itself free from a consciously coded Christian identity, as a fundamentally secular logic, however. This logic, because of its concerns with those who are peripheralized, and because it seems to reject the idea that certain regnant classifications should be controlling, could be seen as, at least in its aspirations, an emancipatory logic; however, as we saw, it still has certain structural homologies to the logic of the Charismatic gift, and that religious charge remains, I would argue, even if the ‘binding together’ that some see etymologically occurring in the word ‘religion’ itself is not occurring. Further, this politicized form of religiosity, because it is reluctant to embrace a certain kind of institutional thinking, is one that is deterritorialized, and hence capable of being invoked on either side of a liberally-constituted secular-religious boundary; it is certainly not a logic that we could identify as following the classical liberal charter.

While it is not a secular logic, it is a logic that is informed by the transformation of the category of religion that has arisen in the wake of secularism. As noted by Talal Asad, the advent of secularism has hollowed out the category of religion, deemphasizing exterior disciplinary practices for an interiorized ‘belief’ identified by contingent referential signifiers. If one was predisposed to, one could trace out in this new turn a ratcheting up of this tendency, where even the signifier of identity, as
something that is capable of sliding into a public realm, is to be avoided;\textsuperscript{85} to this degree, while this practice does not follow a secular logic, it does ensure that when the non-secular does appear, it appears in a way that follows secularism’s chiefly ideational vision of proper spirituality.\textsuperscript{86}

This, however, may be a temporary form, and the earthly logic of both politics and the liberal secular/religious divide may in the end be strengthened by this Christian revolt against a Christian Right. By chance, right before I started to draft this section of my dissertation in late October of 2008, I heard from the same informant who first had brought these issues to my attention over four years ago. Through a social networking site, she had distributed a note on the current election in which she reiterated her

\textsuperscript{85} Asad 1993. That is not to say that this population is against the signifier, or even the ritual – indeed, among the ‘emergent church,’ as we saw, a re-appropriation of medieval and patristic ecclesiastical forms is rather popular, but these chiefly serve to signify nothing less than mystery (or in other words, they identify that which cannot be identified), and individual interaction with these ritual forms appears to be so eclectic, incidental and non-rigorous as to preclude any role in shaping subjectivity that we see in other exercise of religious discipline.

\textsuperscript{86} Further, while it may not be an entirely secular logic, it does have something to offer for our discussion of debates regarding the secular. One line of discussion that has received as much heat as it has light of date is whether the idea of critique is a fundamentally secular one, and whether acceptance of that first postulate suggests that certain kind of interrogations of the foundations of liberal secularity should therefore be marked as forbidden. As put by a chief proponent of this reasoning, “There is a foundational reason why [there cannot be religiously grounded critique]: a politics based on religious command denies the last instance of a society’s self-interrogation as to who authorizes its self-determination. Not only does this politics take for granted an external, ahistorical, heteronomous authorization — a divine power — but it forbids the very question.” (Gourgouris 2008: 457-458). That may be the case, but it is evident here that this presumes a religious politics that envisions itself as present within this world, and not one that pictures itself as by necessity always escaping it, even when it comes to signifying its presence. A logic of transcendence, in which being present and articulable within the current order is a sign that one’s political project has to a degree failed, effectively erases the agency of divine power to take institutional forms at the same time that it is asserted – a move that seems strongly reminiscent of the foundation-denying logic of secular critique, even if it is not strictly identical to it.
previous reluctance to own the name ‘Christian,’ despite what she characterized as a personal relationship with God. There was something different in the way that this reluctance was presented this time, however. It is presented in the past, rather than the present tense, as a decision she made in a particular and identifiable moment in the past, rather than as an ongoing mode of affiliation. She states that recently she has began to resent not just a rightest Christianity, but rather the way that that term Christian (one that she describes as being “plagued with abuses in history,” but also having “some amazing and courageous history at its foundation and core,”) has been “copyrighted” by the right. She even invokes anonymous third parties who attempt to square the circle and proclaim themselves as progressive and as Christian, and refers to this time as a “coming out” (quotation marks in the original) for people who’s religiosity and politics do not line up in the expected manner. The missive ends though in a triumphal note, stating that this election she is “thrilled to find tons of friends and acquaintances coming out . . . that their politics and religion don't necessarily match the prescribed norm . . . and I think that spells a huge step forward for American and human thought, conscience, and faith all at the same time.”

Note the reliance on various categories of belonging here, including that of religion. There are not the only categories of belonging invoked – at another point in the note, she states that God’s command to “take care of the poor” was a “core value” to her as “as a woman, a citizen, a human being,” thereby affiliating herself with certain abstract and not necessarily Christian categories, but still categories of belonging nonetheless. As stated in the previous chapter, the Vineyard has been working towards a sense of what a concern with social justice would effectively mean as of late, and it
should not come as a shock that the outreach to Evangelical voters by the center-left should start to yield dividends. Although there were left-leaning Evangelicals long before this election, this is an election that at least thematically has articulated a space that could be called an “Evangelical Left” in a fully political sense of the word. While this is an imaginary space, and not a numerical force (though Obama doubled his support with young white Evangelicals over what was achieved by Kerry)\(^7\) – this identification of a movement, which brings with it the sense of anonymous others and hence a certain abstract regularity that transcends individual particularity and transcendental call, suggests the normalizing work associated with nascent institutionalization. This may seem to be something at odds with the disjunctive Kingdom politics that characterized the Vineyards’ politics in the previous chapter, and in many ways it is (though of course, some caveats are in order; the note I’m referencing to bore the title “Politics and Faith: It’s about time we started mixing it up . . . ”, thereby alluding to a tumultuousness or playfulness that is not quite what is associated with institution building). Still, this new turn could be read as a making immanent of a transcendent politics, and perhaps as a return to previous models of identity that had been apparently been held at a distance. As much of a break as this may seem, I would argue that it is consistent with everything that we have seen before – and by before, I mean not only in the portrait of the “already-not yet” progressive political imaginary, but with everything that has been argued so far in this monograph.

To discuss how this change is a form of continuity, or even of return, and how it is that

\(^7\)New York Times, “Obama Made Gains Among Younger Evangelical Voters, Data Shows,” Laurie Goodstein, Published: November 6, 2008
transcendence and immanence overlap, we need to step sideways away from the Vineyard and engage with a work that is wholly and self-consciously fictive, at least in as much as it is a story that is literally not true (though, perhaps, one could read it as allegorical), though I would like to emphasize as well that it is a fiction in the sense of being consciously crafted.

The center of the circle or the bluffs of a cliff

What I hope that this recourse to this fictional book, written by someone whose religious style is identifiably “Vineyard,” will allow us to put into sharp relief some of the emerging meta-organizational and self-reflective political processes that we can see in the alternation between anti-institutionalism and the endorsement of categories of institutional belonging that was discussed in the above passage. The work that I would like to call our attention to is True Story: A Christianity Worth Believing in, authored by James Choung (a pastor, speaker, and seminar leader associated with Intervarsity Christian Fellowship), and published by Intervarsity Press. The front cover bears a touting quote from Rick Warren (the Pastor of the Saddleback megachurch, and author of the best selling The Purpose Driven Life) stating that this book is “[b]rilliant . . . [t]ools like this can change the world”88; the back cover also bears a blurb from Brian McLaren, a well-respected author in the Emergent Church movement, and the inside of the book holds thirteen more validations of the book from various authors, pastors, para-church leaders, and seminary academics. In its introduction, the book sees itself not as putting forward any new theological or praxiological agenda – it sees itself as

88 Ellipses were in the original document, and not a redaction by author of this text.
another book putting forward the message of Jesus, referencing well-respected Christian authors such as Dallas Willard, N.T. Wright, and the above mentioned Brian McLaren (Choung 2008a:11). What sets this particular book apart from others penned by these figures is, according to Choung, that this book is constructed as a pedagogical tool, instructing the reader through example on how to present a four-part diagram series of Biblical human history that is supposed to sum up the Biblical message and Jesus’s soteriological role in about five minutes, in the form of schemas that are so simple that they are designed to be able to be drawn on a napkin.\(^9\)

Both this book, and the program that it introduces, is intended as both an evangelical device, to bring in a younger, college-aged generation that is more concerned with how belief can be mobilized, and also as a motivating device, a way to renew and reposition the faith and practice of existing Christians. Indeed, the text, and the author, seems particularly concerned with generational tolling and differentials – a continuation of a pattern we have already observed in our discussion of the Vineyard’s “post-modern” modernist crisis. For Choung, there are three important generations, all of which bear distinctive traits. According to a generational typology put forward in an on-line article,\(^9\) “boomers” were a generation where the central “faith question” was,\

\(^9\) Indeed, there are several Youtube videos showing this napkin-diagram being drawn out, and backed by the accompanying exposition that would normally accompany it; two of these videos are by the books author, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCVCsLUMhY [accessed April 19\(^{th}\), 2008], and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4V60n6KiB8 [accessed April 19\(^{th}\), 2008]), while another has been put up by a different InterVarsity college pastor (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cxY1PQWovA [accessed April 19\(^{th}\), 2008])

“[i]s it true?”; to Choung’s mind this resulted in an apologetic centered around “rational arguments to prove the existence of God and the historicity of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection” (Choung 2008b). “Xers,” a “generation” that would include by his own claim Choung himself (and which also could be used to describe the majority of young professionals that have stood at the center of this ethnography), are controlled rather by the question “[i]s it real?”, which leads them to ask whether “faith can be authentic, tangible and practical in our everyday lives.” (Choung 2008b). In Choung’s eyes, however, there is a different controlling interrogative for the generation of “millennials” that constitutes the current potentially Christian population now under formation. Instead of asking whether it is “true” or “real,” these millennials ask “[i]s it good?”. It is the ability to answer this question that will control whether or not a new generation takes up the message:

They’re an optimistic, civic-minded, globally conscious generation, and they want to know if faith has any role in making the world a better place. If not, they’ll keep looking.

So if we share our faith as a bunch of truth statements (for the previous generation) or as something that helps us merely be honest with ourselves and others (for my generation), then we’ll lose the soul of the next generation. They need a faith that will actually make a difference beyond themselves. (Choung 2008b).

This level of generational anxiety is nothing new in neo-Charismatic circles; as we have seen earlier, to a large extent the common ambivalent engagement with postmodernism exhibited by some Vineyard members is a function of their fear that the same kind of Oedipal rejection that was visited against earlier forms of Protestantism will be visited against them. To a degree, Choung’s statement is animated by a similar logic, with a progression from truth, to experience, and finally a kind of utilitarianism traces out in
the unfolding generational logic. What is different from that earlier logic is the moral valence that is given this sequence; earlier generations come across as interested in useless truth claims or personal validity, rather than in the capacity to dramatically refigure their world for the better.

The book itself, where Choung presents his approach to the problem put forward in his generational typology, is a one hundred and eighty-eight page novel, followed by a twenty page explication of the evangelizing tool that the fictional section is designed to showcase. In the fictional section of the book Caleb, a “millennial” generation Korean-American college student, experiences a crisis in his faith, and is led to what is effectively a reconversion experience after receiving religious counseling from Shalandra, an African-American ethnic studies professor who teaches at Caleb’s top tier public university; it also recounts Caleb’s attempt to engage with and effect the life of Anna, a former Pentecostal co-ed who is initially rather hostile to religion in general, and Evangelical Christianity in particular. Caleb’s initial crisis is caused by his sense that Christianity is merely a religion concerned with gaining access to heaven, and has nothing to say about this world at all. Caleb is convinced that the “good news” should be good news for everyone, but despite this belief, Caleb suspects that contemporary Christians “didn’t need to share their faith with others, become more like Jesus, love people of other cultures and ethnicities, take care of the environment or be concerned about the poor at all” (Choung 2008a: 32). For his concerns, Caleb was being pilloried by his religious peers – “some of his Christian friends thought that he was becoming liberal – their replacement word for heretic” (Choung 2008a: 41); this accusation was a distressing one given that “[h]e didn’t want to become a liberal” (Choung 2008a: 81).
This feeling of being pulled between incommensurable political and spiritual allegiances is exacerbated by his (evangelical) desire for Anna, who considers Christianity to be an obvious reactionary force. The exact words that Choung gives to Anna indicates the degree of vehemence that he associates with the post-Christian critique of Christianity – along with also communicating the substance of the argument. Anna blurts out a series of invectives to Caleb in an earlier failed attempt by Caleb to evangelize her:

> With a tear falling and her teeth clenched, Anna broke the silence. “Christianity’s just another screwed-up religion! Look at what Christians do: they guzzle gas with their SUVs, join the NRA, picket abortion centers, bomb other countries and spend, spend, spend at the mall, right? They only care about themselves. Seriously, what has Christianity done for us – or for the world for that matter? They’re just a bunch of hypocrites, that’s what I think! Are they good for anything?” (Choung 2008a: 19)

The answer to Anna’s rhetorical question seems obvious. It is this reproach from Anna, as much as anything else, that seems to lie at the heart of Caleb’s crisis as put forward by Choung.

Through Shalandra’s tutelage, Caleb is given a new, progressive way to articulate his religious impulses. This process of self-questioning and rediscovery is depicted as being long and difficult for Caleb – the metaphor of a “wrecking ball” taking down an existing home’s framework is used (recalling the ‘deconversion’ used by Bielo). This sense of destruction is mitigated somewhat by the fact that even after Caleb’s figurative religious edifice is torn down, he still has a “foundation” in Jesus Christ that can be used as the basis for his new religious “frame” (Choung 2008a:61). Despite the repeated invocation of (architectural) structure, Caleb’s work is not depicted
as an entirely intellectual exercise. Caleb goes through a moment of surrender and assurance that mimics the experiential-based language of conversion that is typical of so many churches like the Vineyard (see Luhrmann 2004b); he utters an inaugural prayer acknowledging new possibilities, yet seeking divine guidance:

His voice and his eyes started to fill. “I can’t figure any of this stuff out. I thought I knew your message through and through. Now I realize I don’t know much of anything. I’m lost. I don’t know what’s up or down, what’s false or true, But I do know that you’re good, and I still want to follow you, Jesus.”

He knew someone was listening.

“Jesus, I’m really excited. But I’m scared. So lead me down the right path. If I learn something that is not of you, please let me forget it quickly. Let it be as far as the east is from the west. But if something is from you and it’s hard to swallow at first, please keep it in my mind and heart and show me your ways. Jesus, I need you right now. Please lead me. I need you. I need you . . .” (Choung 2008a: 142)

At once a plea of insufficiency and an avowal of divine competency, it has the same logic of placing one’s own capacities and vision aside seen in the conversion template put forward in the discussion of John Wimber’s founding of the Vineyard. It should be no surprise that it is answered by a divine yet sensual sign that also fits the Vineyards’ template for divine encounter:

He let the tears flow down his cheek. He stayed on his knees for a few more minutes. He didn’t want this time to end. He waited and listened. And then he heard a voice NO, actually, it was more like a hunch or an impression – but more than that, too. He couldn’t quite place what it was, but he knows what the voice said: “I will be with you.”

Now the sobs came freely, and his hunched shoulders shook. Snot, sniffles, and prayers flowed together - a seemingly unholy combination that was utterly sacred. His heart felt like it would burst with gratitude. He started to pray fervently, his mouth uttering a torrent of praise and worship while he pounded on the sheets – he prayed like his parents used
to pray. And he kept on for at least an hour. Afterwards, when the pressure within his heart had died down, he just felt stillness. Peace had entered. Shalom had arrived. (Choung 2008a: 142-143).

There are other moments in the narrative where the sense of a direct contact with the divine occurs, and where sacred speech in the form of an inner upsurge of affect points to an exterior origin, suggests the dissolution of both personal barriers, and puts human agency in suspension as well.

Transformed by this encounter, Caleb eventually synthesizes a quick, diagram-heavy mechanism of sharing his progressive Evangelicalism with Anna, and presents it to her in (of course) a coffee-shop; and while the book is coy as to whether Anna in the end converts (she wonders, during some Vineyard-style musical worship at a church, whether she is “becoming one of them” [Choung 2008a:187]), she does end up being much more open to Christianity, and the novel ends with Anna waiting for ‘the talk’ with Caleb, though Anna’s wink and long hug with our protagonist in the closing moments leaves very open the suggestion that a little bit of romance may have slipped into the otherwise religious Bildungsroman.

The Christianity portrayed here, in its openess to popular culture, its concern for progressive political causes, and its celebration of affect-laden communal musical worship, is a form of religiosity that is very similar to that found in the Vineyard. This is little surprise – in a personal interview, the author expressed the importance of the Vineyard, and of Vineyard-style charismatic churches, in his own spiritual development. What differentiates the religion in this book, I would argue, is not that it is structured differently from the Vineyard, but that it captures practice in a structured manner such that it can be thought of instead as praxis; or in other words, it is a more
fully and consciously ideologically realized version of what is already afoot in certain elements of the Vineyard. To understand what is meant by this, we have to turn to the expressly didactic twenty pages that supplement – or rather, in this case, recapitulates in an explicitly pedagogical manner – the evangelizing device put forward in the fictional narrative. As stated earlier, the title *True Story* is a ploy of sorts, an attempt to underscore the importance and veracity of the evangelizing mechanism that *True Story* is supposed to showcase. What stands at the center of *True Story* is the supposed truth or message of the Gospels, as crystallized by a series of four concentric circles. These four circles can be used to sketch out an entire Christian cosmology in a way that is supposed to make Christianity at once credible, inspiring, and instantaneously comprehensible.

To grasp what Chong is trying to articulate here, one has to understand the other ‘diagrams’ that the diagrams here are in conversation with, because easy and quick schematic attempts reducible to being drawn on a napkin are not an evangelical tool unique to this book. For a period of time, one of the stalwarts of theologically conservative evangelical techniques has been the bridge diagram.\(^9\) The bridge diagram is something circulated amongst, and readily deployed by, college-aged evangelists; the hope is that it is short enough to share with perhaps reluctant secular peers, and simple enough (that is to say, readily subject to being scripted) that on-the-fly evangelists will not accidentally drift into heterodoxy when performing it. In most formulations of this

\(^9\) One rather common version of it is available from, again, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship website, and can be seen at the following address: [http://www.intervarsity.org,evangelism/download.php?article_id=5805&version_id=7807](http://www.intervarsity.org,evangelism/download.php?article_id=5805&version_id=7807) (accessed April 20\(^{th}\), 2009).
diagram, one begins the evangelical moment by drawing two cliffs facing each other, separated by a gulf. On one side, usually the left (perhaps to give it a kind of narrative priority for those inculcated in Western modes of reading, or perhaps merely to reserve the vaunted right side for something of greater value), one draws stick figures, crowded to the edge of the abyss; on the other side, one writes the word ‘God,’ or alternately draws a crown, or indicates the divine presence in some other way. This gulf between God and Man, you intone as you draw the diagram, is a result of man’s sinful, fallen nature. On the side of man, there is nothing but physical and spiritual death; the side that God is located on is where spiritual health and eternal life is situated, but it can’t be reached from where we are (see figure one).  

![Figure 1](image)

**figure 1**

Luckily, one states at this point, God has produced a solution – Jesus sent his son into the world, and his death, despite his blameless nature, has created a bridge between the two cliffs. It is at this point that one draws a cross in the gap, with the horizontal axis of

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92 The images that comprise both figures one and two are from the following website: [http://www.intervarsity.org/evangelism/download.php?article_id=5805&version_id=7807](http://www.intervarsity.org/evangelism/download.php?article_id=5805&version_id=7807) (accessed on accessed April 20th, 2009); images appearing in figures three through eight are from Choung 2008).
the cross located such that they connect with each cliff, forming a causeway between them. This cross allows us repent through changing our hearts and dedicating ourselves to Christ, one would then say, and allow us to cross over (see figure two). This act of crossing is usually indicated on the diagram by drawing an arrow that runs left to right at the top of the page or napkin.

![Figure 2](image-url)

**figure 2**

Usually at this point some generic questions are put forward to the intended recipient, usually along the lines of, “Where would you place yourself in this illustration?” or “Is there any reason why you should not receive Jesus and His gift of eternal life?” It is significant that despite the supposed joining of these previously incompatible realms by substitutionary atonement and individualistic conversion, I have never seen stick figures drawn on the right side to indicate that they have crossed over. Give or take some additional touches (in some versions of the bridge diagram that are available, one occasionally sees proof texts scrawled on the diagram, perhaps as a mnemonic to the presenter, or perhaps to underscore the ‘biblical’ nature of the ultimate referent to the audience), this is how the bridge diagram is done.
The significance of the tropic and essentially fixed bridge diagram, so often transmitted through devices like campus evangelism seminars, pamphlets, and internet websites, lies in that while this is an evangelical tool, it also functions as a schematic for the Evangelical Christian cosmology. Indeed, it is this problem of crossing over the gulf between the mundane and the divine that the Vineyard, in both its Charismatic and Evangelical inflected variants, is centered around – how does an individual work through the opposition of the fallen on one side, and the sacred on the other, and to what degree does this difference mean that relationship with the divine consists of following out in this world an imperative that has come from beyond, or, alternately does it entail a participation in this divine in the here-and-now that unsettles the boundaries and classifications of this world? If one takes seriously the idea that conversion is a rite that is never finished, and conversion accounts rendered after the fact are in a sense rituals in which the antinomies that lead to conversion are revisited and rearticulated (Stromberg 1993), is it little surprise that the bridge diagram should in a way encapsulate the core set of oppositions in evangelical practice?

In any case, it is certainly these elements of the bridge diagram, and the questions that seem to autonomously unfold from these elements, that Choung is reacting to in his book. In one scene that is supposed to encapsulate his protagonist’s consternation with traditional Evangelicalism, Choung has Caleb sketch the bridge diagram out in his mind while he waits trapped in his car during a rainstorm, only to realize, while contemplating the diagram’s disjunct between the material and the transcendent, how hollow an otherworldly Christianity is. The implied answer to the shallow nature of the bridge diagram is the presentation that Choung puts forward in
this book. In the fully realized version of this schematic, a circle containing two stick figures (stand-ins for all of humanity, apparently) is drawn in the upper right quadrant (see figure 3).

figure 3

As this is sketched out on paper, evangelist/artist then laconically asks, “What’s our world like? What do you see on the news?” The expected response, called into being by the reference to ‘news’ is a set of complaints regarding the nature of the world. Graphically, this troubled state is captured by taking the preexisting circle and drawing over it with “squiggly lines . . . like the ones you find in comic books, to represent danger or shock” (see figure four). The verbal counter-response for the evangelist at this moment is, “the world’s pretty messed up; that’s obvious. But what’s more interesting is our response. How do you feel about this kind of world?” (Choung 2008a:206-207).
The use of the word ‘kind’ is a tip of the hand, pointing to other varieties of possible worlds – this is a question designed to elicit the idea of there being different kinds of cosmos, and to possibly lead the interlocutor into wishing to inhabit one. The path to this better world, as well as its possible temporal coordinates, is set up with the following scripted response:

No normal person thinks suffering, violence, and oppression are good things. All of us long and ache for a better world. And our universal ache speaks of something more. Just like hunger points to food and thirst points to water, so our ache for a better world means that a better world either once existed or will one day exist. (Choung 2008a: 207).

It is this idea of a telos, of every drive having a proper object, that the speaker is attempting to instill here, but one should realize that there is other work being done by this quote. Justice is set up as being at some level equivalent to the bodily drives, associating it at an imaginary level with various more immanent and embodied ways of being in the world. This is not a complete conflation, of course. Hunger and thirst can
be rendered metaphoric (among neo-Charismatics, being ‘hungry’ for God, or ‘thirsty’ for the spirit, are common expressions) or be cosmologized (through rites like the eucharist, which, despite the absence of any real concept of transubstantiation or consubstantiation, still does the ritual work of collapsing physical and temporal distance when First Corinthians 11:23-26 is read aloud and the bits of bread and plastic thimbles of grape juice are communally consumed). Further, by positing a utopic “better world,” this passage hints at a final satisfaction of the drive toward justice, as opposed to food and thirst, where all satisfaction is by nature only temporary.

At this point, the evangelist draws an outer circle in the top left corner of the page; with the napkin obviously meant to be read in a clockwise fashion, this circle indicates a prior, prelapsarian epoch. Two other stick figures are drawn in the heart of this earlier circle, and unlike the stick figures in the squiggly circle that represent the current condition, these figures are situated closer together, to “connote community and intimacy” (Choung also states that these earlier figures are not necessarily Adam and Eve). (Choung 2008a:207). As this part of the diagram is crafted, the evangelist is suppose to say something along the lines of, “[i]n the Christian worldview, God crafted a good, wonderful world, in the beginning, everything was right with everyone else.” (Choung 2008a: 207). This world was “designed to take care of us, and we were designed to take care of creation.” This interdependence was not merely between humans and nature, but intra-social as well (“people were designed to take care of each other”), and more importantly, between man and God (“on a personal level, we were each designed to be in a relationship with God, one full of love and intimacy”).
God as the first person in the trinity is not represented – or at least not in an overtly pictorial form. Rather, an inner circle is drawn surrounding the figures at this point, and the phrase *designed for good* is scrawled on top of that diagram (see figure 5).

![Figure 5](image1.png)

In the diagram that schematizes the present day, however, another circle is drawn in, only to be covered over in squiggly lines like the first circle, Arrows from the outer circle to the inner circle (representing “self centeredness”) are drawn, running from the outer circle to the inner circle, and the phrase *damaged by evil* is written on top of this diagram (see figure six).

![Figure 6](image2.png)
While this is going on, the evangelist says something to the effect of,

When God was in charge, we had a wonderful world. But we wanted to be in charge so that all of it – creation and everyone in it – could be used for our own benefit instead of the intended design and purpose of serving each other. It became all about us. (Choung 2008a:209).

Choung then goes on to explain that environmental damage, social ills (listing “racism, sexism, slavery, corruption, injustice and oppression” [Choung 2008a:209]), attenuated social relations, and a broken relationship with God are all a result of the fall.

Needless to say, this lamentable situation is not the final state of affairs. A downward arrow is drawn from the bottom of the damaged by evil circle, pointing to a new space that is then marked by another circle in the bottom right. This downward arrow stands for an intervention from the divine, as we can tell from the contents of this space: like the other circles, they contain two stick figures, and like the designed for good circle, the stick figures are rather close together, only this time the stick people are situated at the base of a cross made from two simple lines. As this is sketched out, the following passage is recounted:

God came to the planet as Jesus two thousand years ago and started something new. He started a resistance movement against evil, though not with military revolt or communal escapism. Instead, he taught us a better way to live, and he gives us the power to overcome evil in us and around us.

Ultimately, Jesus comes into the center of our damage, our disease. He gets infected and dies on the cross. But he comes back to life, overcoming the disease, and he offers his immunity to us. In Jesus, we can overcome the selfishness and damage in us and in our word. He has given us the antidote. In so doing, we’re all restored for the better . . .

Racism, sexism, ageism and classism have died with Christ and a new way of dealing with people arises. Our exploitation of the planet’s
resources dies with Christ, and a new way of dealing with the planet arises. This is a new thing, a new world government, where the values are love, justice and peace instead of unfair competition, oppression and violence. (Choung 2008a: 210-212).

We are also told that relationships with man and with God are also restored in this moment as well. An inner circle sans squiggly lines, like the inner circle in the designed for good diagram, is drawn, as the evangelists says that “the good news is that the revolution has begun, and we’re all invited” (Choung 2008a:213). The outer circle, though, is still drawn with the squiggly lines, suggesting the unredeemed nature of the world (see figure seven).

![Restored for Better](image)

**figure 7**

This breaking open of a transcendent space should not be over-emphasized by the evangelist, however. As we’ve seen from earlier discussions of the political imaginaries of left-leaning Vineyard members, the stutter step of a partially completed restoration is as important as the final telos to which it leads. As Choung mentions in an aside,

A word of caution: It’s tempting here to focus solely on the kingdom’s restoration in the end of time, when all systems, relationships and individuals are made right and good. It makes for good theology: creation, fall, redemption and consummation. But when I shared that
with my irreligious friends, it sounded utopian, sterile and boring, like a bad sci-fi movie. Instead, focus on the process of the mission, the fight to heal the planet. Emphasize the adventure and joy of doing something good with our lives. The tension between the now and the not yet is a compelling piece of our gospel that carries the ring of truth. (Choung 2008a:213-214).

It is this proccessual aspect that Choung wishes to capture with his final diagram, situated in the bottom left. Again, there is a cross in the center of two concentric circles, with the inner circle (representing God’s presence) still drawn in a solid, non-squiggly line, while the outmost circle is still drawn in a squiggly line. This time, there are four sets of stick figures, drawn at cardinal points of the inner circle (upper left, upper right, bottom left, bottom right). These stick figures, on the boundary between the redeemed and the unredeemed, are linked to arrows that run from the inner circle to the outer one. Stating that “[m]any Christians have gotten stuck in the third circle, not helping to heal the planet,” the evangelist would then discuss how instead we are called to be more like Jesus, which means again actively healing one’s relationship with God, with one’s fellow man, and with the earth. “Jesus would want us to join this resistance movement against evil, to go out and heal the planet.” It is this outward motion of believers, who are sent to redeem the greater fallen world, that the four arrows appurtenant to the stick figures are suppose to represent. At this point that the evangelist would write a final imperative, sent together to heal, over the final diagram (see figure 8; Choung 2008a: 213, 214, 215). This progression is one that cannot be short circuited – Choung is explicit that without Jesus, we are too damaged to engage in the rescuing work on our own. “We need someone infinitely more powerful to rely on, whether we’re fighting something out there or something in our own hearts.” (Choung 2008a: 216).
Much like the bridge diagram, the intervention is completed by an opening question directed towards the evangelist’s interlocutor – what world do you see yourself in? The answers to the question trigger further interventions. For instance, if the interlocutor reports that he or she is in the second world, the scripted response is “[t]ell me about it. Jesus is offering you a way to overcome it.” The answer, should the person think himself in the third world, is “[t]hat’s great. What you’re doing is in line with the values of the kingdom of God. But you could be doing so much more with God’s presence and with his people. You could be a part of something that will last.” (Choung 2008a: 216-217). 93 It is this last question/comment that one senses is the hoped for finale, where one’s desire to save the world can result in an action that a previous generation of evangelicals saw as primarily a way to save their own souls.

93 This last answer suggest that there is a danger to some degree that Christianity becomes something of an expedient mean towards a goal, the good, that to some degree is seen as autonomous from Christianity because it is capable of being imagined without it.
**Do Dual Denominations Exist?**

While it is these ultimate spiritual-political aspirations that we will turn our attention towards ultimately, we should first attend to the differences – and at the same time the uncanny similarities (and I mean uncanny in the full Freudian sense, of something that appears to be superseded, but is not) that connects these two pedagogical narratives. This may seem to be a surprising thing to say; the ‘True Story’ is something that at first glance cannot be easily conflated with the ‘Bridge’ tool. With Choung’s emphasis on the possibility of social transformation in this earth as opposed to gaining access to heaven, with his use of an entirely different geometrical metaphor, that a comparatively baroque presentation of history that is simultaneously targeted both at a new generation of believers and a presently apolitical generation, it appears that it is only a Christian thematic that links it to ‘the Bridge.’ I have already suggested, though, that this may be an instance where appearance and underlying form here may not be in harmony, and that despite the seemingly great differences between these two formulations, there may be more commonalities between these two pedagogical devices than it initially appears (this is certainly the opinion of Choung, who, despite all his claims regarding generational change and his use of metaphors such as “wrecking ball” to describe the impact of adopting his activist take on a Jesus-centered life, is at pains to state that his diagram is merely a new way of communicating the same Biblical message). To make this argument from an anthropological standpoint, though, we have to turn to what is perhaps the *ur* text when it comes to thinking through dyads and trinities at a purely schematic level – Claude Lévi-Strauss’ essay “Do Dual Organizations Exist” (1963:132-163).
Lévi-Strauss’ ostensible problem in this classical essay is how to understand a peculiar phenomenon found in the ethnographic record of multiple small-scale societies, including Indonesian villages, South American Indian communities, and the Winnebago tribes of the Great Lakes. The core of the puzzle is effectively captured in this one seemingly impermeable exemplar: when asked to present illustrative schematics of their village’s spatial organization, inhabitants of Winnebago settlements, who are divided into two moieties, draw two entirely different diagrams depending on their place in the social structure. Members of the upper section (the more socially and politically paramount moiety) draw the diagram as a bisected circle, with each half of the circle standing for a different section of the village, while the other set of members produce a different diagram, that of two concentric circles, with the inner circle standing for the more valued section and the exterior circle standing for the lower status group, and beyond that circle . . . nothing. While the ethnographer who originally discovered this seeming contradiction in accounts thought that this merely was an instance where it was impossible to discover the “true” organization of the village, Lévi-Strauss’ contribution was to intuit that what was occurring here was an instance where both parties’ vision is entirely accurate in its own way. That is, without resorting to a kind of easy relativism that would write off this disjuncture as mere representational gray noise, or simply vapidly positing that different people see the world in different ways, what is going on here is that each of these presentations schematically capture the “truth” of the villages politico-spatial organization, but merely in different, and fundamentally irreconcilable ways; or as Lévi-Strauss himself said, these two schematics
may also correspond to two different ways of describing one organization too complex to be formalized by means of a single model, so that the members of each moiety would tend to conceptualize it one way rather than the other depending on the position in the social structure. (Lévi-Strauss 1963:134-135).

Being true to his structuralist analytic, Lévi-Strauss grasps the engine of these apparent dual organizations here by observing not only how common binaries act as sorting mechanisms at the level of village life in small scale settlements, but the fact that these binary oppositions were not always structured in the same manner. In a dizzying review of various ethnographic reports of the meaning-laden oppositions that give sense to various geographical and political schemas, Lévi-Strauss shows that in addition to the paradigmatic binary in which each complementing spacio-semiotic term in a map/structure is equal (perhaps best exemplified by the forms of balanced reciprocity), there are also oppositional binaries in which one term is given greater moral weight than the other (that favored by the upper moiety in the Winnebago example), and finally, the concentric dualism (the favored mode of representation by the lower moiety, where things were captured by concentric circles instead of binary but status-unequal spatial sections); Lévi-Strauss goes on to show that there are other societies in which one can find all three forms of dualism giving shape to different co-present aspects of the social structure. This already ornate bestiary of overlapping dualisms is complemented by an observation that these binaries are often combined with or into ternary forms: triskelions, that is, triadic representations of space, status, and exchange.

That last move is made possible by Lévi-Strauss’ observations that binaries and triads are linked in that binaries, when conceived of either as a line or two half-circles, already include a third element, specifically the border between the two sections.
Alternately, a third can be located in a binary by including within the set the background that the diagram in the foreground is set against, so that for instance in villages, the wastelands beyond the settlements are included in the figure. From this, Lévi-Strauss is able to put forward an observation that through a kind of Nachträglichkeit logic, is only obvious after it has been put forward: “[c]oncentric dualism is a mediator between diametric dualism and triadism, since it is through the agency of the former that the transition takes place between the other two.” (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 151). This mediating position of concentric dualism results in it being a mode of depiction with much more promise for transformation than simple binaries have:

Diametric dualism is static, that is, it cannot transcend its own limitations; its transformations merely give rise to the same sort of dualism as that from which they arose. But concentric dualism is dynamic and contains an implicit triadism. Or strictly speaking, any attempt to move from an asymmetrical triad to a symmetrical dyad presupposes concentric dualism, which is dyadic like the latter but asymmetric like the former. (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 151).  

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94 It here that we can see the weakness of the oft-made claim that Lévi-Strauss’ structuralism, with its penchant for taking “cold” societies as its object of analysis, gives us no way to think through history, or at least a way to think through the dialectic of history and system outside of having to frame it in terms of the asystemic irruption of the event. From there Lévi-Strauss goes on to even greater levels of abstraction, noting that there are some variants of triadic structures where relations between the elements are not predicated on some sort of engagement or exchange, but rather avoidance, and in these instances certain organizing principles function as what he calls a zero value organizing principle, as they do not trace out any sort of social action, but merely serve as an empty organizing principle that allows society to function; this observation, he concedes though, is “beyond the point of the present study” (1963: 159); it certainly shall not be taken up in greater detail here. Also, it would be a claim that would be predicated on an obvious misreading of Lévi-Strauss regardless – see Lévi-Strauss 1966: 217-243, 244-269; also see Hénaaff 1998: 214-236.
At the risk of being obvious, it is with Lévi-Strauss’ observation regarding the permutations inherent in structure that allows us to now posit a *structural* kind of relationship between the two evangelizing tools that have been laid out in this chapter. The bridge diagram, with its stark depiction of two bluffs, is the perfect example of an unequal but non-concentric dualism. At the same time, the bridge diagram opens up a mediating space through its identification of a gap between these two spaces, a mediating space that is filled by Jesus’ death on the cross, which stands here for a way to suture together the differences between the divine and the mundane, undoing the vast space between the left and right cliff, which may be connected, but as we have seen, in practice (as far as practice is exhibited in display) never crosses over. It is this implicit order, and implicit promise, in the bridge diagram that we can see more fully developed in Choung’s *True Story* diagrams, where the line-segment-connector of the bridge diagram becomes refigured as a concentric dualism, with the favored element, a divine perfection that includes healed human relations and the presence of God, set at the center of the diagram. In addition to these structural changes, there are some transformations of the specific elements that are set in relation to each other that occur here. The cross is present in both diagrams, but they appear to be doing different work. In *True Story* the cross is not a mediator as it is in the bridge diagram; the cross rather serves to signify the historical inbreaking of the divine (note, for instance, the arrow that points directly down to it, mapping a literally ‘above’ transcendent to the center of the circle, that occurs in figure seven). The mediating role in the *True Story* diagram is played here rather by the (stick figure) *believers themselves*, as the divine contagion that carries over the Kingdom’s justice to a fallen earth (as shown in figure eight). This is
not quite the shocking leap from the bridge diagram that it may first appear as; recall how Choung (who deemphasizes the redemptive work of the crucifixion without erasing it) creates a metonymic link between Jesus’ redemptive purpose in coming to earth, and the redemptive work that Choung himself asks believers to engage in, which to a degree hints at the exchanges of position in structure that occur here.

As we shall see, there is still more that we can realize in viewing these two diagrams simultaneously (or to be more accurate, less we can realize, as we engage in a further reduction of the problem to have a more clear articulation of what might be occurring when we view these in a parallax fashion). Before we do so, though, a brief aside for two points. First, on the use of theory: of course, there are some limitations on the applicability of Lévi-Strauss’ model here, as the dissimilarities are as striking as the parallels, but the limitations of the applicability actually tends to speak to the overall relevance of the material to our question, rather than to impeach it. The most vital difference between “Do Dual Organizations Exist” and the Bridge/True story diagrams is the physicality and ontology of the objects being described. In the Winnebago and other similar cases, what was being analyzed was cross cutting difference between spatially located moieties that were hierarchical stratified, and hence these opposition within the system had to be worked out by re-reading the same social topography so that neglected elements rise to the fore (emphasizing either a diametrically bisected social space, or one predicated on a central projection). When it comes to these Christian practices, however, the maps are predicated entirely on metasocial and metaphysical spatial metaphors, and hence freely re-articulable. This means that rather than shift focus from one aspect of the social geography to another, as the Winnebago
must, in the Bridge/Choung case the very same metaphorical geography can be reconstituted anew in a different form. Free to craft the world as they will, in an odd sense their election of these two forms is all the more telling for its immateriality. Not having to reproduce the Winnebago’s topography, they did so anyway.

Second, an argument could be made that Choung’s diagram, with its emphasis on political engagement, does not really stand for the charismatic worldview. I will argue later on in this chapter, however, that though it may seem counter-intuitive to those who are versed in the social science literature on this point, there are reasons to see a connection between a certain egalitarian bent and the charismatic gifts; we can put this issue aside for the moment, though. Rather, what is important, at least for this aspect of the conversation that we are having now, is not the political valence that comes with a participatory divine being, but rather the fact that it is a participatory divine being, and one whose active engagement, however mediated through humans, heralds an either now-occurring, or rather imminent, transformation in how part, but not all, of the fallen world is to be structured.

Returning to the issue at hand, we can see that this would be the easy way of reading Lévi-Strauss into these diagrams (or rather, merely allowing these diagrams to read themselves into Lévi-Strauss, given how neatly the unequal and concentric binaries of these two systems line up). Simply because one is capable of reading these diagrams as structural variants is not warrant enough, however, for doing so, and if it were, it is not clear what accepting such an analysis does for us. In other words, we need to do more than simply ask Choung’s variant of the boomer question, “is it true,” and ask the millennial question of whether it is good – or in more explicitly Christian language,
what are the fruits of such a reading for our analysis? I would say that reading these two diagrams through Lévi-Strauss does three things. First, it allows us to see how a politically left neo-charismatic sensibility can engage in the act of erasure discussed earlier in the chapter, without ever being erased. Second, it allows us to start to understand why these neo-charismatics have turned to the left in the first instance, in a way that goes beyond the mere contingency of contemporary politics. Third, acknowledgment of these two diagrams true interrelation serves to not just illustrate, but in a way explicate the running motif of the monograph so far, specifically the odd tendency of dual or triple modes of apprehending or practicing in the world to co-exist in the Vineyard; it also allows us to understand why these differing modes often are invoked in practice without being marked as differing modes by Vineyard participants. Answering all these questions also means an engagement with the one vital element of “Dual Organizations” that has not been taken up yet – Lévi-Strauss’ claim that the engine of multiple yet still veridical representations of the same phenomenon is a result of the organization being “too complex to be formalized by means of a single model.”

*The territory is not the map, rather two maps make the territory*

For believers, of course, or at least for those believers (documented by Crapanzano) who are unwilling to bracket off their beliefs and consider various forms of representation as an autonomous field, the answer to the question of how Christian practice could be “too complex to be formalized by means of a single model” is quite obvious. The believer’s relationship with God is multifarious, at once hierarchical and egalitarian, characterized by both a kind of deep love not unlike romantic love, and at
the same time by a submissive obedience. One is at once a creature in the natural order, and at the same time an adored colleague in saving it (and this is true even in forms of Christianity such as conservative Calvinism where agency is very much placed into question, where individuals are still co-workers in distributing the soteriological message, so much so that their will and God’s can be seen as co-terminus [see Dumont 1985: 114-115]). While we may or may not agree with their ontology, it is certain that we can agree that this sketches out some of the antinomies of their representational economy. For neo-charismatics and other Pentecostal and Pentecostal-inspired Christian practitioners, this ambivalent relationship is further complicated by the various modes through which God has chosen to communicate with us; on one hand, he has chosen the Bible as a way of speaking, and on the other he has made use of the infilling of the Holy Spirit and of the charismatic gifts. One of these forms, print, has a capacity to be impersonal and ‘objective,’ in that it can be seen as existing independent of the individual and exterior to one’s actual bodily boundaries; in this communicative mode, engagement with the message consists of adhering to its imperatives, and in a sense agency is the question of whether one is to obey these external communiqués. The other form, charismatic activity (in the sense of receiving visions or prophecy, being healed, or speaking in tongues), always is in relation to a specifiable actor, and with very rare exceptions, involves a breach of bodily boundaries in some manner.95 This form of

95 Regarding those rare occasions, take this as an example: the secondary ratification occasionally seen in social forms of discernment, and the occasional moments where divine communication is seen in wild coincidence, or as ratification of a decision by the later success of an enterprise that one has prayed over, both seem to stand apart from other prototypical charismatic phenomena in that they both seem outside the body. There are two other notable examples: one can be found in the rare moments where
communication puts the autonomous self into question as the bodily or sensory *location* of the communicative event, in as much as that which would be considered internal now potentially has other origins, and while obeying is not entirely absent as an issue of proper agency (often people describe receiving divine messages, but then state that they were too shy or scared to act on them, especially when it was a directive to communicate a prophetic message to a third party), the arena where concerns about agency is expressed is the area of discernment, which addresses the proper *interpretation* of the origin and content of charismatic material.

The Bible and prophecy have just been put forward as if they were to a degree sharply different domains, with reading privileging one form of submissive and boundary respecting subjectivity and agency, and charismatic activity being a more apt space for another constellation of participatory agentic and subjectivizing forces – but this split into two contrasting realms was merely a heuristic, for purposes of clarity. We have seen earlier on in our discussions how there is a level of recursivity in the way that these alternate modes of being are exercised in the various specific areas discussed; recall how in the folk Biblical hermeneutics of the Vineyard, there are moments where a

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individuals claim that God has communicated to them by way of an audible voice (and even these can be placed into the question by the fact that it is just as likely to be narrated in a subjective, “as-if” sort of manner, almost as if to immunize it from being impeached by being descried as a classic communication). The second example where Charismatic activity seems to have more respect for the interior/exterior division is being slain in the spirit, where the body collapses under what is described as an outside pressure. Here as well, there is a little wiggle room, and that wiggle room perhaps also helps in making the point that the interior/exterior opposition is honored as much in the breach as the observance in charismatic activity; once on the floor, individuals often describe the sensation not as an exterior force, but an internal suspension of the will, an inability to direct their bodies to move rather than as being pinned or pushed to the floor.
supplementary particularizing and intimate sense of presence (dialogue) is given worth over the objective reading, other times where the anonymous and objective aspects of the Bible (dissemination) is exactly what is valued. We have also seen that in boundary erasing charismatic practices such as deliverance or prophecy, there are still moments of decision or commitment where porous bodies become closed and where previously problematized agency again becomes locatable in autonomous subjects as they engage in acts of performative self-reconstitution. In other circumstances, such as the various exchanges of material good, wealth, worship, and of partitionable aspect of the self, these two orientations of submission and participation glimmer into being as implicit parallel formations, although these are formations with a hierarchical relation to each other.\textsuperscript{96} Given this level of ‘emic,’ and mostly unconscious, complexity, it is easy to see why believers might constitute two different organizational schematics to present the skeleton of their cosmology, which seems to be the best way to view whatever wider significance the ‘bridge’ and ‘circular’ diagrams may have beyond their intended pedagogical and rhetorical purposes; to the degree that contact with God is affected by the image one has of that transaction, one could see the way in which these metaphors (or the countless other metaphors that are constantly being created on the fly by Christians to describe a participatory or submissive relationship with the divine), with their spatial as well as ethical charge, could unconsciously affect both Christian

\textsuperscript{96} Although cast as contrasting cognitive schemas, Brad Shore has notice a similar phenomenon in Fijian modes of spatial reckoning, where one is more articulated and given a greater status, and the other is underdeveloped and privileged less, but extant all the same. Shore 1996: 265-283.
cognition and what one would wish to call, if the contradiction wasn’t too much, an
imaginatively rooted bodily hexis (see, e.g., Lakoff 1987).

Such an explanation may not completely suffice for an atheistic reading
(whether it be methodological or otherwise), we should note. An analytic that does not
see Christian discourses as unproblematically identifying a transparent referent would
not merely take this complex, self-contradictory representation for granted; this analytic
would go on to ask why it was that these believers have chosen a worldview shot
through with such antinomies. If one brackets off any theory that posits God as having
any kind of ontological consistency apart from his representation in the human
imagination, then the problem that we are left with is why is it that believers would
portray God (and their interactions with God) in this way, when other ways of his being
and their relations with him could be imagined? This is especially puzzling when one
considers that a great deal of the antinomies in this split representation of proper
interaction with the divine appear to be at least hypocognized, if not unconscious.
Strong visible divides or antinomies being consciously represented in another realm
make sense if one is trying to thematize or work through these known disjunctures, but
what of the case where these disjunctures appear omnipresent, yet are not flagged in any
way?

History, of course, could be one answer to this question. The argument here
would run along the lines that we are dealing with multiple inheritances in ideology and
practice, and that these variant yet co-present Christian traditions have yet to be, or
perhaps cannot be, synthesized. We have already seen that the Vineyard was from its
first moments a very particular institution, engaging in a self-conscious melding of two
elements: the first being a sort of Evangelicalism characterized by a rhetoric and a
body-practice of control, and the second being the kind of affect-laden, emotive, and
spontaneous-valuing Neo-Pentecostalism. While it is certain that both of these religious
traditions have their own dialectic of control and spontaneity, of separation and
participation, it is easy to see how, when they were conjoined, each of these spiritual
streams would ensure that these sets of enchained binary opposition would be as
hypocognized as possible; too much meditation on difference leads to internal
dissention, and is at odds with the Vineyard’s ‘atheological’ orientation regardless.
History, however, can only account for the elements that were assembled into a
structure, but not for the way that the structure was articulated, or for the relative
stability of the structure over what passes for a _longue durée_ in a church movement that
is just under thirty years old. Nor would it explain why it is that these antinomies
always seem to center on issues of agency, bodily boundaries, and forms of
communication and exchange. Furthermore, a historical analysis would not necessarily
give us a reason for current instantiations of these historically received forms to have
such a level of recursive complexity, when it seems so much more plausible that
complexity would be sheared off over time, especially considering how informal the
transmission of ideology and practice is in most instances in the Vineyard, and how

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97 There are, to be sure, particular courses and seminars in most Vineyards that are
either developed by the church, or are borrowed by the Vineyard from other
organization (such as the Vineyard stalwart called the _Alpha_ program, which taken from
the Anglican church and oddly absent at the fellowship where I did most of my
fieldwork); they often are either highly structured courses that serve as a guide to new
Christians, or occasional afternoon, day, or weekend long events about particular topics,
such as marriage, leadership, or hearing from God. However, it is my contention that
these courses have limited educational affect on most Vineyard participants – the fact
often that transmission has occurred in the quickly-growing Church. Finally, viewing
the historical inheritance of the Vineyard alone as an organization is questionable
because it would not explain why other churches, who do not have the same specific
founding charter put forward by John Wimber, seem so often to resemble the Vineyard
in their beliefs and practices; it is no accident that Donald L. Miller, in his discussion of
the Vineyard (1997), saw it as being in effect just one of a type of “new paradigm”
Churches that represent a wide transformation that characterizes a wider portion of
American Christianity. History, though useful and cogent, cannot be our master key
here to understand why it is that the religious practices of our Vineyard believers to
some degree exceeds their capacity to schematicize it.

Another possible explanatory matrix that we should set aside as having
something to contribute, but certainly not being able to give us any more of a complete
picture than history, is any kind of an empirical or processual sociology. A
sociologically framed explanation centered around the manner in which sectarian
churches become domesticated as they age, such as that found in the various church-
sect typologies that have been put forward by Max Weber or Ernst Troeltsch, or even

that these courses are highly variable in nature, subject, and quality, and are only
attended by small fractions of the members of a church, limit their impact. I would say
that small group has a much greater affect in transmitting norms and practices, albeit in
a more informal manner; while it is true that small group also usually only includes a
fraction of the congregational body (in my experience, anywhere from a third to a tenth,
the larger churches often have a much smaller rate of participation), the regularity of
that participation, and the further transmission of information across the consociate
bonds that small groups oftentimes foster, is responsible for a great deal of the
education and normalizing that occurs.

There are also conferences as well, which can convey a certain amount of
ideological material and inculcate some training; however, whatever work they do as a
sort of Christian corroboree, their occasional and theme-specific nature limits them as a
prime way of inculcating practices and cognitive styles into the congregation.
Rodney Stark, could certainly account for the overall maturation of the Vineyard, as its members (according to most forms of church-sect theory) have gained in social prestige to the degree that their highly disciplined practices have allowed them to gain in economic capital, and therefore have shifted their interest from the other-worldly to the this-worldly (granting, for the sake of argument, that we can call their Pauline political project an immanent one, for, even if it is about irruptions of the divine, it is about irruptions of the divine into this world). A not unrelated argument could be built around the claim that as Evangelicals have ascended to be included in the American elites (see, e.g., Lindsay 2007), there would certainly be transformations in their religious conceptions and practices as these believers were exposed to secular discourses that they had previously held at arm’s length (though this seems to be a particularly shallow argument, given that the history of Evangelism suggests that it was always in some ways in dialogue with secularism, even if that discussion was often been a one-sided one [see, e.g., Marsden 1987]). This depiction of Vineyard believers as gaining access to secular education and prestige certainly fits a great deal of the informants whom I worked with, young professionals whose parents were Korean Methodist or Calvinist immigrants, staunch Protestant military servicemen, Mennonite missionaries, or blue collar congregants of mid-western Pentecostal home churches; this hypothesized upward movement seems particularly apropos when one remembers that many of these people were members of Christian campus organizations, such as the previously mentioned Intervarsity Christian Fellowship during their college days, attending prestigious but often public Universities that are often a gateway for those aspiring towards an upward mobility. However, there are problems with this reading – what do
we do with individuals whose parents were well-to-do members of rather rock-ribbed, respectable Evangelical denominations, as well as people converting from Judaism, Catholicism, or an easy agnosticism? In all these cases, it is hard to see an adoption of a more socially grounded style of Vineyard religiosity as either signaling a greater engagement with the world, or a form of ‘upward movement’ in status. Further, for many of those who did “gain” in access to a more engaged and education-friendly faith by joining a left-leaning Vineyard, there was a corresponding loss of some status in that not all of the natal religions countenanced engagement with the charismatic gifts, which, as we have seen earlier, can often be treated as dubious by other strains of Protestantism. While the gifts are in decline, they are still not absent, and they, and their stigma, must be accounted for. As much horizontal as vertical moves in status, or even vertical moves that rise and fall in the same instance, it is hard to imagine what a proper metrics for this kind of question of religious status would look like in these instances. Finally, such an analysis of social mobility can give us a measure of the broad concerns that these individuals may separately or collectively have, and for the broad turns in the denomination’s history, but as in our discussion of history, it by itself will not help us understand the odd, systemic, and insistently regularized ways that this structuration has occurred in multiple domains.

Rather than rely solely on history or sociological explanations, we need to look elsewhere to understand what is occurring here. Rather than look for some other, outer cause that precipitates the structure sketched so well by Lévi-Strauss, I suggest that we look for a cause that is imminent to the structure. Slavoj Žižek’s reading of “Do Dual Organizations Exist” gives us a different formulation of the normally unrepresentable
complexity that is creating the multimodal structuration that we have been tracing out in our discussion here. For Žižek, contrasting facets of an object is an indicator that the object to some degree suffers from an ontological fault, a deadlock built into its very being at the most basic of levels. As he has stated in his exposition of Lévi-Strauss:

The point Lévi-Strauss wants to make is that . . . the very splitting into the two “relative” perceptions implies a hidden reference to a constant – not the objective, “actual” disposition of buildings but a traumatic kernel, a fundamental antagonism the inhabitants of the village were unable to symbolize, to account for, to “internalize,” to come to terms with, an imbalance in social relations that prevented the community from stabilizing itself into a harmonious whole. The two perceptions of the ground-plan are simply two mutually exclusive endeavors to cope with this traumatic antagonism, to heal its wounds via the imposition of a balanced symbolic structure. (Žižek 2006: 25-26).

For Žižek, the best way to think through this antagonism is as “the Real,” a term from Lacanian psychoanalytic practice for the entirely negative supplement that is excluded from yet still present in and exerting an influence on the system. The Real is often (incorrectly) conceived of as some element that predates the inauguration of structure, or (more aptly) as some external residual that is created by the imposition of structure, but in his discussion of “Dual Organizations,” Žižek tries to emphasize that the Real also can be thought of as something that does not precede the underlying structure, or is external to it, but instead is given rise to internally by a deadlock, by a conflict within that order, and can only be identified by contrasting partial presentations of that order, an act Žižek, borrowing again from Jacques Lacan, labels anamorphosis.98

98 For Lacan, anamorphosis consists of a sort of viewing at an angle, through which one purposefully distorts the object that one is gazing at in such way that it is recognizable as that which is lost from the symbolic (see, e.g., Lacan 1981:79-90). For Žižek, what he seems to be taking from Lacan here is the idea of looking at things purposefully
Continuing with Žižek’s reading of “Dual Organizations,” we can have a better sense for the kind of deadlocks that become apparent when contrasting yet complementary systems are given an anamorphic reading:

It is here that one can see in what precise sense the Real intervenes through anamorphosis. We have first the “actual,” “objective” arrangements of the houses, then its two different symbolizations which both distort the actual arrangements in an anamorphic way. However, the “Real” is not the actual arrangement, but the traumatic core of some social antagonism which distorts the tribe members’ view of the actual arrangement of the houses in the village.

The Real is thus the disavowed X on account of which our vision of reality is anamorphically distorted; it is simultaneously the Thing to which direct access is not possible and the obstacle which prevents this access, the Thing which eludes our grasp and the distorting screen that makes us miss the Thing. (Žižek 2006: 26).

In other words, as used in this sense, the Real is some contradiction or antagonism inherent in a structure itself, which causes the appearance of some “cause” that must be external to that structure. Žižek, of course, is not interested in the Winnebago for their own sake (or for that matter, is he at all interested in Lévi-Strauss for Lévi-Strauss’ own sake, either); his interest is in identifying similar contrastive structures in contemporary society, due to his belief that counterposing such modern “dual organizations” is a way to think through the current moment in a way that would be very similar to classical Hegelian dialectics. We need not follow Žižek this far, but the example of what contemporary “social antagonisms” might look like that he presents while making his case is informative, at least in as much as it suggests how other contemporary social cum structural/representational antagonisms, such as those we are looking for in the askance so that its true nature can be obscured – here, the ‘angle’ as it was is the shift from one enframedment in a symbolic system to another.
Vineyard, might be structured. For instance he gives as an example of an antagonism that becomes visible only with a perspectival shift, some contemporary discussions of the nature of the social; here he relies on the antagonistic characterization of society put forward by Adorno:

[1]In a first approach, the split between the two notions of society (the Anglo-Saxon individualistic-nominalistic notion and the Durkheimian organicist notion of society as a totality seems irreducible; we seem to be dealing with a true Kantian antinomy which cannot be resolved via a higher “dialectical synthesis” and elevates society into an inaccessible Thing-in-itself; in a second approach [towards a structural understanding of the Real], however, we should merely take note of how this radical antinomy which seems to preclude out access to the Thing is already the Thing itself – the fundamental feature of today’s society is the irreducible antagonism between Totality and the Individual. (Žižek 2006: 26).

In short, it is not that we are incapable of creating a proper map of the relationship between the individual and society, and must somehow attempt to look past our phenomenal mode of cognitive mapping to see what the “real relation” in the neumenal is – it is that our impossible attempt to look past the representation for an (absent) whole is a result of the fact that the relationship between the individual and the social is by its nature an antinomy.

Given this as our interpretive framework, it is time to address the exact nature of the split in the Vineyard that we have been tracing out for all this while. In doing so, we can see that the concerns about agency, bodily boundaries, and the origin of things are about . . . agency, bodily boundaries, and the origin of things, or rather their impossibility. The wild yet systemic variations in how the subject acts and is depicted in the Vineyard is a function of the fact that there is no one way to represent and think through the subject, or rather that when it comes to thinking through a personalized
agency and external causation, the self is not capable of being fully represented in a single moment. This should be no surprise, as concerns with agency and its limits are a repeated motif in some ethnographic studies of American subjectivity, both historically within the category of religion, and currently outside of the domain of religion, and it has been postulated that to some extent being a modern means to think of one’s self as at once a free individual, and at the same time as the result of a dependent function in a

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99 Both Taves (1999) and Schmidt (2000), in their discussions of early American ecstatic religious practice, sketch out contrasting modes of religiosity where on one hand a constraining self-discipline and a lawful social order was valued, and on the other ecstatic and to some degree antinomian forms of spirituality were encouraged; Taves herself shows how slippage from one of these categories to the other was a constant concern for more the decorous Evangelicals, who were always afraid of slipping into `enthusiasm,’ yet at the same time unable to deny its value.

100 Claudia Strauss, for instance, has documented numerous times splits in the conceptual frameworks employed by Anglophone North Americans to regard their agency – these modes alternate vertiginously between an unchecked voluntarism and a feeling of being completely powerless in the face of an oppressive, determining collective social other (Strauss 1990, 1992, 1997, 2007). Also relevant is the work of Adrie Kusserow (2004), who had charted two divergent strains of American individualism in parental and pedagogical attitudes towards the proper values to inculcate in children. She labels these two sets of values “hard” and “soft” individualism; “Hard individualism emphasized a tough, resilient self that was hardy enough to either protect itself from violence, poverty, and misfortune . . . or to project itself into a higher social class . . . [s]oft individualism, on the other hand, with its more psychologized conception of self emphasized the delicacy of the child’s self, the extreme care, resources, wide canvas, and gentle touch needed to help the unique self of the child flower and open up into her full potential.” (Kusserow 2004: v). These two readings seem relatable to the two structures of self that we have sketched out here, with a sense of self submissive to God being a variant of a hard self concerned with power, and the participatory/charismatic self as a pneumologized variant of the creative, soft self. Unlike the cognitivist Strauss, Kusserows’s reading is heavily influenced by Bourdieu, and she stresses the way that class affects the distribution of these two forms of individualism; tangentially, this class distribution of different sensibilities of self may explain the difference in class between the Vineyard and its closet cousin, Calvary Chapel, which tends to have a lower socioeconomic profile than the Vineyard, and have a much more cautious attitude towards the Charismatic gifts.
system (though to be fair, it is uncertain that the boundaries of this crisis is not necessarily delineated by either American culture or “modernity,” whatever that would mean). The issue of interiority vs. exteriority of a message can also be seen as a function of an underlying concern with agency and individualism – if one is agentive and individual, and meaning is external, then how does one develop a relation to externalized communication or imperatives in such a way that it has a meaningful effect on the person? Alternately, if communication is internalized in some manner, if outside words have an effect upon and within us, then what does that do to an idea of an autonomous, agentive self? Submission to and participation in communication rise up as the possibilities here, but we can see that neither by itself can smooth this irritant. The problem of the relation to alterity is not one that is susceptible to domestication.

I am thinking here of Charles Taylor’s work, though not just the obvious reference, namely his sketch of religion as having two different modalities, of individuation and participation in the divine, and submission to a religio-social order, both of which are necessary and are in a dialectical relationship with one another, though that dialectal balance has disturbed by the advent of what he calls a post-Durkheimian expressivist ‘culture.’ (Taylor 2002). Rather here I am leaning on his view of the necessary bifurcation (and Taylor uses the term ‘bifocal’ for this way of seeing, and uses it in a literal, and not figurative, way) required to conceive of one’s place in what he calls the “modern” or “social” imaginary. For Taylor, an essential part of the social imaginary is the capacity to hold in one’s head simultaneously a picture an objectified vision of the social in which the agentive is erased, epitomized in his mind by early social science, and at the same time hold a vision of one’s self as a free agent who can act within, or on, that objectified realm. (Taylor 2004: 75-80). It should be noted that there are slight hitches in mapping on Taylor’s schematization to the participatory one that I map on here – the chief of which is that Taylor sees this sense of the modern imaginary as by its nature rejecting a claim that there is a ‘telos’ in the social order. The Vineyard would seem to reject this claim, in that there is a sense of a redeemed end to all things, including the social, but as we have seen, in the current ‘dispensation’ the idea of a telos is absent, and as we saw in our discussion of exchange, and again in the vision of the world presented in True Story, sketches of the contemporary world as a space metastasized with desire suggests that whatever proper order there may be, it is currently very much in suspension.
If one was determined to look for specific, historical causal factors rooted in broader trends, rather than entirely formal ones, there are some places that appear to be more promising than others to start at, though – and one of the primary suspect areas would be the space of modernity itself. One could turn to Bruno Latour’s (1993) conception of what he calls the “modern constitution,” his trope for discussing the division of nature and the social into separate yet co-present spheres; for Latour, modernity is characterized by the freeing of the individual as he who masters nature, while simultaneously the same individual is robbed of all agency in that he is seen as a function of society, the other all-powerful analytic system. This simultaneous mix of Promethian capacity to fashion as the subject wills, and total subservience to a determining social-cultural order, suggests a dialectic that is not too dissimilar from the freedom of an individual participating in God, and the fixity of a creature who must decode God’s will through signs and carry it out. If later reflection does suggest that there is some genealogical relationship between Latour’s mythic foundational charter for modernity and contemporary religious practices, there is some irony in this, because it has been postulated by Webb Keane (2007) that it was Protestant Language Ideology’s fervor for discriminating between language and it’s material substrate that led to the purifying imperative that the Moderns effectively redeployed to separate “the social/cultural” from “the natural.”

Another possible ‘origin’ of this double system is the long running split, recently observed by Elizabeth Povinelli (2008), between discourses of liberal self-fashioning that she identifies by using the neologism the ‘autological’ self, and the collective/norm based pre-modern discourse used to discuss modernity’s non-liberal others, the
‘genealogical’ self. For Povinelli, these are two entirely ideological forms of being (like Spiro [1993], she rejects the actual idea of an originary and peculiar ‘liberated’ Western self, seeing forms of freedom and fixity in both the West and the colonized non-West), but they do point to an underlying tension between unstated assumptions of both a self that can determine its own fate and another self that is again determined by social forces. What makes Povinelli’s formulation of this usually trite dichotomy interesting for our purposes is that in her version the autological self finds its fullest realization not in its independence, but rather in what Povinelli calls “the intimate event,” where individuality is at once emphasized and erased by the kind of coupling that is ideologically justified by the contemporary idea of love. For Povinelli, this is a way in which the free and independent subject is celebrated, and simultaneously sutured to the social through a particularized bond with another. Carrying this over to the Vineyard, this idea of love seems a productive place to think this problem through, not only in as much as it give us a model to think of perceived social determinism (in the sense of genealogical reasoning) as well as independence (in the autological), but in that this idea of a seemingly independent self both fashioned and anchored by love seems to have parallels not only to the relationship that we see in the human-divine dyad, but also in the wider sphere of intra-small group and intra-church intimacy that is a stated goal of the Vineyard.

These other historical parallels are merely promising leads, something that doesn’t take away from the fact that this is an imminent condition for Vineyard believers, without cause in their day-to-day lives – and also doesn’t explain why these larger social schisms in representation and practice should appear in the space set aside
for worship and belief. In other words, if this is an “existential” question, then, why is it that it is played out in a ‘religious’ domain? As we have discussed in the introduction to this monograph, there is an argument to be made that alterity is the very originating kernel of religion as a practice, if one takes originating not in the sense of a first instance, but a core phenomenon; the stutter step of self-alienation and surprise (‘is this myself or another’) that must either be acknowledged or involved in any human contact (Csordas 2004b). Even if one would rather reject this argument and see the category of the divine as purely an empty or unessentialized space as some have argued (e.g., Asad 1993), there is the fact that if one is to give this empty category a particular content as used in a particular situation, templates must be drawn from somewhere – and in a Feuerbach sort of way, it seems obvious that in dealing with a divine person, one cannot help but have one’s thinking affected, either positively or negatively, by conceptions of the person in quotidian life.

Under this analysis, it makes sense why, in attempts to recreate a sense of human interaction with the divine, these Vineyard believers have unconsciously crafted techniques where the fissures involved in agency and the self-other dyad can be recreated, including building into the system techniques that produce, even without the presence of a physical other, a sense of tuché, of the irruption of the real (Lacan 1981), that characterizes true contact with another (see, e.g., Reinhard 2005, Žižek 2005) – for how else can we understand the exercises that allow them to be first surprised by themselves, and then to have them read it as pointing to an external agent, as anything other than an attempt to recapture the uncomfortable frisson that is inherent in the alienation found even in the most intimate of social contacts (Stasch 2009)?
This argument may not seem to follow for some, I should acknowledge. One may argue that this odd, inside-out alterity that seems to be associated with the divine in the Vineyard, where the alien is found in one’s core being, is so different from normal human relationships, that it could not be taken as being predicated upon paradigmatic cases of human interaction. There are also other objections, however weak, that could be made – as commented on earlier, there are times that interaction with the divine is seen not through an encounter with an internal alterity, but through outside uncanny elements, such as coincidence, or that at times the hallucinatory nature of the encounter is such that, while still internal to the subject, it is described as almost having the feel of an exterior sensory encounter; experiential aspects that concretize the encounter are a common tactic – small sensory details, such as the background the vision was played against, or a kinesthetic element to how a vision plays out, is usually included in most descriptions of prophetic communication. More to the point, though, than this special pleading just engaged in, is the fact that many day-to-day interactions do have that odd de-centering aspect; I am thinking here of instances where one finds oneself using an expression, tone of voice, or bodily movement that is associated with another, and the often uncanny feeling that comes over the self when that occurs. Finally, as Tanya Luhrmann has observed again and again, what the Vineyard is trying to do in their practice is to concretize the divine, to at once turn attention to this inward alterity and re-present it as another person that one can have a relationship with: “the goal of prayer is to develop a direct, personal, and vividly felt relationship with their creator experienced through dialogue, through an interaction between two intentional agencies” (Luhrmann 2007: 85). Whether or not we think that there is too much of a difference
between these internal and external forms of relationship, it is clear that member of the Vineyard do not see this difference to be so great that it can not be in some way assimilated and overcome.

**Progressive Politics and Conservative boundaries**

Still, though, this is an agent whose presence is heralded by surprise, an exterior agent indicated to a large degree by interior signs. Little wonder, then, the earlier noted description by progressive Vineyard members of God as being “messy,” a breaking of borders and categories that in a way is the ultimate sign of a true Other. That irritant, internal and eternal, is what is in a sense necessary for this interaction with the divine to also be seen as a truly human interaction, characterized by all the antinomies of agency that we have sketched out. What I would like to argue is that this irritant, this bit of tuché, along with the dual structure that has grown up to at once domesticate and nurture it, is also why the turn to the Left by these Vineyard members was in a way structurally fated.

This suggestion that there in an inherent egalitarian element in the Vineyard’s religiosity may be taken to be an even more speculative note than what has just been presented heretofore. There is an oddness that to some degree exists in the under-defined nature of the claim; what does it mean to say that something is structurally predisposed towards a left turn, let alone to read, as I am about to, egalitarianism and a ‘left’ politics as the same thing? That latter problem is not too much to bear, because it is to a degree a problem of how one chooses to define terms, but the first problem is a much more serious one, in that the claim being put forward seems to run against the
majority of the extant evidence – the history of neo-Charismatic and Pentecostal religion worldwide has not been one that has been tilting in a consistent direction towards the left, or egalitarianism, by any means. Christians in the global south have been described as being marked by a “conservatism or political quietism” (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins 2008: 1140), and therefore are oft thought of as making “disappointing subalterns” (Bialecki, Haynes, and Robbins, 2008: 1140, quoting Maxwell 2006:10), and this claim seems to be particularly true of Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity worldwide. Indeed, there is something of a sense in the literature that there is almost something inherently regressive when it comes to Charismatic and Pentecostal religious practice and thought. Taking as an example (for reasons that will soon be clear) issues of gender, it is easy to see Pentecostalism and its derivatives as encouraging the centrality of patriarchal authority (see, e.g., Austin-Broos 1997), though it should be noted that Pentecostalism may also exert a moderating influence on this patriarchal force (Brusco 1995). Even in America, where there is a (comparatively) much greater imperative mandating a certain kind of gender egalitarianism, we see the religious beliefs of Charismatics presented as patriarchal, even if it is a patriarchy of the last instance (see Stacey 1998). In politics itself (as opposed to merely the ‘political’), Pentecostalism has been accused of being inordinately hierarchical and regressive (Bastian 1993); the best that has been said about it is rather that in encouraging a withdrawal from a fallen world, it allows them an egalitarian space away from the eyes of authority, and can therefore serve as a future reservoir for democratic action (see Martin 1990) . . . perhaps (see Gifford 1998, who questions Martins’ claim as speculative in nature), and even here, it is not clear how this
withdrawl for another day takes away any of the sting from the accusation of current social quietism.\textsuperscript{102}

This political quietism and social conservatism, however, is only one side of the story. Drawing both on a reading of Ernst Troeltsch (1992 [1935]) and on fieldwork in various metropolitan centers in Venezuela, David Smilde (1997) has argued that politically, Pentecostalism is Janus-Faced, containing both progressive and regressive elements. For Smilde, these \textit{Evangelicos} (the common term for Pentecostalism in Spanish-speaking Latin American; see Smilde 2007) are characterized by what he calls a dual ethic. While his main concern here is to explain how that dual ethic allows simultaneously for a certain patriarchal order, and for a kind of gender egalitarianism, the logic of his argument carries over into the question of hierarchical relationships generally. Christianity has within its structure the potential for an “unlimited, unqualified individualism and equality, based on the individual call to fellowship with a transcendent God and the eternal value of the individual soul,” while also containing within a concept of a “transcendent, predestinarian God whose will is inscrutable,” and which therefore “cuts the nerve of the absolute and abstract idea of equality.” (Smilde 1997: 344). While the individual is given a dignity that can potentially erase various structural forms of inequality, on the other hand, “institutions, statuses, hierarchies and differences insofar as they do not rely on openly sinful foundations, might be accepted as divinely ordained with equality relegated to the relationship with God.” (Smilde: 1997: 344).

\textsuperscript{102} For a more elaborated and clear-headed review of these positions and related debates, see Robbins 2004: 131-136
Smilde bases this on what he considers to be basic Pauline values, but what is striking is that when he turns to evidence for this on the ground, the prototypical instances given by his informants where the ‘egalitarian’ face of Christian practice comes into focus is that of prophecies or dreams. These prophecies or dreams, of course, were subject to the social normalizing force of discernment to ensure that messages weren’t from malevolent spirits (in Smilde’s ethnographic situation discernment consists mostly of having a prophecy or dream being ratified by being received by other members of the congregation as well), but despite this attempt to domesticate the supernatural, it is striking that it was this ‘direct’ contact where the egalitarian edge of a Pauline-influenced Christianity was at its strongest. Of course, this is not the only way that prophecy can work. Prophecy can be used to intensify existing hierarchies, particularly where access to socially approved forms of prophetic speech is controlled by hierarchies, or even localized in specific individuals given a leadership position, and egalitarian messages are not countenanced (see, e.g., Csordas 2001). But if the prophetic is associated with the novel, and if prophecy and other gifts of the spirit are democratically distributed as they were in the Vineyard (and remember, the promise of the Vineyard was that “everyone would get to play”), then it seems that prophecy by its nature would aspire towards the novel social forms, and since these social forms, regardless of whatever other content they had, would be predicated on a supernaturally democratic precedent and a certain Christian egalitarianism, then they tend to open up the political landscape.

As we have seen however, this opening up of the political landscape runs the risk of being a gesture that is concerned with communicating its own alterity to the point of
foreclosing effective political action, rather than producing a capacity to engage in realpolitik; alternately, we have observed that, due to an attempt to distance itself from conservative orientated Christian political thought, and also due to the purifying edge inherent in the immaterializing form of Christian language ideology that has been captured by Keane, there is at least in some portions of the Vineyard a self-erasing tendency, to deny any identification and therefore prevent the kind of concretization of ideas and institutions necessary for social change. What is to prevent it from either of these fates – being permanently condemned to a politics of the exceptional gesture, or erasing itself entirely in the pursuit of purity?

What I am putting forward is speculative, but I think that we can trace out enough evidence for it in the material that we have before us to intuit that, over the long run, this is not a danger. Remember the other side of Smilde’s (and Troeltsch’s) opposition – that to some degree whether that which is, must be considered to be fated by God? This to a degree mandates a fixing of whatever is the current situation, and the current elements contained within it. Nor is this hypothesis particular to Smilde and Troeltsch alone. This conception of a submission to the divine as also bearing the same kind of logic as submission to other forces, such as the abstract force of a supposedly ‘free’ market, has also been pointed out by Omri Elisha (2008a), who sees this common acquiescence to both as part of what he describes as an anti-humanist tendency in contemporary Evangelicalism. This tendency would seem to be a final nail in the coffin of any dream of a politically progressive Charismatic Christianity, since it suggest that we either must choose between a progressivism that is incapable of acting in the world because it is predicated on being novel as its warrant for being divine, or alternately we
can have a submission to that which already is, which means an abandonment of change.

Such a reading would miss one element, however, which is the fact that as we have seen that the non political homologies both views are to a degree simultaneously available in other charismatic activities, and that at proper moments, such as demonization or exchange, individuals are capable of shuttling quickly between them; I believe that this shuttling back and forth is what is beginning to occur in contemporary progressive Christian Charismatic politics. We have seen this earlier in this chapter in one informant’s use of categories of belonging during the 2008 election, when previously she had forewarn them entirely. There are other instances as well: I am remembering another informant, a serious, blond haired man who had come over to Shores as a college student when his earlier church, which was much more ambivalent about the charisms, fell apart as a result of a split. When we had first met, he was enthusiastic about both missionary endeavors (he had a “heart” for the Southern Sudan, and had spent time working as a missionary in Ethiopia) and charismatic activity (he had for a while apprenticed himself to the “prophet” discussed in chapter one, and had demons cast out of him, as well as trying to cast out other’s demons, earlier in his career as a Shores member). In my talks with him at the time, he was ambivalent about political change – his hope for the Southern Sudan was that its political emancipation would make it a rich missionary field, and he saw material and hygienic improvements he had campaigned to introduce to Ethiopia as merely being something instrumental to the missionary endeavor . . . in conversations where I asked him how he would have felt if those technical improvements had been his only legacy, he became uncomfortable,
shifting in his chair as we spoke. Since then, however, he has become rather politically outspoken, embracing left-leaning ballot-driven causes such as immigration reform, universal health care and, to my surprise, opposition to the recently passed California proposition eight.\footnote{Proposition Eight was a state-wide ballot initiative that was designed to strip same-sex couples of the right to marry, a right that had only recently been presented to them by the Evangelicals were proponents of passing this proposition and of limiting same sex marriage.} Given his earlier mission-centered concerns, and his description of himself as a ‘former conservative,’ it seems like a complete change of political consciousness – even if it is a reorientation merely towards a radical electoral politics, one that is focused around mobilizing populations on an already cognizable social map. While there is still an element of the symbolic and gestural to his politics (he has attended attempts to have a commune ceremony what would bridge both sides of the border fence at “Friendship Park,” the misnamed space that marks the area along the coast where the United States and Mexico meet), that is not all there is to his practice.

This shift in the political allegiance and style among some Vineyard believers is a thing in motion, and this monograph may be an “Owl of Minerva” moment, marking a high-water point in a tendency that will soon exhaust itself, but that is not a great worry of mine; I have little fear that concretization will be a tactic that is learnable. There will be difficulties, of course. We have already discussed the social drag caused by other conservative Christians who cycle through Shore’s body, for instance, and the fact that all this must occur in a field that until recently has been dominated by conservative Christian literature and thought. There are other structural problems as well. The reason why a display of the gifts, or a deliverance drama, has such a tropic air to it is that they
are scenes or events that can be performed in a single evening, even if that evening may run, in the case of a prayer vigil or a deliverance, late into the night; it is easy for the few individual actors present to take the pulsation (*pulsion*) hither and to open to closed ways of being, and participatory versus submissive relationships with the divine, and improvisatorially craft an aesthetically and emotionally engaging event, be it a boundary-disrupting opening to a prophetic voice, or an agency enhancing moment of personal dedication to a particular way of being. One has time, in a sense, to practice one’s chops, as the cast is merely a small one of agreeing interlocutors, the stage is a bounded church or conference room, and the medium is just words and action. The same could be said of other practices, such as the hermeneutic techniques in the Vineyard; there is enough collective and individual Bible reading going about that one can both learn when to read as if the text is directed to you alone, and when to read as if the text is laying down an impersonal standard – once the educational infrastructure has been assembled and the book is in your hands, reading is a low-cost activity.

It is when we are dealing with acts that involve material with a more resistant material substrate, such as the discussions of exchange, that the waters get choppy; one may wish to give or husband money or other material or social resources, depending on what is willed by the God, but one must first have full command over it, and because of the investiture in amassing it, these overseeing steps may take longer, and because the material will most likely have their own momentum, these performances may not end up in such a pitch perfect place, with ambivalences about a job given up, or disquiet about exactly how efficiently one has truly been a steward.

This latency is even more pronounced when one is trying to work with large scale
institutional structures, such as we’ve seen with the Vineyard’s attempt to think through generational shifts; the ambivalence seen in attempts to express an at once feared and desired post-modern identity through formal experimentation in liturgy and worship points to the difficulties that ensue when one is working at the congregational level. To some degree the political may seem to be a lesser challenge – in middle class North American culture, one’s politics always has the possibility of being purely individual, and for many Vineyard believers both right and left it most certainly is. Even in the most politically active of small groups, there were conservative leaning believers, and even those who felt that politics was somewhat orthogonal to religion. Still, though, the way in which this idea is circulating, in conversations in small groups, in crafted and distributed evangelical techniques such as “True Story,” and in Sunday morning sermons, suggests that this is imagined to be a communal exercise – recall again Shore’s pastor’s prognostication that it will be justice what the Vineyard will be “known” for in coming years. Work on that scale can take years, but not as long as one may imagine – indeed, it appears to be happening as I write. And, while some may misinterpret what I am about to say, I have faith that my friends in the Vineyard can and will see it fully realized.
CONCLUSION
THE KINGDOM AND ITS SUBJECTS

This monograph has presented an analytic and a social history of the Vineyard; it has traced this non-denominational crypto-denomination from its origins with John Wimber, who attempted to unite Evangelical theology and Charismatic religious practice through a concept called “The Kingdom,” in which God’s reign on earth was seen as at once having already occurred, and not having come into being, as something that was inevitable and also as something that had to be fought for. Through his ministry, through publications, and through a highly controversial class at Fuller theological seminary, the premiere Evangelical seminary on the West Coast, we have seen how Wimber had attempted to present charismatic practices such as speaking in tongues, healing, prophecy, and deliverance from demons to a skeptical Evangelical audience, which not only resulted in his being denied permission to continue teaching at Fuller Seminary, but more importantly, resulted in his splitting off from a major new denominational movement (Calvary Chapel) to form the Vineyard. We then saw how Wimber’s adherence to these charismatic practices resulted in a series of institutional crises within the Vineyard itself, perhaps hitting their peak during the nineteen-nineties when the Vineyard first embraced, and then rejected, a particularly colorful revivalist movement called the “Toronto Blessing,” that was characterized by holy laughter and people making animal sounds when they were “in the spirit.”

To understand what Wimber’s legacy, and the legacy of the Vineyard as a whole, was, we turned to an ethnographic study that was centered on Shores Vineyard, a younger, vibrant, professional, and growing Vineyard church located in the
pseudonymous town of Rancho Palma Vista. After sketching out Shores’ undistinctive origins, we went on to chart the way that language ideology works at Shores. Centering our discussion on an instance of prophetic activity and demonization that occurred one night in a small group setting, it was shown that while the standard discussion of “Protestant Language Ideology” was applicable to quotidian speech acts, when it came to ritually charged linguistic artifacts, the relationship between author and animator was more complex; oftentimes speech was valued not because it supposedly mapped onto someone’s internal state, but specifically because it didn’t. This did not mean that “sincere” language acts were not valued, however; they were, and often occurred at important moments in the ritual process, where they served to cohere speaking actors whose words had been, up to now, read as either being produced or queered by other supernatural agents.

We went on to discuss the folk biblical hermeneutics found in the Vineyard; we observed that again there was a split in these practices, where sometimes the Bible was read as a text whose meaning was the result of a supplemental, supernatural presence that allowed the reader to understand the language as being directed to his or her self. In other moments, however, what was valued about the Bible was that rather than being a form of personal address from God, it was a text directed to all the church, and hence no one in particular, and therefore could be understood as setting up a universal measure of proper epistemic and social practices that could not be affected by anyone’s individual position.

This tendency of seeing a split between one form of religiosity in which the believer participated in the divine, and another in which the believer was obliged to
carry out the divine’s dictates, was identified yet again in a discussion of economic exchange and giving within the Vineyard. Here, in addition to the exchanges associated with unrestrained “secular” culture, individuals either saw themselves as stewards of divine wealth, with an obligation to carefully manage a divine res with which they had been entrusted, or sacrificial givers, who offered up part of their very being as in the salvific economy of redemption. It was here that conversion between these two practices occurred, at moments where the material and the self became conflated, where the church as an institution could ask for believers to exceed careful tithing and engage in sacrificial giving.

At this point our discussion turned to newer constellations of practice in the Vineyard; unorthodox (or “emergent”) worship sessions and politics. Emergent worship, it was argued, was an attempt to deal with the anxieties related to generational change in the Vineyard; with “the postmodern” standing for the Vineyard itself, for future hard-to-evangelize generations, and for alien others, it stood as a powerful relay through which a certain nervousness about the tendency of charismatic movements to domesticate could be thought. I argue that in “postmodern” emergent practices, the Vineyard tried to have it both ways, envisioning the future as literally un-envisionable, while at the same time thinking that core verities of a stable evangelical, biographically designated self could be counted on to exist in this postmodern future. Politics followed a similar, though not identical, logic; I argued that the turn to progressive politics by younger members of the Vineyard could be seen as a rejection of a previous generation of Christian Right politics that had overstepped an implicit secular/sacred divide that orders liberal America, resulting in a sense that the Christian Right had become merely
an earthly, as opposed to an otherworldly, force. In an attempt to create a politics that
followed the logic of the Kingdom, where the eschatological could be realized in the
here-and-now, I argued that progressive Vineyard believers had a politics of the
unrecognizable, where the very shocking and radical nature of the political gestures
being engaged in would point to there sacred provenance.

In the final moments of this monograph, I asked what the likely future of this
political form would be. Comparing two different evangelizing aids, at least one of
which has its roots in forms of religious practice very much like that of the Vineyard in
general and Shores in particular, I reviewed the ethnographic material presented in this
dissertation and suggested that there are two strong, structural tendencies in these
religious practices; one to emphasize a distance from the divine, where proper action is
following the dictates of God, and another where individual participation in the divine
is emphasized. Using Lévi-Strauss’ essay, “Do Dual Organizations Exist,” and Žižek’s
reading of this essay, I suggested that first of all, these two forms were actually not
clashing structures introduced by Wimber’s melding of Evangelical and Charismatic
practice, but rather were structural variants of each other, and that Wimber’s marriage
of the Evangelical and Charismatic merely highlighted an already existing antinomy in
American Protestant thought. While I suggested that this antinomy may be related to
large scale representational and political tendencies put forward by Bruno Latour and
Elizabeth Povinelli, I also suggest that it is more likely simply due to core
contradictions present in the common view of the constitution of the person, and that
religion is simply a privileged space where this contradiction can be thought of because
a divine alter allows one to engage in issues of personhood in an abstract register.
Given the recurrence of this split in other forms of Vineyard religious practice, I closed by suggesting that left-leaning Vineyard believers would eventually be able to make use of a politics of obedience, of categories, and of the articulable and recognizable, as opposed to merely relying on a politics of pure eschatological difference and of the surprising.

This material, I hope, is more than a contribution to the study of theologically conservative evangelical and neo-charismatic Protestant groups in America, though I would be happy to have it thought of as such. As suggested in the introduction, I hold that while transcendence and immanence may not be universal features of Christian belief, they are common ones, and that in the spaces where they occur they may be doing some of the structuring work in “convert cultures” that I have identified them doing in “post-Christian” cultures like the United States. Finally, there is the question of whether the antinomies in the self that I have identified in the Vineyard are as widespread as I claim that they are. While there is some ethnographic evidence that this may be the case, more sustained work is needed; perhaps work among other American groups, including those who have taken the step of not just being indifferent to the divine, but actually rejecting it, may be a natural next step to see whether believers and non-believers, despite the supposed ontological gap between them, may have more in common than either would care to admit.
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